Three months ago we broke the bad news: The Santa Lucia Chapter is on the brink of insolvency. Without a significant and sustained infusion of cash, our San Luis Obispo office will close, staff will be laid off, and the Chapter’s ability to respond to critical environmental issues facing our community will be limited to an answering machine, a website, and self-organized volunteer efforts. The initial response from our membership has been extraordinary, and we have received enough emergency donations to keep the lights on long enough for the Chapter’s Executive Committee to gather input, crunch the numbers, discuss options and come up with a plan. So here’s the bottom line: In order to meet our basic obligations, (rent, utilities, payroll, printing, and paying our sole part-time staffer), we need at least 300 members to go to the Chapter’s website (www.santalucia.sierraclub.org), or follow the instructions in the “Bill Pay” box at right, and sign up to contribute $20 per month.

You can walk into your bank and set it up, or do it online at your bank’s website. (Paypal keeps more than two percent of your donation as service fees; your bank does not.) You can contribute more than $20 a month (heartily encouraged), we can expand our ability to address local environmental challenges, from preserving important wildlife habitat to protecting public access to promoting green jobs and sustainable land use decisions to advocating clean, renewable, locally-controlled energy sources. But if we don’t get the minimum level of participation, we will have to close our office, lay off staff, and greatly reduce our presence in the community.

For a glimpse of what San Luis Obispo County would look like now and in the future without the Sierra Club’s active engagement, take a look at “The County Without a Sierra Club” on pages 6 and 7 of this issue. Normally at this time of year, we recap the Chapter’s accomplishments over the preceding 12 months. This year, in the spirit of It’s a Wonderful Life, we are imagining what our community would look like today if Sierra Club had not been here to protect the environmental and community values we all share. (Hearst Ranch? A golf resort. Cayucos’ scenic ridgelines? McMansions silhouetted against the sky. San Luis Obispo’s celebrated Greenbelt?)

Automatic Donation via “Bill Pay”

If you don’t have a Paypal account and monthly donation via our website is not an option, you can set up your monthly donation with your bank with a monthly bank check. The service, called Bill Pay, is free to anyone with a bank account. All you need to give the bank besides your own account info is the date on which you want the check drafted and sent every month, and the name and address of the person or business you want it sent to. That would be:

Sierra Club
P.O. Box 15755
San Luis Obispo, CA 93406

You can walk into your bank and set it up, or do it online at your bank’s website. (Paypal keeps more than two percent of your donation as service fees, your bank does not.)

The most recent clash between free trade and our environment was in Quebec, where communities are fighting against the harmful effects of fracking, the hazardous process used to extract natural gas by blasting significant amounts of water, chemicals, and sand into rock formations deep underground. On November 8th, Lone Pine Resources, a Delaware-incorporated oil and gas firm with operations in Canada, filed notice of its intent to sue Canada for $250 million under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) over Quebec’s moratorium on fracking. The moratorium is set to stay in place as long as the preceding 12 months. This year, in the spirit of It’s a Wonderful Life, we are imagining what our community would look like today if Sierra Club had not been here to protect the environmental and community values we all share. (Hearst Ranch? A golf resort. Cayucos’ scenic ridgelines? McMansions silhouetted against the sky. San Luis Obispo’s celebrated Greenbelt?)

Subdivisions and strip malls. (Hearst Ranch? A golf resort. Cayucos’ scenic ridgelines? McMansions silhouetted against the sky. San Luis Obispo’s celebrated Greenbelt?)

It’s a sobering read. And while we don’t claim to be solely responsible for all of our county’s environmental victories, the fact is that without the Sierra Club’s leadership, public advocacy and commitment, our county would be a very different and diminished place.
It’s the 4th annual Environmentalists’ Rendezvous! Hear what representatives of seven key organizations in one place. The forum will include short presentations from the Alliance for Nuclear Responsibility, Audubon Society, CoastKeeper, SLO Green Build, SLO Land Conservancy, Surfrider, and, of course, the Santa Lucia chapter of the Sierra Club. Each will present their projects and answer your questions and comments.

Santa Lucia chapter of the Sierra Club. Each will present their projects and answer your questions and comments.

They’re Steamrollers, Baby

Two lawsuits will tell us all we need to know about our new board of supervisors.

The semi-progressive, occasionally environmental SLO County Board of Supervisors of 2009-2012 has come to an end. The majority did not use their majority vote in the service of bold, visionary measures to protect the environment of the central coast, and often did harm. They did not put policies in place that would have secured significant protections for rural land, local agriculture or wildlife habitat. They did not move the county any closer to the distant dream of affordable housing, nor institute basic political reforms (see “How About Now, Guys?”, Jul./Aug. 2012). In December, as their last significant act of land use planning, they crumbled under political pressure and put on vital decisions to the Ag Cluster Ordinance, inviting more disasters along the lines of the Santa Margarita Ag Cluster, “the Final Fumble,” (see their own lawsuits, page 9).

The majority did a few good things and prevented a few particular harms. It is two of those good things that two recent lawsuits seek to undo.

