Don’t Miss:
March 24
Steynberg Gallery
The 10 best SLO hikes you’ve never taken

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SANTA LUCIAN
We Can be Nuclear Free

Landmark no nukes summit in SLO

With five U.S. nuclear power plants shutting down last year, and Diablo Canyon looking more and more likely to be the next one to go (see “Believe Them Now,” page 6), an impressive group of regional and national activists converged on the SLO Grange hall and SLO City Library over the weekend of January 24 for Nuclear Free California, a two-day strategy session on the best ways to bring about the end of the nuclear era on the west coast, and in San Luis Obispo County in particular.

Representatives from the Nuclear Information Resource Service, Sierra Club’s Nuclear Free Campaign, Abalone Alliance, Nuclear Free Northwest, the Ecological Options Network and Code Pink joined with citizens from the San Onofre reactor community, Northern California, and SLO for the memorable event.

Subjects ranged from Diablo’s long-suppressed tsunami study to the movement to press for federal prison terms for California Public Utilities Commissioners and staff who betrayed the public trust by jumping into bed with the state’s biggest private utilities. Nuclear engineer Arnie Gunderson phoned in on Sunday to discuss the framing issues of money and integrity and the industry’s least mentioned statistic: one out of 100 nuclear power plants has experienced a meltdown.

Nuclear managers “are nice, safety-conscious people,” he said, “but it’s not always a nice people.” Human error can never be overcome, and nuclear power is unique as an industry that can’t afford to have “forty good years and one bad day.”

The standard two-pronged nuclear hype — “It’s either coal or nukes!” and “nuclear power is necessary to combat climate change” — was efficiently disposed of by Paul Gipe, one of the world’s foremost authorities on wind power, who phoned into the meeting to discuss with SLO Clean Energy’s Eric Veium the program of supplanting both fossil fuels and nuclear power with clean, safe renewable energy. Gipe ran the numbers: Germany has seen the growth rate in renewables rise from 5% to 27% in ten years. Denmark is now at 50% renewables in its electricity sector and getting close to that in heating and transportation. Japan has installed 13,000 megawatts of renewable energy since Fukushima — enough to replace the output of Diablo Canyon.

Veium agreed, adding that the other key component for the wholesale shift to renewables — energy storage technology — is now being commercialized and installed. “We’re there,” he said.

James Lerager, author of the book In the Shadow of the Cloud and director of the Documentary Photography and Research Project, came from Berkeley to attend the summit. Afterward, he wrote “We experienced a fusing of perspectives, knowledge, and strategies towards and beyond shutting down the Diablo Canyon reactors and replacing our current electrical and energy systems with decentralized, efficient, carbon free, and sustainable systems. ‘We forged a commitment to continue our connections and to work effectively together.’”
Sierra Club General Meeting

If you are looking for Sierra Club news or your monthly newsletter, please sign up on our website: www.santalucia.sierracub.org.
Up from Oil

The battle was joined against fracking and crude-by-rail at Oakland convergence

At the March for Climate Leadership
by Marty Brown

The morning of February 7 was dark and rainy. North County participants in the March for Climate Leadership met the bus to Oakland at 6:45 a.m., joining people from San Luis Obispo and our coordinator and spokesperson, SLO Clean Water Action’s Jeanne Blackwell, an energetic and energizing leader.

There was excitement and good feeling on the bus. We were united for an important cause.

The trip was rainy all the way. When we arrived in downtown Oakland, there was a clearing and the sun came out. The buses came from as far south as San Diego and as far north as Humboldt.

There was mutual respect between the police and demonstrators. Along the march route, we passed many spectators who were aligned with us.

The day after the February 7 March for Climate Leadership in Oakland, anti-fracking marchers and activists from communities impacted by crude-by-rail projects converged on the campus of Laney College, taking over several classrooms for twin summit meetings on fracking and oil trains.

Throughout that rainy Sunday, with representatives from the Sierra Club’s San Francisco Bay Chapter, Forest-Ethics and the Center for Biological Diversity moderating, I had the privilege of representing the concerns of SLO County residents fighting the Phillips 66 rail spur project in Nipomo and comparing notes on flawed Environmental Impact Reports.

The take-away message: We are not alone. And the fate of about five million people depends on what the San Luis Obispo County Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors decide to do with the permit application for the Phillips 66 project.

At the oil train summit were activists fighting oil by rail projects in Benicia (the Valero refinery project: 50,000 barrels a day; flawed draft EIR, recirculated), Richmond and Martinez (the Tesoro refinery project: no environmental review; sued), Pittsburg (the WesPac project: 240,000 barrels per day via marine terminal, pipeline and train), Bakersfield (Alon/Plains All American refineries, in litigation), and Stockton (terminal and holding facility; 50-car trains passing through daily on their way to Bakersfield).

For me, the most valuable aspect of the gathering was the ability to meet with the good folks of CRUDE (Crockett-Rodeo United to Defend the Environment – crockett-rodeo-united.com), who are fighting the project proposed for the other end of the pipe that connects the Phillips 66 Nipomo refinery to the Rodeo refinery in Contra Costa County. After partial refrining in Nipomo, the oil company plans to send the tar sands crude up the pipe to Rodeo to be processed into propane, butane and pet coke. The fact that the two facilities comprise the front and back ends of a single unit

SLO Oil Train Forum
by Lee Perkins

Community members from across SLO County and beyond gathered at a public forum at San Luis Obispo Library on February 4 to hear and voice concerns over the Phillips 66 oil refinery rail spur expansion proposal. The event included residents, visitors from south county and San Jose, and public safety and environmental experts.

