Speaking Up for Sanctuary

Local business owners get the vision for a marine sanctuary for SLO

As part of the long-term effort to bring the benefits of national marine sanctuary designation to the waters of San Luis Obispo County (see “The Road to Sanctuary,” Nov./Dec. 2011), a panel of experts on the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary came to the Sycamore Mineral Springs Resort in Avila Beach on Saturday, February 25, to meet with thirty SLO County business owners for a discussion of the economic benefits of a national marine sanctuary.

The panel discussion “What a National Marine Sanctuary Would Mean for Your Business,” was hosted by the San Luis Obispo chapters of the Sierra Club and the Surfrider Foundation, who work together on local sanctuary issues as the Marine Sanctuary Alliance.

It began with an address by Representative Lois Capps (D-Santa Barbara), who noted the $118 billion and 2.3 million jobs generated annually by the nation’s ocean and coastal economy.

“The well-being of this area depends on the health of the oceans,” said Capps. “A healthy environment provides a strong economic foundation for the communities where we live.”

Dr. Chris Harrold of the Monterey Bay Aquarium, Dan Haifley of O’Neill Sea Odyssey, former Santa Cruz City Councilwoman Cynthia Mathews and Randy Widera of Friends of Santa Cruz State Parks spoke on the events that brought about the creation of the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary in 1992, and how their communities have benefited from the presence and activities of the sanctuary since then.

The basic message from the panelists: the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary has been a boon to the marine resources, schools, scientific research, fisheries and tourism economies of Monterey and Santa Cruz, and it could be the same for San Luis Obispo.

Panelists described the business partnerships, educational curricula, resource protection programs and benefits to tourism the sanctuary has brought to their communities. They recounted their excellent relations with the agricultural community on water quality issues, rebutted criticisms from the fishing industry, and noted the work of the sanctuary in creating a Community Supported Fishery (CSF) program.

Dr. Harrold said that in terms of research dollars coming into local communities, the sanctuary leverages from and contributes to fifty research organizations with more than 2,000 faculty, staff and graduate students, representing a $250 million combined annual budget for marine research.

“We have launched a national effort to preserve America’s wild legacy and minimize the loss of wild places and biodiversity to climate change,” said Amanda Wallner, organizer for the Sierra Club’s California Coast Resilient Habitats Campaign. “We have a unique opportunity to leave a vibrant legacy for our children and our grandchildren. Creating a national marine sanctuary in San Luis Obispo reflects a growing national tide. We really do have momentum behind us to get this done.”

“A national marine sanctuary is not only necessary, it’s also feasible,” said Brad Snook, chair of Surfrider Foundation San Luis Obispo.

With the sanctuary leading, we’ve focused on our product. We have focused on the fact that we have this incredible natural and cultural place, that we want to share it with people. And that’s allowed people like me, who have this entrepreneurial spirit, to say “what are the ways that I can create a living here?”... We’ve used that sense of place, the sanctuary, the natural beauty. And this was able to raise over a quarter million dollars for the organization.

- Randy Widera, Friends of Santa Cruz State Parks

“What a National Marine Sanctuary Would Mean for Your Business”

Avila Beach, Feb. 25, 2012
Spring into Family Garden Education

April at the SLO Botanical Garden features children’s hands-on learning activities

With a goal of “education through exploration,” children aged 2 to 102 who come to the San Luis Obispo Botanical Garden this month will learn about sustainability, ecology, where food comes from, and the importance of plants in our everyday lives. Two events of many:

April 14, 1-3 pm – Lip Balm and Sunscreen Making! Can’t pronounce the ingredients in your lip balm or sunscreen? Learn to create your own yummy smelling lip balm and sunscreen using plants from the Garden. Bring your own small container, or buy one here! Activity is $5 donation per family.

April 22, 10am-5pm – Earth Day at the Garden, in collaboration with Earth Day Alianza. A full day of outdoor activities, hikes, live music, games, craft making, tickle sticks from the solar oven, and so much more…for free! Take a free family trip on the bus from every corner of the county, to the park and back, all day long.

For more information on these and all the other April programs, call (805) 541-1400 ext. 304 or email smcollinsworth@slobg.org. Check out the Garden at www.slobg.org.

More Petty Irrelevance

Politics is democracy’s way of handling public business. We won’t get the type of country in the kind of world we want unless people take part in the public’s business.

By Andrew Christie, Chapter Director

In our March issue, we featured a critique of HR 7, the House Transportation Bill. Much of that critique appeared under the headline “House Republicans and the Stunt to Pass Worst Transportation Bill Ever.” We knew some people would have a problem with that headline, and with the content of the Sierra Club’s critique. Prominent among those people would be, of course, House Republicans. But they wouldn’t be the only ones.

I knew this because a minor kerfuffle I had the pleasure of inadvertently starting on the letters page of the San Luis Obispo Review last January. I wrote a letter on behalf of the Club that was more in line with the Club’s interest in producing the kind of world we want, and the kind of nation we want, than that of the politicians who normally write for it. The reaction was predictable: immediate silence, followed by a wave of complaints from the Club’s��雅图粉丝. This is, after all, what the Sierra Club is for – mucking around with the editors of the whole world, to see if they can’t improve it a bit.

In reply, a gentleman wrote in to point out that much of the editors’ critique of HR 7 was based on its likely impacts of House Resolution 1581, an anti-wilderness bill introduced by Rep. Kevin McCarthy (R-Oak). “Mr. McCarthy seems to have transformed…into another political special interest group that will use any tactic to advance their agenda.”

It wasn’t my first kerfuffle in which variations on this theme had been played. In a New Times opinion piece last May, I detailed the potential impacts of House Resolution 1581, an anti-wilderness bill introduced by Rep. Kevin McCarthy (R-Oak). “Mr. McCarthy seems to have transformed…into another political special interest group that will use any tactic to advance their agenda.”