Specifically, the County is being sued for preventing an oil company from drilling for oil in the Huasna valley. Arroyo Valley Grande, and for passing an ordinance halting future subdivisions of the rapidly depopulating Paso Robles groundwater basin. Both lawsuits are without merit. But in both cases, merit is not the point. Excelaron LLC, the proposed operator of a solar panel farm claiming the County engaged in an illegal “taking” of property by barring them from extracting oil from the land in question. But in order for a “taking” claim to stick, the County would have had to deny all economic use of the property involved and issued a flat denial of all oil drilling in the area, not just a permit for a specific project. A permit to drill for oil on agricultural land is a “discretionary” permit, meaning that it may be denied. When you file for a dis-cretionary permit – and expend all the necessary funds on project review and a full analysis of environmental impacts – you are rolling the dice.

The Paso basin suit, filed by entities from the Alliance for Nuclear Responsibility, Audubon Society, CoastKeeper, SLO Green Build, SLO Land Conservancy, and, of course, the Paso Robles Basin, “uses the same title “Concerned Landowners in Paso Robles, Baby” as the Paso Robles Basin,” uses the same bogus legal argument that didn’t work when the plastic industry tried to block the county’s plastic bag ban, and when the Coalition for Labor, Agriculture and Business (COLAB) filed suit to stop the implementation of smart growth policies. The argument in a nutshell: the responsible agency failed to evaluate the potential environmental impacts of the project, notwithstanding the fact that the project would result in less impact on the environment than the impact currently caused by the practice that the project would curtail. As environmental law requires the assessment of a project’s potential to cause environmental impacts, not its potential to reduce or eliminate existing impacts, a bright ten-year-old can see that this argument won’t fly. To the disappointment of COLAB, and the plastic lobby, the court agreed with bright ten-year-olds everywhere who threw out their lawsuits.

But, again, the legal merits of the arguments are beside the point. Neither of these actions appears to have been designed with an eye toward prevailing in a courtroom. Rather, they are gift lists designed to elicit late Christmas presents from a not-so-secret Santa: the new majority on the County Board of Supervisors, comprised of Frank Mechem, Pat Terceira and Debbie Arnold. The complainants want the 2013 board to roll back the votes of the 2012 board. (Think Ronald Reagan removing Jimmy Carter’s solar panels from the White House.) The Tribune noted that Excelaron’s lawsuit “asks a judge to set aside the county’s denial of its project and either approve the application for 12 wells, or send it back to the Board of Supervisors.” Both suits are a ruse to get the new board to work out a deal in a closed session, take the issue back for reconsideration, and make sure the second time’s the charm. (It’s equally likely that Excelaron hopes to intimidate the County into approving its next project permit.) Supervisors Mechem, Terceira and Arnold should feel insulated by the obvious calculation of the complainants, and should instruct County counsel to vigorously defend the vote.
Sierra Club California is the Sacramento-based legislative and regulatory advocacy arm of the 13 California chapters of the Sierra Club. Every year, after the legislature goes home for the season, Sierra Club California staff analyze the votes and figure out who has been good and who’s been not so good. You can find out how your legislator and the governor performed by reading the Sierra Club California’s California Legislative 2012 Report Card.

Scores looked better in 2012 than they did in 2011. While in 2011 only one legislator earned a perfect score, last year seven legislators earned a perfect score. Additionally, many legislators raised their scores.

The governor also improved his score based on bills he signed and vetoed. In 2011, his score was just 55 percent. Last year, he raised that to 73 percent. You helped make these scores better by sending many, many emails, letters and phone messages to elected officials, telling them how you wanted them to vote on key legislation.

Also, thanks to you, many Club-endorsed candidates succeeded in their efforts to get elected to the legislature in November. You can see a full list of our endorsee’s status and the outcome of the propositions on which we took a position by going to the elections page on sierrcalifornia.org. The scorecard and the election prove once more how valuable and important grassroots activism is for California’s environment.

California Legislators Improve Environmental Voting Record

by Kathryn Phillips, Director, Sierra Club California

In February, Chapter members will vote for the candidates who will lead the Santa Lucia chapter of its Execu- tive Committee in 2010. We encourage our members to run for the ExCom and become part of the dynamic action of Sierra Club leadership on energy, air, water and land use issues.

The ExCom meets in February to appoint the chair, vice-chair, secretary and treasurer for 2013, as well as the program, conservation and outings chairs. We also appoint a delegate to the Council of Club Leaders, liaison to the national Sierra Club.

Candidates are accepted for a term of three years. Deadline for nominations is February 1. For more information or to run for your seat in The Ring, contact Cal French at calfrench@gmail.com or call the Sierra Club Office at (805) 543-4717.

Sierra Club Honors Volunteer for New Laws on Rooftop Solar

from the Sierra Club Yodeler, November 2012

On November 10, during Sierra Club California’s annual convention at Rancho El Chorro in SLO, volunteer Kurt Newick received the John Zierold Award, recognizing an individual who has served the Sierra Club in the area of legislative advocacy. The award specifically honors Kurt’s efforts—and tremendous successes—in cutting the permit fees for installing new solar panels. One of the satisfactions of being a Sierra Club volunteer is knowing that you have helped with some environmental victory. But few volunteers can boast of the achievement of Kurt Newick: two bills were signed into law that would not have worked without him. They were the outcome of his hard work over seven years, and he helped draft them. Lots of other volunteers were involved, of course, but it was Kurt’s initiative, hard work, and expertise that made the laws possible. Kurt notes with appreciation, “There was always someone willing to work with me.”