Phillips 66 is seeking permission from the SLO County Board of Supervisors to build a rail spur for oil trains at its Santa Maria Refinery. The plan would bring five oil trains a week and millions of gallons of crude oil through San Luis Obispo County.

SLO Fire Chief Garret Olson and SLO City Councilwoman Carlyn Christanson spoke, along with representatives of the sponsors of the forum: Mesa Refinery Watch, Sierra

Oil in Your Water
Pismo caught in oil waste-water scandal

On February 6, the day before the Climate Rally in Oakland, the Associated Press reported that a California agency has permitted more than 2,500 injection wells to dispose of oil drilling waste fluids into aquifers that are federally protected or provide drinking water for Californians.

At least 46 percent of those wells — 1,172 — have been permitted in the last four years.

The agency, the Division of Oil Gas and Geothermal Resources (DOGGR), is responsible for permitting oil and gas extraction in the state. The agency continued to permit oil industry injection wells into underground water stores even after warned against doing so by the US Environmental Protection Agency in 2011.

The oil industry uses injection wells to dispose of liquid waste created in the process of drilling for oil. This waste includes a soup of chemicals used in fracking and other well
Spinning Their Wheels

Why the failure of State Parks to comply with the requirements of the California Coastal Act at the Oceano Dunes, and the Coastal Commission’s failure to enforce them, is a never-ending story

In California’s Coastal Zone, the recipients of Coastal Development Permits are supposed to comply with the terms of those permits and conform to the policies of the Local Coastal Program. If they don’t, the California Coastal Commission is supposed to take action to enforce compliance.

On February 11, a new generation of California Coastal Commissioners took on the burden of the ongoing, unresolved environmental burden of the Oceano Dunes State Vehicular Recreation Area (ODSVRA) and its decades of non-compliance with the coastal protection requirements of its Coastal Development Permit and San Luis Obispo County’s Local Coastal Program.

The Commission’s meeting that day at the Cliffs Resort in Pismo Beach marked the first time in eight years that the Commission had reviewed the management of coastal resources at the dunes by the California Department of Parks and Recreation since the Coastal Commission issued them a permit in 1982.

At the hearing, the Sierra Club noted that it’s hard not to marvel at the timidity of the permit non-compliance and Local Coastal Program nonconformity that State Parks has achieved at the Oceano Dunes.

The report that Coastal Commission staff provided to Commissioners for the hearing strongly evoked the movie Groundhog Day. The staff report meticulously documented all of the problems that were identified in the Coastal Commission’s last ODSVRA permit review, eight years ago. (And the one before that. And the one before that...)

What the Hay?

A primary objective of the California Coastal Act and the Coastal Commission is the preservation, protection and enhancement of environmentally sensitive habitat areas (ESHA). The Coastal Act defines this as any area in which plant or animal life or their habitats are either rare or especially valuable because of their special nature or role in an eco-system, and which could be easily disturbed or degraded by human activities and developments.

That neatly describes the Oceano Dunes. The emergency measures State Parks has implemented in its thus far unimplemented coastal development permit has achieved the ODSVRA – hay bales and wind fences – are running up against the Coastal Commission’s mandate to protect ESHA.

Crust to Dust

In a late addendum to the Coastal Commission’s February 11 staff report on the ODSVRA, the Commission’s staff ecologist felt compelled to amend a memo she had written as an appendix to the report’s original draft.

The rewrite was apparently undertaken when the Dept. of Parks and Recreation objected to her observations related to the formation of a natural crust on the dunes. Attempting to re-litigate arguments that they had lost in court, presumably with an eye toward creating a record that will assist in future arguments seeking to defer liability should Parks fail in its efforts to mitigate the dust hazard from the ODSVRA, Parks got these references removed.

The crust that forms on the dunes sand sheet has been perhaps the single most intense point of contention for both State Parks and the local off-road lobby. Over the course of two years of APCD board hearings and a protracted failed lawsuit, they tried and failed to discredit and overturn the local ordinance and evade state and federal pollution requirements. They have lost every argument at every turn.

All those failed arguments boil down to this one: It’s not our fault. And that claim rests on the allegation that the primary mechanism for dust transport identified in the APCD study – dunes denuded of vegetation by off-road vehicles, which then collapse into irrelevance. The staff report recommended more study and review to ponder what should replace it.

At the hearing, the Sierra Club suggested the obvious: replace the Technical Review Team with a true environmental review, but it quickly abandoned its charge to monitor vehicle numbers and conduct studies of their impacts on park resources. The TRT declined to review an alternative access study that failed to resolve the interim status of the entrance and staging areas. The TRT has now collapsed into irrelevance. The staff report recommended more study and review to ponder what should replace it.

In a footnote, the staff report suggested it might be a good idea to name an independent third party evaluator to take on the implementation of a carrying capacity study and updating of Parks’ entry access and staging analyses, as a third party may be better equipped to ensure an impartial evaluation than the TRT or...
the Department of Parks. We noted that, based on the record, that is not just a mere gap, but it is an essential requirement.