A reader promptly wrote to tell us that “the Sierra Club has turned down half a dozen amendments that would have eliminated…from, and the importance of plants in our everyday lives. Two events of many:

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POLITICS continued on page 5
We’ve recently received visits and e-mails from Los Osos residents who are upset with the Sierra Club for supporting the Audubon Santa Lucia Chapter’s project to remove non-native eucalyptus trees and replace them with native plants. Opponents have said that Audubon, in proposing to restore native habitat, is “interfering with nature,” but that eucalyptus shipped here from Australia, “the United States has pledged itself as a sovereign state in the international community to conserve the to the extent practicable the various species of fish or wildlife and plants facing extinction.”

We are concerned by the implication that avoiding potential inconvenience to individual animals should be a priority over working to avoid the extinction of species. When it passed the Endangered Species Act in 1973, Congress noted that “the United States has pledged itself as a sovereign state in the international community to conserve the to the extent practicable the various species of fish or wildlife and plants facing extinction.”

We are concerned by the tendency of project opponents to disparage or downplay the importance of coastal sage scrub habitat. This usually takes the form of an assertion that habitat is “inferior.” Audubon is going to remove all the trees and wipe out all the species on site—a belief that somehow exists alongside the acknowledgment that the trees serving as habitat will remain—and replace them with something like a lawn.

As per the Point Reyes Bird Observatory, “coastal sage scrub supports over 100 species of plants and animals of rare, threatened, or endangered status. Donors of bird species depend on scrub.” Those include the sharp-shinned hawk, red-tailed hawk, American kestrel, and California gnatcatcher.

We commend Audubon for its responsiveness to community concerns about the project, including ours. There’s no question that the concerns conveyed by an intensively protective community have altered the project. Audubon is going the extra mile on protections and mitigations, including their agreement to leave raptor colony nesting eucalyptus trees intact and considering taping the stumps of cut trees rather than applying herbicide.

For Los Osos residents who fear the loss of one of the most beautiful places in their town, we recommend this passage from the habitat enhancement project proposal that Morro Coast Audubon submitted to secure state grant funding. It describes the vision for the project:

Planting of relatively fast growing sub-shrubs and wildflowers will provide immediate habitat improvements for native pollinators, birds and small mammals. These plants should also provide immediate benefits for the human community. Visitors [will] delight in a abundance of wildflower bloom in the spring as well as the foliage of fast growing coastal shrubs, such as hush and dune lupines. These benefits will only increase over time as the project areas mature, becoming denser and multi-storied as the years pass…. The sea of veldt grass will be replaced by a diverse array of coastal dune shrubs such as lupines, sages, buckwheat and mock heather. Sub-shrubs and forbs such as deer weed, wallflower, aster, croton, and yarrow will fill the spaces that have been replaced by the sea of veldt grass. These benefits will only increase over time as the project areas mature, becoming denser and multi-storied as the years pass. As you walk toward the bay and across the top of the salt marsh will be every sign of the removal of eucalyptus trees. The ground below will no longer be littered with leaves, twigs and bar but will support a thick blanket of sedges and rushes, interrupted by an occasional bloom of coast goldenrod or marsh baccharis. We can find nothing wrong with that picture.

**Sierra Club Eco-Grants Awarded to Atascadero, Morro Bay Students**

The Santa Lucia Chapter has marked the second year of our popular Eco-Grants program with awards to two deserving local high school programs.

Last year, a Sierra Club Eco-Grant allowed the students of the Los Osos High School’s Environmental Club to create a vermiculture bin. This year’s $380 award will be used for composting bins in their school garden. Composting vegetable matter from the garden and collected from the cafeteria means green waste will stay on site instead of going to a landfill. The green waste will be naturally broken down and reused in the garden. Students will collect green waste from the cafeteria, assemble and manage the composting bins, and educate other students on the benefits of composting.

The Environmental Club is made up of approximately 15 students who are dedicated to raising awareness about lessening the human impact on the environment and coming up with ways to help preserve nature. The club’s eco-friendly activities include making compost out of recycled materials and hosting clothes exchanges to encourage the community to get involved and participate.

The Green Leadership elective class from Atascadero High School’s Green读后感 Academy will use their $350 Eco-Grant to construct and place compost, recycling and landfill bins. Presently, most of the bins are used for recycling, but this year will include composting. The goal for the growth rate of the native plantings, seventy of the odds of the project’s success, with a corollary 30 percent chance of failure; rather, it’s the goal for the project to provide the benefits of composting bins in their school garden. Composting vegetable matter from the garden and collected from the cafeteria means green waste will stay on site instead of going to a landfill. The green waste will be naturally broken down and reused in the garden. Students will collect green waste from the cafeteria, assemble and manage the composting bins, and educate other students on the benefits of composting.

Project opponents have engaged in vigorous volleys in the local media. They will block [out] the street and neighboring houses. As you walk toward the bay and across the top of the salt marsh will be every sign of the removal of eucalyptus trees. The ground below will no longer be littered with leaves, twigs and bar but will support a thick blanket of sedges and rushes, interrupted by an occasional bloom of coast goldenrod or marsh baccharis. We can find nothing wrong with that picture.

**About Sweet Springs...**

Aesthetics should not trump ecology at Sweet Springs. As per the Point Reyes Bird Observatory, “coastal sage scrub supports over 100 species of plants and animals of rare, threatened, or endangered status. Donors of bird species depend on scrub.” Those include the sharp-shinned hawk, red-tailed hawk, American kestrel, and California gnatcatcher.

You’re welcome! The Greenhounds express their appreciation.
Getting at the Roots

by Megan Montgomery

Very little can compare to the joy gleaned from spending time outdoors. But with the many technologies that exist today, too few youth enjoy the wonders that our earth has to offer. A goal of The Roots program is to expose kids to these wonders. The Roots pairs students from the Cal Poly chapter of the Sierra Student Coalition with fifth graders from the organization Youth In Action. Youth In Action works with children and teens that are considered at risk of becoming involved in gang activity in the future. Through The Roots, we hope to give these kids a mentor, show them the benefits of hiking and being outside, and instill in them an appreciation for the beauty that exists in the nature we have so close to home.

We had our first outings with the Youth In Action kids a couple of weeks ago. We’re still not sure if we or the fifth graders had more fun. Our plans for the first get-together with the kids consisted of a few ice-breaker games and a hike to the “P” above Cal Poly. Though rain prevented one of our two groups from hiking the “P” both had a fantastic time spending the afternoon with these energetic kids, who were in constant motion.

