The Power is in the Plan

from Coming Clean, The blog of Executive Director Michael Brune, August 3, 2015.

Most of the news we read and watch about climate change is dark. Bleak, even. Depressing. Many of the tweet, posts, and stories we see reveal the consequences of government and corporate leaders’ inaction on climate — in the form of more intense wildfires, droughts, extreme weather, and more.

But there’s another story that rarely gets told. Our movement is growing. It is becoming more diverse and more powerful. Clean energy is becoming cheaper every month and is displacing dirty fuels at an increasing rate.

All of this momentum is creating a positive feedback loop: As we become more effective at advocating for clean energy, the costs of solar, wind, and energy storage are all plummeting. As clean energy gets cheaper, it becomes easier and easier to put fossil fuels in our rearview mirror.

Today’s announcement by President Obama gives our movement a shot in the arm. The EPA has at last issued its Clean Power Plan in final form. Until now, power plants faced no real limitation on how much carbon pollution they dumped into our atmosphere. For an administration with many significant climate achievements, this is the crown jewel.

The journey to get here started years ago, in the dark days of the Bush administration. Twelve states, three cities, and an array of environmental groups (including the Sierra Club) brought suit to force the administrator of the EPA to regulate carbon dioxide, methane, and other greenhouse gases as pollutants under the Clean Air Act.

Eventually, on April 2, 2007, the Supreme Court, in a 5-4 decision, reversed an earlier judgement and found for the plaintiffs. Today we reap the rewards of that legal victory. If the Clean Power Plan plays out as the EPA expects it to, the net reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from U.S. power plants by 2030 will be 30 percent or more below 2005 levels — a big step toward meeting our current international climate commitments.

The genius of the Clean Power Plan is that there really is no single plan. Instead the EPA has set individual goals for each state (except Vermont, which has no power plants that qualify for regulation; no wonder my friend Bill McKibben lives there). Each goal is calibrated for what state can reasonably achieve in reductions through measures like retiring coal power, increasing energy efficiency, and encouraging the growth of renewable energy. Yet it’s up to each state to determine how it actually will achieve its goal; the EPA will remain hands off unless the state does nothing at all.

To be honest, the EPA has been conservative in putting this plan together. Each state is being asked to reach an attainable goal that is not just possible, but surpassable — and every state will end up in a better place than where it started. Our economy will benefit, and so will workers — provided that the federal government and the states ensure that training and funding mechanisms are in place to support workers and communities that previously depended on fossil fuels.

Important as it is, though, the Clean Power Plan is only a first step in the race to stop climate pollution from power plants. This plan, by itself, does not solve climate change. It doesn’t even reach the potential for carbon
Sierra Club General Meeting
7 p.m., Thursday, September 17th
Walking Across the Nation—My Story

After 40 years teaching at Cuesta College, anthropology professor Bill Fairbanks set off on a coast-to-coast trek in 2009. Over five years and 6,500 miles, he talked to hundreds of locals, visited small towns and large, attended community meetings, and sketched awesome landscapes. Bill’s stories about his experiences and his reflections on how the country has changed, accompanied by slides, will make for a remarkable evening. Come hear what will begin the meeting.

Steynberg Gallery, 1531 Monterey St., SLO. Info: Joe Morris, 549-0355.
**Save the date: November 7, 2015**

**A Dry-Farmed Fundraiser**

With the water issue in North County taking a lot of space in the news -- and irrigated agriculture taking 80 percent of the water -- we think it’s time to get educated on the issue. Since the growing of grapes considered the main player in this problem, we thought a talk with those dry-farm vintners and growers who are not part of the problem would be in order. Dry land farming in the North County is seeing a growing renaissance. We’re going to spend a day dropping in on these visionaries and hearing how it works.

A bus will leave San Luis Obispo mid-morning, with stops at Atascadero and Templeton to pick up you “over the hill” folks. You will spend the day visiting several of these growers and vintners, capping it off with a locally sourced dinner by Chef Spencer Johnson at Ambyth Winery (not only dry farmed but grown using biodynamic methods). Just east of Templeton. The buses will then head back south.

Plan to spend the day with friends, tasting wine and enjoying a splendid dinner in an amazing place. Write a note to stoerry@gmail.com and we’ll put you on the list to receive more information as plans progress.

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**Would You Like a Deduction with Your Donation?**

As you may know -- per the wording that appears on every Sierra Club membership form and website -- contributions, gifts and dues to the Sierra Club are not tax deductible because they support our citizen-based advocacy and lobbying efforts.

However, we also do plenty of things that aren’t strictly a matter of legislation or waging in elected officials (supporting the nomination of a national marine sanctuary, organizing resistance to a potentially disastrous oil-by-rural project and opposing the relicensing of Diablo Canyon, to name three), which can be funded with tax-deductible dollars.

If you want to support the work of the Chapter and take a deduction off your taxes next April, here’s how:

- Write your check to “The Sierra Club Foundation”
- Write “Santa Lucia Chapter Fund” in the Memo section
- Mail to Sierra Club, P.O. Box 15755, San Luis Obispo, CA 93406. That’s it. You have successfully made a tax-deductible donation to the Sierra Club, and you will receive the requisite acknowledgment letter to that effect for the edification of the IRS. We thank you!