We mentioned another good idea: amend the Coastal Development Permit to include the place of nesting area exclusion, which could otherwise disappear when Parks completes its Habitat Conservation Plan.

Sierra Club organized the submission of 300 comments from residents, all telling the Commission that enough is enough and urging them to take action now to ensure the ODSVRA is managed in a manner consistent with its permit requirements and mandates to protect coastal resources.

We pointed out that the staff report notes “the Department of Parks and Recreation is not in compliance with the CPD,” and “that the CPD and its review requirements provide the Commission with broad authority and discretion.”

Instead of taking that message to heart, the Commissioners directed staff to monitor Parks’ conservation efforts and deliver a progress report later this year.

Can’t imagine why

Over the course of the six-hour meeting, the Commissioners seemed generally mystified as to what is taking State Parks so long.

The exception to the general bafflement was long-serving Commissioner Mary Shallenberger, the only current member of the Commission with past history on the Oceano Dunes, who was able to shine some light on that history on the Oceano Dunes, who was a member of the Commission with past history on the Oceano Dunes, who was able to shine some light on that history.

She recounted what happened a few years ago, and the “stunning” arrogance of State Parks.

Here’s the problem: The California Department of Parks has an OHV Division, which generates a significant portion of the Department’s annual budget. Any reduction of riding area in any State Vehicular Riding Area means a potential reduction in budget. A reduction, or refusal to implement — conservation measures, however, does not.

The CDPR is non-compliance. The failure to recognize this reality and act accordingly has resulted in three decades of obsolete requests and no progress. Because no enforcement.

The most mystified by the thirty-year-plus history of the Oceano Dunes State Vehicular Recreational Area is Commissioner Zimmer, who was finally interrupted.

Commissioner Zimmer made a concerted effort to get to the bottom of at least the aspect of State Parks’ history of refusal when it comes to measures protecting coastal resources off-highway vehicles. Since 2003, the Technical Review Team’s scientific subcommittee has recommended studying the effects of year-round closure of the sandy plover breeding area to compare the hatching and fledging results thus achieved to those seen under the current regime of closing the breeding area only during the mating season. Letting ORVs run through the rest of the year. And every year, State Parks has refused to implement that recommended study.

Zimmer’s effort to find out why, though valiant, was doomed.

She called Brent Marshall, District Superintendent for the ODSVRA, to the podium and asked him why Parks has not gone forward with the proposal, and was also not going to stop talking anything soon, Commissioner Zimmer finally interrupted.

“I’m sorry,” she said. “I didn’t mean to call for a long explanation. The scientific subcommittee of the TRT has recommended this step. Have you said to them ‘you’re wrong, the science is the other way, therefore we’re rejecting your recommendation, don’t bother to talk to us about this anymore’? I mean, why would they make the same recommendation for a number of years in a row if you’re coming up with science that you believe invalidates that recommendation?”

“People have personal proclivities things like that,” Marshall replied, “but I have to make my decisions based on hard science.”

“So you’re saying the scientific subcommittee of the TRT was not basing the recommendation on hard science?”, Zimmer asked.

Marshall replied, “I would say that there’s disputing science, and the overwhelming professional recommendation of the science would indicate that the decisions we’re making are exceeding the requirements, and we provide a report to Coastal Commission staff every year.”

“Okay, thank you,” Zimmer said, cutting him off and giving up.

Whereupon Superintendent Marshall packed his proclivities into his pros and left the podium.

At the Coastal Commission’s Feb. 11, 2015, an instant demonstration of the bedrock reality of money and turf that lies at the bottom of the ODSVRA mystery was offered up by Commissioner Wendy Mitchell, whose attitude for smelling money and power — immediately aligning herself therewith, and against anything that might protect species or natural habitat — is akin to the ability of a shark to smell a drop of blood in the ocean from several miles away. After the Commission was presented with a panorama of State Parks’ breathtaking decades-long non-compliance, Mitchell’s response was simple: “I would recommend that we not take any additional action at this point.”

So they didn’t.

Memo to Coastal Commissioners: You can compel the holders of Coastal Development Permits to undertake actions you deem necessary to protect coastal resources. You are regulators. You have regulatory authority. You should use it.

The Delicate Dance of Intransigence
Believe Them Never

PG&E’s “safety is our first priority” mantra for Diablo Canyon has definitively bitten the dust

Though our local media don’t seem to have grasped the fact, 2014 marked the end of an era. Henceforth, when any elected official or public relations flack seeks to defend the claims made by PG&E or the Nuclear Regulatory Commission for the safety of the Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plant, he or she will do so at the expense of his or her credibility.

Which doesn’t mean, of course, that many won’t keep trying to do so. In the book Rattling the Cage, Steven Wise, founder of the Center for the Expansion of Fundamental Rights, describes the phenomenon of “belief preservation” and gives the example of what happened when Galileo first trained his telescope on the moon and found that it was not, in fact, what it was supposed to be — a smooth, mirror-like orb fixed in the heavens — and that the alternately lengthening and shortening shadows of its mountains and craters meant that it and the Earth were revolving around the sun. For years afterward, many distinguished gentlemen simply refused to look through his telescope. Or did so and claimed they saw nothing of the kind. Or that there were flaws in the lens. Or their glasses. Or their eyes.

