The release of the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the plan to accommodate crude oil by rail at the Santa Maria Refinery was met by a blizzard of public comments, including ours (see “Shale Oil Target: Nipomo Mesa,” February), and as a result will not be heard at the Planning Commission on April 24. The hearing may be postponed up to seven months while the County and Phillips 66 re-write and re-circulate the EIR.

The overwhelming response to the refinery rail spur can be attributed to two factors: the potential impacts on SLO County’s environment and citizens are extremely alarming, and the Environmental Impact Report that was supposed to assess and mitigate those impacts did an extremely bad job.

The Santa Lucia Chapter zeroed in on the EIR’s multiple assertions that the likely source of crude oil would be the Bakken shale formation of North Dakota – the oil that has been the cause of massive explosions and fires that have attended multiple recent oil train accidents. Such accidents have been on the rise as the industry has come to rely more and on the nation’s tippy-tack rickety rail system for increasing U.S. crude oil output, resulting in a skyrocketing number of oil by rail shipments.

The Sierra Club, Communities for a Better Environment, Natural Resources Defense Council, Food & Water Defense Council, and other organizations met with members of the Santa Lucia and Los Padres Chapters of the Sierra Club, ForestEthics and the Center for Biological Diversity to discuss the reckless growth of crude-by-rail, threatening to come to our neck of the woods. The EIR fails to provide a stable, accurate and detailed project description, thus undermining every aspect of the impacts analysis;

- The EIR does not accurately evaluate numerous project impacts, including air quality, greenhouse gas emissions, public health and safety, and biological resources;
- The EIR does not provide sufficient analysis of the project’s cumulative impacts;
- The EIR does not adopt feasible mitigation measures.

And finally, there is the card trick that forms the basis of virtually all the EIR’s deficiencies: The environmental review does not disclose the likelihood that the primary purpose of the rail spur project would be to bring tar sands oil from Canada to the refinery. By citing only Bakken shale oil – a light crude – as a specific source, the EIR evidently sought to avoid disclosing the serious local pollution, climate impacts and chemical safety hazards that the refining of heavy, high-sulfur tar sands crude oil presents for the public and the refinery’s own workers. The series of Bakken oil train explosions had just begun at the time the EIR was being prepared. Thus the sleight-of-hand that sought to get the project out of the tar sands frying pan dropped it into the Bakken crude oil volcano. As noted by Sierra Club et al.:

It is impossible to provide any intelligent evaluation of the potential environmental effects and risks to community and worker health and safety of partially refining Canadian tar sands crudes in Santa Maria, unless the DEIR first discloses this critical component of the Project. At a minimum, the DEIR should have established whether this Project would result in the company’s use of a different or lower quality crude oil feedstock, whether in Santa Maria or any foreseeable location... and evaluated such consequent impacts. Until then, the DEIR Project Description is inaccurate, incomplete and renders the analysis of significant environmental impacts inherently unreliable.

At a public meeting on the Nipomo Mesa on March 13, a standing-room-only crowd watched the YouTube video “Voices Against Oil Trains.” When we showed this video, there was a decided gasp from the audience, said Larry Shinderman, a member of local watchdog group Mesa Refinery Watch. “Up until now, they knew that the benignly named ‘Rail Project’ was an insidious plan by Phillips to change their business model by sending 20,800 tanker cars into the refinery rather than their current method of sourcing ‘feedstock’ by pipeline. But seeing the billowing fire ball drove the point home.” Stay tuned.
Pandora Panned

Nuclear roadshow bombs at Cal Poly

On March 11, the third anniversary of the Fukushima nuclear disaster, Cal Poly chose to mark the occasion and besmirch its academic reputation by hosting a screening of the pro-nuclear propaganda film Pandora's Promise. Essentially a 90-minute commercial for nuclear power and the Breakthrough Institute, Pandora's Promise dismisses renewable energy and the idea that putting a price on carbon would aid the development of renewables, and denies protesters of the Keystone XL pipeline because they use fossil-fueled buses to get to protests. (An ongoing sparring match with prominent Climateprogress blogger Joe Romm, Shellenberger has posted Romm's picture on the Breakthrough website alongside a picture of Joe McCarthy. Romm is relentless in pointing out the flaw in Breakthrough's premises and is therefore “hyper-partisan” and a “climate McCarthyite,” according to Shellenberger.)

Disingenuous and intellectually insulting on multiple levels, Pandora’s Promise downplays, dismisses or omits the drawbacks of nuclear power and gives no screen time to any critic presenting a rational critique of the industry.

For example, the omitted facts is what the film’s call for a future nuclear utopia would actually require and the cost of this alleged solution to global warming. The trillions of dollars needed to build enough nuclear power plants to reduce carbon emissions by any significant amount — 1,500 new reactors on line worldwide by 2050 — represents funds that would be sucked away from the development and deployment of renewable energy and energy efficiency. That money is well represented by the unstable white elephant known as the fast breeder reactor, which Pandora’s Promise holds up as the all-new, improved version of nuclear energy while omitting to mention the tendency of its cooling system to burst into flames. $100 billion has been spent on the effort to make breeder reactor technology work, an effort that, in forty years, has resulted in zero operating commercial reactors.