**FOES continued from previous page**

sustainability would stop accidents from occurring.” But nobody believes that. We’ve said that if a sanctuary had been made off Goleta before the oil rigs went in, that spill wouldn’t have happened because the rigs that pumped the oil into that ruptured pipe would not be there.

Tolich argues against the argument that nobody’s made. Mr. Peschong points out that a faulty valve recently resulted in a 220,000-gallon sewage spill into the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary. “The sanctuary status of Monterey Bay did not prevent raw sewage from reaching the ocean,” he concluded, thus making the point that a national marine sanctuary isn’t a magic marine sanctuary. Virtually all of the current crop of criticism mentions the economic study which found that our region would see a likely benefit from the establishment of a national marine sanctuary in the form of at least $23 million added annually to the local economy and up to 600 new jobs. Sanctuary opponents must attack this report because, unless they can mount a credible challenge to it, they know it would be pretty tough to find a local elected official anywhere who would vote against a $23 million boost to the local economy and 600 new jobs.

So let us underscore this point: There has been no credible challenge to the study of the economic impacts of a national marine sanctuary on the central coast. The one formal attempt to challenge it was mounted by an uninformed and unqualified individual in the opinion piece that contained significant errors and made conclusions based on mistaken assumptions, invalid comparisons and groundless opinions.

The conclusion of the economic study stands. And that does indeed mean that if you oppose the CHNMS, you are opposing a likely $23 million addition annually to the local economy and 600 new jobs.

The opposition says things that aren’t true but sound like they might be true. It’s a national marine sanctuary, so that means we’d lose local control, right? Decisions would be made by “far-flung government bureaucrats” by Washington D.C., right? Wrong. Decisions would be made by the local superintendent and Sanctuary Advisory Council, comprised of a broad group of local stakeholders.

When members of a particular economic special interest group complain about “loss of local control,” it is necessary to translate: they’re not afraid of too much local control, shared with local stakeholders other than themselves who may feel that they, too, have an interest in the ongoing health of our local ocean.

Mr. Peschong claims the livelihoods of fishermen would somehow be threatened by a marine sanctuary, and supports this claim with a citation of one of those mistaken assumptions from that aforementioned uninformed commentary attacking the economic study. Again, the attempt is to paint a picture of fishermen thrown out of work by theoretical future fishing regulations to be imposed by a marine sanctuary that would impose no regulations on fishing.

The opposition is frequently anonymous. The report on the economic impacts of a national marine sanctuary on the central coast of California was commissioned by the local community of the Sierra Club California. It says so on the first page. In the opinion piece that tried and failed to debunk it, the author coyly declined to identify who asked her to write an attack on the economic study.

Furthering the cause of anonymity, Mr. Peschong writes that “other fishing communities all along the California coast, whose ports and harbors have...fallen into national marine sanctuary waters, have spoken out about the constraining overreach in the name of preservation.”

Really? Do these communities “all along the California coast” have names? Have they spoken out like Martin and Sonoma Counties did earlier this year when they successfully petitioned to expand the national marine sanctuaries off their coast because they wanted even more of what they already had? Have they spoken out like Captain Alex Brin, the First Manager for Island Packers in Ventura? He said: “The research, outreach and education provided by the dedicated employees and volunteers of Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary help to put our business on the map. Businesses like ours reap direct and indirect economic benefits from the presence of Channel Islands Marine Sanctuary worth millions of dollars for our local economy.”
Power

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savings in the electric sector — we will meet and exceed this goal.

But there’s a saying among marathon runners that nothing affects your average speed like zero miles per hour. The Clean Power Plan officially gets zero miles per hour. But what has changed — and perhaps most significantly — is the way people talk about climate change. In the past, it was often framed as a problem to be solved by experts or policymakers. But now, the conversation has shifted to one of collective action and individual responsibility. Everyone is encouraged to make changes in their daily lives to reduce their carbon footprint.

The Sierra Club quietly announced that it would adopt a new platform for climate action. The new platform includes a commitment to support policies that would bring the country closer to meeting the Clean Power Plan targets. The Sierra Club also pledged to work with other organizations and communities to ensure that clean energy is accessible to all Americans, regardless of their zip code.

The new platform is a significant shift for the organization, which has traditionally focused on legal challenges and advocacy. But with the Clean Power Plan in place, the Sierra Club sees an opportunity to transform the way it works. The new platform includes a commitment to support clean energy projects in underserved communities, as well as efforts to ensure that clean energy is affordable for all.

I believe this is a turning point for the Sierra Club. By adopting this new platform, the organization is demonstrating a willingness to embrace new ideas and strategies. This is a positive step, and I look forward to seeing how the Sierra Club continues to evolve and adapt to the challenges of the 21st century.

Nancy Ruhl, Los Osos

Who controls local control?