On December 3, 2014, in testimony before the Environment and Public Works Committee of the U.S. Senate, former State Senator Sam Blakeslee turned that telescope on Diablo’s seismic history and examined it in forensic detail. In doing so, he decimated assurances that the plant can withstand an earthquake at any magnitude the geologic faulting around it may be expected to produce. He dismantled the alleged scientific analysis on which PG&E and the NRC have based those assurances over the last thirty years, exposing it as group-think and the opposite of science.

The hearing was entitled “NRC’s implementation of the Fukushima near-term task force recommendations and other actions to ensure and maintain nuclear safety.” Blakeslee’s verbal testimony was supplemented by a more detailed written document. It is 26 pages long, and it is the most devastating indictment of the operation and regulation of the Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plant ever compiled.

Blakeslee is a geophysicist. The text is dense with technical data in support of the conclusions he draws. You need an advanced degree in earth sciences to understand much of it. But nothing beyond a comprehension of English and logic is required to apprehend his conclusions or the underlying outrage of a scientist who has found science being twisted and deformed in service to a desired outcome. Equally obvious is the outrage of a man discovering that a large private utility has been playing fast and loose with its assertions about the safety of the nuclear power plant located in close proximity to his home.

Blakeslee shared with the Senate Committee his findings that PG&E has, over decades, betrayed its employees and this community and left a trail of mendacity that allows for only one conclusion: The utility, abetted by its ostensible regulator, has subordinated the interests of public safety to the imperative of its bottom line.

It is an unanswerable indictment. One of its most damning particulars: when PG&E discovered, based on all the seismic data now available for the area around the plant, that the faults could generate a level of ground acceleration more than twice as powerful as what certain plant components were designed to withstand, they simply changed the “damping coefficient” — altering the numbers to make the problem go away on paper.

What we reproduce here is the gist of his written testimony. You can watch Dr. Blakeslee’s oral testimony before the Senate Committee and download the full text of his written statement at www.a4nr.org. We can’t reprint it in its entirety, but the following passages convey the heart of Blakeslee’s argument.

“...As a geophysicist and former California State Senator, I authored AB 1632, a bill that required PG&E to conduct seismic hazard research of the faults near the Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plant... Just two months ago, PG&E published the Coastal California Seismic Imaging Project (CCSIP) Report and the results were astonishing. The Report documents the presence of a number of earthquake faults discovered after the design and construction of the plant that have been found to be larger and more dangerous than previously understood. In a post-Fukushima regulatory environment, it is important that policymakers and regulators understand the ramifications of these findings... In the late 1970s, when Diablo was still under construction, data surfaced on the presence of a large active fault (named the Hosgri) located just three miles offshore from the plant. PG&E first denied its existence. When that assertion was disproved, it argued the fault was likely inactive. When PG&E had to concede it was active, it argued the fault was weak. When PG&E had to concede it was active, it argued the fault was weak. When PG&E had to concede it was active, it argued the fault was weak. When PG&E had to concede it was active, it argued the fault was weak. When PG&E had to concede it was active, it argued the fault was weak. When PG&E had to concede it was active, it argued the fault was weak. When PG&E had to concede it was active, it argued the fault was weak. When PG&E had to concede it was active, it argued the fault was weak. When PG&E had to concede it was active, it argued the fault was weak. When PG&E had to concede it was active, it argued the fault was weak. When PG&E had to concede it was active, it argued the fault was weak. When PG&E had to concede it was active, it argued the fault was weak. When PG&E had to concede it was active...
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“In a recent replay of these events concerning a newly discovered fault system, the Shoreline fault was discovered in 2008 and analyzed with state-of-the-art methods and found to be capable of generating an M7.3 earthquake within a mere 600 meters of the plant.”

“Now that the data about the faults near Diablo is indisputable, PG&E has changed tactics and declared the plant safe on the basis of a new set of equations it has developed. PG&E has undertaken major revisions to the complex ground motion equations that have been used to estimate how much shaking can be produced by earthquakes. Unsurprisingly, PG&E’s changes to its methodologies have dramatically reduced estimated shaking at the plant from all hypothetical earthquakes. So far, NRC has largely gone along with these changes.

“With PG&E’s history of playing down seismic concerns these recent developments are cause for deep concern. So is PG&E’s documented history of co-opting the very regulatory bodies tasked with overseeing it. Just this year:

- PG&E was found to be inappropriately, and possibly illegally, lobbying California Public Utilities Commissioners and staff to successfully “judge shop” in a case before the CPUC. The revelation resulted in the firing of three senior PG&E executives, the reassignment of the CPUC’s chief of staff, and the decision by the President of the CPUC to recuse himself from future PG&E decisions and to not seek re-appointment. The CPUC was just fined $1.05 million for this back-channel lobbying.
- PG&E was indicted on 12 criminal charges related to safety violations in its gas distribution, including an accusation that PG&E officials obstructed a federal investigation and that the utility “knowingly relied on erroneous and incomplete information” to avoid inspections that would have exposed risks that ultimately killed 8 people in a 2010 gas pipeline explosion.
- PG&E was discovered, through email disclosures, to be exploring how and when the Diablo Canyon Independent Peer Review Panel could be disbanded. This is the state-mandated panel tasked with providing third-party quality control of seismic risk analysis at Diablo that is required by the Report, which is in my subject here.
- In 2013, because of steam generator failures, San Onofre, California’s only other nuclear power plant, was permanently shut down at great cost to ratepayers, shareholders, and grid operators. Last month the Office of the Inspector General at the NRC issued a report criticizing the NRC’s failure to call for a license amendment process, which might have identified the shortcomings of the utility’s technical analysis that ultimately led to those leaks. The safety ramifications of steam generator leaks at San Onofre, as serious as they are, were dwarfed by the risks to the public should PG&E’s Diablo seismic analysis prove to be incompletely accurate. You would go beyond that after Fukushima, so NRC would go beyond the “check the box” review process if it were to confront it, as it did, with the possibility of a 7.3 magnitude earthquake within a half-mile of the plant. So far we have been disappointed.