Before the outings, we had been concerned about what speed we should hike considering most of the kids we were working with had little hiking experience. Little did we know we would be the ones having to catch up with them! It was inspiring to see how much fun our fifth-grade friends were having outdoors. The super-exuberant kids that hiked the “P” even insisted on continuing up the rest of the hill.

The success of our first outings has surpassed all of our greatest expectations. Our next outings will include a hike into Poly Canyons.

I speak for my fellow Roots members when I say that we cannot wait for our next outings. We set out with the goal of teaching these kids the rewards of spending time in nature, but after witnessing the excitement and energy they exhibit at every event, I realize we have just as much to learn from them.

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December, noted “the tendency of even the most sophisticated political reporters to treat the entire process as a contest between rival teams and ignore the substance of their argu-
ments and policies, as if politics were simply a spectator sport with fewer (and perhaps greater) fans than the Mets or the Red Sox.”

The don’t-be-so-partisan-let’s-all-get-
good sentiment is understandable,
and as has arisen in response to the rise in American political acri-
mony, a modern history of vitriol can be traced back to the Vietnam War (with major surges since which could be labeled “Watergated,” “Limbaugh debates,” “M. Lewinsky gets
internship.”)”The dawn of blog-
gaming” and the became an offense against objective reality. Foe instance, it is simply a fact becomes an issue the actions or inaction of individuals who are in support or opposition become irrelevant. So do specific facts and the consequences of action or inaction. It’s not an argu-
ment for civility so much as an argu-
ment against the idea of argument. 
(And minus sincere belief, the things when argument is deployed by political operatives who are seeking to shut down one side or an argument.)

When Congressional Republicans and Democrats spending bills that seek to lift the moratorium on uranium mining on the rim of the 13,000 or 20,000 or 250,000 jobs, depending on which press release you read, was absurd. (For the record, here’s the independent conclusion of Cornell University’s Global Labor Institute: “Almost all of the jobs – direct, indirect and induced – associated with Keystone XL will, of course, also be temporary. Based on the figures provided by TransCanada for the Canadian section of the pipeline, the new permanent U.S. pipeline jobs number in the U.S. number as few as 50.”)

If, when confronted by facts like this, one’s response is a horrific cry of partisan vitriol, one need not participate in the discussion at all. You have played the get-out-of-
argument-free card. You don’t have to know anything about the subject under discussion, and, in fact, it helps if you don’t. Offering yourself as a model to be emulated by those engaged in the vulgar habits of debate, you merely pronounce yourself above the fray and your done. The corollary belief for sincere believers in let’s-all-get-along is the idea that the arguments on both sides of an issue always have equal merit and equal flaws, and that both sides are equally at fault for the problems we are arguing about. This belief is in a par with the notion that any two rocks dislodged from the peaks of different mountains upon reaching the bottom will always be found to weigh exactly the same and share identical chemical composition.

In 2008, the most visible and vocal proponent of let’s-all-get-along was presidential candidate Barack Obama. He offered himself up as not only the post-racial candidate, but the post-
politics candidate. In nearly every speech he gave, he painted a picture of a magical realm in which everyone would simply set aside their history, interests and differences and work harmoniously toward shared goals.

It was very attractive to a nation that was weary of the partisan war. But “Let’s all get along” does not transcend politics or cancel the obligations of an informed citizenry, President Obama, after three painful, bruising years when his national unity fantasy repeatedly ran into reality, has now learned (we hope) that interests matter – that all of politics and interest and political candidates are seeking to lift the moratorium on uranium mining on the rim of the 13,000 or 20,000 or 250,000 jobs, depending on which press release you read, was absurd. (For the record, here’s the independent conclusion of Cornell University’s Global Labor Institute: “Almost all of the jobs – direct, indirect and induced – associated with Keystone XL will, of course, also be temporary. Based on the figures provided by TransCanada for the Canadian section of the pipeline, the new permanent U.S. pipeline jobs number in the U.S. number as few as 50.”)

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Why Does Dan Richards Still Have a Job?

Just imagine:
- The head of the Drug Enforcement Agency takes a European vacation and sends around a photo of himself lighting up at a cannabis coffee shop in Amsterdam.
- The attorney general of Utah takes a trip to Nevada and has his picture taken partying with his favorite girls at the Mustang Ranch.
- The chairman of the U.S. Marine Mammal Commission goes to Tijuana, Mexico, where he’s filmed enthusiastically joining in with the local residents in their annual custom of driving dolphins into nets and stabbing them to death.

Now imagine that upon their return, these gentlemen are told by their superiors that they need to resign from their respective agencies, since their exploits have demonstrated that they should not be involved in setting policy or making decisions on the issues under their purview. They each reply that what they did was perfectly legal in the place where they did it and is therefore nobody else’s business and they will stay right where they are, thank you.

That last sentence requires no imagination, as it is, in fact, the response of Dan Richards, the President of the California Fish and Game Commission, when he was asked to resign by 40 members of the State Assembly after his return from a February trip to Idaho, where, unbeknownst to California’s law against shooting mountain lions, he shot a mountain lion.

Mr. Richards’ departure has also been urged by the Lieutenant Governor, The Humane Society of the United States, Sierra Club California, Audubon California, Natural Resources Defense Council, Western Lands Project, The Wilderness Society, and several other organizations dedicated to protect the endangered California condor.

Mr. Richards is almost right: The legal activities he engages in outside of California will indeed be nobody else’s business, just as soon as he steps down from his public trust position, which is the very next trip he should take.

Contact the Fish and Game Commission and urge Commissioners to act at their May meeting to repeal the “sacred site” which allowed Dan Richards to assume the presidency of the Commission, and then remove him from that position.

CA Fish and Game Commission P.O. Box 944209 Sacramento, CA 94244-2090 916-653-8499 Phone: 916-653-8499 Fax: 916-653-5040

Transforming the Politics of Big Solar

Energy Democracy, which outlines the negative consequences of the current industrial-scale, public land-focused approach to renewable energy development and demands a swift change over to the better alternative of DG in the built environment and on degraded land.