In the forty years I have been a Sierra Club member, I have occasionally—not often—seen the Club’s leadership take the wrong stand, and support some action that is not the best choice to protect the environment. The Santa Lucia chapter’s Executive Committee has made such an error, in my judgement, by choosing to support the County Flood Control District (FCD) as the best option to balance the Paso Robles Groundwater Basin.

For 45 years, the FCD (comprised of the five County supervisors) has been half-hearted and ineffective at limiting pumping in the Basin. It has resisted asking any extractors to reduce their usage, let alone to cut back. Even the 2013 Urgency Ordinance, designed as a moratorium on irrigated agriculture, was gutted by the FCD with a long list of “vested rights.” More than a thousand acres of irrigated crops have been planted since then.

A much better choice is the new Local Water District. Its ground-breaking nine-member board reflects the unique mix of residents and agriculture in the Basin: five board seats represent residents (both landowners and renters) and small family farmers; two seats represent owners of mid-sized properties; and two seats represent owners of larger land holdings.

The Local District board is all unpaid volunteers, and must live over the Basin. The FCD board members are professional (paid) politicians, none of whom lives in the proposed district. My neighbors—rural residents, small farmers, retirees—are more likely to be on the convivial board that can stabilize the Basin, while County management will only bring more of what we have now. The County has calculated that the costs for either approach are virtually equal.

Local demand management, local supplemental water, local recycling and reuse projects—all require committed management by Basin residents who rely on a sustainable rural water supply.

Michael Baugh, Paso Robles

The Sierra Club replies:

To clarify, the Sierra Club supports several potential management options for the Paso basin, including County management, State management and adjudication. Anything, that is, except a "hybrid" water district using a Recommended people's board. Any local board that can stabilize the Basin, while County management will only bring more of what we have now. The County has calculated that the costs for either approach are virtually equal.

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The Sierra Club replies:...
Sept. 16: Edward Abbey Documentary at the Palm

Central Coast Bioneers and the San Luis Obispo International Film Festival are collaborating on a screening of the documentary “Wrenched” which examines the colorful life of “The Monkey Wrench Gang” author Edward Abbey. Abbey was a novelist referred to as the “Thoreau of the American West.” Infamous for his views on the environment and a criticism of public land policies, Abbey emerged from the early sixties conservationist writers with a uniquely sharp wit and sardonic sense of humor. His stories warn about the consequences of over-development, particularly in the Southwest.

His fight continues to sustain the last bastion of the American wilderness - the spirit of the West.

The film will screen at 7:00 pm on Wednesday, September 16 at the Palm Theater, 817 Palm Street. Tickets are $10 for adults and $8 for students and can be purchased at the door. Advance tickets are available at www.sloffilmfest.org.

A Q&A session will be held after the film.

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Have they spoken out like Ted Balestretti, President of the Cannery Row Company? He said: “For the four million annual visitors to Cannery Row, the health and beauty of Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary is priceless. We simply would not have the vibrant economy and visitor experience we currently enjoy were it not for a clean and accessible marine environment. The hotels, restaurants, shops, and other vendors along Cannery Row understand and appreciate this connection.”

How about Captain Joe Nazar, owner of San Francisco Whale Tours at Pier 39 in San Francisco? “Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary is one of the earth’s most unique ecosystems,” says Captain Nazar. “We are incredibly blessed to not only live next door to this ocean treasure, but to run a business whose success hinges on a healthy and well protected sanctuary.”

When sanctuary opponents pop up in our local media, they like to claim that they are among “hundreds of individu- als and organizations” opposed to the Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary. Sanctuary supporters make the same claim about hundreds of supporting individuals and organiza- tions. The difference: those hundreds of supporters can actually be listed by name, and have been (www.nominate.nps.gov).

All sanctuary opponents like to guide the curious reader to the website of the Our Protected Coast Coalition. As we’ve previously noted, OPCC is a studiously anonymous website, a collection of links to anti-sanctuary political hit pieces going back decades. The first name ever to be publicly linked with the OPCC was that of Amber Johnson, the proprietor of Pacific Coast Strategies, Mr. Peschong’s political stablemate and fellow p.r. professional, whose main claim to fame is serving as field director of the oil industry-funded campaign that killed Santa Barbara’s anti-fracking ballot initiative.

And finally:

The opposition is inexplicable. To his credit, Mr. Peschong’s political stablemate and fellow p.r. professional, whose main claim to fame is serving as field director of the oil industry-funded campaign that killed Santa Barbara’s anti-fracking ballot initiative.

Congress passed the National Marine Sanctuaries Act in 1972 in response to the 1969 Santa Barbara oil spill. Fourteen sanctuaries have been designated in US waters since then. They have everywhere fulfilled their mission of public education, increased research, and implementing ecosystem-based management of our shared ocean heritage, providing protections that no other state or federal system of regulations can provide. The facts about national marine sanctuaries are clear, plentiful and readily available. The national marine sanctuary system has been a boon and a benefit to the American fishing industry in two counties. Sanctuaries have protected marine habitat and assured the viability and continuance of fisheries. Coast to coast, the catch of fishing fleets in the waters of national marine sanctuaries has brought hundreds of millions of dollars to local coastal economies.