The financial cost of nuclear power is the reason why former Nuclear Regulatory Commissioner Peter Bradford has commented “Saying that nuclear energy can solve climate change is like saying caviar can solve world hunger.”

Writing in The Grid, Mark Hertsgaard summed up the key failure of Pandora’s Promise in its trashing of alternatives such as energy efficiency and renewable power. The film’s dismissal of wind and solar — the fastest growing technologies on record — and, per the Rocky Mountain Institute, “each dollar invested in improving energy efficiency generates seven times more reduction in greenhouse gas emissions than a dollar invested in nuclear.” (See “Let’s Get Efficient,” page 9.)

The most disingenuous aspect of Pandora’s Promise may be its treatment of the Fukushima disaster. The film deals with Fukushima by framing it in the past tense – depicting it as an historic event whose impacts have been measured and understood. It fails to present an example of any other type of industrial accident that, with a single event, has the potential to turn hundreds of square miles of land into uninhabitable sacrifice zones and destroy an entire economy.

After the screening, Gordon Thompson, executive director of the Institute for Resource and Security Studies in Cambridge, Massachusetts, was given ten minutes to present a Powerpoint presentation that quietly refuted as many of Pandora’s arguments as was possible with that allotted time frame. Shellenberger was then given time to present his own Powerpoint — which raised the question “why?” in the minds of many in the audience, who had just seen a 90-minute pitch for Shellenberger’s point of view.

For a non-time-constrained response, we can thank the thoughtful folks at Beyond Nuclear, who have produced the report “Pandora’s False Promises: Busting the pro-nuclear propaganda,” available at beyonddanger.org, which addresses “virtually all of the myths, lies and disinformation typically found in pro-nuclear rhetoric, and is intended to address these long after Pandora’s Promise fades into deserved oblivion.”

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The Executive Committee meets the second Monday of every month at 5:30 p.m. The Conservation Committee meets the second Friday at 1 p.m. at the chapter office, 205 Santa Rosa St., San Luis Obispo. All members are welcome to attend.

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Coastal National Monument Gets New Jewel

On March 11, President Obama designated Point Arena-Stornetta Public Lands as part of the California Coastal National Monument.

Located along the south coast of Mendocino County, these public lands include 1,665 acres of views, tide pools and coastal wetlands. “In his State of the Union speech, President Obama promised to use his authority to protect more of our public lands for future generations,” said Sierra Club Executive Director Michael Brune. “We commend him for making this irreplaceable coastal refuge one of them. This special piece of America deserves to be recognized as part of the California Coastal National Monument.”

The Point Arena-Stornetta Public Lands area includes more than two miles of coastline, portions of the Garcia River, the Garcia estuary and a five-acre island—Sea Island Rocks. Its wildflower meadows and shifting sand dunes provide a home for otters, seals, pelicans and a host of other wildlife.

The designation marks the first expansion onto land for the coastal monument and it will serve to protect important habitat for migratory birds, salmon, and several endangered species, including the Point Arena mountain beaver and the Behren’s silverspot butterfly.

There was broad local support from the community, conservationists and business leaders for including Point Arena-Stornetta public lands in the national monument. The move was also championed by Congressmen Thompson and Huffman, and by California Senators Boxer and Feinstein, who helped lead efforts to protect the area.

“Local citizens have been working with the Bureau of Land Management to support appropriate use of the area, but the scarce resources available have been overburdened by the demands placed on this fragile, special place,” said Sierra Club Redwood Chapter Chair Victoria Brandon. “Today’s designation will encourage effective management to ensure the permanent protection of Point Arena-Stornetta Public Lands for the enjoyment of our children and grandchildren.”

The California Coastal National Monument is comprised of more than 20,000 small islands, rocks, exposed reefs and pinnacles along 1,100 miles of coast between Mexico and Oregon. Permanently protecting Point Arena-Stornetta Public Lands as part of the national monument provides significant conservation and recreation benefits, including the potential for more than ten miles of California Coastal Trail extending from the City of Point Arena to Manchester State Park.

“Once again we see President Obama listening to the widespread desire among Americans for permanently protecting our outdoor heritage for future generations. We hope he will continue to heed the call to protect other special places as national monuments,” said Brune.

Don’t forget!
In March we went 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 through the Sierra Club’s website, you support the work the Sierra Club does in your backyard.

Visit our website to continue our work to protect wilderness and wildlife, to enhance the quality of life in our cities, and to promote the enjoyment of nature.

Thank you. Send your contribution to: Sierra Club, P.O. Box 13795, San Luis Obispo, CA 93406

Dear Media:

The proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade deal has drawn heavy criticism (See “Not This Trade Agreement,” April 2013, “Trade is Good, When It’s Fair,” Nov. Dec. 2013 and “Sierra Club Opposes Fast-Track Rush on International Trade,” Feb. 2014.) The Sierra Club and 500 other environmental, labor and farm groups oppose granting the White House “fast track” authority to speed the pact through Congress. TPP will enshrine corporate control of decisions previously subject to democratic processes—decisions over intellectual property, the environment, labor rights, food, finance and more.

The deal, still being negotiated in secret, has spawned protests around the world. But there’s one thing that TPP hasn’t generated: news.