The vehicle is our Call to Action for Energy Democracy, which outlines the negative consequences of the current industrial-scale, public land-focused approach to renewable energy development and demands a swift change over to the better alternative of DG in the built environment and on degraded land.

In that light, Solar Done Right is now focusing on public education and engagement as the most effective way to end desert destruction and bring DG to the forefront. We must generate a grassroots upwelling of demand for localized, democratic, distributed generation in the built environment as the far superior alternative to massive solar array and facilities on public lands and in fragile environments.

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By now, some readers of the Desert Report are familiar with Solar Done Right, an ad hoc coalition working against the massive industrialization of our deserts by Big Solar, and for working for greater knowledge and support of the alternative—distributed generation (DG) in the built environment and on already-degraded lands.

After 18 months of work, we at Solar Done Right have a pretty good grasp of what drives U.S. renewable energy policy, what keeps it entrenched, and—we hope—what we can do to change it.

We started at the bottom — the U.S. Congress — and are now working our way to the top, issuing a Call to Action to our fellow citizens for a better approach to renewable energy (see facing page). We began our outreach efforts in September 2010 with a trip to Washington, D.C. to talk with Members of Congress and staff about the impact of Big Solar on public lands and the need for an alternative of distributed generation. Four days of meetings confirmed the hunch that has been building for the first place: (1) staffers working on energy issues had no inkling of the severe damage these projects would bring to public lands, and (2) staffers working on public land issues had no clue that there are alternatives that can spare desert ecosystems.

The Powers That Be

Democrats were generally sympathetic to concerns about the environmental impacts of Big Solar, but were either resigned to the supposed necessity of Big Solar in the desert or indignant that we would dare oppose any kind of renewable energy development. (To paraphrase, “Just what do you people want from us?”) Republicans essentially wanted more oil and gas development and viewed distributed generation with suspicion. (“You can’t coerce people into putting panels on their roofs!”)

That November, the Republicans won back the House and the entire U.S. Congress settled into profound gridlock. It was clear that the divided and deeply dysfunctional state of Congress had made any kind of effective advocacy all but impossible. In the ensuing year, it has become downright futile.

To make matters worse, the Administration is incorrigibly committed to Big Solar and Big Wind on public land. President Obama, who seemingly has no feeling for public land, has essentially handed over our country’s renewable energy policy to the Interior Department — a real estate manager not known for its environmental sensitivity, and led by the department’s worst Secretary since James Watt.

In the meantime, while Interior hands out 30-year public land leases to Big Solar and Wind, the Environmental Protection Agency has identified 15 million acres of previously developed, degraded, and contaminated lands potentially suitable for solar energy development across the country. Yet this much-maligned agency cannot get the support it needs to advance a better strategy on those lands.

Behind the scenes, but in full control, are the same entities that have controlled the “Fossil Fuel Era” — BP, Chevron, Morgan Stanley, Goldman-Sachs. With entrenched corporate influences steering our national policy toward industrial-scale renewables, as opposed to small-scale, local, distributed renewable energy, it is virtually impossible to counter them at the policy level.

Finally, bringing up the rear are the national environmental organizations such as The Wilderness Society and Natural Resources Defense Council, who have bought into the model of desert renewables industrialization and ask only for a little tweaking here and some trimming there. Funded by the very foundations and corporations that thrive on the status quo, their job is to create the illusion of change for the better, while ensuring that things stay essentially the same.

The Power That Must Be

Dancing as this all sounds, there is one sure way to work around the entrenched political and corporate power arrayed on the side of Big Solar: go to the people. Citizens don’t serve the monopolistic utilities or make decisions based on what’s best for big investment firms — and by and large, they instantly understand how small, local renewables better serve their interests and the environment. Tell them about the locating of these projects not being wrought upon desert ecosystems and they know it is wrong. Tell them they can have panels on their roofs and feed power into a community grid, and they’re all for it. The distributed generation (DG) approach is an angst-free answer that makes sense to virtually everyone. It serves taxpayers, ratepayers, job-seekers, and desert tortoises.

In that light, Solar Done Right is now focusing on public education and engagement as the most effective way to end desert destruction and bring DG to the forefront. We must generate a grassroots upwelling of demand for localized, democratic, distributed generation in the built environment as the far superior alternative to massive solar array and facilities on public lands and in fragile environments.

The vehicle is our Call to Action for Energy Democracy, which outlines the negative consequences of the current industrial-scale, public land-focused approach to renewable energy development and demands a swift change over to the better alternative of DG in the built environment and on degraded land. We are now spreading the Call to Action far and wide to citizen and community groups of all types throughout the country to bring them on as signatories. So far, we have dozens of groups signed on, from Public Citizen in Washington, D.C. to the Utility Consumers Action Network in San Diego. As we build our list, word will spread. With the strength of civic passion behind it, the Call to Action will be delivered to multiple levels of government, where better decisions can and must be made.

Janine Blaebach is Director of the Western Lands Project, which monitors federal land sales and exchanges across the West and beyond, and which works to protect public land from privatization. She is also a co-founder of Solar Done Right.
Solar Done Wrong

It's time for some serious policy rethinking, including our own

Last January, after the Sierra Club's Board of Directors adopted new policy language on internal decision-making on the siting of large-scale renewable energy projects, the policy was submitted to Club leaders for comment. The following are comments adopted by the Santa Lucia Chapter on the Sierra Club's new Large Scale Renewable Project Siting policy.

From the summer of 2010 through March 2011, National Sierra Club, via the Beyond Coal Campaign, intervened in the public comment and permit appeal process for the Draft Environmental Impact Reports (DEIRs) on two solar power plants proposed for California's Carrizo Plain, the site of one of the highest concentrations of threatened and endangered species in the United States. Both projects were designed to sit athwart wildlife corridors; both were acknowledged to impact thousands of acres of habitat for multiple endangered species. Due to the size and location of the projects, their potential environmental impacts were unprecedented, and the efficacy of the proposed mitigations for those impacts are likewise unknown.