But the likes of Mr. Peschong and the folks pulling the strings at the OPCC can reliably count on an ability to whip up a number of commercial fishermen by playing on ignorance and phantom fears and selling the notion that a national marine sanctuary would mean the end of them.

And their most amazing trick of all: The Refugio Beach oil spill shut down the fishing industry in two counties. Fishermen were thrown off the water. They have sued the oil company for lost income. In other words, the oil spill did in reality what marine sanctuaries do only in Peschongian fantasies, and has also likely permanently altered the marine environment off the coast of Santa Barbara. Only a marine sanctuary can stop new oil and gas development off our coast and protect our fisheries from another Refugio. And yet. Even after this very recent real-world example of what can happen in the absence of marine sanctuary protections, some of the people who should be fighting hardest to gain that protection for the fisheries they depend on for their livelihoods, have been fighting the hardest against it. This remains a mystery.

We will continue to cite the facts about national marine sanctuaries and the fact of communities and businesses that feel incredibly blessed to have national marine sanctuaries. Some of the people who should be fighting hardest to gain that protection for the fisheries they depend on for their livelihoods, have been fighting the hardest against it. This remains a mystery.

First, we cited the need to proclaim sanctuaries “powerful enough to persuade over-regulation” of fishing... without, you know, regulating fishing.
that alternative. More renewables, distributed generation, geothermal, and efficiency would achieve the same outcome with a much more environmental and consumer-friendly impact.”

Dr. Cooper notes that: “one need only compare PG&E’s Amended Environmental Report with the California Energy Commission documents PG&E relies on. PG&E rejects the option of geothermal energy based on the assumption that a single new geothermal plant would be built in PG&E’s service territory. Making the conservative assumption that the PG&E service territory includes half the geothermal resources in the state, geothermal resources are twice as large as Diablo Canyon’s capacity. Adding in efficiency and other distributed resources, the alternative energy capacity would be four times the capacity of Diablo Canyon.”

Further, “PG&E’s analysis of the supply-side of the California electricity sector also obscures a simple fact: non-hydro renewables, i.e. wind and solar, have increased dramatically and are poised to surpass nuclear generation, which has been in decline.”

We trust the EIS alternatives analysis will take note of this fact, as well as the fact noted in Power Shift that “nuclear power and central station generation are at a severe economic disadvantage as the technologies of distributed generation continue to develop and deploy.”

The EIS should analyze and contrast “short-term operating costs, long-term total resource costs, including efficiency as a resource, identify the implications of the dramatically declining cost of renewables, and recognize the economic problems of aging reactors in wholesale markets where renewables and efficiency are putting downward pressure on prices.”

The EIS should incorporate Power Shift’s assessment that the economics and necessity of Diablo’s reactors are being undermined by a:

- 40 percent increase in the operating cost of aging reactors;
- 60 percent decrease in the cost of wind;
- 60 percent decrease in the cost of solar;
- low-cost energy efficiency technologies that have taken a bite out of load growth;
- demand response that has become an increasingly valuable and effective resource;
- huge investments in storage technologies that are on the brink of redefining the value of intermittent resources; and
- advanced information and control technologies that transform the approach to reliability.

The NRC’s alternatives analysis should incorporate Dr. Cooper’s findings that “aging reactors are more costly than efficiency, wind, gas, and some solar in the near-term. In the mid-term, more solar becomes competitive with aging reactors as do several other generation sources, including biomas, geothermal, micro-turbines, and even offshore wind.”

In view of the fact that the NRC’s 2009 GEIS insisted that “to serve as a source of commercial power, photovoltaic systems and concentrating solar power systems would need to work in conjunction with energy storage systems such as batteries,” the alternatives analysis in the EIS should acknowledge the April 2015 introduction of affordable residential and industrial battery storage systems; the implications of this technology’s immediate, widespread demand and acceptance; and its projected growth to become a $19 billion industry by 2017, the year the final EIS is scheduled to be released.

If the EIS does not incorporate an analysis of this new information, we will know that the NRC has again chosen to remain strategically out of date so as to include viable alternatives to license renewal.

Finally, the EIS should dispense with PG&E’s argument that Diablo’s carbon is needed to meet the goals of carbon reduction. Recent projections by the Department of Energy’s Energy Information Administration (EIA) based on multiple scenarios for carbon emission reductions found that nuclear power does not help achieve greater carbon emission reductions.

Per Dr. Cooper, “pointing out that 60% of our current low carbon generation comes from nuclear as a basis for suggesting that nuclear must play a central role in the future decarbonization of the electricity sector is simply wrong as a matter of fundamental economics and totally irrelevant to policy making. The existence of nuclear power is a very old sunk cost… In the mid- to long-term, none of the existing nuclear reactors will make any contribution to decarbonization. They will all have to be replaced, and their future costs, compared to the available alternatives, are all that matters.”

In its Clean Power Plan, the EPA concurred, rejecting a proposal to allow states to count six percent of existing nuclear generation toward clean energy goals. In its final rule, EPA states “We believe it is inappropriate to base the BSR (Best System of Emission Reduction) on elements that will not reduce CO2 emissions from affected electric generating units below current levels… Existing nuclear generation helps make existing CO2 emissions lower than they would otherwise be, but will not further lower CO2 emissions below current levels.