Rep. Keith Ellison (D-Minn.) has called it “the largest corporate power grab you never heard of.” He’s right. Per Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR), over 14 months—from March 14, 2013 through February 2014—TPP was never covered in any detail by the three major television networks.

It’s time to let the news networks know that a big, secret trade deal that has mobilized thousands of activists is a story that needs to be covered. Sign FAIR’s petition now. Tell ABC, CBS and NBC that the Trans-Pacfic Partnership—and the opposition to it—is news.

TAKE ACTION
Go to fair.org, click the Action Alert tab under “Take Action,” and scroll down to “Mar. 14: No More Media Silence on TPP.”
Yosemite all other the Range of Light.” (from countless waterfalls, it still seems above Snowy Range, but the Range of Light. And after ten years of wandering and they do in a rainbow, making a wall of all these colors, from the blue sky to the way down, was a rich pearl-gray belt of And from the eastern boundary of this rich furred garden of yellow compositae. 

Pacheco Pass one shining morning, a the east and that I should surely find it. pocket map that Yosemite Valley lay to town. “But where do you want to go?” Arriving by Panama steamer, I stopped one day in San Francisco and then inquired for the nearest way out of town. “Where do you go to?” asked the man to whom I had applied for this important information. “To any place that is wild,” I said. This reply startled him. He seemed to fear I might be crazy, and therefore the sooner I was out of town the better, so he directed me to the Oakland ferry. So on the 1st of April, 1868, I set out for Yosemite. It was the bloom-time of the year over the lowlands and coast ranges; the landscapes of the Santa Clara Valley were fairly drenched with sunshine, all the air was quivering with songs of the myriad robins and sparrows, and the hills were so covered with flowers that they seemed to be painted. Slow, indeed, was the progress through these glorious gardens, the first of the California flora I had seen. Cattle and cultivation were making few scars as yet, and I wandered enchanted in long, waving curves, knowing by my pocket map that Yosemite Valley lay to the east and that I should surely find it. Looking eastward from the summit of Pacheco Pass one shining morning, a landscape was displayed that after all my wanderings still appears as the most beautiful on the face of the earth. At my feet lay the Great Central Valley of California, level and flowery like a lake of pure sunshine, forty or fifty miles wide, five hundred miles long, one rich furred garden of yellow compositae. And from the eastern boundary of this vast golden flowerbed rose the mighty Sierra, miles in height, and so gloriously colored and so radiant, it seemed not clothed with light, but wholly composed of it, like the wall of some celestial city. Along the top and extending a good way down, was a rich pearl-gray belt of snow; below it a belt of blue and dark purple, marking the extension of the forests; and stretching along the base of the range a broad belt of rose-purple; all these colors, from the blue sky to the yellow valley smoothly blending as they do in a rainbow, making a wall of light marvelously fine. Then it seemed to me that the Sierra should be called, not the Nevada or Snowy Range, but the Range of Light. And after ten years of wandering and wondering in the heart of it, rejoicing in its glorious floods of light, the white beams of the morning streaming through the passes, the noontide radiance on the crystal rocks, the flash of the alpenglow, and irised spray of countless waterfalls, it still seems above all other the Range of Light.” (From “The Yosemite” by John Muir)
Remarks of Sierra Club Executive Director Michael Brune before the U.S. Senate Committee of Foreign Relations regarding determination of the national interest of the Keystone XL tar sands pipeline, March 14, 2014.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Corker, members of the committee, it is an honor to appear before you today to discuss whether Keystone XL is in the national interest. I’m Michael Brune, Executive Director of the Sierra Club.

The Sierra Club, and the more than two million people who submitted comments last fall to the Department, know this pipeline is not in our national interest. The Keystone XL tar sands pipeline would cut through more than a thousand miles of American farms and ranches, carrying oil that is more toxic, corrosive, difficult to clean up, and more carbon intensive all the way to the Gulf, where most of the oil would be exported.

Like many of you, I am a parent, and I am deeply concerned about the world we are leaving for our children. One lesson my wife and I try to teach our kids is the need to set goals and remain focused as you strive to achieve them. Our country has a clear, science-based goal to limit climate pollution. We must keep this in mind and recognize that achieving that goal is incompatible with permitting this pipeline.

None of the scenarios in the State Department’s analysis show how Keystone XL could be built in a way that insures our nation can meet those climate goals. In fact, Keystone XL would significantly exacerbate climate pollution because it would increase the development of tar sands substantially. A report from Carbon Tracker found that Keystone XL would spur additional production of roughly 500,000 barrels per day, the emissions equivalent of building 46 new coal plants.

I would like to enter this report into the record today. Although the climate impacts of tar sands are sufficient reason to reject this project, there are others: Any spill from this pipeline could be catastrophic. Transporting tar sands crude into the United States poses a heightened risk to communities and their air and water compared to conventional oil. Diluted bitumen is heavier and more toxic than conventional crude. When it spills in a waterway, it sinks. Just one tar sands oil spill in Michigan fouled more than 35 miles of river. After three and a half years and more than a billion dollars, that spill still has not been cleaned up. Take a look at this image from a neighborhood in Mayflower, Arkansas where an ExxonMobil pipeline ruptured, spilling more than 7,000 barrels of tar sands into resident’s backyards and driveways.