“Remarkably, in all the years of its operation, the facility has never gone through a formal license amendment process to deal with even the Hongri

Night and day PG&E’s p.r. does not fare well when it has to go up against reality.

“USGS found the Shoreline Fault within 600 meters of the reactors and within 300 meters of the intakes. When considering that the fault runs to a depth of 16 km, spatially the nuclear power plant lies virtually overtop the new fault. In the immediate aftermath of the discovery, PG&E’s data demonstrates that the nearby faults could produce ground motions significantly higher than the 0.4g peak acceleration permissible under the DDE standard.

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"Two future possible seismic threats remain unclear due to data limitations. It is not clear that the poorly imagined faults under the Irish Hills have been properly identified in the geologic cross-sections which could mean a whole new category of undiscovered threats may exist directly under the plant. The quality of the seismic data obtained onsite just under the Irish Hills is poor and due to the virtual absence of relevant geologic information from deep wells it is difficult to differentiate active from dormant faults in the seismic data.

"It is time to end this hodge-podge of licensing rationalizations. We know a great deal more about seismic issues than we did when Diablo Canyon was licensed. It’s time for the NRC to reassess the seismic standards for the plant and submit them to a formal licensing amendment process. The thing that both PG&E and NRC fear most is a public hearing in which they would have to justify what they have done. It is also what we need most to assure seismic safety, and it is what the public deserves.

"Never is PG&E’s documented history of obstructing a federal investigation and publicly withholding vital information from the public."

Night and day PG&E’s p.r. does not fare well when it has to go up against reality.

“New art exhibit in SLO transforms secret and not-so-secret nuclear safety documents on the Fukushima anniversary

As scandal explodes surrounding the release of formerly secret emails cementing the cozy relationship between Pacific Gas & Electric, Southern California Edison and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, concerned citizens have been wondering if any of the fallout affects nuclear power plants like Diablo Canyon and San Onofre. It does. As legal participants in cases involving PG&E and Southern California Edison, the watchdog group Alliance for Nuclear Responsibility (www.anaonr.org) has requested documents vital to understanding decisions that affect the nuclear reactor at PG&E’s Diablo Canyon and SCE’s now closed San Onofre nuclear power plants.

Availing itself of legal discovery in regulatory proceedings, the state Public Records Act and the federal Freedom of Information Act, AANR requested documents involving the costs of seismic safety, tsunami threats, and the regulatory lac-tices evidenced in the wake of the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

Many of these requests come back redacted—page after page covered with swaths of black ink or blank white fields, their contents and context obliterated, a Rorschach test of expunged histories, figures and bullet points. Visually, they bring to mind the "color fields" of Mark Rothko. More profoundly, they reflect vital information withheld from public scrutiny.

And now they have been turned into art, hanging on the walls of the Steyngberg Gallery.

"Night and day" is the work of Russell Hodin, whose editorial cartoons add highly visible layers of un-edited meaning and social comment to the discussion of nuclear power. A video installation examines PG&E’s seismic studies.

Art After Dark, Friday March 6, 2015, 6-9 p.m. Exhibit runs through March 13. Steyngberg Gallery, 1531 Monterey St., San Luis Obispo. (805) 547-0278.

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Cars and a house were engulfed by flames, and at least one tanker ended up in a river. West Virginia’s governor declared a state of emergency, hundreds of families were evacuated from the area and two water treatment plants — at risk because of oil in the river — were shut down.

As we go to press, the County Planning Commission has yet to re-re-schedule its off-delayed deliberations on the project permit. While the deadline to comment on the Environmental Impact Report has passed, you can let the Commissioners know what you think about the project any time before that meeting. Check out the facts at mesaenergywatch.com, and then drop a note to the Commission. Send to Ramona Hedges, Clerk of the Planning Commission, at rhedges@slo.ca.us.

TAKE ACTION


It’s Time for California to End Risky Fracking

By Michael Brune, Executive Director of the Sierra Club

At the end of last year, Gov. Andrew Cuomo banned hydraulic fracturing in New York, citing the threat it poses to public health. His state’s acting health commissioner put it this way: “The potential risks are too great. In fact, they are not even fully known.”

Here in California, however, fracking is already happening and is poised to spread more widely. A report released last month by the California Council on Science and Technology showed that as many as 175 new fracking wells are drilled in the state every month, even though most residents are against it.

Why would the Golden State allow fracking after New York found the practice — already linked to water contamination and earthquakes in Colorado, Oklahoma and Pennsylvania — too risky?