The story goes back to 2005. Kurt, who works for a solar contractor, saw a problem that was discouraging people from installing photovoltaic solar panels. Every city and county charges a permit fee for a new solar system, but in many cases the fees were much greater than the costs involved in issuing the permit—and large enough to be a significant discouragement to homeowners and businesses considering an installation.

Kurt didn’t just grumble—he organized. He worked with the Global Warming and Energy Committee of the Sierra Club Loma Prieta Chapter to conduct a survey of the permit fees for residential solar installations in his chapter, and the committee then publicized the results and encouraged jurisdictions to cut high fees. The results were astounding—lots of cities started lowering their fees. Kurt and the committee didn’t rest on their laurels. They extended the survey to include the Bay Chapter and several others (for a total of 25 counties), and to include commercial installations.

In 2011, state Senator Mark Leno and Assemblymember Nora Campos contacted Kurt for advice about statewide policies on the permit fees. They needed to be fair to enable cost-recovery for the cities, yet so not too high as to discourage new installations. Kurt worked with legislative staff to craft bills. Along with Sierra Club California senior advocate Jim Metropulos, Kurt provided advice and presented amendments that the lawmakers included in the final bills.

“The were pleased to work with the Sierra Club and Kurt Newick on SB 1222, which helps streamline government bureaucracy to make solar more accessible to consumers,” said Leno. “Kurt’s extensive studies on solar fees statewide, including many cases the fees were much greater than the costs involved in issuing the permit—and large enough to be a significant discouragement to homeowners and businesses considering an installation. The ExCom meets in February to appoint the chair, vice-chair, secretary and treasurer for 2013, as well as the program, conservation and outings chairs. We also appoint a delegate to the Council of Club Leaders, liaison to the national Sierra Club.

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Call for Candidates

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Can SLO Hear You?

Residents have overwhelmingly told the City of SLO what they want. Getting it is another matter.

Last spring, the city of San Luis Obispo sent a survey to residents to get their input on the City’s update of the Land Use and Circulation Element (LUCE) in the General Plan. The survey of the section that obtained the most interesting results reads as follows:

On a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being the poorest and 5 being the best, do you think the city should provide more, less or a certain service? (Please also indicate the city should provide more, less or a certain service, indicate whether you would be willing to pay more for it or whether you would divert funds from that to other uses.)

When staff collated the more than 2,000 responses received, they found that just four areas were supported by a majority of respondents who approved of seeking additional facilities and services: 58% support acquiring and maintaining open space land for the city’s greenbelt, 53% support open space land for parks and hillsides, 54% support acquiring and maintaining open space land for the city’s greenbelts, 53% support open space land for creeks and marshes, and 50% would like more bike lanes.

Further: “Despite support for some services, only a slight majority of respondents said they would support funding for more just for 54% for open space for peaks and hillsides, and 52% for open space for the City’s Greenbelt.”

To a survey question seeking input on the most and least important aspects of “quality of life,” respondents overwhelmingly rated the natural environment (air quality, open space) as having the highest impact on quality of life (71.1%). This was true for all catego- ries of respondents, including the students (74.7%), retired (69.2%), employed (69%), and owners of businesses in the city (73.4%). The “runner up” was “crime levels” at a significantly lower 62.9%. Even “job opportunities” rated way down at 38.2%, and “housing opportunities” at 35.3%. At the bottom of the list were “Shopping opportunities,” rated a mere 15.7%, and “entertainment opportunities, at 16.9%.

That’s what you call a mandate. Natural open space is clearly the top priority of city residents. Will that fact be reflected in the LUCE update, and will the City make this its top budget priority? If history is any guide, no.

At the time of the last LUCE update in 1994, after the City circulated substantially the same survey and got substantially the same results, a citizens’ Open Space Task Force ensured that the adopted Open Space Element defined and protected natural open space as a refuge for wildlife and a refuge for people from the built environment. But a few years later, when the city council directed staff to update the Conservation and Open Space Element and “consolidate” it with the 1994 document to create more detailed natural resource protection

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“We were pleased to work with the Sierra Club and Kurt Newick on SB 1222, which helps streamline government bureaucracy to make solar more accessible to consumers,” said Leno. “Kurt’s extensive studies on solar fees statewide were the supporting basis for the bill. Our teamwork led to bipartisan support and will help ensure that the solar industry continues to generate investment and jobs in California.”

Kurt was invited to Sacramento to testify before legislative committees. Kurt California.”

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SOLAR continued on page 8

3
No Cameras!
The Nuclear Regulatory Commission didn't say you could do that

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission conducts periodic meetings in SLO as local outreach exercises meant to shore up public confidence in the safety of the Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plant. The NRC chose the occasion of its November 28 SLO "open house" and poster session, meant to demonstrate how forthcoming the agency is in the flow of information and lean on residents who seemed intent on getting too much of it.