Even without spills, the Keystone XL would risk the health and livelihood of communities living near each stage of the project. Petro coke is a byproduct of tar sands production, and it’s a major health hazard for U.S. communities. Fuel grade pet coke contains high levels of toxins, including mercury, lead, arsenic, selenium, chromium, nickel, and vanadium. Huge pet coke piles from refining processes have begun to appear in cities like Chicago and Detroit.

Furthermore, Keystone XL would not even benefit American consumers. This oil is intended for export. Keystone XL would deliver tar sands to refineries on the Gulf Coast that already export most of their refined product, have increased their exports nearly 200 percent in the past five years and are planning to increase these exports further in the future.

Keystone XL would also be a threat to national security. Because it would facilitate the development of one of the world’s most carbon intensive sources of oil, it is important to consider the impacts that these additional greenhouse gas emissions would have on people worldwide and America’s national security.

Since 2010, key national security reports have indicated that floods, droughts, and rising seas brought on by a destabilized climate in places of geopolitical importance to the U.S. multiply threats and risks for Americans working in those areas. Climate disruption directly affects our armed forces. Admiral Samuel Locklear, head of the U.S. Military’s Pacific Command, believes the single greatest threat to his forces is the instability sparked by climate disruption.

Finally, clean energy will power a new American economy. Let’s not delay.

Sierra Club Executive Director Michael Brune (center) and Columbia University Earth Institute adjunct professor James Hansen (right) testify before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee during a hearing about the proposed Keystone XL pipeline project on Capitol Hill, March 13.

Sierra Club Executive Director Michael Brune (center) and Columbia University Earth Institute adjunct James Hansen (right) testify before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee during a hearing about the proposed Keystone XL pipeline project on Capitol Hill, March 13.

America is a land of innovators. Today the laboratories of Silicon Valley, and the next generation of American consumers are already investing in and profiting from clean technology. Thanks to fuel-efficiency standards, gasoline demand in the U.S. is decreasing and projections show decreases through 2040 and beyond.

Investing in the clean energy economy is supported by American businesses, workers, and all who care about clean air, water, and a stable climate. That’s a win-win-win scenario. Compared this to Keystone XL, which jeopardizes our drinking water, farmland, climate, and health. The sad truth is that the Keystone XL tar sands pipeline is all risk and no reward.

Secretary Kerry has called climate disruption “the world’s most fearsome weapon of mass destruction,” and last week, he instructed all U.S. diplomats and employees around the world to “lead by example through strong action at home and abroad” to fight the climate crisis. America can lead on climate, by saying no to this polluting pipeline, and saying yes to clean energy. Thank you.
Wind Wolves Preserve Nature Festival

If you want to slow down and reconnect with nature, it would be hard to do better than the magnificent Wind Wolves Preserve – 100,000 acres of pristine wildlife habitat east of Maricopa and the southern edge of Carrizo Plain National Monument.

Wind Wolves is holding its first Nature Festival the weekend of April 12. A remarkable staff of rangers, naturalists, biologists and educators host the preserve’s outdoor education programs and work on restoration and science-related projects. They have brought together an astonishing array of talent who will be offering guided hikes, wildlife and wildflower viewing, preserve tours, and more. Activities are ongoing from 7:00 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. Saturday, and from 7:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. Sunday. Booths and exhibits with themes including reptiles, skull identification, student art gallery, scavenger hunts and Friends of California Condors will be open from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., Saturday and Sunday. Entrance to the Preserve and all activities are free. Advance registration is required for all activities and can be completed online at www.wildlandsconservancy.org/preserve_windwolves.html or by calling 909-797-8507.

Saturday, April 12th

7 am to 4 pm: BIRDING BIG DAY HIKE. Up San Emigdio Canyons and back. Slow-paced with many stops for birding, but be prepared to walk up to 7 miles. Wear appropriate clothing, hat, sunscreen, comfortable hiking shoes; bring binoculars, plenty of water, a lunch and snacks.

* Ages 12 & up
* Limited to 12 participants
* Leader: Mike Stiles
* Meet at: Crossing kiosk

9 to 11 am: WIND WOLVES PRESERVE LANDSCAPE & THE CALIFORNIA CONDOR. A drive up the canyon to learn about the Wind Wolves landscape and how it works for the California Condor. A short hike after stopping the van at the El Camino Viejo. Meet at the kiosk with views of the Devils Kitchen Syncline on the flank of Eagle Nest peak.

* All Ages
* Limited to 10 participants
* Leader: Martin Fletcher
* Meet at: Bridge to Adventure
* May walk up to 2 miles

9 am to 12 noon: SPRING WILDFLOWERS & PLANTS HIKE. Take a leisurely hike up the trail to search for wildflowers and learn some of their names. Very slow round-trip hike, suitable for mature children and sure-footed adults.

* Ages 5 & up
* Limited to 15 participants
* Leader: All Sheehy
* Meet at: Wildflower Loop
* May walk up to 2 miles

10 am to 12 noon: BEGINNING BIRDING WALK. Families will enjoy a fun morning exploring riparian, saltbush, and grassland habitats to discover the birds that live in these areas. Wear sturdy shoes, bring water, binoculars and spotting scopes. A few binoculars will be provided.