On Saturday, thousands of people from every corner of the state — including the communities hit hardest by fracking, such as Kern County — will take to the streets of Oakland in a March for Climate Leadership. We will call on the governor to protect all Californians by curtailing a practice that directly threatens our water, our health and our communities.

One out of every seven Californians lives within a mile of an oil or gas well. If all the potential risks of fracking are “not even fully known,” then perhaps we should consider what we do know about fracking.

First, we know that it’s risky. Even fracking’s supporters (the oil and gas industry and anyone else who stands to profit from it) use words such as “acceptable,” “minimal” and “mitigating” when discussing the risks. Not even fracking’s biggest boosters pretend there are no dangers. The truth is that we won’t know the full price of expanding fracking until after it’s too late. If your drinking water supply is contaminated, it’s small solace that the risk of it happening was minimal.

Second, we know that more oil and gas fracking means more pollution. That means more of the air pollution that has already made the San Joaquin Valley the most dangerous place in America to breathe. Why sabotage our progress on clean air by promoting a huge new source of pollution?

Third, and most importantly, scientists know that we need to leave as many fossil fuels in the ground as possible. To avert catastrophic global warming, they say, more than 80 percent of known fossil fuel reserves must stay untouched. This reality must be factored into every energy decision. And if our political leaders cannot accept this reality in California, an international leader on climate, can we really expect much progress globally?

Largely thanks to Gov. Jerry Brown, California boasts the most ambitious state targets in the nation for cutting climate pollution. That’s a logical and necessary response to the threat of global warming, and a reflection of our political leaders embracing the truth. But the U.S. is still today the world’s biggest polluter, and California is the world’s ninth.

As the long, hot summer approaches, the people who grow and raise the food we eat. Farmland takes an intimate look at the lives of six young farmers and ranchers, all in their twenties and thirties, responsible for running their own agriculture businesses. Academy Award winning director James Moll travels across the country to capture a first-hand glimpse into this high-risk, high-reward job, along the way discovering what could be a more just and sustainable way to farm. (the San Francisco Refinery) means burning one million dollars to secure that vote. Watch for these films at slofilmfest.org or call (805) 546-3456.

Santa Lucian • March 2015

This year’s SLO International Film Festival features a number of presentations of interest to Sierra Club members:

Growing Local

Three short vignettes, each focusing on a different challenge hindering the growth of local food systems.

Oil & Water

The true story of two boys coming of age during the contamination of Ecuador’s Amazon region by reckless oil drilling. Hugo and David were born on opposite ends of the oil pipeline. Hugo, a member of the Cofan tribe, comes to America to fight for the survival of his people and their traditional way of life, while David goes to Ecuador to launch the world’s first company to certify oil as “fair trade.” Their journeys lead them to explore what could be a more just future, not just for the Cofan, but for all people around the world born with oil beneath their feet. USA/Ecuador. 78 min. Wed, 3/11, MC, 4 pm; Sat, 3/14, MC, 4 pm.

Farmland

Most Americans have never set foot on a farm or ranch, or even spoken with the people who grow and raise the food we eat. Farmland takes an intimate look at the lives of six young farmers and ranchers, all in their twenties and thirties, responsible for running their own agriculture businesses. Academy Award winning director James Moll travels across the country to capture a first-hand glimpse into this high-risk, high-reward job, along the way discovering what could be a more just and sustainable way to farm. (the San Francisco Refinery) means burning one million dollars to secure that vote. Watch for these films at slofilmfest.org or call (805) 546-3456.
Now a Word from a County Not Run by COLAB

By David Gold

[Editor’s note: Writing on the issue of protecting Ventura’s ground water resources in the December 8 issue of the Ventura County Star, refuting COLAB Executive Director Lynn Gray Jensen’s Dec. 5 guest column on “Diablo Canyon’s seismically safe,” that’s false.]

Simeon Fault with the San Gregorio Fault. The Rep. agreed that the Tongue Creek Fault is connected with the San Simeon Fault, which has caused the maximum possible earthquake to increase significantly. If the San Gregorio Fault to the north is similarly connected then the Rep. has underestimated the maximum earthquake that Diablo might need to survive.

The conclusion is that the remarkable history of producing sanguine technical reports that get the seismic history of producing sanguine technical reports that get the seismic utility’s license based on these new, unissued, but are able and willing to think fairly wrong. When ever an earthquake raises the question about the utility’s ability to convince the public to give up its land for a nuclear plant is out of the question.

...In short, beliefs survive unless we are strongly motivated to examine the contradictory data as unbiased a mind as we can muster and are both able and willing to think deeply about it.

Defenders of the seismic safety of the Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plant are not arguing on the basis of facts. They are defending a belief. Profit is their first priority.

TAKE ACTION

The next time you read an inevitable Tribune or New Times editorial by a PG&E supportive defending the safety of Diablo Canyon and promoting the renewal of the plant’s operating license, write a letter to the editor citing Dr. Blakeslee’s December 3, 2014, testimony before the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee and point out that PG&E’s evasion of the public requirements for a license amendment means that relicensing the plant is out of the question.
March

It was encouraging to be outnumbered or at least matched by young people — it was not a grey-hair convention as it often is. Students from Cal Poly, Cuesta College and UCSD, Humboldt State, UCSB and others were marching with us and had such energy and optimism.