Accordingly, the EPA is not finalizing preservation of generation from existing nuclear capacity in a component of the BSR.”

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission must replace its dated alternative by including biomass, geothermal, and the current state of the art in renewable energy when it drafts its Environmental Impact Statement on the proposed relicensing of Diablo Canyon.
Atascadero, Paso, Pismo, Grover, Arroyo Grande: Are you listening?

On June 28, the City of Santa Barbara became the latest California municipality asking the County of San Luis Obispo to deny the Phillips 66 oil by rail project.

The first speaker at that city council meeting turned out to be the first and last person at the hearing who spoke in favor of the project. He ticked off the Phillips 66/Barnett Cox p.r. talking points, then introduced the specter of legal action against the City should the council make a “hasty decision” to opposed the project.

Mayor Helene Schneider turned to the city attorney for clarification of this eyebrow-raising remark. The city attorney assured the council that the law provides “overwhelming support for public agencies that wish to exercise their First Amendment rights,” including by such means as sending a letter to county planners.

Assemblyman Das Williams’ representative urged denial, noting that “we just had a devastating spill on our coast, and that was a pipeline, and pipelines are safer than trains. Senator Hannah-Beth Jackson’s representative concurred that the project poses a direct risk to Santa Barbara’s public safety and environment, and the Refugio Beach oil spill “has reminded us how vulnerable we are.”

Fred Shaw, Vice Mayor of Carpinteria, told the council why his city had decided to oppose the project. Ken Huff (left) of the Santa Barbara County Action Network delivered a 15-page report delineating the risks posed by the project throughout the county.

Aside from the “you’ll get sued” guy, the only other project supporter in the room appeared to be councilmembers Dale Francisco and Frank Hotchkiss.

Hotchkiss allowed that “it’s true this kind of oil is more explosive; that probably contributes to its value,” but his constituents should “take some solace in knowing the risks are absolutely minimal.” And: “We shouldn't tell other planning commissions what to do.”

Francisco assured attendees that the feds have total control because this project involves interstate rail transport; cities and counties have no say. He offered the encouraging word that with new safety rules were put in place by the Department of Transportation earlier this year, assuring “newer and stronger” tank cars and mandatory speed limits in urban areas. Also, “the San Luis Obispo Planning Commission will be very hard pressed to turn this down, as there would be no justification in land use law.”

To help out councilmembers Hotchkiss and Francisco: Tar sands oil trains explode because the chemicals needed to dilute the crude sufficiently to pour it into a tank car are highly volatile. Far from being an indicator of value, this is a graphic illustration of just why tar sands crude has earned its rep as cheap and dirty “extreme oil” — it’s barely even oil.

Per those “absolutely minimal” risks, at current levels of oil transport, the Department of Transportation estimates 15 derailments and spills per year, and one “La Megane level event” (a large portion of a city incinerated, mass casualties) every two years.

As for councilmember Francisco’s assurances that the new rules will save us: “Old tank cars won’t be off the rails and retrofits will not be complete for 8 to 10 years. Retrofits will have thinner walls than new tank cars. The new speed limits apply only to a few “high-threat urban areas” (i.e. not us). And the new rules gutted requirements for giving the public and emergency responders advance notification of oil spills and routes.

As far as the SLO County Planning Commission could justify turning down this project, it will have available to it at least eleven justifications under land use law. They are called Class I environmental impacts — significant and unavoidable — and they are all listed in the project’s Environmental Impact Report. Even more justification can be found in the fact that the EIR minimizes or simply omits other significant impacts altogether in an attempt to obscure the full scope of the project’s harms. Any deliberative body that issued a permit for a project based on an EIR as deficient as this one would be in violation of state law.

And then there’s the ultimate justification, as articulated by Sierra Club Santa Barbara Chapter Chair Katie Davis in her remarks to the city council: “There would be zero benefit to us from oil trains moving through Santa Barbara to prepare crude oil to be refined for export.”

As another speaker put it, and as all other speakers put it with the exception — agreed, the council “should place the health and safety of residents over the profits of private industry.”

So they did.

Send a Message to Your City Council

What does the Santa Barbara City Council know that your city council doesn’t? Quite a lot, it would seem, if you live in Pismo Beach, Grover Beach or Arroyo Grande. They still haven’t managed to make a peep on the Phillips 66 project, although hundreds who every week for the next 20 years will be subjected to the threat of derailment, fires, explosions, massive amounts of new air pollution from diesel engine exhaust and toxic, carcinogenic fumes vented from the tank cars carrying the dirtiest crude oil on Earth.