Two incidents occurred at the ratepayer-funded public meeting at the Embassy Suites Hotel, on which the NRC presented its evaluation of the hazard of the Shoreline Fault, just offshore of Diablo Canyon. One resident was expelled from the open house for taking pictures. Later, Alliance for Nuclear Responsibility outreach coordinator David Weisman, operating a video camera during a conversation between Alliance attorney John Geesman and an NRC seismologist, was accosted by the NRC's Public Affairs officer, who attempted to halt the filming.

A brief First Amendment discussion ensued. The conversation with the seismologist was allowed to proceed for a few more minutes, but as Geesman's relentless questioning dug into the NRC's reluctance to answer tough questions, he was kept at bay. The incident can be viewed at www.AINR.org.

The incidents occurred three days after the Supreme Court affirmed the constitutionality of a law forbidding the filming of Chicago police officers by citizens.

In the report and their presentation, NRC staff confidently assured residents that we have nothing to fear from the Shoreline Fault — in marked contrast to the discussion held among two dozen geologists and seismologists of the Senior Seismic Hazard Analysis Committee, which convened for a three-day meeting at the same location two weeks earlier, and was unable to confidently assert the magnitude of the hazard from the Shoreline Fault due to the high level of uncertainty.

It became clear that the NRC was intent on dismissing the largest potential threat to the plant, which hangs on Diablo's most ominous seismic question: whether the Shoreline and Hosgri faults intersect, with a "dip" toward the power plant and the capability for joint rupture.

This intention became most evident when the NRC geologist on hand attempted to dismiss an analysis by U.S. Geological Survey geologist Jeanne Hardebeck of the potential for the catastrophic dual rupture of the two faults, calling it simply "her opinion," and unworthy of further discussion.

"There's no shortage of whitewash here and the brushes to apply it," observed Weisman in his testimony.

Alliance for Nuclear Responsibility executive director Rochelle Becker blasted the meeting as "a waste of time," noting that there was no agenda for the day. The subject specialists were scattered around the room for most of the day for one-on-one conversations only, with no chance for a panel discussion "where we can listen and respond to what you're saying."

Shortly thereafter, NRC called it a night. As the staff members made their way to their cars in the Embassy Suites parking lot, they were surely relieved to note that none of them were bounded by paparazzi.

Santa Lucian  •  Jan./Feb. 2013

Join Our Nuclear Free Campaign

The Sierra Club is focused on changing our energy sources to go beyond coal, natural gas and oil. Phasing out nuclear power plants is the next phase in this campaign.

Nuclear power is not clean power. We propose that nuclear power plants can be replaced by energy efficiency and renewables within our lifetimes, and that the U.S. should follow the lead of Germany, Italy and Switzerland by phasing out our nuclear reactors. The Sierra Club Nuclear Free Campaign and No Nukes Activist Team are working in the U.S. and Canada to make a difference on these issues. You can participate via conference calls on specific issues, national action alerts, our activist list serve, and regional and national meetings. Sign up at http://sio.org/no_nukes.

The Sierra Club opposes consolidating waste at any central "interim" storage site due to concerns about transport and the temptation it poses to promoters of dangerously polluting reprocessing, and advocates instead building new waste disposal sites. The plan for the Diablo Canyon site is to be located under the ground at the site.

Join our Nuclear Free Campaign and become involved! Contact us at sierraclub.org/nuclear.
So it’s up to you. Who can say what the next year or the next decade will bring? With a new, strongly pro-development majority on the Board of Supervisors, an active Sierra Club chapter in our county is especially relevant. There is just no way to predict what may be around the corner. But it’s safe to say that we need the Sierra Club now more than ever. Whether coalition-building with other organizations, advocating for environmentally superior development alternatives, or litigating to undo damage, the Sierra Club is your county-wide, quality-of-life insurance policy.

We know times are tough. Believe me, we know. For many people, twenty dollars a month can be the difference between paying the rent or sleeping in their car. But for others, it is the equivalent of one large coffee drink per week. A restaurant dinner for one. A mid-priced bottle of wine. Half a tank of gas. What would you be willing to contribute to ensure that the Sierra Club’s smart, principled advocacy on your behalf and on the side of clean water, clean air, open space and public access can continue in the place where it makes the biggest difference—locally?

When you sign up for a $20 monthly contribution at www.santalucia.sierraclub.org you can be assured that every dime is going directly into the local Chapter’s activities. This is not your membership dues, the lion’s share of which go to the national organization to help out with national stuff, like getting bills passed or defeated in Congress and holding BP accountable for the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. This fundraising drive is 100% dedicated to supporting the Santa Lucia Chapter’s work right here in San Luis Obispo County.

We are confident that our members value their Chapter’s active engagement and want it to continue. Your volunteer service is deepened and amplified when you can depend on the support of our dedicated, award-winning staff. The effectiveness of your advocacy is extended when you can rely on the accurate information and shrewd analysis in this newsletter.

And your political engagement is translated into a force to be reckoned with when the Chapter endorses and supports visionary leaders like Bill Monning and Los Cerritos come election time. So. Today is the day. Now is the time. We have a month or two to see if you want the Chapter to continue as it is, or basically close its doors. If you want to be part of the solution, please go to www.santalucia.sierraclub.org now and sign up to contribute. Then get another friend or family member to do the same. With your help, and your investment in the future of our community, we can do this.

picture yourself “Kelp Forest,” by Alexa Sharpe, 12th grade, Torrance, 2012 contest.

