



Jul-Aug 2010
Volume 47 No. 7

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DON'T MISS

Life After the BP Disaster

July 29 Steynberg Gallery

Cal Poly experts discuss the legacy of the Gulf of Mexico oil spill

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SANTA LUCIAN

Protecting and Preserving the Central Coast



The official newsletter of the Santa Lucia Chapter of the Sierra Club • San Luis Obispo County, California

The Buzz in the Bay

Sierra Club appeals Avila Beach high-speed tour boat license to Coastal Commission

On June 4, the Sierra Club filed an appeal with the California Coastal Commission of the Port San Luis Harbor Commission's decision to license a high-speed tour boat concession on Avila Bay. Port San Luis has been receiving an increasing number of requests for such concessions, and is issuing licenses without consideration of the potential impacts of such projects under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), or referring applicants to the California Coastal Commission for a Coastal Development Permit.

The hi-speed tour boat license was itself an amendment of a license issued two years ago for a jet ski concession, also without CEQA review or a CDP. Here's the problem with that, in addition to a growing number of complaints from Avila Beach residents about noise levels on the bay: per the County's Coastal Plan Policies, this stretch of coast "includes some of the most biologically productive, environmentally sensitive, pristine and irreparable habitats and coastal resources along the San Luis Obispo County coastline. These include the important kelp-bed and rocky-intertidal habitats...and the southern range of the threatened California Sea Otter."

The hi-speed tour boat concession is operating at speeds of up to 70 miles per hour in those environmentally sensitive habitat areas.

Our coastal policies require proof of "no significant impact on sensitive habitats, and that proposed development or activities will be consistent with the biological continuance of the habitat," and that "the maximum feasible mitigation measures" be implemented.

When we filed the appeal with the

Coastal Commission, nearly two dozen concerned residents asked to have their names added to the list of "interested persons" wishing to receive notice of any Coastal Commission action on the appeal. Commission staff are investigating and hope to resolve the issues soon.



Sierra Club Joins Carrizo Plain Grazing Lawsuit

The Sierra Club has joined Los Padres Forest Watch as co-plaintiff in a legal challenge to the state's approval of cattle grazing on the Carrizo Plain Ecological Reserve. The Reserve is managed by the California Department of Fish and Game and is comprised of more than 30,000 acres of ecologically sensitive habitat, including the 15,000-acre Chimineas Ranch, forming a link between the Los Padres National Forest and

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President Obama:



We Need to Get Beyond Oil in the Next 20 Years

letsmovebeyondoil.org

We Moved

...but not very far

Ever in the thick of things, the Santa Lucia Chapter office has relocated from the west side of downtown SLO to the east side, and is now at 974 Santa Rosa Street, across the street

from the County Courthouse and half a block up the street from the County Government Center.

Phone, P.O. box, etc. the same. Make a note!



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photo/Karen Walsh

It's time for America to get smart about energy and be less dependent on dwindling oil reserves. We need to increase our use of clean, renewable energy sources like wind and solar power.

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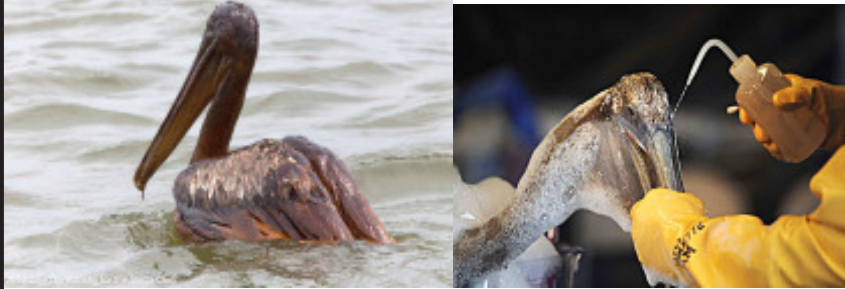
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Outings, events, and more!

General Meeting

Thursday, July 29, 7 p.m.

Life After the Gulf Oil Disaster



courtesy of U.S. Coast Guard/Justin Stumberg

Hear Cal Poly professors Chris Kitts (microbiology) and Yarrow Nelson (environmental engineering) share their thoughts on the environmental disaster and how the ocean and shoreline may recover over time. Both have had long experience with oil spills, including Unocal at Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes, still one of the largest land spills in U.S. history.

Steynberg Gallery, 1531 Monterey St., SLO. For more info, call Joe Morris, 772-1875.

The Myth of "Golden Rice"

By Jesse Arnold

"Golden Rice" is often cited as a triumph of genetic engineering in which rice is transformed into a crop which provides Vitamin A and saves poor children in Asia from blindness due to a lack of Vitamin A in their diet.

However, a crop of "golden Rice" has never been grown, so no human has ever eaten it.

How can this be?

People at the Rockefeller Foundation heard that children of poor families in Asia living on a diet of nothing but rice were going blind because of a lack of Vitamin A in their diet. (In *Seeds of Destruction: The Geopolitics of GM Food*, William Engdahl writes that "the Rockefeller Foundation is at the center of the worldwide actions of Monsanto, DuPont, Cargill and Dow Agrisciences, Syngenta, Bayer AG and other major biotech giants" in the quest for "future control of world agriculture through control of GM patents and GM crops.")

Without asking any of the affected people what they thought should be done about the problem, the folks at the Foundation came up with a hi-tech solution to the problem: splice a gene for beta-carotene into the rice, thus making it a source of Vitamin A and turning it a golden color.

The Rockefeller Foundation paid \$2 million to develop the prototype "Golden Rice" in a lab in Switzerland.

After the "Golden Rice" was developed, no one wanted to grow it. Just another example of people in rich countries thinking up the solution to a problem in a poor country without asking anyone in the poor country what they think.

It is not a surprise to me that the "Golden Rice" was not accepted. What the Rockefeller Foundation was telling poor people was "We think it is fine that we can make it possible for

you to continue to eke out an existence on nothing but rice. We don't think you should be paid enough to afford a balanced diet. Nor do we think you should have access to land to grow some vegetables for your family. We are happy to develop "Golden Rice" to help your employer to continue to exploit you."

The fact that "Golden Rice" looks different than normal rice is an obvious tip-off that it could be genetically engineered and would not be accepted in a traditional culture. So even though employers might be tempted to use it to exploit their workers, they realize they would not be able to convince people to eat it.