Alternative, sustainable energy technology was widely discussed. There is no reason to keep polluting our Mother Earth. One of the speakers from the Cuesta Citizens who were the driving force behind having New York’s Governor Cuomo sign onto a state ban said education is a big factor in getting climate action, doing the research, telling the truth and using the science.

The young Cuesta student I was seated next to on the bus said, “That was a life-changing event.” It was the first demonstration she has been a part of — hopefully the first of many.

Thanks from Jeanne Blackwell

We had fresh coffee and pastries for the trip from Black Horse and Cowboy Cookies and munchies from SLO Food co-op. Tori, Linda and Holly. Take charge ladies that just made things happen. And to our sponsors who subsidized seats and made sure this happened, THANK YOU. We always get just what we need when we need it. This community rocks.

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Douglas Anderson
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Linda Saydy
Jeremy White
Nancy Vincent-Zinke

Our Riders

Alexandra-Silver Helms
Alyssa H. Parr
Ariana Brando
Cal Wilvert
Cindy Dixon Levine, son & 3 friends
Dana Gibson
David Koi & 8 fellow Cuesta students
Elysa Ruiz
Eric Greening
Eric Veium
Erin Grise
Greg McMillan
Jamie May
Jane Eddy
Jeanne Blackwell
Jesse Gibson
June Cochran
Kai Lord-Farmer
Kate Lord-Farmer
Kathleen Minke & granddaughter
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Paula McCambridge
Rachel Fee
Ray Weymann
Rosemary Wilvert
Sean Fowler
Shane Bennett
Steve Lell
Steven Marx & grandson Lucas
Tori Poppenheimer
Victoria Carranza

Thank you June Cochran for handling the check-ins — no small task. Never did find out where that extra person came from on the way home, but at least we didn’t lose anyone.

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Oil Water

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the $5 million requested by State Parks to purchase the land. When the Senate budget subcommittee killed the appropriation, they made it clear they won’t open the purse strings until unless the issues surrounding the La Grande tract are resolved.

And so it was that, at the time of the February 11, 2015, Coastal Commission meeting, the La Grande tract still had not fallen into the hands of State Parks, which, as we pointed out eight years ago, is still violating the LCP. From the remarks of Coastal Commissioners at their Feb. 11 meeting and from reading their staff report, it is clear that the state is exactly the opposite of what we state is within half a mile of the tracks, which go through the campuses of Cal Poly and UC Davis.

The proposed rail terminal would increase air and noise pollution on the Nipomo Mesina, in addition to hazardous dust pollution levels from the Oceano Dunes.

A number of California communities on the Pacific main line have written to the SLO County Planning Department and the Board of Supervisors asking that they not approve the rail spur project, which will bring oil trains from Canada through their cities to the refinery. The SLO fire chief said underfunded local fire departments do not have the equipment to handle a derailment and oil fire and would have to call in other fire departments for help.

In the last 24 months, there have been 33 derailments of oil trains in the United States. Heidi Harmon, California Assembly Candidate, said “This is not just a case of not in our backyard. This is a dangerous, dirty and detrimental project that should not be in anybody’s backyard.”

Stick

continued from page 3

No more.” The good news is that California has superior energy options that don’t require fracking. We have excellent renewable energy resources and strong goals. We’re the home of Tesla, Sungevity, Solar City, Sunrun, and SunPower — companies creating the technology, financing and infrastructure for clean energy future.

Within decades, California’s economy can and should be powered with 100 percent clean, renewable energy, replacing our oil-guzzling transportation infrastructure with clean-powered electric vehicles and high-speed rail.

It’s time for California to follow New York’s lead and kick fracking to the curb.

Try again, Trib

The Tribune reported on February 19 that the SLO City Council sent a letter to the County Planning Department simply expressing “concerns” about the Phillips 66 crude-by-rail project. The City’s letter actually asks the County to deny the permit and reject the project “to protect the health, safety and welfare of San Luis Obispo County residents, including over 46,000 City residents.”

Brune

continued from page 8

California’s desire to show international leadership. By that same logic, though, we should also be looking for every opportunity not to increase the oil and gas production that is creating that pollution. Finding reasons to continue and even to expand fracking in our state is exactly the opposite of what we should be doing to solve the problem of climate change with one hand, and then make it worse with the other.

Brown has a singular leadership opportunity to put a stop to this logistical failure of SLO County residents in the oil and gas industry, taking away the oil and gas infrastructure that is the back of the crisis.

Fuels and dust pollution levels from the Oceano Dunes are within half a mile of the tracks, which go through the campuses of Cal Poly and UC Davis.

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Classifieds

Next issue deadline is March 13. To get a rate sheet or submit your ad and payment, contact: Sierra Club - Santa Lucia Chapter P.O. Box 15755 San Luis Obispo, CA 93406 sierracityclub8@gmail.com

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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 area code 540. Natural resources 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 outing leader, contact Outing Chair Joe Morris, 549-0535. For information on a specific outing, please call the listed outing leader.

Mon., Mar. 2nd, 10 a.m. Valley and Islay Creek Hike. Identify a dozen wildflower species and their ruins, and if you arrive we can look forward to spring wildflowers in the Carryo Plain National Monu- ment. For more information on Saturday will either remove or modify sections of fence to facilitate the mobility of longhorn antelope. These residents prefer to crawl under rather than jump fences to escape predators. Sunday will be, at the choice of the group, either a hike in the Caliente Range or else a tour of popular viewing areas in the plains. Leader: Craig Deutsch, craig.deutsch@gmail.com, 710-477-6670. CNRCC Desert Committee.