The Beyond Coal campaign representative first contacted the Santa Lucia Chapter to offer “to take a look” at our draft comments on the first DEIR. This collegial offer quickly morphed into a line-by-line edit of the Chapter’s comments, representing a deletion of nearly half the original text, accompanied by the pronounce-ment that National was “the tie breaker” in the event of any disagree-ment between the Chapter and National.

The primary concern of National’s representative was to ensure that no potential project alternative, espe-cially the distributed generation of solar power, would be identified or referred to in our comments as a feasible environmentally superior alternative to the proposed project. All such references were ordered deleted, despite the fact that virtually every other major environmental group submitting comments on these projects noted this basic fact (as did the Draft EIR itself, in order to offer arguments as to why environmen-tally superior alternatives would be allegedly infeasible). Nor was the chapter allowed to submit comments rebutting the DEIR’s inflexibility arguments against the environmen-tally superior alternatives.

National appeared to have the clear goal of preempting any legal chal-lenge the Chapter might consider and allowing both projects to go forward unimpeded, no matter what their impacts to endangered species or their habitat.

So intense was National’s micro-management of the process that after several months of discussion with National’s rep, we were only able to submit the Sierra Club’s comments on the first project DEIR to the County Planning Department fifteen minutes before the deadline for submission. A few months later, after more of the same regimen of exhaus-tive back-and-forth with National’s rep challenging virtually every line, we were able to submit comments on the second project DEIR less than one hour before the deadline.

Prior to its being codified in the proposed policy lan-guage, our chapter has already seen the results of the decision to remove renewable energy projects from chapter jurisdiction, with chapters now having “input” into the siting of projects in their jurisdiction but no functional role in decision making, replacing long established precedent and Club procedure. National staff commandeered the local environmental review process for the Carrizo solar projects, weakened the Chapter’s EIR comments so as to ease the passage and approval of two projects that National wished to see permitted, and preemptively stated that no legal action was likely to be allowed. It now seeks to place an extra layer of procedure into the litigation approval process with the evident intent of making litigation, and the protection of wildlife and habitat from the impacts of utility-scale energy projects, even more unlikely.

The abandonment of place-based decision making and transfer of that authority essentially to the purview of Sierra Club senior staff is resulting in long-distance decision-making, a defective process, and unworkable policy that is antithetical to the grass-roots democratic structure of the Club.

It’s time for some serious policy rethinking, including our own

Solar Done Right

www.solardoneright.org

CALL TO ACTION FOR ENERGY DEMOCRACY

Whereas,
We must take rapid, effective, innovative action to change the ways we generate and use energy;
Renewable energy is ubiquitous, offering a new model of energy generation that is local, democratic, and free from the abuses of a centralized monopoly;
The US government’s current renewable-energy policy and the policies of most US states push industrial solar and wind development onto public lands;
This industrial development is proposed for hundreds of thousands, possibly millions, of acres of our public lands—much of that acreage consisting of intact ecosystems which provide habitat for rare and endangered plants and animals, sequester carbon, and offer the chance for ecosystem adaptation to climate change;
The utility-scale solar and wind generating plants now proposed, most with footprints of several thousand acres, would transform these ecologically-rich, multiple-use lands to single use industrial facilities, in effect privatizing vast areas of public lands;
Once developed, those lands cannot be returned to their previous state after the life of a project-conversion is total loss, and permanent even though such projects will generate power for only 15 to 20 years;
The thousands of miles of new transmission infrastructure necessary to carry power from remote solar and wind electric generating plants to urban demand centers drastically inflate the cost of renewable energy, while imposing its own serious environmental impacts;
The federal government has provided tens of billions of taxpayer dollars in cash grants, loans and loan guaran-ties for remote industrial-scale solar and wind development to many of the same corporations that have domi-nated the Fossil Fuel Era, created the problems renewable energy is designed to rectify, and helped hasten the recession, while those same corporations have incurred substantial costs to expedite these for-profit projects;
Efficiency upgrades and “distributed generation”—point-of-use energy generation on rooftops, in parking lots and highway medians, brownfields, and throughout the built environment—are cost-effective, efficient, clean, and democratic strategies that are quick to implement, and would serve communities, ratepayers, and taxpayers by improving local economies and adding to home values, and creating millions of local jobs;
Efficiency and distributed generation further have far less environmental impact than industrial-scale solar or wind projects on intact ecosystems, while making our electrical power grid for less prone to catastrophic failure;
Feed-In Tariffs (FITs) and true net metering programs, in which utilities purchase democratically produced, decentralized renewable energy at a fair price, have been proven a cost-effective way of stimulating rapid deploy-ment of local solar and other distributed generation, while providing economic stimulus to communities rather than multinational corporations, even in cloudy countries like Germany;
The Environmental Protection Agency’s “Re-Powering America’s Lands” program has identified 15 million acres of degraded or contaminated land potentially suitable for renewable energy development, and is committed to working with renewable energy developers to remediate these lands for use as utility-scale renewable energy generation sites where large projects may be desirable.

Therefore, we demand:
That the Federal and state governments abandon their current path of industrialization and destruction of our public lands;
That any large-scale solar or wind installations be restricted to degraded, contaminated, or already-developed lands, including those identified by the EPA;
That Federal, state, and local governments facilitate a massive deployment of efficiency upgrades and point-of-use solar power;
That no new large, long-distance electrical transmission projects be approved to serve remote solar or wind projects until distributed power generation and energy efficiency are maximized;
That the Federal Housing Finance Agency immediately lift its defacto freeze on property assessed clean energy (PACE) loans, which provide critical low-risk financing for efficiency upgrades and home energy retrofits;
That Federal and state funding and other incentives be made available to help states establish and expand generous Feed In Tariffs (FITs) modeled after successful programs like Germany’s, and improve net metering poli-cies, and that Congress work to establish the proven solutions of German-style FITs and less-restrictive net metering at a national scale.
Not Trade Away

Back in July 2007, the latest round of talks at the World Trade Organization, which were intended to further expand the global domination of corporate-style free trade, were instead collapsing in disarray. U.S. Trade Representative Susan Schwab said she blamed “the proliferation of television channels, cable channels, the internet, blogs” and “unchecked communication.” It was all drowning out the message that corporations and their political friends wished to send, that the corporate free trade model — a disaster for democracy, the environment and human rights — was really a boon to humanity.