There are also reasons why "Golden Rice" probably wouldn't work as claimed even if you could get people to eat the stuff. First, some fat or oil is needed in the diet to make Vitamin A available in the body. A diet of only rice would not supply any fat or oil. Second, given the amount of beta-carotene in "Golden Rice," a child could not eat enough of the rice — about 20 pounds a day — to get enough beta-carotene to prevent Vitamin A deficiency.

The ag biotech boosters who speak of "Golden Rice" in glowing terms ignore the fact that it was rejected by the people it was supposed to help and blame its failure instead on the opponents of genetic engineering in the rich countries.

Since the ag biotech companies want their crops to be unlabeled, it is highly unlikely that they would ever develop a crop like "Golden Rice" that would stand out due to its visual difference in color from the normal form of the crop.

And although some folks at the Rockefeller Foundation may want to help poor people, you can bet all the rice in China that helping poor people is not on the agenda of the Monsanto Corporation.

Local Organic Food Needs You

The Cal Poly Organic Farm needs your help this summer! We are in great need of 25 more members to ensure we can keep educating the organic farmers of the future. Without memberships to our Community Supported Agricultural (CSA) Program, we simply cannot continue.

A produce box grown and harvested by students at our organic farm is only \$20/week for a small share (feeds 2) and \$26.50/week for a large (feeds 3). To sign up, e-mail us or go to our web site at www.calpolyorgfarm.com.

Any community leaders interested in helping us provide info about our farm via your e-newsletter or by inviting me to come to your office for a short presentation, please contact me: Cindy Dougals, CPOF Manager, 756-6139, www.calpolyorgfarm.com. Thank you!

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The Lessons of Los Osos

The crescendo of the drama that is the Los Osos Sewer played out at the June 11 “de novo” hearing of the project by the California Coastal Commission in Marina del Rey.

The Sierra Club has been engaged with this issue since 2005, when we fought for the deal brokered between the Los Osos CSD and the State Water Board that (almost) saved the project’s State Revolving Fund loan. When that fell through, Sierra Club lobbied hard in Sacramento for the passage of AB 2701, the bill that allowed transfer of the project from the bankrupt CSD to the County. We advocated for the approval of the Proposition 218 vote necessary to assess the funds for the project.

That collaborative effort turned necessarily adversarial as the County’s project took shape within extremely narrow and environmentally unsound parameters – a treat it & toss it approach — and the County made the decision to fiercely defend all components of the project against any alternatives or contrary arguments.

The County – and *The Tribune* — loudly urged the Coastal Commission to stay out of it. The Commission agreed with our concerns and directed its staff to come up with the best ways in which to address them.

How we got here from there

Not long ago (March 2009), the sewer the County was proposing for Los Osos would have laid to waste hundreds of acres of prime farmland, treated wastewater only to a sub-optimal secondary level, and disposed of it outside the groundwater basin rather than reclaiming it to recharge the aquifer. Meanwhile, wells would continue to pump out the basin’s lower aquifer and the ocean continue rushing in to fill the vacuum, a scenario that would assure the eventual destruction of the potable water supply.

Narrow, status-quo groupthink came up with a project that, by design, would do only one thing: collect, treat and dispose of waste-

water. Replacing the groundwater that would be lost, preserving environmentally sensitive habitat, maintaining the aquifer and avoiding its total loss to rapidly advancing seawater intrusion were deemed by the SLO County Department of Public Works to be issues of secondary importance and/or beyond the scope of the project.

The County had said: “After extensive analysis of technical, environmental, and economic issues, [urban reuse and agricultural reuse] were eliminated from further consideration” (Supplemental Notice of Preparation). In its most telling passage, the Final EIR noted that “Several commentors focused on how the County is approaching water reclamation, beneficial reuse of treated effluent, and sustainability of the groundwater supplies. Several state that agricultural exchange must be a central component of the LOWWP. Several commentors also point to language in AB 2701 identifying that the County has some legislative ability to implement water resource efforts as part of the wastewater project. Several commentors assert that the Draft EIR is deficient in this respect.

“These comments seek to expand the LOWWP beyond solving the wastewater issue.... [E]xpanding the wastewater project to incorporate other programs will repeat the LOWWP history of trying to do too much and then risking not funding and constructing the project as a

result of further delays.... An approach that attempts to solve all problems with one project could delay LOWWP construction under the premise that all problems must be



What we won SLO Green Build VP Tom Murray told the Coastal Commission that the County has agreed to work with Green Build on the design of the Los Osos water conservation program.

solved simultaneously or nothing should be done.”

It is a sad fact that every member of the County Board of Supervisors accepted this logic and the one-trick pony version of the sewer despite the fact that, for several years, we spelled out its deficiencies to them in detail, and the necessity for agricultural reuse of the treated water inside the basin and more aggressive water conservation measures.

Deaf to arguments and entreaties, the County continued along its chosen path...until the Planning Commission listened to and acted on what residents, environmental groups and independent experts were telling them. The Planning Commission tore up the inadequate plan and insisted on a project that comprehensively addresses Los Osos’ water issues.

We then appealed the project to the Coastal Commission to ensure that the newly required protections for groundwater and habitat got the

attention they deserved and critical loopholes of timing and implementation were closed.

The Sierra Club, Surfrider, SLO Green Build, the Los Osos Sustainability Group, and concerned citizens variously advocated for:

- moving the plant off the proposed midtown (Tri-W) site – half a mile uphill from the Morro Bay Estuary – to an out-of-town site but inside the groundwater basin
- mandating tertiary, not just secondary, sewage treatment
- returning treated effluent to the basin to recharge the aquifer
- implementing a recycled water program via agricultural reuse to reduce pumping of the aquifer and seawater intrusion
- implementing an aggressive water conservation program to curb seawater intrusion
- requiring the creation of “green streets” (bioswales) when putting streets back together after laying sewer pipe, retaining rainwater on site
- planning for the impact of sea-level rise by sealing sewer pipes in high-groundwater areas
- recognition of the lower environmental impacts of a sealed, pressurized effluent (STEP) collection system over a gravity system.