Sun., Mar. 14th-17th, Tamarisk Eradication in Saline Valley. Join us in eradicating tamarisk and improve water quality in the Mountaiin canyon west of Saline Valley. Meet 10 a.m. Sat. at the intersection of Heys 395 & 168, just north of Big Pine and drive into Saline Valley. Camp at Saline Hot Springs. We will work Sat afternoon, Sunday and Monday with Ridgecrest BLM Wilderness Coordinator Marty Dickens. On Tuesday there will be a hike in the area. High clearance vehicles preferred. Leader: Kate Allen, j’allen96@gmail.com, 661-944-4566.

Sun., Mar. 18th-22nd, Death Valley National Park - Spring Weekend. Visit Death Valley when temperatures are mildest. Passkeys may be blooming. We’ll hike to waterfalls including oasis-like Darwin Falls, through stunning areas including Titus Canyon, visit ghost towns and mining areas, and explore some lesser known but truly fantastic areas outside of the Park. We will also tour Scotty’s Castle. The hikes are rated moderate to strenuous with several hikes off maintained trails. Strenuous hikes to the most interesting locations require short sections of rock scrambling and minor exposure to heights. The hikes range from five to ten miles, with elevation gains up to 500 feet. Cost is $60 per person and includes 4 nights of camping and tour of Scotty’s Castle. Group size limited to 15 people. Email or call leader for reservation information. Leader: Rich Jurichic, rich.sierracircle@pacbell.net 916-492-2181. Sacramento Group/ CNRCC Desert Committee.

Sun., Mar. 29th, 9-11 a.m. Day Hike: Mount Diablo. Join the Mt. Diablo Search & Rescue and the Diablo Range chapter of Sierra Club for an easy hike to the summit of Mt. Diablo. The hike is 4.5 miles (5,600 feet) round trip. Meet at the Ranger Station at 8:30 a.m. The hike is rated easy to moderate. Bring water and lunch. Leader: Sarah Schiefer, 528-2567 or sschiefer57@gmail.com

Sun., Apr. 26th, 9-11 a.m. Day Hike: Mount Diablo. Join the Mt. Diablo Search & Rescue and the Diablo Range chapter of Sierra Club for an easy hike to the summit of Mt. Diablo. The hike is 4.5 miles (5,600 feet) round trip. Meet at the Ranger Station at 8:30 a.m. The hike is rated easy to moderate. Bring water and lunch. Leader: Sarah Schiefer, 528-2567 or sschiefer57@gmail.com

Join the CAL FRENCH CIRCLE AND GET THE 2015 GUIDE TO SLO COUNTY TRAILS FREE!

Did you know that only 15% of Sierra Club membership dues go pay the expenses of this chapter—the rest goes to the Club’s vital national conservation campaigns. We thank our members for that, but it’s only by their additional contributions that we are able to maintain a chapter office, staff, our local conservation work and this newsletter. So here’s a way to keep us healthy and for you to get a copy of the brand new third edition of Road 805: THE CALIFORNIA DESERT TRAILS GUIDE. Outlined in the book are 158 mostly short hikes — several dozen more than the previous edition, with locales from seacoast to summits and everywhere in between. How is this possible? Join the CAL FRENCH Circle donors by signing up for a monthly contribution of $20 or more. Go to www.santalucia.sierracircle.org, click the “Donate” button and either donate $240 or select an automatic monthly contribution of at least $20 or more. You can cancel at any time, using your free “bill pay” service. For this limited time/limited quantity offer, you need to sign up by March 31st to receive a copy of Day Hikes before the offer expires. But there’s more. Cal French Circle donors are invited to exclusive events, such as special films or wine & cheese receptions with environmental leaders. Join your fellow Santa Lucia Sierra Club members who have already joined CFC. Give a present to the environment and yourself!

Sant Lucian • March 2015

Activities sponsored by other organizations

Citizens’ Climate Lobby, Sat., March 7th, and Sat., April 4th, 9:30 a.m. Meeting at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, 2201 Lawton Ave, SLO. Join us and learn what you can do to slow climate change and make a difference in our community. Become a climate activist and part of the solution to the most pressing issue of our time. For more information, email citizensclimatelobby@slo.org.

Saturday, March 14, 1 p.m. San Luis Obispo Botanical Garden: Saturday at the Garden — Creating Container Gardens Workshop. Even if you don’t have a large yard you can still enjoy the many benefits of gardening! If you love birds, butterflies, fresh vegetables or low maintenance plants but have limited space or time, this is the class for you! Join landscaper Pat Thomas as we learn about containers for ornamental plants and vegetables. Following a demonstration, class participants will plant their own containers to bring home. Participants should bring a planting container approximately 18” diameter by 18” deep or larger to the program. Some plants will be provided and others will be for sale or bring your own. Soil, trowels and gloves provided. Presenters are: Pat Thomas, SLO. For information, call 549-0535.

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

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For further information contact:
Joe Morris, Sierra Club (805) 549-0535
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SLO COUNTY TRAILS FREE!

San Luis Obispo

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