On March 14, the Sierra Club freely engaged in unchecked communication on the first day of the Good Jobs, Green Jobs regional conference in Los Angeles. Suzanne York and Andrew Christie, members of the Club’s Trade, Human Rights and Environment Team, were joined by former Club President Larry Fahn; Martin Schlageter, Executive Director of the Coalition for Clean Air; and Tim Robertson, Director of the California Fair Trade Coalition for a workshop entitled “People and Environment Over Profits” — i.e. the opposite of the free trade model.

Christie gave a PowerPoint presentation that laid out the history and impacts of corporate globalization and free trade agreements, with particular emphasis on the “investor-state” provisions of FTAs, a radical expansion of corporate power. This rule allows any foreign corporation barred from selling a toxic product or engaging in an environmentally destructive practice to sue a signatory nation to extract millions of dollars in compensation or overturn any regulation, from local zoning ordinances to federal environmental laws, on the grounds that such laws are an unfair hindrance to profit.

Schlageter warned against the upcoming Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) — the NAFTA of the Pacific Rim — the biggest multilateral trade agreement the U.S. has ever contemplated. Fahn encouraged shareholder activism as a curb to corporate power, noting that activists managed to get a 41% vote in favor of an anti-fracking resolution at a recent Chevron shareholders meeting. Attendees got the message that we will not get to a green economy, and no green jobs will really be green, if the transition to clean power and zero waste leaves intact the corporate free-trade model and related structures from landfills and recycling 71 percent of its trash.

Teamster National President James Hoffa, BlueGreen Apollo Alliance Chair Phil Angelides, and Tarryl Clark, National Co-Chair of the BlueGreen Alliance’s Jobs1 initiative, weighed in. Hoffa spoke on clean ports in Los Angeles and emphasized the accomplishments of his city in exceeding the greenhouse gas emission reduction targets of the Kyoto Accord, becoming a national leader in energy efficiency, and successfully diverting

DON’T FORGET!

In March we sent out an appeal to each of our members, asking for contributions directly to our Chapter. These contributions really do make a difference to us, and are an important part of our Chapter’s budget. When you make a donation to the Chapter, you support the Sierra Club’s work in our own backyard. You allow us to continue our work to protect wilderness and wildlife, to improve the quality of life in our cities, and to promote the enjoyment of nature.

Please be as generous as you are able — and remember, these funds directly affect your way of life in your neighborhood.

Mail your contribution to Sierra Club
P.O. Box 15755
San Luis Obispo, CA 93406

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Letters

send to: sierraclub8@gmail.com, or Sierra Club, P.O. Box 15755, San Luis Obispo, CA 93406. Letters may be edited for space.

Judith Bernstein’s poem “Who Has Time?” (March) is so appropriate to today’s society. A large thank you for printing it in the Santa Lucian and a thank you to Judith for her words.

Dorothy Yelda
via e-mail
The recent defeat of Excelaron’s Huasna Valley oil project at the County Planning Commission was an important line in the sand: an assertion that the new energy policies in SLO County’s Conservation and Open Space Element (specifically Policy 7.1—“the design, siting, and operation of non-renewable energy facilities will be environmentally appropriate”—and its implementation measures 1 through 5, and policies 6.2 and 7.3) mean what they say.

This project has been appealed to the Supervisors, who will probably make their decision within a month. The importance of encouraging the Supervisors to uphold the Planning Commission’s decision and planning staff goes beyond the protection of the character of the Huasna Valley to setting a precedent that, if weakened, would leave large areas of the County vulnerable to huge impacts. Excelaron is a relatively small player in the oil business; far bigger threats are looming behind them.

The vigilance needed to anticipate and prepare for what is coming can lead one into unlikely neighborhoods on the web. Every so often I Google word combinations like “Monterey shale investment” and a recent search led me to a site that showed the true extent of what may be facing us in the coming years.

I have not found any information source that breaks that investment down by county, but it is clear that the impact here could be enormous. While those who give the economy more weight than the environment on which it depends might welcome voluminous “investment” in our county, it should be remembered that the two largest sources of present economic activity in our county, agriculture and tourism, fare very poorly in the presence of major oil extractions. Those whose primary concern is the ability of our county’s environment to continue to support us and other species already have every reason to be alarmed.

If Excelaron is allowed to override our OSE, the big players can demand “fair” treatment. Thus, the exemplary turnout of Huasna Valley folks defending their backyard needs to be enhanced by the voices of people from throughout our county defending the much bigger backyard that is at imminent risk. The oil locked in the depths of the Monterey shale is very patient. If not burned it now, depleting resources and adding to climate mayhem, or leaving it in the ground for them to use if they need it? The more oil we can keep in the ground, the more chance those now young will have for a decent life.

Who’s Got the Survey?

Questions arise in county’s quest for complete communities

By Dorothy Jennings

The County has embarked on a project based on a key policy added to the General Plan in 2009—that the County should “create complete communities with appropriate areas for housing, commerce, civic uses, schools, recreation and open space.”

County Planning wants Templeton residents to respond to a survey that includes questions about parks and recreation. At the same time, the Templeton Community Services District is releasing a detailed survey on the subject.

As an indicator of the degree to which County Planning and the Templeton Community Services District seem to be communicating with each other, that’s not a good sign.

The County has embarked on a project based on a key policy added to the General Plan in 2009—that the County should “create complete communities with appropriate areas for housing, commerce, civic uses, schools, recreation and open space.”

County Planning received a $589,000 grant from the California Strategic Growth Council to perform “Community Sustainable” studies for four unincorporated urban areas—San Miguel, Templeton, Oceano and Nipomo.

The project consists of four major tasks: 1) Communities Research Summary; 2) Facilities Inventory; 3) Funding and Financing Plan, and 4) Community Profiles. The County has hired three consultant firms to produce these four products. The project is scheduled for completion by September.

County Planning deems Phase 1 to be complete and recently made a presentation to the Templeton Area Advisory Group (TAAG). The presentation focused on a 26-page document entitled “Complete Communities Research Summary.”