Initially, the County vehemently insisted that it should do virtually none of these things and they would not be part of the project. We held our ground through the multiple Planning Commission meetings from April through August of last year (see “A Sewer Almost,” September 2009) and our appeal to the Coastal Commission and the resulting Substantial Issue hearing last January (see “Getting Los Osos Right,” February).

Result: of the eight conditions listed above, seven are now part of the project’s permit.

We achieved this despite heavy political pressure. The Sierra Club and Surfrider were targeted as the

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...Or We Could Do the Smart Thing

Welcome winds of change begin to blow around Morro Bay-Cayucos wastewater project

Common sense has unexpectedly broken out in the projected replacement of the Morro Bay/Cayucos wastewater treatment plant. The communities are now facing a real possibility that the project may utilize a superior technology to treat wastewater to the highest level, which could then be reclaimed and recycled instead of dumped into the ocean, and cost far less than originally proposed.

The brick wall on the Morro Bay City Council and Cayucos Sanitary District that had previously met every effort to turn the two communities from the path of the most expensive project with the greatest environmental impact (see “Morro Bay and Cayucos Flying Blind,” October 2009) started to crumble at a hastily called June 16 Joint Powers Agreement meeting. The meeting was called after the JPA board finally grasped how much more they were likely to wind up paying for the conventional

treatment plant planned for them by Montgomery Watson Harza than with an alternative being offered by PERC Water Company. PERC’s representatives describe a proposed alternative project that would occupy one-fifth of the physical footprint and deliver higher quality effluent, for about \$9 million less. They said they could deliver a guaranteed project price in 60 days instead of their rival’s 18 months.

PERC has just completed construction of a treatment plant for the City of Santa Paula that uses membrane bioreactor technology to treat wastewater and is said to be the most



Let’s take a look Capital Projects Manager Dylan Wade directs the attention of the Morro Bay City Council and Cayucos Sanitary District at the packed June 16 meeting on the wastewater project.

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You did it Last spring, Santa Lucia Chapter volunteers spread out across the county, gathering hundreds of the signatures on "Save Our Parks" petitions that helped put the State Parks Trust Fund Act on the ballot.

State Parks Initiative Will be On November Ballot

Measure will provide reliable funding for California's parks

On June 10, California Secretary of State Debra Bowen qualified the State Parks and Wildlife Conservation Trust Fund Act of 2010 for the November 2 statewide ballot. The measure will provide a stable and adequate funding source to keep state parks open.

With passage of the initiative, not only would state parks have a long-term funding solution, but important General Fund dollars will be made available for other vital needs.

A wide-ranging coalition that includes business, public health, education, labor, entertainment, public safety, Latino, conservation and environmental interests already support the November state parks initiative.

The campaign submitted more than 760,000 signatures, nearly twice the number required to qualify the measure for the ballot.

"Once considered to be among the best in the nation, California's state parks now rank among the most endangered sites in the country," said Elizabeth Goldstein, president of the California State Parks Foundation. "Budget cuts forced nearly 150 of the state's 278 state parks to close or reduce services last year, and chronic underfunding is forcing the more than \$1 billion maintenance backlog to continue to grow. This initiative will provide the stable and adequate source of funding needed to keep state parks open and contributing to our economy, the public's health and education."

State parks play an important role in strengthening California's economy. Annually, California's 278 state parks attract millions of tourists, who spend \$4.32 billion annually in park-related expenditures. In fact, Visitors generate so much local economic activity that every dollar spent on state parks creates another \$2.35 for California's treasury. Budget cuts have forced state parks to accumulate a backlog of more than \$1 billion in needed maintenance and repairs. Roofs and sewage systems leak, restrooms are not cleaned regularly, bridges have collapsed, trails are washed out, campgrounds and visitor centers are shuttered and buildings and structures throughout the system are badly deteriorated.

Currently, the proposed state budget provides some General Fund money for state parks, but it is still insufficient to address the ongoing funding needs of the system.

Without the long-term solution offered by the state parks initiative, state parks will continue to slowly starve from underfunding. In addition to providing a reliable funding stream for state parks, through the initiative more than \$130 million in state General Fund dollars - that have historically provided a portion of overall state parks funding - will now be available for other vital needs, like schools, health care, social services or public safety.

"California's state parks are priceless public assets, and these assets could be lost forever if we don't invest in them," said Ruskin Hartley, executive director of Save the Redwoods eague. "Our state parks have been forced to ride a budget rollercoaster, but Californians will have the opportunity this November to vote to stop that sickening ride and ensure that these valuable assets are protected and accessible for future generations."

Approval of the state parks initiative will provide California vehicles with free, year-round day-use access to state parks, in exchange for a new \$18 surcharge. This new surcharge will be assessed as part of California's annual vehicle registration. All California vehicles will be subject to the surcharge, except larger commercial vehicles, mobile homes and permanent trailers.

Funds from the surcharge will be placed in a trust fund dedicated specifically to state parks and wildlife conservation, which cannot legally be used for other purposes. Approximately \$500 million will be generated annually from the trust fund, providing the funding needed to restore, maintain and keep state parks accessible today and for future generations.

Since launching qualification efforts, the campaign has had strong, early support from a group of broad and diverse organizations and leaders throughout the state.

To see what other groups and leaders have to say about the initiative, visit www.YesForStateParks.com.

Environmental Contamination: Time for a Change

By David Broadwater

At its June 14 meeting, the SLO County Health Commission discussed the Precautionary Principle as a means of regulating contaminants in the environment and making recommendations to the Board of Supervisors about county policy and its state and federal legislative agendas.

This was in the context of the release of the annual report of the President's Cancer Panel. Entitled "Reducing Environmental Cancer - What We Can Do Now," it addressed, for the first time in the Panel's 40-year history, the connection between environmental contamination and genetic, immune and endocrine diseases. The panel calls for a revolutionary shift to the Precautionary Principle, away from the reactionary approach now used in this country. It also calls for a higher degree of public participation in that regulation, specifically mentioning the role of "environmental and public health advocates," and for the involvement of "all levels of government, from federal to local" in reforming the current system "through rigorous regulation of environmental pollutants."

The report has the potential to be a powerful tool for organizations and individuals working to protect living organisms from what it calls the "unacceptable burden" of "nearly 80,000 chemicals on the market" from which regulatory agencies fail to protect us.