Local citizens have taken it upon themselves to begin canvassing the blast zones throughout SLO County with factual information fliers, which inform people of the potential dangers to themselves and their property. What we are finding is that typically upward of 90 percent of residents and business owners we talk to have never heard any specifics about the Phillips 66 project. A colleague and I recently canvassed within one block of the train tracks running through Oceano. Only four of the approximately 100 persons we contacted knew anything about the project. Not surprisingly, after we briefly shared the facts of the project, the majority of them were opposed to it. It is easy to see when your community is being put at
Taking Issue: the Pope vs. David Brooks
problematic environmental coverage & commentary in our local media

Taking Issue: the Pope vs. David Brooks


**Summary:** On June 18, Pope Francis issued his historic encyclical making the moral case against climate change and in defense of the planet. Because he took aim at the mindset for which “maximizing profits is enough,” conservative pundits awoke one to tell the pope to shut up. No one rushed to the defense of the status quo with more fervor than the New York Times’ David Brooks.

A few years ago, a team of researchers led by Daniel Esty, Yale University professor and Yale President’s Council member, took a look at the environmental health of 150 countries. The nations with higher incomes per capita held better environmental ratings. As countries get richer, they invest to tackle environmental problems that directly kill human beings (though they don’t necessarily tackle problems that despoil the natural commons).

“Fracking is a net environmental plus.”

Brooks ignores it to a comical fault.”

--- Lindsay Abrams, Salon.com, 6/23/15.

You would never suspect, from the encyclical, that over the past decade, one of the most catastrophic industries produced some of the most important economic and environmental gains. I’m talking, of course, about fracking.

--- Lindsay Abrams, Salon.com, 6/23/15.

“Has it really come to this? It is now conventional wisdom to admonish the Catholic Church for undervaluing the contributions of Chinese totalitarianism toward ‘human dignity?’ It’s nauseating enough when Western economists laud the Chinese ‘economic miracle,’ as if there’s some secret ingredient involved in using slave labor to hoard mountains of manufacturing profits. But asking us to appreciate the ‘gains in human dignity’ offered by a society without freedoms of speech, assembly, political choice, religion or labor organization is absurd.”

--- Matt Taibbi, Rolling Stone, 6/27/15.

Cleanups continued from page 6

million pounds of trash and recyclables. In San Luis Obispo County, volunteers clear 30 beach sites and pick up thousands of pounds of trash each year.

ECOSLO provides supplies at every site (gloves, buckets, bags, pick up sticks). However, if Cleanup volunteers bring their own bucket or reusable bag and gloves from home, this assures everyone will have the equipment they need.

When: Saturday, September 19th, 2015 from 9 AM to noon at a beach near you!

**Where:** Cleanups will take place at over 800 sites on California beaches, bays, rivers, and creeks. In SLO County, you can choose one of the 30 sites that ECOSLO manages. Call ECOSLO, The Environmental Center of San Luis Obispo, at (805) 544-1777 for exact locations and other site-specific information. For further detail, visit the ECOSLO web site at www.ecoslo.org.

How: To sign up to volunteer for Coastal Cleanup Day, go to http://theoclos.volunteer.com. If interested in helping lead this event, sign up as a Site Captain. There are just a few spots left and we need your help! Call or email ECOSLO for available locations and Site Captain Orientation dates: (805) 544-1777 or programs@ecoslo.org.

--- Lindsay Abrams, Salon.com, 6/23/15.

“The catastrophic pollution” caused by China’s industrialization, he writes, is a ‘short term’ problem. It’s strange, because Brooks isn’t a climate denier. And yet there’s really no way to make that argument with a straight face unless you’re somehow unaware that the very same coal-fired industry that’s making it hard for people in China to breathe has also made it so that the country is responsible for some 30 percent of the world’s emissions (or that the U.S., despite having more breathable air, is the world’s second-highest emitter). Far from short-term, some have gone so far as to call that existential.

--- Lindsay Abrams, Salon.com, 6/23/15.
Taking Issue: Diablo vs. Email
problematic environmental coverage & commentary in our local media

"Diablo Canyon can endure quakes, latest study finds" by David Sneed, The Tribune, September 11, 2014.

**Summary:** On July 14, 2015, the Alliance for Nuclear Responsibility (A4NR) filed testimony in a case before the California Public Utilities Commission in which PG&E will attempt to claim the remainder of ratepayer funds taken for its “AB 1632” seismic studies. The studies were released on September 10, 2014, as the California Central Coast Seismic Imaging Project. A4NR’s testimony, relying on 2,400 internal PG&E emails, paints a picture of obfuscation and stonewalling in the course of preparing the $64 million study. In short, had these emails been available when the study was released last fall, the headline in the Sept. 11 Tribune might have looked very different.

So said Chief Nuclear Officer Ed Halpin. But internal emails tell another story. From a June 24, 2014, email between the geoscience directors:

...[Mr Halpin] reviewed the Executive Summary that was presented in the recent webcast... He specifically asked about the last set of ground motions curves in the presentation where it shows us using the 86th percentile for a deterministic evaluation that looks Hoogria [sic], San Simeon, and Shoreline and shows exceedance both at low frequency and high frequency. Halpin was still concerned on September 2, 2014, just a week before the report was released:

...as I ‘read’ the executive summary section of the report and go to the last page that summarizes old vs new data assumptions, it seems the majority of the data has worsened and not improved. The optics look bad. If I was to color code the summary sheet and show all data in red that’s worse in regard to assumptions it would not look good....