* Ages 8 & up
* Limited to 20 participants
* Leader: Andy Lundin
* Meet at: Administrative Office Fountain

10 am to 12 noon: INSECT & OTHER ARTHROPOD HIKE. Discover the insects, spiders, pillbugs, millipedes, etc. that live at Wind Wolves Preserve. Slow-paced 1 to 2 mile hike; meander through grassland, shrubland, and riparian woodlands to look for arthropods on the plants, dead logs, streams, pond, leaf litter, under stones.

* Ages 8 & up
* Limited to 20 participants
* Leader: Mary Pacheco
* Meet at: Crossing kiosk
* Spanish translator available

11 am to 12 noon: THE ART OF A TREE DRAWING CLASS. Drawing is the mother of all the visual arts. We will be using drawing materials such as charcoal, colored pencils, and pastels to depict the trees and plants that live there.

* Leader: To be determined
* Meet: At Administrative Office Fountain

1 to 2 pm: THE ART OF A TREE DRAWING CLASS. Drawing is the mother of all the visual arts. We will be using drawing materials such as charcoal and pigments from vegetable tints found on the preserve.

* Ages 8 to 18
* Limited to 12 kids. Parents and guardians may participate too.
* Leader: Dr. Navdeep Singh
* Meet: At Crossing Ramada

11 am to 12 noon: STORYTIME & WALK IN SPANISH. Take a short walk in nature and then sit and listen to a story read aloud out in the fresh air.

* All Ages
* Limited to 20 kids. Parents and guardians may participate too.

* Leader: To be determined
* Meet: At Administrative Office Fountain

1 to 2 pm: REPTILE BOOTH. Join us at our reptile presentation to learn about some of the fascinating animals native to our preserve. See and compare a variety of snake species and learn about their behavior. Perfect for reptile lovers as well as those that want to become more comfortable with reptiles.

* All Ages
* Limited to 40 kids. Parents and guardians may participate too.
* Leader: Sami Neymark
* Meet: At Administrative Office Fountain

1 to 2 pm: PLAN & ANIMAL CONNECTIONS HIKE. Hike along multiple habitats to discover the interrelationship between the animals and plants that live there. Learn how native plants support animal life with shelter from the elements, defense against predators, and food.

* Ages 12 & up
* Limited to 15 participants
* Leader: Melissa Brashers
* Meet at: Bridge to Adventure

1 to 3 pm: INVASIVE PLANT SPECIES & DROUGHT IN ARID REGIONS. Hike and discussion of the ecology of the southern San Joaquin Valley, non-indigenous vs. indigenous species, problems associated with invasive species, and plant adaptations for coping with drought.

* Ages 12 & up
* Limited to 20 participants
* Leader: Andy Lundin
* Meet at: Crossing Ramada

3:30 to 5 pm: AQUATIC INSECT HUNT. Using drawing materials such as charcoal and pigments from vegetable tints found on the preserve.

* Leader: To be determined
* Meet: At Administrative Office Fountain

Sunday, April 13th

7 to 10 am: BIRDING BIG SIT. See how many birds can be seen or heard from a 17 circle. Bring binoculars and a spotting scope if you have one, and plenty of water.

* Ages 8 & up
* Limited to 20 participants
* Leader: Mike Stiles
* Meet: At Crossing kiosk

7 to 10 am: BIRDING BIG SIT. See how many birds can be seen or heard from a 17 circle. Bring binoculars and a spotting scope if you have one, and plenty of water.

* Ages 8 & up
* Limited to 20 participants
* Leader: Mike Stiles
* Meet: At Crossing kiosk
A celebration of City Farm - San Luis Obispo

All are invited to join Central Coast Grown on opening day for City Farm San Luis Obispo, Sunday, April 6, from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Join the Mayor of SLO at the groundbreaking ceremony, create memories by planting vegetables on Nico Farms, City Farm’s first tenant, constructing eco pots to plant in, and taking pictures in the photo booth. You’ll even get a chance to name the Nico Farms tractor. Bring your favorite homemade picnic foods to enjoy with some local snacks. Live music by Off the Griddle and puppet shows for the kids. Bike valet provided.

City Farm is located at 1221 Calle Joaquin, in the heart of the city’s Calle Joaquin Ag Reserve. Head east on Los Osos Valley Road from the 101, turn right onto Calle Joaquin, and drive until you see the farm at the end of the cul-de-sac.

More info at centralcoastgrown.org/city-farm-fun-raiser/
Let’s Get Efficient

On March 5, 2014, 191 Republican and 184 Democratic members of the House joined to pass the Energy Efficiency Improvement Act of 2014 (HR 2126), sponsored by Representatives David McKinley (R-WV) and Peter Welch (D-VT). The act is focused on saving energy in buildings.

“For the last one hundred years, utilities have operated under the premise that demand for electricity would grow every year,” said Jesse Berst, Chairman of the Smart Cities Council. “Then came the Great Recession, which caused growth to flatten. And now, maybe, comes the Great Intercession – the federal government interceding to insist that federal buildings reduce energy use and to ‘encourage’ commercial buildings to do the same. Energy efficiency is already on a roll, but I believe this intercession will take it to a new inflection point. Do you really need that new power plant? Can you really afford to upgrade that substation? It may be time for long-range planners to rethink their assumptions.”