California Students Invited to Enter Coastal Art & Poetry Contest

Let our coast and ocean inspire you! Win great prizes! Have your work featured online and exhibited throughout California!

The California Coastal Commission invites California students in kindergarten through 12th grade to submit artwork or poetry with a California coastal or marine theme to the annual Coastal Art & Poetry Contest. Up to ten winners will be selected to win $100 gift certificates to an art supply or book store, and each winner’s sponsoring teacher will receive a $50 gift certificate for educational supplies, courtesy of Acorn Naturalists. All winners and honorable mentions will receive tickets for their families to visit the Aquarium of the Pacific, courtesy of the Aquarium. Students may have their work featured on Commission web pages and materials, and winning entries will be exhibited throughout the year.

Entries must be postmarked by January 31 to be eligible for the upcoming contest. For rules and entry form (and helpful links for扭 curers and students), visit coastforkids.org or call (805) 224-9600. You can also download a contest flyer.
PGA Tour to Land on San Simeon Point

The PGA has announced that next year’s tour will be coming to the Hearst Ranch Golf Resort and it’s celebrated 18th hole, San Simeon Point.

The course will be part of the Hearst Corporation as its Stewards o’ the Land Luxury Lodge. For the duration of the competition, the country will double the number of water trucks that serve the resort beyond the usual fleet that brings in water every week to replace what once came from the San Carpoforo dry creek.

Longtime resident Britt Micklin said “I can remember when I was a kid and we went hiking out there on the Point. There were a lot of trees, little trails and everything.” she said. “There were fish in the cove, too, before the golf course and the herbicide runoff. It was a wonderful piece of nature; the kind of thing the Sierra Club might’ve saved, maybe stopped this resort from being built, if we’d had an active Sierra Club here. Oh well. This is the price of progress, I guess.”

Micklin said she may watch parts of the tournament through binoculars from the 100-yard perimeter the public is required to maintain from the course. “They finally got the message that they weren’t wanted. I wish someone had told us that knocking down nests is illegal, and how important the swallow was to our community and the local ecosystem and stuff like that. I bet that’s the kind of thing the Sierra Club would have done, if we had one here. Too late now, I guess.”

He sighed, lowered the mosquito netting from the rim of his pith helmet, attached it to his collar, and walked back to his empty hotel to sit at the front desk.

Cayucos Ridgelines Full

No more room in “McMansion Country”

With this week’s completion of construction of a 50,000-square-foot spec vacation cottage overlooking the landscape of green hills and valleys between Highway 41 and Highway 46, every buildable lot on the ridgelines of the Cayucos Viewshed has now been occupied by mansions that offer current or prospective owners sweeping views of each other.

“Everybody wants a great view, and for as long as there were views here, they paid top dollar for it,” said a satisfied Zip Zullin of the Home Builders Association. “It was a great run. Without our friends on the County Board of Supervisors who passed the viewshed ordinance that was written for them by the lot owners back in 2007 to re-jigger county planning standards, we never could have pulled this off.

Miff Whiplin of the Cayucos Citizens Advisory Council ruefully agreed. “We had sort of hoped that someday some subsequent board would roll back that god-awful ordinance,” he said, “but that never happened. Nobody wanted to get anybody riled up, I guess. If we had the Sierra Club here, I bet they would’ve sued to get that thing repealed. But we don’t have one, so that didn’t happen, either. Hey, you want to see some pictures of what this place used to look like? It was really pretty.”

Los Osos Goes Dry

August 7, 2015

With last week’s announcement that the Los Osos aquifer has fallen to a level too low to support the population of the town, a wave of foreclosures and home abandonments has left the community a virtual ghost town.

The vegetation in the area’s last environmentally sensitive habitat area died off several months ago when the creeks went dry.

“With the benefit of hindsight, we went the wrong way on the sewer project,” said Whit Whipplin of the Los Osos Ridgelines Full project. “And we really shouldn’t have done it. It was a good idea if the County had been a partner. But we just wanted to focus on getting the sewer built and the water treated and disposed of. It’s all we know.”

Whipplin believes it would have been a good idea if the County had expanded its thinking when the project was in the design phase and shifted from a philosophy of waste water disposal to ramp up conservation and include water recycling as part of the project. “And we really shouldn’t have gone with spraysystems — spraying...
Here are some local news stories you won’t be seeing in the future because we were there in the past.

We hope we can continue to be here in the future for San Luis Obispo’s citizens, natural resources and wildlife.

The real estate firm Trampell & Clutterup has announced plans to develop eight parcels on the hillsides above Johnson Avenue in San Luis Obispo, to be subdivided into 22 residential lots, plus a recreation center, amphitheater, and hotel. The project will complete the full build-out of the hillsides surrounding the city.

Johnson Avenue residents have expressed dismay, and are pressing the City to purchase the parcels from the present owners and preserve them as natural open space.

“It’s a nice idea,” said SLO Economic Development Manager Viv Grifflin, “but that would require something like a greenbelt program to acquire open space, and a natural resources manager to run it.”

Grifflin says that those things in turn would require the right policies in the city’s Land Use Element. “And getting policies like that would probably require something like the establishment of an environmental quality task force,” he said.