At issue is the matter of deterministic evaluations — i.e., the worst that could happen. This is what the California Energy Commission specifically requested from the AB 1632 report — and PG&E found that the deterministic news was grim. Instead, Halpin chose to report on the probabilistic results — i.e., how likely is it to happen? It’s been determined that if the earthquakes occur, they will be stronger. Of course, the “probability” of the Fukushima disaster was one in a million.

Dr. Gibson’s chagrin at PG&E’s bypassing of review by the CPUC’s appointed Independent Peer Review Panel was justified, and is now documented. A March 19, 2014, email from a top PG&E legal advisor verifies that PG&E has promised they would share drafts of the report with the IPRP:

“See slide 3 from Feb 2013 presentation that says we’re sending draft technical reports on Irish Hills to the IPRP in February 2014. I’ve rec’d nothing to send them... but clearly we indicated we were going to share drafts.

Two days later, a top PG&E geoscience manager lays out the plan:

No meeting is currently scheduled. We are issuing a final report June 30th. I expect meetings after we issue the report based on when the CPUC/IPRP requests them. If a meeting is scheduled for any reason, I will let you know.

...less than two weeks later, the IPRP staff liaison asks PG&E again to see a draft of the report:

I’m hearing that PG&E plans on submitting a report of its results and findings to the NRC in June 2014. The IPRP would like to see a draft before then... the sooner the better... so that any comments or suggestions we might have could be incorporated into your report. (ellipses in original)

And an engineering director then explains PG&E’s refusal to Ed Halpin:

...Our sense is they [IPRP] will not be happy not getting an advanced review before we issue but we really have no choice at this point....

Halpin issued an internal report on July 3, 2014, that stated “We believe we have answered all of the questions posed by the IPRP of the PUC but will work with them to answer additional questions throughout the summer once the report is issued.

**Summary:** It took filing as legal intervenors for A4NR to discover the trail of emails that contradicts PG&E’s claims in the Tribune when the study was originally released. It validates Dr. Gibson’s concerns that the IPRP was ignored. And it can only reinforce in the public’s mind that PG&E is continuing to show the kind of bad corporate behavior that earned them a federal indictment for obstructing the investigation that followed the San Bruno explosion. The entire A4NR testimony, with all emails, can be read at: http://a4nr.org/?p=3476

Of Brickbats, Bouquets & Pelicans

In June, the Sierra Club filed a Coastal Commission appeal of the Harbor Terrace project in Avila Beach due to its likely impacts on the Harbor Pier fish cleaning station — where fish oil rains down on hungry pelicans, producing the same effect on their life expectancy as an oil slick. (See “One For the Pelicans,” Tribune, September 11, 2014.) The Tribune soundly scolded us for potentially holding up the beloved Harbor Terrace project and heaved a brickbat our way.

In August, when we withdrew our appeal of the Harbor Terrace project, the Tribune bestowed a bouquet upon us because it believed we withdrew the appeal due to a sudden realization that Port San Luis is “taking steps to make fish cleaning stations safer for marine life.”

Yes, it is. Right after we filed the appeal, the Port San Luis Harbor Commission, which had previously been in no great hurry on the issue — mostly spending its time arguing with representatives of the Sierra Club, SLO Coastkeeper, Morro Coast Audubon, Willow Tree Wildlife and Pacific Wildlife Care — suddenly snapped into action, accelerating the pace of short-term protective measures at the station. Our appeal became the only topic of conversation at the Port’s ad hoc committee meetings on the fish-cleaning station. We got near daily phone calls and emails from staff seeking withdrawal of the appeal. When the Port finally took the step of approving a full suite of near- and long-term measures, including new parcels and dollar amounts attached, we withdrew our appeal.

Coastal Commission staff, who were unaware of the problem prior to our appeal, reported to the Coastal Commission at their August 14 meeting that they will now be engaging in active encouragement and support of efforts to resolve the issue around the Harbor Pier fish cleaning station.

Thanks to our brick-batted appeal, matters were ignored. Yes, it is. But a careful reading of the evidence points to the promise it’s made.
Stop Oil Trains: The Week of Action

By Ethan Buckner, ForestEthics

What a week it was. Throughout the week of July 6, more than 5,000 people participated in 100 events during this year’s #StopOilTrains Week of Action, amounting to the largest protest against oil trains in history. Across the US and Canada, communities took to the streets, held memorial vigils, blockaded the tracks, hosted educational events, hung banners, canvassed neighborhoods, and spoke out at public hearings. This effort—led by grassroots leaders and communities most impacted by oil train transport—sent ripples across North America.