To date, bills addressing energy efficiency have focused on how real estate owners and developers may lower energy consumption at the “whole-building” level. But in fact, owners and managers of large buildings control only about 50 percent of their structures’ total energy; tenants consume at least half. The Better Buildings Act takes a holistic approach by considering office tenants’ impact on energy consumption and behaviors. Notably, the act brings the Energy Star rating for whole buildings to the next level by authorizing a “Tenant Star” program to certify leased spaces in buildings as energy efficient.

Considering the overwhelming success and private sector acceptance of Energy Star for buildings – which are located in all 50 states, represent billions of square feet of commercial floorspace, and saved American businesses over $2.7 billion in utility bills in 2012 alone – it is sound energy policy to evolve this program to the “Tenant Star” level of leased spaces.

The act also includes:

* A provision to encourage benchmarking and public disclosure of energy use in commercial buildings, following a strategy several cities around the country have adopted to encourage more efficiency;
* The Energy Efficient Government Technology Act for federal agencies to develop strategies to implement energy-saving information technologies from building energy management to telework, and to improve efficiency of federal data centers, and
* A provision to address concerns that recent efficiency standards for water heaters could interfere with their use in demand response programs run by rural and other utilities.

The provisions are designed to address some key barriers of lack of information and perverse incentives that prevent building owners from implementing cost-effective energy efficiency measures. These measures also are in the new version of the Senate’s energy efficiency bill (S. 2074), sponsored by Senators Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) and Rob Portman (R-OH), along with other important efficiency measures. If the Senate passes that bill, Americans can start reaping more of the utility bill savings, jobs, cleaner air, and more secure energy that energy efficiency can provide.

De-Fence!

A volunteer project to remove and replace existing four-strand barbed wire fencing with two strands of plain barbed wire on top and one strand of smooth wire on the bottom is ongoing in the Carrizo Plain National Monument for the benefit of the pronghorn antelope, the fastest land mammal in the western hemisphere.

The pronghorn cannot ‘will not jump over the wire, but they will go under, so the smooth wire is used to replace the bottom wire, and is placed higher off the ground than the original wire.

Over the weekend of February 8 and 9, Los Padres Forest Watch volunteers joined a Carrizo crew led by Sierra Club volunteer Craig Deutsche and the California/Nevada Desert Committee of the Sierra Club. The crew included “Condor John” Hankins from the Club’s Los Padres Chapter, Jon McCabe and Craig Carey, author of the new book Hiking and Backpacking Santa Barbara & Ventura.

They made short work of some bad wire, securing safe passage for the pronghorn.

Are GMOs Like Climate Change?

by Andrew Christie, Chapter Director

Analogies can be useful. But if we try to claim that two different big, complex issues are alike, we tend to get ourselves into trouble, as a recent Tribune letter-writer did when presuming to assert “facts vs. beliefs” about climate change and genetically engineered food.

Those who push this analogy believe that the overwhelming scientific consensus on climate change is matched by a similar consensus on the safety of genetically modified food.

But it’s not, and the repetition of this belief by GMO advocates doesn’t make it so. There is no equivalency between the real scientific consensus on climate change and the claim of alleged consensus on the safety of genetically modified food.

A comprehensive peer-reviewed 2011 survey of hundreds of GMO studies in international scientific journals found “an equilibrium in the number [of] research groups suggesting, on the basis of their studies, that a number of varieties of GM products (mainly maize and soybeans) are as safe and nutritious as the respective conventional non-GM plant, and those raising still serious concerns.”

There is no comparable equilibrium to be found in peer-reviewed climate research, on one side of which there really is an overwhelming scientific consensus on the reality of human-caused climate change and only a handful of outlier studies suggesting otherwise. An insignificant number of scientists oppose the consensus on climate change. On GMOs, roughly the same number of scientists can be found on both sides of issue.

This is why the European Network of Scientists for Social and Environmental Responsibility concluded that “the claimed consensus on GMO safety does not exist. The claim that it does exist is misleading and misrepresents the currently available scientific evidence and the broad diversity of opinion among scientists on this issue.” They also found that animal feeding studies that “have revealed toxic effects or signs of toxicity in the GM-fed animals…have not been followed up by targeted research that could confirm or refute the initial findings.”

Also: “A peer-reviewed survey of the views of 62 life scientists on the environmental risks of GM crops found that funding and disciplinary training had a significant effect on attitudes. Scientists with industry funding and/or those trained in molecular biology were very likely to have a positive attitude to GM crops and to hold that they do not represent any unique risks, while publicly-funded scientists working independently of GM crop developer companies and/or those trained in ecology were more likely to hold a ‘moderately negative’ attitude to GM crop safety and to emphasize the uncertainty and ignorance involved.”

All the more reason to support California Senate Bill 1381 to label genetically engineered foods.

De-Fence!
Rolling Back Righetti Hill

"It's such a big county, with all those rolling hills that aren't being used. There are lots of places for development."