“I’m told there was some discussion of doing something like that about 25 years ago when we did the General Plan update,” said Grifflin, “but there was no Sierra Club and no Sierra Club activists to get behind that idea and push.”

“Which is okay by me,” she added, “I think we’re doing just fine. Especially the real estate sector.”

Don’t want to see future news stories like these? Go to www.santalucia.sierraclub.org, click “Donate,” and sign up for an automatic monthly contribution of $20, or whatever you can afford. If you don’t have Paypal, you can request a monthly bill pay service from your bank, free to anyone with an account. Provide the bank your account number, the date on which you want the check sent every month, and the name and address of the recipient:

Sierra Club
P.O. Box 15755
San Luis Obispo, CA 93406

Want to help us build support? Plan to attend the first meeting of the Chapter Development Committee on January 12. For time and place, email Doug Bing at dougbing@sbcglobal.net.

You’re welcome! The Santa Lucia chapter had to wage a two-year legal battle with the County to repeal the Cayucos Viewshed Ordinance and save these hillsides.
On November 21, KJET’s web publication ReWire, providing news and analysis about renewable energy in California, published an article entitled “The End of Large-Scale Solar Projects in the U.S.?” which featured excerpts from an interview with Jack Curtis, the Asia-Pacific Vice-President of Business Development and Sales at First Solar, the Arizona-based thin film photovoltaic company best known for building large utility scale power plants in the California desert and the Carizzo Plain.

Curtis said the company -- and, he believes, the solar industry as a whole -- will be scaling back on the construction of massive solar power plants in North America.

“I don’t think you’re going to see a lot of these going forward — largely because it is difficult to find that optimum balance between land availability and transmission availability — but more importantly you’re really not leveraging the modularity of photo-voltaic (PV) solar as much as you could. Solar PV essentially realizes all economic economics of scale at about 20 megawatts (MW), so if it doesn’t cost you any more on a unit basis to build 20 MW as opposed to 500 MW, then what you should be doing is leveraging more strategic places on the grid where you don’t have those grid constraints, where it’s easy to find a site, where it’s easier to distribution load, or it’s not as much of a pain to connect, or it doesn’t have the same line loss impact.”

The article concludes: “projects of that size are far more likely to fit into urban and other develop-"
Their Final Fumble
Supervisors drop the ball on ag clusters & hit the showers

Going out with a whimper, the allegedly progressive majority of the County Board of Supervisors made its last major planning decision on December 4, they decided that after four years of trying, they were unable to fix the faulty Ag Cluster Ordinance, a fundamentally flawed land use policy intended to protect agricultural land from sprawling residential subdivisions, and dropped it into the waiting arms of the new, profoundly anti-environment board.

It is likely to be a chilly embrace, from which no meaningful reform of this failed ordinance will emerge. Essentially, the public process — four years of work by the planning department, planning commission and citizens advisory committee — was dropped down a hole. The amendments will now be re-written by development interests who have volunteered to assist the County in that task.

From its inception, the Ag Cluster Ordinance has brought about results contrary to the intent of its promoters. It was intended to be both a disincentive to subdivision of ag lands and an incentive for preserving large swaths of agricultural land by agri-businesses and ranchers to pursue some modest development of clustered home sites on small portions of their land.

That was the intention; the reality is that the ordinance has been a failure in doing what it was intended to do, as vividly illustrated by the projects approved for Santa Margarita Ranch and proposed for Laetitia Vineyards. The reality has been developers purchasing large agricultural parcels to develop projects featuring gated communities and expensive home sites that depend on the property’s ground-water, which is supposedly protected for agricultural uses, in order to throw a monkey wrench into the workings of the current ordinance.

At that point, it was clear that there was a matter of stretching out and defying the law. The board had a chance to keep what it was intended to do, as i.e. fold under pressure from economic interests eager to throw a monkey wrench into the workings of the current ordinance, said that “Sierra Club and the Farm Bureau, attempting to conjure support for the original flawed ordinance, said that ‘a cluster would maximize protection of ag land.’”

What we really said was that this outcome was possible if ag clusters are no longer done in the way the current ordinance allows, but instead in the manner prescribed by the amendments that were before the Board.

Delaying the vote on the reform of the ag cluster ordinance, after the rushed vote on the Santa Margarita Ranch cluster, was a compounded travesty of responsible land use planning, firmly branding the 2009-2012 SLO County Board of Supervisors with the badge of political cowardice.

The board had a chance to keep what happened last time from happening again. They let it happen again.

A Vote for Urban Agriculture

By the Central Coast Ag Network

On November 20, the San Luis Obispo City Council unanimously voted to lease 18 acres of the Callio Joaquin Agricultural Reserve to the Creek to Sierra Club, P.O. Box 15755, San Luis Obispo, CA 93406.

The proposed amendments were drafted to remedy these problems. The Tribune noted that the exceptions of those who opposed them looked a lot like a filibuster, intended to prevent the those who opposed them looked a lot like a filibuster, intended to prevent the County from voting and thereby handing off the decision to the developer-friendly 2013 board.