The Health Commission took the opportunity to take a step away from the ineffective and corrupted regime now used in regulating the vast quantities of poisons being released into our environment, voting to send a letter to the Board of

Supervisors supporting the report of the President's Cancer Panel, calling for the implementation of the

Precautionary Principle, and suggesting the Supervisors work with the Health Commission to educate the public about the Precautionary Principle's ability to protect people and the environment.

The Health Commission was encouraged to recommend that the Board of Supervisors adopt a Precautionary Principle ordinance, direct County departments to implement it, and include it in their state and federal legislative strategies.

A number of Commission members expressed the opinion that the public is largely unaware of the Precautionary Principle and its implications, and expressed their own lack of information about it, while others showed they understood some of the basic elements. Some members suggested forming a task force to study the matter. Most expressed a desire to move forward with the Precautionary Principle in some manner.

The County Health Commission's action is an opportunity to move county and eventually state and federal policy in the right direction. There are many incidents of people and communities poisoned by numerous contaminants and left defenseless because polluters have a stranglehold on regulatory policies, placing the burden of proof on the

victims and blocking the use of less dangerous substances.

Whether the county moves toward implementing the Precautionary Principle will depend, to a large extent, on whether there is sufficient public awareness and interest in advocating that our county move in that direction.

Dignity Advocate



The Wingspread Statement on the Precautionary Principle

The release and use of toxic substances, the exploitation of resources, and physical alterations of the environment have had substantial unintended consequences affecting human health and the environment. Some of these concerns are high rates of learning deficiencies, asthma, cancer, birth defects and species extinctions; along with global climate change, stratospheric ozone depletion and worldwide contamination with toxic substances and nuclear materials.

We believe existing environmental regulations and other decisions, particularly those based on risk assessment, have failed to protect adequately human health and the environment - the larger system of which humans are but a part.

We believe there is compelling evidence that damage to humans and the worldwide environment is of such magnitude and seriousness that new principles for conducting human activities are necessary.

While we realize that human activities may involve hazards, people must proceed more carefully than has been the case in recent history. Corporations, government entities, organizations, communities, scientists and other individuals must adopt a precautionary approach to all human endeavors. Therefore, it is necessary to implement the Precautionary Principle: When an activity raises threats of harm to human health or the environment, precautionary measures should be taken even if some cause and effect relationships are not fully established scientifically.

In this context the proponent of an activity, rather than the public, should bear the burden of proof.

The process of applying the Precautionary Principle must be open, informed and democratic and must include potentially affected parties. It must also involve an examination of the full range of alternatives, including no action.

- The Wingspread Conference on the Precautionary Principle
Science and Environmental Health Network
January 26, 1998

Carrizo
continued from page 1

Carrizo Plain National Monument. The lawsuit alleges the Reserve is under threat from over-grazing and mismanagement. The Department of Fish and Game approved the extension of a lease for commercial livestock grazing on the Chimineas in August 2009 despite widespread environmental damage to the area resulting from over-grazing that occurred during the previous three-year term of the original lease. In October, Forest Watch, the Santa Lucia Chapter of the Sierra Club and several other environmental groups notified the DFG that “overgrazing is evident across much of the Reserve, with fencing in disrepair, trampled wetlands and springs, cattle trespassing into areas where the lease expressly prohibits grazing, and other unsatisfactory conditions.”

The Sierra Club and Los Padres Forest Watch are challenging the Department’s decision to extend the lease without evaluating the environmental impacts of that decision. The lawsuit charges that DFG violated the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) when it “approved the Project without required environmental review or public involvement pursuant to CEQA, and with complete disregard for CEQA’s requirements to evaluate potential significant environmental impacts associated with the discretionary Project.” As a result, DFG abused its discretion and failed to analyze the cumulative impacts of the proposed activities on the environment, the basic purpose of the state’s premier environmental law.

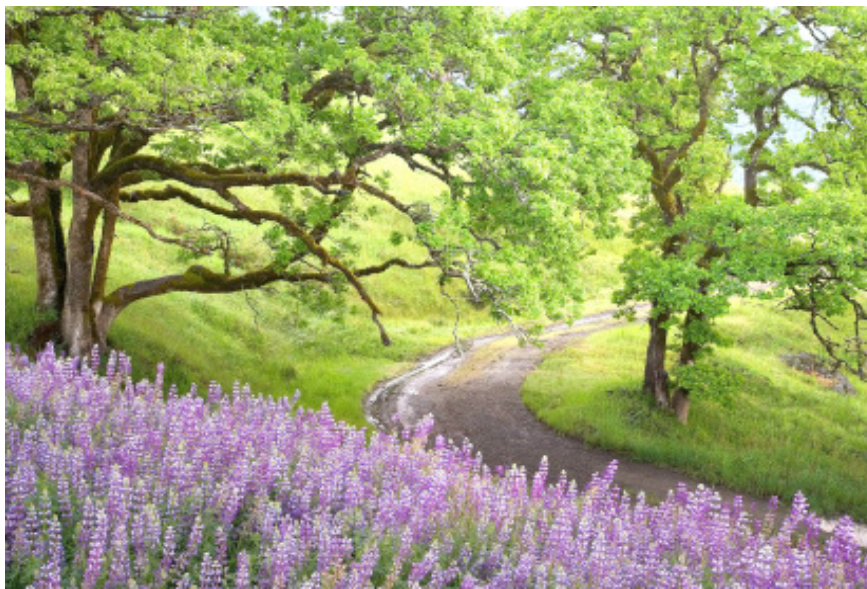
Careful management of livestock grazing is particularly important on lands such as the Carrizo Reserve that provide habitat for several species of endangered or threatened plants and wildlife as well as wetland riparian areas and vernal pools.

“Much of the grazed area is bare soil, with residual dry matter estimated at 100 pounds per acre or less, well below the 1,000-pound standard required by the lease agreement,” said Jeff Kuyper, Executive Director of Los Padres Forest Watch.

“DFG needs to learn that this is not the wild west, and they can’t simply circumvent the law in order to permit a destructive practice in an ecological reserve,” said Santa Lucia Chapter Chair Melody Demeritt. “Fish and Game was entrusted with the care of this land by the people of California.”