Highlights from the week of action—too numerous to count—include: National press coverage included pieces in MSNBC, Democracy Now, EcoWatch, The Hill, AP, & VICE—alongside dozens of local print, TV, and radio pieces. In Lac-Mégantic, Ontario, site of the first and worst oil train disaster, the week started with a beautiful, bold and somber march that drew hundreds of people to the tracks. The week concluded with a banner funeral procession in Philadelphia and a die-in in Seattle. On Saturday, thousands attended coordinated protests across California, including rallies that drew hundreds each in San Luis Obispo, Richmond, Minneapolis and DC—just to name a few. Over the weekend, action picked up with a jazz funeral in Philadelphia and a die-in in Seattle. On Saturday, thousands attended coordinated protests across California, including rallies that drew hundreds each in San Luis Obispo, Richmond, Los Angeles and San Jose to call on decision-makers across the country to reclaim the oil train infrastructure proposals and shut down existing operations. There are countless more to name, and every action had an impact, from gatherings of 5 to 500. No matter where or how you participated, you were a part of something extraordinary.

We’ve come a long way, but we know we can’t and won’t stop here. Across North America, big oil will continue to push for new extreme oil infrastructure despite its impact on community health and safety and the climate. Our movement will continue to grow and fight for our communities and our climate, so thanks to all who made the 2015 Stop Oil Trains Week of Action a powerful step along the way.

get involved at
protectsloslo.org

Stone Soup Gets a Dash of Activism

On August 3, the Sacramento Bee published a list of who’s been spending the most money lobbying Sacramento officials this year, according to disclosures filed with the California Secretary of State’s office. Phillips 66 is spending slightly less than Comcast and slightly more than the City of Los Angeles:

- COMCAST CORPORATION AND AFFILIATED ENTITIES, INCLUDING NBC UNIVERSAL MEDIA, LLC: $523,722.96
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- PHILLIPS 66 COMPANY: $506,780.16
- CITY OF LOS ANGELES: $506,373.33
- CITY OF LOS ANGELES: $506,373.33


Phillips 66 is Spending Big in Sacramento

Wonder what that’s about?

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Classifieds

Next issue deadline is September 14. To get a rate sheet or submit your ad and payment, contact:
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USE IN AND FOR GOOD HEALTH
Outings and Activities Calendar

Sat., Sep. 5th, 10 a.m. City Walk: SLO’s Secret Past. A guided, exploratory stroll to reveal the original site of the Mission, the 1860s stagecoach stop, home of SLO’s first millionaire, the last remaining city gas light, a forgotten WPA project, and other hidden landmarks in the historic core of SLO. Duration about 1 1/2 hrs. Meet at NW corner of Nipomo and Dana Sts. Leader: Joe Morris, 549-0355.

Sun., Sep. 6th, 10 a.m. Quarry Trail Trekking Pole Hike. “Polecats” hike to model and practice the benefits of using trekking poles. This hike near Cerrro Cabrillo is 2 miles long, with 320 ft. of elevation change. Meet at trailhead for Quarry Trail. From Hwy 1 in Morro Bay, take Los Osos/ Baywood Park exit, driving 1.4 miles south on South Bay Blvd to trailhead parking lot on the left. Leader: David Georgi, 458-5575 or hikingspole@gmail.com.

Thurs., Sep. 17th, 7-9 p.m. Bi-monthly Meeting: Walking Across the Nation—My Story. After 40 years teaching at Cuesta College, anthropologist Professor Bill Fairbanks set off on a coast-to-coast trek in 2009. Over five years and 5,600 miles, he talked to hundreds of locals, visited small towns and large, attended community meetings, and viewed awesome scenery. Bill’s stories, accompanied by slides, about his experiences and his reflections on how our land has changed will make for a remarkable evening. Conservation news will begin the meeting. Meets at Steynberg Gallery, 1531 Monterey St., SLO. Info.: Joe Morris, 549-0355.

Sat., Sep. 26th, 8:30 a.m. Cruikshank to Soda Springs Hike. Strenuous, nine-mile, 2,500 ft. gain, hike in southern Big Sur, with stunning coastal views from upper elevations. Poison oak on trail. Meet at Washburn Day Use area in San Simeon State Park, about one mile north of Cambria, for a car shuttle between the trailheads. Extreme heat will postpone hike to a later date. Leader: Carlos Diaz-Saavedra, 546-0317.

Sat.-Sun. Sep. 26th-27th Service opportunities. Opportunity to visit and assist at an outstanding, lesser known national known national monument. Saturday is a National Public Lands Day, and we will join other volunteers on several maintenance projects. Car camp with potluck and campfire on Saturday night with Sunday tour of historic, prehistoric, and geological sites in the Monument—details to be determined by group consensus. Leader: Craig Deutsche, craig.deutsche@gmail.com or 310-477-6670 CNRCC Desert Committee.


Sat., Oct. 17, 12:30-2 p.m. Learn to Cook with the Sun! Solar Cooking is a fun, easy, nutritious, efficient and cost effective way to prepare home-cooked meals even while you’re away all day at work or play! Come to learn about this exciting method now used all over the world. Solar cooking saves trees, saves lives and builds communities! Free. There are the last two monthly demonstration classes of the year. Watch for additional demonstrations offered around the county or request a demonstration for your group of 6 or more. Volunteers and donations always appreciated. Davies Farm, 5015 Jesperson in SLO. Contact: Marcia After 458-1241, MALter1011@aol.com, or Phyllis Davies 440-9346, Phyllis@DaviesCo.com.