Four years ago, the same economic interests made sure that the previous board voted on the Santa Margarita ag cluster. In December 2009, it was a matter of hurry up and vote on an insufficiently studied, inadequately mitigated project that never should have made it out of County Planning — a display of raw politics that exposed all the flaws of the Ag Cluster Ordinance and the ease with which they can be exploited. In December 2012, it was matter of stretching out and delaying the fix for those flaws and claiming that the proposed amendments had been suddenly thrust on an unsuspecting public, despite the fact that this issue has been the subject of public surveys and multiple public hearings before the board and the planning commission for the last four years.

At the very start of the December 4 hearing, Supervisor Adam Hill signaled his willingness to “continue the item” — i.e. fold under pressure from economic interests eager to throw a monkey wrench in the process, gut the amendments and keep exploiting the weaknesses in the current ordinance. At that point, it was clear that there were not enough votes to get the amendments passed, and public comment became moot.

Nevertheless, there was plenty of comment from the public, who, drunk on COLAB kool-aid, variously asserted that the ordinance if amended as proposed — which would not prevent anyone from building a home — amounted to the seizure of private property, a conspiracy by the County’s socialist planning staff comparable to the Nazis rounding up Jews, a betrayal of our troops who stormed the beach at Normandy, and an extension of the U.N.’s plans for world domination.

“One such commenter stated proudly ‘I don’t read the newspaper.’”

The Farm Bureau, attempting to conjure support for the original flawed ordinance, said that “Sierra Club and the Farm Bureau, attempting to conjure support for the original flawed ordinance, said that ‘a cluster would maximize protection of ag land.’”

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You Can Pay the Rent!

Last month, our members met a generous donor’s matching grant challenge for our $700 monthly office rent, and our donor matched it!

He’s offering the same challenge for the February rent. So here’s an opportunity for more of you to collectively kick in to keep the doors open. Any amount you contribute will be automatically doubled! Make your check payable to Sierra Club and send to: Sierra Club P.O. Box 15755 San Luis Obispo, CA 93406

(Write “Feb. rent match” in the memo section of your check.)
Taking Issue

**Summary:** If the public retains their right to know about risks to their health and the environment, this will somehow prevent California from having a strong economy. So let’s “reform” the California Environmental Quality Act to relax or eliminate environmental review.

Can anybody recall a time when Republicans didn’t take full advantage of an electoral mandate to go full steam ahead with their agenda? If California Democrats don’t see their first supermajority since 1883 as a mandate, they don’t deserve the support they got from voters in November and they won’t be able to hold onto that advantage beyond the next two years.

“Reforming” CEQA won’t reduce unemployment, and cynically pitting the economy against the environment won’t spur economic growth. Creating green jobs, investing in education, and supporting environmental restoration are the kinds of initiatives needed to stimulate the economy and put people back to work.

See the Equal Protection Clause of the U.S. Constitution. Laws are not selectively available to favored classes of citizens. The demonization of “NIMBY” has always been a pernicious Orwellian attempt to attack citizens defending their interests. Why shouldn’t folks use CEQA to halt or improve bad projects in their communities? That’s why we have CEQA. That’s what it’s for. And that’s why the author has to admit that CEQA has been working with CEQA experts to develop reforms that prevent abuses while maintaining the law’s intent. The proposals were discussed briefly in Sacramento and legislative session ended, but they were too complex to be passed quickly.

Nearly 2 million Californians remain unemployed. Economic growth must be a top priority. And one of the best ways to accomplish it is to reform the California Environmental Quality Act.

CEQA is one reason the state has been able to preserve its natural beauty — a central component of its attraction for residents and businesses — and it has given residents a strong voice in community development. But it is too often abused by a wide range of interests: NIMBYs to protect their personal interests, labor unions as a weapon to demand contracts and businesses to stop competition, to name just a few.

Many laws have been amended multiple times since it was signed into law, to respond to abuses, weaknesses and oversights. When critics talk about “update” these days, what they mean is gutting the law to make it less effective.

Note the lack of supporting data and the choice of rhetoric. CEQA lawsuits are “few” but they “often” deter job creation? Changing “what businesses do and where they try to build” is precisely the intent of CEQA. Developers doing legitimate infill projects on sites that have few (or adequately mitigated) environmental impacts have little to fear from CEQA. And a supermajority in not needed to amend CEQA; it can be accomplished with a simple majority vote. That is how it got amended to exempt a sports stadium in 2011. That’s how it’s been amended numerous times over the last 20 years. A supermajority vote is only necessary to raise taxes or place constitutional amendments on the ballot.

Reform opponents say CEQA lawsuits are few, and they’re right. But the threat of a lawsuit changes what businesses do and where they try to build. Sometimes that’s for the best, but often it’s a needless deterrent to job creation. Reforms could actually enhance environmental protections. Infill, which is building in already developed areas — far preferable to sprawl into open land — is often challenged by NIMBY neighbors. Gov. Jerry Brown, Senate President Darrell Steinberg and Assembly Speaker John Perez all have promised reform. It’s a perfect opportunity to show Californians they’re serious about using their supermajority power responsibly.

**Upshot:** “CEQA is an essential check on government decision-making on a wide range of development decisions, from oil drilling along our coast to industrial development to allocation of natural resources like clean water, clear air and open space. Californians should remain wary of giving up their say in decisions about how and where property is developed. With the election behind us, it is time for the legislature to turn its attention to the issues that really matter. Promote good, clean jobs. Find a sustainable path forward with green environmental safeguards won’t get us there.”