Forest Watch and Sierra Club want the court to bar DFG from authorizing livestock grazing in the absence of the required environmental review and a Land Management Plan. The environmental review would compel the agency to disclose significant adverse effects on the Reserve, and to adopt feasible alternatives and mitigation measures to eliminate or substantially lessen all significant impacts of livestock grazing, should it determine that grazing is environmentally beneficial to the Reserve at any level of intensity.

Ecological reserves are established to provide protection for rare, threatened or endangered native plants, wildlife, and terrestrial or aquatic habitats. The primary purpose of DFG’s ownership and operation of the Carrizo Plain Ecological Reserve is wildlife conservation, including at least 26 sensitive, threatened or endangered species. The grazing of livestock is expressly prohibited on any ecological reserve unless undertaken solely for habitat or vegetation management purposes.



Earth Talk

A Dozen Fun Facts About California

By Joe Morris, Outings Chair

Responding to my last column about the struggles of trying out a vegetarian lifestyle, several people e-mailed me about their favorite meat substitutes. David Georgi likes Morningstar Farms Breakfast Patties. Andrew Christie enjoys Trader Joe’s soy meatballs. If you have a big favorite or any other Earth Talk comment, let me know @ dpj1942@earthlink.net.

Get an early dinner on any given Wednesday and you could catch Gary Felsman’s popular weekly SLO hike at 5:30. Here’s some intriguing but unfamiliar facts about nature in our state you could use as a conversation opener with a fellow walker:

1. Mt. Whitney is the highest peak in California—you knew that—but can you name the second highest? It is Mt. Williamson, at 14,375 feet only 120 feet shorter. It’s located about 6 miles north of Whitney, making for a dramatic view from the Eastern Sierra town of Independence.
2. Yosemite is the tallest waterfall in the U.S., ’tis true? Strictly speaking, it’s not one but two falls, “Upper Falls,” crashing down 1,430 feet, and “Lower Falls,” descending another 320 feet to the valley floor. Combined, they exceed the length of Ribbon Fall, a seasonal one nearby, also overlooking the valley. But, when Ribbon is flowing, as it has in this heavy-snow year, it becomes the tallest U.S. waterfall (singular), at 1,612 feet.
3. How many national parks does our state have? Time’s up. Even well-experienced outdoors people are surprised to know there are eight: Channel Islands, Death Valley, Joshua Tree, Lassen, Redwood, Sequoia and Kings Canyon, and Yosemite. Give John Muir credit for instigating the last three, and David Brower for Redwood.
4. This has thankfully been a rainy season, but the wettest day ever in the state netted as much water as SLO County usually gets annually. On January 22, 1943, a drenching 26 inches fell on Hoegee’s Camp, near the Angeles Crest Highway.
5. Speaking of water. . . Lake Tahoe is famous for its clear water and enormous depth. How deep? It hits bottom at 501 meters. Tahoe contains enough water to cover California to a depth of almost a foot.
6. The most snow in a 24-hour period fell in a blizzard on Echo Summit in Nevada County, January 4-5, 1982. At a smothering 67 inches, it would top the head of an average man, who hopefully wasn’t there to find that out.
7. Which makes me shiver, but no more than if I had been at Boca, also in Nevada County, on January 20, 1937. The thermometer plummeted to a record -45 degrees that day, the state record.
8. But let’s think warm thoughts. Like being in Death Valley on July 10, 1913, when the temp rose to a scorching 134 degrees, indeed the highest recorded in the entire Western Hemisphere. But wait for climate change to up that record.
9. What’s the most widespread weed in California? That would probably be yellow starthistle, an invasive plant that arrived during the Gold Rush, mixed with alfalfa seeds from Europe. First noticed in Oakland, it has now spread throughout most of northern and central California, infesting over ten million acres. Look for starthistle in eastern SLO county. Dense outcroppings push out native plants, suck up much of the soil moisture, and can even kill horses if they eat a lot of it.
10. In the same location in SLO county, you can also find the native bird found only in California, nowhere else, which is? Of course, you knew it’s the Yellow-billed Magpie. Few who see it will forget its dramatic looks—black head, mantle, and long tail, with a white chest and bright yellow beak. Another bird found exclusively in California but only on the island of Santa Cruz is the Island Scrub-Jay.
11. Okay—for an easy (?) question—what is our longest river? That would be the Sacramento, 382 miles long. Its headwaters lie near Mt. Shasta, where it flows south, fed by rivers like the Feather and American, to finally empty into San Francisco Bay.
12. And finally, my favorite fact: 44% of the land in California is federal (public) land, owned by all of us, not by any one of us. This includes not only the eight national parks, but the national monuments, forests, seashores, preserves, and BLM areas. That makes for many millions of acres in which to wander about, find nature, and maybe yourself.

How would you like to remember 2010?



Chugging up a mountain trail in the Rockies? Forging family memories in Costa Rica? Maybe contributing to service projects in New Orleans?

Firm up your plans on one of nearly 200 Sierra Club adventures. It’s not too late to make the most of the summer months on a family trip with the kids, or to fly solo on a backpacking journey through the wilderness.

If you prefer awe-inspiring autumn foliage, be sure to check out our fall trips, including service, Alaska, and international. With options for all ages, interests, and abilities, you’re sure to find an experience that’s right for you. Select from our different trip types from our featured trips:

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- Howl with Wolves and Watch for Sheep: Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve, Colorado.
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The Useful Death of Prop. 16

Arrogance of failed PG&E power grab pays dividends

Proposition 16 went down to defeat at the polls on June 8, despite PG&E's spending some \$46 million to pass it, outspending the opposition by more than 500 to 1.

Californians sent a message that our constitution is not for sale to corporations. The defeat of PG&E's naked power grab is a victory for democracy and clean energy. Despite the utility's ubiquitous deceptive advertising, voters saw through the lies and rejected the brazen effort by PG&E to eliminate competition. PG&E's customers in Northern California and the Central Valley, who know the utility best, rejected the power grab resoundingly, -- with San Luis Obispo County also registering strongly in the "no" column.