Templeton Parks & Recreation Facilities Survey

A parks and recreation survey has commenced in Templeton.

In the fall of 2011, the Templeton Community Service District established a Parks and Recreation Blue Ribbon Committee. TCSD director Greg O’Sullivan chairs the Committee.

The task given the committee is to revisit a draft 2004 Master Plan that was never adopted, and to survey the community. An earlier questionnaire has been revised to collect a broader range of information about Templeton area needs.

The Committee of sixteen individuals represents many recreational interests and age groups, from youth to seniors. The District has parks powers and collects Parks Public Facilities Fees. These fees are collected at the time a building permit is issued in order to provide additional park facilities for growing population. The District is well known for its mid-week Summer Concert series and youth team sport programs. Since assuming parks powers, the District has been functioning without a Parks and Recreation Master Plan.

The one-page, two-sided questionnaire is available at the Templeton Community Services District (TCSD) office, schools, several downtown businesses and online to reach residents living or working within the greater Templeton area. Residents receiving TCSD surveys will find the survey included with their utility bills.
Eco-grants continued from page 3

this year; next year the program will expand to all grade levels and contain approximately 150 students. The Greenhounds maintain an organic garden and a water filtration system that cuts down on plastics and encourages reusable water bottles, both funded by previous grants.

“We hope these two high schools, in fairly close proximity to each other, will share information and/or student contact,” said Eco-Grant program coordinator Joe Morris. “That would probably be motivating and instructive for both schools.”

Taking Issue

problematic environmental coverage & commentary in our local media


Summary: Assemblyman Achadjian was pleased that The Tribune printed his press release on his 2012 legislative platform, but extremely annoyed that the reporter also reported his anti-consumer 23% voting score as rated by a state consumer watchdog group.

Some of the highlights along the road to Katcho’s failing grade from the Consumer Federation of California were his vote against a bill prohibiting the manufacture, sale or distribution of bottles, cups or food containers for babies and infants that contain detectable levels of toxic Bisphenol A (BPA); his vote against a bill that would ensure that our state’s oil spill prevention programs have sufficient funds to remain solvent and protect our beaches and coastal waters; his vote against a bill that would have improved access to public transit and reduced air pollution and global warming; and his vote against a bill that would require those who operate oil and natural gas wells to provide information on “fracking” for publication on the website of the Division of Oil, Gas and Geothermal Resources.

I find it regrettable that [the reporter] used the article as an opportunity to attack the records of state Sen. Sam Blakeslee and mine [sic] based on a report issued by one of the state’s most liberal interest groups.

...the article could have provided balance by noting my 100 percent rating from the CalChamber, National Federation of Independent Businesses and CalTax.

The con-sequences of Katcho’s votes against good legislation that passed despite his objection have been avoided. The consequences of his successful anti-consumer and anti-environment votes — such as his vote to curtail the ability of local communities to exercise their right to challenge large development projects under the California Environmental Quality Act — are consequences we’ll all be paying for in years to come in costs to consumers, the environment and public health.

Art After Dark

Nature lovers who appreciate both landscapes and close-ups in nature are invited to the opening of an exhibit of work by Paul J. McCloskey and Dennis Eamon Young on Friday, April 6, from 6-9 p.m. at The Salon on Monterey, 1435 Monterey in San Luis Obispo.

Both artists will be present at the opening, part of ArtsObispo’s first Friday “Art After Dark” program.

Paul J. McCloskey is a local graphic artist, photographer and printmaker. He describes his art/work as “photo-painting,” a convergence of current digital photography/imaging technology with traditional printmaking. Paul’s work has appeared in numerous local & national publications, including on the cover of SkyWest magazine and Santa Ynez Valley Journal, and will be on display at the SLO City Library through April 15. He is working on a book with a local publisher entitled Painting with Light - A New Vision of the Central Coast.

Dennis Ramon Young describes himself as a “classically trained photographer who specializes in travel and adventure photojournalism, product and portrait photography.” His photographs have appeared in such publications as GQ and Cosmopolitan, and he serves as photographer for the Cal Coast News and the San Luis Obispo Chamber of Commerce.

To see more of these artists’ work, go to: www.paintingwithlightgallery.com and www.denniseamonyoung/photo.com or visit their Facebook pages.

The SLO County Food System Coalition

invites you to join us in creating a SLO County Hunger Free Community Plan.

What is it?

• An action plan with concrete, achievable steps to reduce hunger in our county.

Rest is it being developed?

• We need everyone’s help to not go back and/or steps to move us to achieve our goals.

Where is the planning occurring?

• Wednesday, April 18, 2:00-5:00 p.m. at the UC Cooperative Extension Ag Auditorium, 2650 Sierra Way, Salinas, California.

For questions, recall Carl Morrison, Food Bank Executive Director, cmmorrison@foodbankofthebark.org.

...Or it could have added that Katcho scored 36% on Sierra Club’s 2011 California Legislative Report Card, and that during his brief stint as a California Coastal Commissioner, he racked up some of the lowest pro-coastal voting scores in the modern history of the Commission.

Upshot: No doubt Katcho will continue to dismiss his legislative failing grades as attacks by “liberal interest groups,” maintain that his anti-consumer and anti-environment votes mean he is “pro-business,” and proudly cite the affection shown to him by the corporate polluters and developers he serves.

Spring Reflections” Paul McCloskey

805-238-4820 greg@flyingment.com

The Tribune

Missing in the article is an explanation of the consequences of the bills in which we were in the “wrong.”
Classifieds

Next issue deadline is April 13. To get a rate sheet or submit your ad and payment, contact:
Sierra Club - Santa Lucia Chapter
P.O. Box 15755
San Luis Obispo, CA 93406
sierracclub8@gmail.com

Hold Your Water
“Slow it, sink it, spread it” is the mantra of enlightened water managers who know that water works best when it stays on the land where it falls.
Now that mantra can be yours, too, along with healthier soils, happier wildlife, and reductions in your water bill, thanks to the tips and techniques in Rainwater Management for Low Impact Development, a publication of the Appropriate Technology Coalition – SLO Green Build, the Santa Lucia Chapter of the Sierra Club and the Surfrider Foundation, available for $10 postage paid, while supplies last. Mail your check to Sierra Club, P.O. Box 15755, SLO 93406.