“Gutting CEQA would be wrong for California,” Kathryn Phillips, Director of Sierra Club California, and Joel Reynolds, Western Director of the Natural Resources Defense Council, San Jose Mercury News, Dec. 7, 2012.
Classifieds

Next issue deadline is January 12. 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
sierrahub8@gmail.com

Hold Your Water

“Aim 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.

Environmental Protection

Cynthia Hawley
Attorney

Environmental Protection
Land Use
Civil Litigation

P.O. Box 29 Cambria California 93428
Phone 805-927-5102 Fax 805-927-5220

Santa Lucian • Jan./Feb. 2013

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Outings and Activities Calendar

All our hikes and activities are open to all Club members and the general public. Please bring drinking water to all outings and optionally a lunch. Sturdy footwear is recommended. All phone numbers listed are within area code 805 unless otherwise noted. Pets are generally not allowed. A parent or responsible adult must accompany children under the age of 18. If you have any suggestions for hikes or outdoor activities, questions about the Chapter’s outing policies, or would like to be an outings leader, call Outings Chair Joe Morris, 549-0355. For information on a specific outing, please call the listed outing leader.

Sun., Jan 13, 10 a.m. Sycamore Springs Trekking Pole Hike: "Hike cats" is dedicated to leading Sierra Club day hikes and modeling the benefits of using trekking poles. The easy hike to Sycamore Springs is 2 miles round-trip, 700-ft elevation change. Meet near the entrance to Sycamore Springs Resort, 1215 Avila Beach Drive. Need to confirm beforehand with leader, David Georgi at 458-5575 or polecatleader@gmail.com

Fri-Sun., Jan. 18-20. Death Valley Wilderness Restoration Work: Death Valley NP Wilderness Coordinator Charlie Callagan, picking up debris in Panamint Valley. Hike in of 1 1/2 miles, carry out what we pick up. Camp at either Panamint Springs or Wild Rose campground. Arrive Friday afternoon and start work on project, continuing on Saturday with a potluck in the evening. Sunday may be a work day or recreational. Leader: Karen Allen, kalallen66@gmail.com or 661-944-4056. CNRCC Desert Committee.


Sun., Jan 27, 2 p.m. City Walk of San Luis Obispo: Jazz Age to the Fifties. Where is the hotel where Hearst entertained his guests, the speakeasies of the 20s, the original French Hospital? Find out and much more on a guided stroll past historic stores, theaters, and hotels. Learn about SLO city life from the Model T to Prohibition and World War II. Meet at building designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, corner of Santa Rosa and Pacific. Info.: Joe Morris, 549-0355.

General Meeting: 4th Annual Environmentalists' Rendezvous Come and hear what major environmental groups in SLO county are doing and their plans for 2013. A unique chance to hear from representatives of key organizations in one place. The forum will include short presentations from Alliance for Nuclear Responsibility, Audubon Society, Coast Keeper, SLO Green Build, SLO Land Conservancy, Surfrider, and of course our own chapter. Each will present their projects and leave time for questions and comments. Steinberg Gallery, 1531 Monterey St., SLO. Info.: Joe Morris, 549-0355

Sun., Feb. 24, 2 p.m. Musical Walk of Old San Luis Obispo. Join us on a guided tuneful stroll past ten landmarks in the historical center of SLO. Hear the stories behind an ancient adobe, the stagecoach stop, homes of SLO’s first doctor and first millionaire, the Creamery, a forgotten WPA project, and more—accompanied by recordings of period songs from Mission days to World War II. Duration about 1 1/2 hours. Meet at NW corner of Nipomo and Dana Sts. Info.: Joe Morris, 549-0355.

Island Hopping in Channel Islands National Park

April 7-9: May 5-7; June 2-4; July 21-23; Aug. 25-27; Sept. 15-17
Join us for a 3-day, 3-island, live-aboard cruise to Channel Islands National Park. Hike wild, windwept shores bordered with blooming wildflowers. Kayak rugged coastlines. Marvel at pristine waters teeming with frolicking seals and sea lions. Visit Sea Island, a protected island of unique flora and fauna. In Channel Islands National Park, see the wildlife in their natural habitat with great views of the Pacific. Info.: Joe Morris, 549-0355.

Thank You, George and Gewynn

By Andrew Christie, Chapter Director

There are no words to express our sense of sorrow and loss in the face of the tragedy that overtook the lives of George and Gewynn Taylor last December. The Los Osos couple were 30-year members of the Sierra Club and active supporters of the Santa Lucia Chapter. The feeling was mutual. For me, personally, they offered an object lesson in what it means to be a community activist. We met during the long fight over the Los Osos sewer, and worked on Judy Vick’s campaign for 2nd District Supervisor. I won’t forget the hours spent in their rec room working through the process of drafting a permit appeal to the Coastal Commission for a house they felt was out of scale for the neighborhood. I won’t forget their friendship. The Sierra Club won’t forget their support. We support the Sierra Club, to leader Joan Jones Holtz, 11286 The Wye St., El Monte, CA 91732. For more information call or e-mail 626-443-0706 or joholtzhln@aol.com.