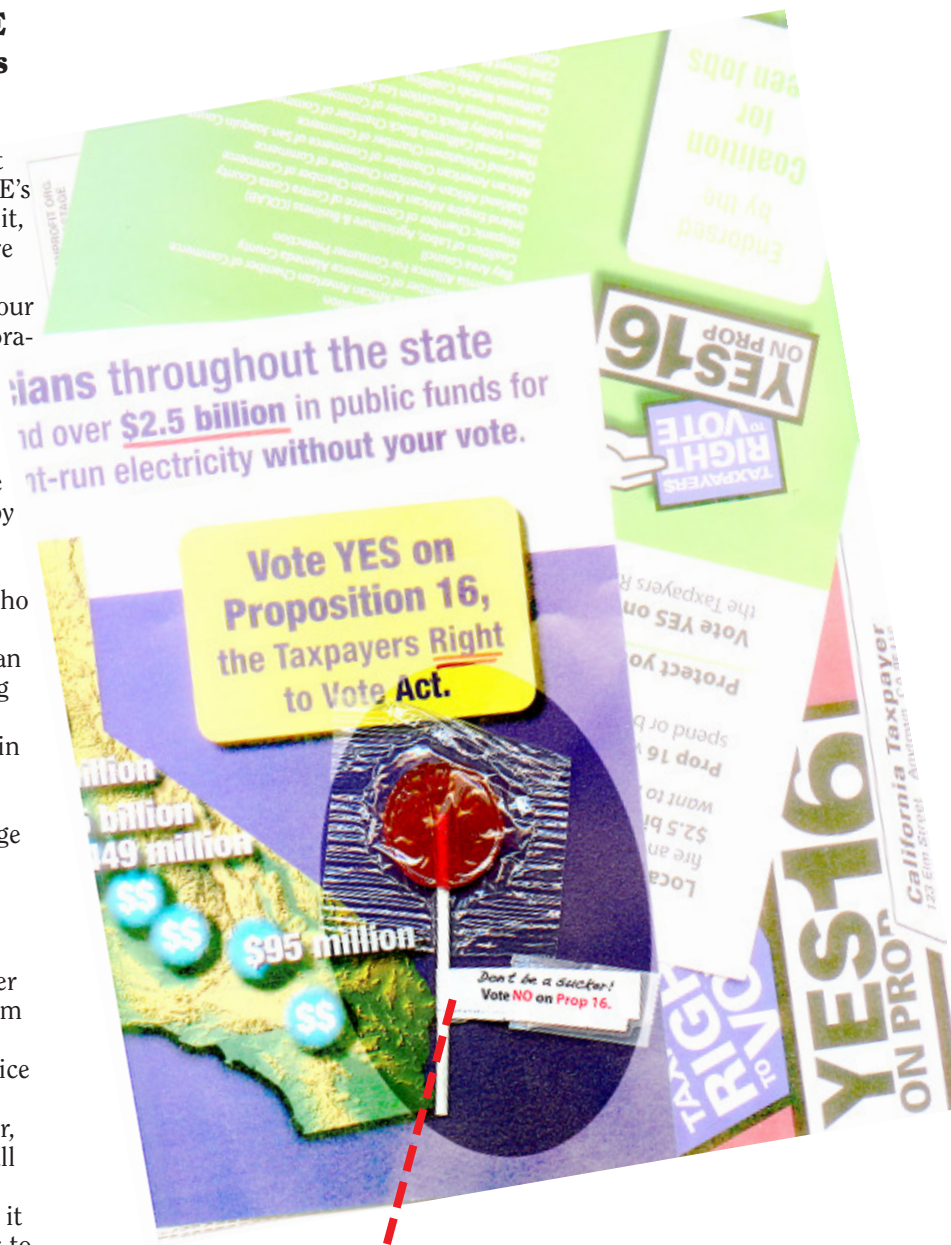
The Sierra Club joined our allies in the consumer and environmental movements in opposing Prop 16 because it would have thrown a huge obstacle into the path of affordable clean energy. The anti-democratic two-thirds vote requirement in the initiative was designed to prevent communities from choosing greener electricity than they are getting from their monopoly utilities.

Under state law, Community Choice is a right that allows local governments to contract for electric power, and make this service available to all local utility customers. There is a compelling public interest to make it as easy as possible for communities to promote clean energy, reduce air pollution and greenhouse gases, and increase local and consumer control over energy decisions.

The defeat of Prop 16 by a feisty band of under-funded public-interest groups sets a tremendous precedent for the November ballot, when oil companies and the Chamber of Commerce will be trying to pass a Polluter Protection Act to get polluters off the hook for cleaning up the damage they cause, again by seeking to enact an anti-democratic two-thirds vote requirement.

Sierra Club's chapters and activists statewide played an important part in decisively defeating PG&E's power grab. The way is now cleared for California cities and counties to follow the lead of Marin and San Francisco in developing and implementing much cleaner energy and low-carbon alternatives through Community Choice (CCAs).

Prop 16's defeat also will allow municipal public-power districts to continue to flourish and expand. Sierra Club California has been a strong supporter of Community



Sweet Grassroots confectionery triumphed over a \$46 million snow job.

Choice electricity aggregation as potentially one of our most powerful tools to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Paradoxically, PG&E's strategy has now backfired — the Prop 16 ballot battle has worked in favor of Community Choice: leaders and publics throughout California now are aware as never before of CCA's potential benefits. The Sierra Club can now help many of them to consider moving to operationalize CCAs locally and regionally.

Here are some quotes from the media coverage about Prop 16's defeat (from "Proposition 16 fails despite \$46 million in funding from PG&E," by Richard Halstead, *Marin Independent Journal*).

Charles McGlashan, Marin Supervisor and Chair, Marin Energy Authority (CCA): "The voters saw through the attempt to buy the election. They could smell a rat. I'm relieved that other communities may be able to

join us in creating competition."

Dotty LeMieux, who managed Marin Supervisor Susan Adams's successful local re-election campaign against a PG&E-backed challenger: "Proposition 16 was just over the top. I think people saw through it as a big corporation spending a lot of money trying to hoodwink people into thinking they were giving them the right to vote when in fact they were taking away their choice."

Richard Stapler, a consultant with Kaufman Campaign Consultants in Sacramento who advised the opposition to Proposition 16 without pay. "This was a real grassroots effort. Opponents spent a total of \$100,000 while PG&E may have spent a total of \$50 million. If it wasn't the most lopsided spending disparity in California ballot history, it has to be in the top two or three."