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Rainwater Management
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Now that mantra can be yours, too, along with healthier soils, happier wildlife, and reductions in your water bill, thanks to the tips and techniques in Rainwater Management for Low Impact Development, a publication of the Appropriate Technology Coalition – SLO Green Build, the Santa Lucia Chapter of the Sierra Club and the Surfrider Foundation, available for $10 postage paid, while supplies last. Mail your check to Sierra Club, P.O. Box 15755, SLO 93406.

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Outings and Activities Calendar

Sun., April 1, 9 a.m. Arroyo Hondo Preserve. Moderate, docent-led hike along creek through scenic canyon to ridge, 6 miles rt. Preserve is 30’ drive N. of Santa Barbara. Bring lunch and water. Carpool from behind B of A, State St and Hope Ave in SB or call leader: Christine, 963-2347, for directions.

Fri.-Sun., April 6-8, Carrizo Plains Campout. Easter weekend campout at Selby Camp—primitive camping (no water), with exploratory hiking in Caliente Ridge area, leaving 9 a.m. on Saturday. Bring your own food, water, sturdy shoes, warm clothes for possibly freezing temperatures; some dirt road driving involved. Reservations, detailed driving directions, and info: contact Carlos Diaz-Saavedra at 546-0317.

Fri., April 12, 2-5 p.m. Island Hopping in Channel Islands National Park -- 3-Day, Live-Aboard, Multi-Island Cruises. For info and signup, contact Craig Deutsche, 310-477-6670 or craig.deutsche@gmail.com

Sat.-Sun., April 1-2, Mojave National Preserve Tour. Meet Saturday morning at Teutonia Peak trailhead on Cima Rd. for hike to Teutonia Peak, onto Cima Dune, with primitive camping at Sunrise Rocks. Sunday includes 8-mile downhill hike from Midhills to Hole-in-the-Wall, with possibility of good wildflowers. For those wishing to arrive on Friday, option of doing the Rock Springs Loop Trail. Primitive camping near Kelso Dunes for those wishing stayer on Sunday, including hiking dunes on Monday morning. Reservations: Carol Wiley at deserthike@verizon.net or 760-245-8734.

Sun., April 14-15, Birds, Flowers, and Fences in the Carrizo. Opportunity to visit and assist at Sunrise Rocks. Sunday includes Saturday: assist staff in removing fences to allow pronghorn antelope access to the range. Sunday reserved for sightseeing or hiking, as group decides. Views from Caliente Mts. are spectacular and spring wildflowers may be blooming. For info and signup, contact Craig Deutsche, 310-477-6670 or craig.deutsche@gmail.com

Sun., April 21, 8 a.m. Reservoir Canyon and Bowden Ranch. Moderate hike through wooded Reservoir Canyon near San Luis Obispo and then over the backbone ridge (Bowden Ranch), ending at San Luis Obispo High School. Spring wildflowers will be well represented. Meet at the eastern corner of SLO High School parking lot near corner of Johnson Ave. and San Luis Drive. A few cars will caravan hikers to trailhead in Reservoir Canyon (first right turn off north Hwy 101 after leaving SLO). Hike is 5 miles, elevation gain 1000 feet, total time of 3 hours. Owners of cars parked at the trailhead will be driven back to retrieve their cars. Bring adequate water, snacks, and dress for the weather; a hat and sturdy shoes is advised. Info: Bill Waycott, 459-2103 or bill.waycott@gmail.com. Rain cancels.

Sat., April 28, 10 a.m., Musical Walk: Historic San Luis Obispo. Come on a guided, tuneful stroll past ten historic landmarks in the oldest area of SLO, accompanied by recordings of thematic songs from Mission days to World War II. Meet at NW corner of Nipomo and Dana Sts.

Guided City Walks: San Luis Obispo
Each walk lasts about 90 minutes, is easy-paced, and free to the public. Families welcome. No reservations. Check this space or our website for information about future scheduled city walks.

Walk I: Mission-Era San Luis Obispo. See the home of the city’s first doctor; the location of the “hanging tree,” where the stagecoach stopped, and other sights on a stroll past the Mission, adobes, and old Chinatown. Meet at NE corner of Monterey and Osos Sts.

Walk II: Victorian-Age San Luis Obispo. Easy stroll past 18 lovely century-old homes and churches in the Old Town Historic District. See the homes of mayors, the newspaper editor, and Cal Poly’s founder, and learn about the lives of the newly wealthy who transformed the city in the late 19th and early 20th century. Meet in front of Jack House, 536 Marsh St.

Walk III: Mill Street Historic District. A walk through a neighborhood of splendid century-old homes to discover SLO in the era of Hearst, coming of the railroad, WW I, and the twenties. Learn the stories of the rich or not-so-famous who shaped the city of today. Meet at corner of Monterey and Johnson Sts.

Walk IV: Jazz-Age to Fifties SLO. Stroll past Jack House, 536 Marsh St., and the twenties. Learn the stories of the rich or not-so-famous who shaped the city of today. Meet at corner of Monterey and Johnson Sts.

Walk V: Musical Walk: Historic San Luis Obispo. A guided, tuneful stroll past ten historic landmarks in downtown San Luis Obispo, accompanied by recordings of thematic songs from Mission days to World War II. Meet at NW corner of Nipomo and Dana Sts.

This is a partial listing of Outings offered by our chapter. Please check the web page www.santalucia.sierracclub.org for the most up-to-date listing of activities.

Sponsored by other organizations

Mar. 2 - May 31: Theodore Payne Wildflower Hotline. 24 hours a day, anyone can call the Theodore Payne Wildflower Hotline to find the best places to view wildflowers in Southern and Central California. The hotline message is narrated by Emmy Award-winning actor Joe Spano (Mill Street Blues, NYPD Blue) and is updated every Thursday evening with new information on more than 90 wildflower sites. A public service of the Theodore Payne Foundation for Wild Flowers and Native Plants. (818) 768-5333 or www.wildflowerhotline.org.

- CRECC Region 8 News, www.crec.org