- Mark Schniepp, Director, UCSB Economic Forecast Central Coast Economic Symposium

Back in May 2011, we mentioned a distinction SLO had just achieved in the pages of Men's Journal. In a feature in the magazine entitled “The 18 Coolest Towns in America,” there was San Luis Obispo, with the notation of the “stratospheric levels of emotional well-being” as recorded in the Gallup poll and the happiest-town-in-America title bestowed by the Dan Buettner book, Thrive.

The article cited “Ordinances [that] keep development from creeping up the city's signature hillsides” as one of the features that makes SLO so cool.

We pointed out the fact that ordinances keeping development from creeping up the city's signature hillsides didn’t mean much in 2007 when a SLO city council headed by Pavin’ Dave Romero was determined to green-light four annexation and development proposals that were set to bust the Urban Reserve Line and creep right up those hillsides.

Back then, Johnson Avenue neighborhood residents organized and forced the City Council to relocate the Vets Hall to accommodate the crowds that showed up for the meeting at which those development proposals were heard. In the face of overwhelming testimony on mudslides, giant water tanks, traffic and the destruction of the view, Pavin’ Dave threw in the towel and had to vote against the developments he supported.

However, the council voted 4 to 1 — Mayor Jan Harris distinguishing herself as the only inside — not outside — the area designated by the city’s Urban Reserve Line. Now it’s a matter of science: The developers have new and improved measurements of the gradations between a 20 percent slope and a 30 percent slope. And, of course, SLO’s projected future housing requirements must be met...and what better place to meet them than in places with million-dollar views, despite the fact that, annoyingly, City policies remove those areas from consideration as locations to be used to meet goals on housing numbers?

In 2012, on the occasion of the retirement of Neil Havlik, the man who created the Natural Resources Manager in 1994, the council voted 4 to 1 — Mayor Jan Marx dissenting — to move the plan forward in the planning process. This despite a plea from that very same former Natural Resources Manager, Neil Havlik, the man who created the open space that the plan for Righetti Hill and the Urban Reserve Line would obliterate. “Rather than adjusting the Urban Reserve Line to accommodate housing numbers,” Havlik pleaded with the council, “adjut housing numbers to accommodate the Urban Reserve Line.”

Good idea. Time will tell if this city council can grasp it.
Taking Issue

Reviewing problematic environmental coverage & commentary in our local media


Summary: New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristoff ticks off everything wrong with factory farming — from cruelty to animals to environmental destruction to the devastation of small farms — before coming to the conclusion that you can’t beat cheap, efficiently produced industrial food so whaddaya gonna do? All responses are from the essay “Seven Deadly Myths About Industrial Agriculture,” as printed in Fatal Harvest (Island Press).

Under closer analysis, our supposedly cheap food supply becomes monumentally expensive. The myth of cheapness completely ignores the staggering externalized costs of our food, costs that do not appear on our grocery checkout receipts. Conventional analyses of the cost of food completely ignore the exponentially increasing social and environmental costs customers are currently paying and will have to pay in the future. We expend tens of billions of dollars in taxes, medical expenses, toxic cleanups, insurance premiums, and other pass-along costs to subsidize industrial food producers. Given the ever-increasing health, environmental, and social destruction involved in industrial agriculture, the real price of this food production for future generations is incalculable... Subsidies add almost $3 billion to the “hidden” cost of foods to consumers...

All of these environmental, health, and social costs are not added to the price of industrial food. When we calculate the real price, it is clear that far from being cheap, our current food production system is imposing staggering monetary burdens on us and future generations. By contrast, non-industrial food production significantly reduces and can even eliminate most of these costs. Additionally, organic practices reduce or eliminate the use of many chemicals on food, substantially decreasing the threat of cancer and other diseases and thus cutting health-care costs.

Finally, small-scale sustainable agriculture restores rural communities and creates farm jobs. If the public could only see and understand the savings that are possible, the real price tag of the food we buy, purchasing decisions would be easy. Compared to industrial food, organic alternatives are the bargains of a lifetime.

Upshot: If you added the real cost of industrial food — its health, environmental, and social costs — to the current supermarket price, not even our wealthiest citizens could afford to buy it... It is indisputable that this highly touted modern system of food production is actually less efficient, less productive than small-scale alternative farming. It is time to re-embark the virtues of small farming, with its intimate knowledge of how to breed for local soils and climates; its use of generations of knowledge and techniques like intercropping, cover cropping, and seasonal rotations; its saving of seeds to preserve genetic diversity; and its better integration of farms with forest, woody shrubs, and wild plant and animal species.

Special Delivery

On February 20, a bill requiring a moratorium on fracking was introduced in the state legislature. On the weekend of March 8, despite our pro-fracking Governor’s presence at the California Democratic Party’s Convention in Los Angeles, the party included a plank in its 2014 platform endorsing an immediate moratorium on fracking.

“The shift in the prevailing political winds has been a remarkable one,” said Sierra Club activist and Democratic delegate Richard Miller after the convention.