John Geesman, former Commissioner,

California Energy Commission, doesn't buy the argument that none of the money that PG&E spent backing the proposition was ratepayers' money: "Every single nickel is collected from the ratepayers. I think it is a bit of a myth that by the tap of a wand that money can be characterized as shareholder money."

Geesman said enterprising advocates for community choice aggregation and municipal utility models will be able to "go through these election results with a fine-tooth comb and cherry pick. Because there are some communities where PG&E has profoundly offended its customers, and those are natural candidates for somebody with a better idea."

Mark Toney, director, The Utility Reform Network (TURN), a consumer watchdog group: "PG&E's strategy for this ballot initiative is going to backfire. Far more people will have heard of community choice and public power than ever heard of it before and some of those people are going to want it. [The Bay Area's 60-percent vote against Prop 16] shows that the more people know about PG&E, the less popular it is. That's a problem for any company. It sends a message to corporate America that it doesn't matter how much money they put into this."

San Francisco Supervisor Ross Mirkarimi, a leader in SF's CCA effort: "It's nice to know there isn't this artificial grim reaper, namely PG&E, looking over our shoulder."

Lawmakers Seek Limits on Utilities' Political Spending

by Patrick McGreevy
PolitiCal - June 14, 2010

The backlash continued Monday to last week's election, in which Pacific Gas & Electric Co. spent \$46 million on a failed attempt to pass a ballot measure that would have benefited the utility.

Two state lawmakers separately proposed to restrict such activity, including one measure that would bar utilities from using ratepayer funds for such campaigns.

Sen. Mark Leno (D-San Francisco) said his proposed legislation would allow corporations to continue participating in political campaigns but prohibit using money from ratepayers to finance the ventures.

"PG&E launched a dangerous and

continued on page 7

PUC Blowback

The California Public Utilities Commission came to SLO's Meadow Park rec center on June 15 for the last of 14 public hearings statewide on a request from PG&E to hike its rates, already the highest in the state, to the tune of \$4 billion. The timing -- one week after Proposition 16 and its two-thirds vote requirement got trounced at the polls -- assured that PG&E received the full brunt of public anger

at the idea of requesting permission to soak ratepayers after just having blown \$46 million of their money on a ballot initiative diametrically opposed to ratepayers' interests.

SLO citizens packed the room -- "packed" both in the sense of the representatives of local businesses, charitable organizations, and school districts whose fealty PG&E purchases wholesale, and in the sense of citizens

not beholden to PG&E and determined to give the PUC's administrative law judge a piece of their mind about PG&E's waste,

continued on page 7



Brace yourself PUC administrative law judge John Wong (right) prepares to take the testimony of an outraged public.

PG&E's reputation for customer service and its compliance record on regulatory directives are unremittingly foul — so much so that the Public Utilities Commission had to issue a four-page letter last month explaining to the company, in terms even a 4-year-old could understand, how its machinations against Marin County's renewable energy initiative violated the law.

- "Corporate power grabs on the California ballot: What do we learn?"
Michael Hiltzik, L.A. Times, June 13, 2010

Spending limits
continued from page 6

misleading political campaign – with ratepayer funds – that had only one goal, to preserve the corporation's monopoly," Leno said. "The state's largest electrical and gas company should not be able to use ratepayer-generated profits to write special rules into the state Constitution protecting it from competition."

PG&E spent \$46 million on Proposition 16, which was rejected by 52.5% of voters. The measure would have required voter approval before cities could get into the electricity business.

Separately, Assemblyman Pedro Nava (D-Santa Barbara) said Monday he had introduced a broader bill that would require corporations to issue an annual report to shareholders detailing money spent on a company's political activities. Corporations would also be required to give their shareholders the ability to opt out of political expenditures for their proportionate corporate ownership amount, Nava said.

"Even when corporations recklessly spend money in pursuit of private gain over public interest, current law grants shareholders little to no recourse," Nava said.

PUC
continued from page 6

greed, lavish executive salaries, corporate jet, and attempts to suppress public power initiatives that could get California to the renewable energy goals that PG&E is failing to achieve. Also on the docket was the folly of contemplating granting PG&E funding to complete a license renewal study for the Diablo Canyon nuclear power plant when the PUC has rebuked the utility for claiming the right to plow ahead with the license

On the Spear of Empire

What shall not be discussed in Grover Beach

The Grover Beach City Council was the site of a small demonstration of the oppressive but ultimately self-defeating political power of PG&E, just before a larger demonstration, when the voters of California showed what \$46 million can't buy.

After 60 major newspapers, 13 local/regional Chambers of Commerce, several taxpayer groups, three Republican County Central Committees and dozens of California municipalities voted to oppose Proposition 16, Grover Beach City Councilwoman Karen Bright sent a letter to the Council requesting that they discuss -- not take any action on -- Proposition 16. Her letter listed the concerns the City should have for its future green energy plans if the initiative passed.

John Shoals, the mayor of Grover Beach, is employed by PG&E as its Government Relations Representative.

The discussion was agendized for June 7, the night before the election. It was placed as item 12 on the 14-item agenda.

The Council heard all agenda items through number 11, then Mayor Shoals abruptly adjourned the regular meeting and jumped ahead in the agenda to convene a meeting of the Joint City Council/Improvement Agency. The Council heard "Final Acceptance: South Grover Beach Industrial Sewer Project" and "Tagline Visualization Theme for Marketing Efforts."

Then Shoals reconvened the general meeting... but jumped ahead to Item 13. When done with that, at 9:30 p.m., a full two and a half hours into the meeting and with the room virtually emptied out, he backed up to Item 12.

Shoals recused himself as an employee of PG&E and stepped down from the dais, handing the gavel to Mayor Pro Tem Bill Nicolls. Bright got through half a line of her letter, and was immediately cut off by Nicolls, who said "I'm not sure that we should be discussing this." Nicolls said he did not want to be so presumptuous as to talk about a statewide initiative and "tell people how to vote." (Arroyo Grande and the City and County of San Luis Obispo had all passed resolutions opposing Prop. 16 weeks before.)

After five minutes of discussion as to whether a discussion should be allowed to occur — the city attorney finally reassuring the Council that they were not voting on anything, it was informational only, and Nicolls could control how much discussion actually took place — a flustered Councilwoman Bright was given leave to speak by Nicolls.