One week later, more than 5,000 Californians (SLO contingent at left) descended on Sacramento to tell the Governor that his “fabulous economic opportunity” needs a big time-out. Take the gentle hint, Governor.
Classifieds

Next issue deadline is April 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 sierrachb8@gmail.com

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FROM THE RED HILLS


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Island Hopping in Channel Islands National Park. 3-Days, 3-Islands: April 12-13. Hike with the Chumash people who lived on these islands for thousands of years. Or just relax at sea. A ranger/naturalist will travel with us to help lead hikes, point out items of interest and present evening programs. All cruises depart from Santa Barbara. The $590 cost includes an assigned bunk, all meals, snacks, and beverages plus the services of a ranger/naturalist. To reserve space, send a $100 check, written to Sierra Club to leader Joan Jones Holtz, 11826 The Wye St., El Monte, CA 91732. For more information contact leader; 626-443-0706; jholtzhln@aol.com.

Meet at Washburn Day Use area of San Simeon State Beach, off Hwy 1, about 2 miles north of Cambria. Bring lunch, water, and dress for the weather. Prepare for possibility of ticks and poison oak. We will probably stop for eats after the hike. Rain cancels. Info: Leader, Chuck Tribby, 441-7597.

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Sun., Apr. 6th, 2 p.m. SLO City Walk: San Luis Cemetery. Guided stroll past grave stones of famous pioneers like Angel, Cass, Murray, Sinshheimer, and Civil-War vets, plus the old “potter’s field” for indigents and, of course, the landmark pyramid. Learn the compelling stories of settlers in 19th-century San Luis Obispo. Duration about 1 1/2 hrs. Meet in south parking lot, adjacent to the pyramid, 2890 S. Higuera St. Leader: Joe Morris, 549-0355.

Sat., Apr. 12th, Prevtit Loop Hike, 8 a.m. A challenging, very strenuous hike of 13 miles and 2800 ft. elevation gain, but worth it for the beautiful scenery: redwood groves, great ocean views, rolling grassland, and an exploration of the Prevtivit Creek drainage area. Expect to be out all day, and assume poison oak on the trail. Bring lunch, plenty of water, protective clothing, and dress for the weather. Meet at the Washburn Day Use Area of San Simeon State Beach, about 1 1/2 miles north of Cambria, off Hwy 1 if you are going, let leader know ahead of time. Those wishing to carpool from SLO be at Santa Rosa Park to leave at 7:15 a.m.—no guarantee others will be there to join you. Contact Carlos in case of rain. Carlos diaz-Saavedra, 546-6317.

Sat.-Sun., April 12th-13th, Hot Springs/Cold Nights in Black Rock Desert. Visit Trego Hot Spring in IR Desert, about 100 miles north of Reno—exact itinerary depending on playa conditions (drivable as of January, but can change). May stay at one spring with good all-weather access. Primitive camping, bring water and all food. No RVs or trailers allowed. Dogs on leash OK. Bad weather cancels. Further info.: David, 775-843-6043 Great Basin Group/CNRC Desert Committee.

Sun., April 13th, 10 a.m. Wildflower Walk and Identification. Easy, one-mile walk in the Elfin Forest in Los Osos to view and identify common Central-Coast wildflowers like manzanita, lupine, coffeeberry, heather, sage, and others. From South Bay Blvd., turn west on Santa Ysabel toward the ocean, then right on 11th St. to end. Leader: Vicki Marchenko, vmarchenko57@gmail.com or 528—3567.

Sat., Apr. 19th, 9 a.m. Salmon and Spruce Creek Trails to Dutra Flat. A moderate 8.4-mile hike in beautiful southern Big Sur area, with 2200 ft. elevation gain. Beginning at the Salmon Creek trailhead, hike ascends through Salmon Creek and Spruce Creek canyons into open brush land, with views of Silver Peak, then dropping down into Dutra Flat camp. Leader: Vicki Marchenko, vmarchenko57@gmail.com or 528—3567.

Sun., Apr. 20th, 10 a.m. Sycamore Springs Trekking-Pole Hike. “Pole cats” dedicated to leading local hikes, modeling benefits of effective use of trekking poles. Hike is 2 miles, 600 ft. elevation change. Meet near the entrance of Sycamore Springs Resort, 1215 Avila Beach Drive. Confirm beforehand you are coming with Leader: David Georgi, 458-5575 or hikingpoles@gmail.com.

Sat.-Sun., April 19th-20th Carrizo Service and Flowers Outing with a day of service in Carrizo Plain National Monument and a day of sightseeing and or/hiking. Wildflowers can be spectacular if sufficient rain. Weather typically cool in evenings and in the day. Service is removing and modifying fences to give pronghorn antelope greater mobility; recreation determined by interests of group. Contact Leader: Craig Deutsche, craig.deutsche@gmail.com or 310-477-6670 CNRC Desert Committee.

Activities sponsored by other organizations

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

It’s Time to Make Your Reservation for Ojai Wild!

Sat., Apr. 12: The 7th Annual Ojai Wild! is just around the corner. Join Los Padres Forest Watch in celebrating 10 years of forest conservation victories! This event helps us raise critical support for the protection of our beautiful Los Padres National Forest & Carrizo Plain. It’s also great fun - and you’re invited! Whether you come for the food & drink, the great live music, the exciting auctions, the amazing surroundings, or the good company… just come! Tickets are $80 for adults, $20 for kids 14 and under, and $600 for a reserved table with priority seating (seats 8-10). Get your tickets online, or contact Diane at 805-617-4610 x2 or dinoel@pWF.org.