Saying "now you've kind of made me feel very uncomfortable about the whole thing," she protested that she was not telling other people how to vote, that she simply had some concerns about the future of their city and what the city would do if measures like Prop. 16 passed. Nicolls continued to badger her. Abandoning the text of her letter altogether, Bright eventually stammered out a few lines about the ability of private interests to thwart public competition, falling silent after about two minutes.

"Then I think, with that, we'll close Item 12," said Nicolls.

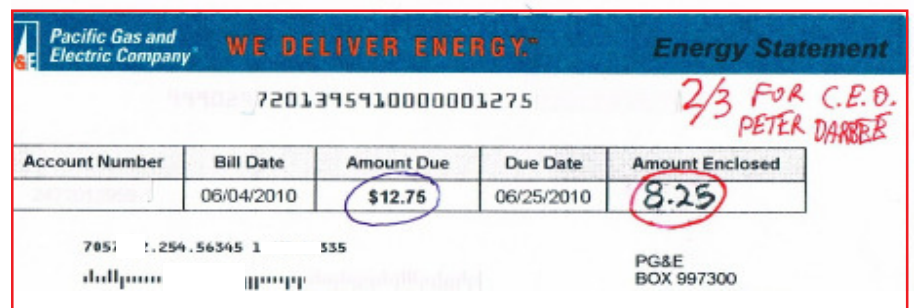
The "discussion" was over.

The next day, so was Proposition 16.



renewal process before completing the seismic studies that must be done to determine whether the plant can be operated safely.

The high point of the evening came when the Alliance for Nuclear Responsibility's David Weisman produced his utility bill and a pen and made out a check to PG&E for 75 percent of the amount he had been billed for, honoring the utility's "two-thirds" preference (right).



The rule of thirds PG&E gets a message from a ratepayer.

Please raise my rates... IF

I am a fan of PG&E. I appreciate the work that they do. I am grateful for the ability to toast my bread in the morning and take a hot shower in the nite. However my affection for the utility comes with certain caveats:

- Please raise my rates... IF Diablo Canyon is deemed safe from earthquakes.
- Please raise my rates... IF you will invest in a robust distribution grid that will support our hospitals, data centers, and businesses.
- Please raise my rates... IF they are used to help those without enough to pay their own bill.
- Please raise my rates... IF you will develop advanced smart distribution grids.
- Please raise my rates... IF you hire more employees locally to design, build and maintain a system that supports the integration of large percentages of solar, wind, biomass, combined heat and power and other distributed renewable energy technologies.
- Please raise my rates... IF it will help California to get off its addiction to fossil fuels and to fight climate change.
- Please raise my rates... IF it will help our economy and communities become more resilient.
- Please raise my rates... IF they go towards innovation and not towards ballot measures that stifle competition.
- Please raise my rates... IF they don't go to buy the voices of our trusted business leaders and politicians and the loyalty and silence of our needy community organizations.
- Please raise my rates... IF they will internalize the REAL costs of energy instead of externalizing them to our ecosystems and to future generations.

a conscious ratepayer's poem

by Eric Veium

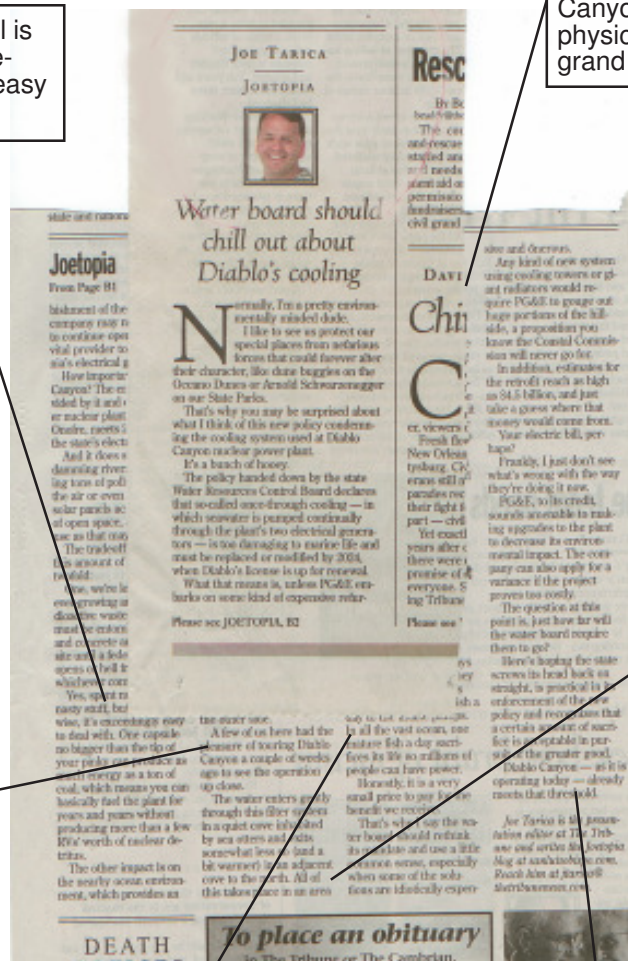
This testimony was read into the General Rate Case record by Eric Veium during the June 15 California Public Utilities Commission General Rate Case Hearing at San Luis Obispo's Meadow Park community building. Eric Veium is a ratepayer, a nine-year citizen of San Luis Obispo, and a human being. He is a graduate Engineer working locally on issues around local renewable energy systems. He can be contacted at eveium@gmail.com

Taking Issue

problematic environmental coverage & commentary in our local media

“Water board should chill out about Diablo’s Cooling,” by Joe Tarica, *Tribune*, May 22, 2010.

Summary: The columnist is indignant that the State Water Board is requiring the Diablo Canyon nuclear power plant to replace or modify its seawater cooling system by 2024 to avoid further decimation of the marine environment. A flurry of letters to the editor the same week -- one from Diablo Canyon’s former public relations chief, unidentified as such -- echoed his opinion.



That’s not a great comfort for residents of the County as Diablo Canyon prepares to double- and triple-rack the waste stored in its spent fuel pools, increasing the risk of fire and radioactive release as the space between the fuel rods narrows. The fruitless sixty-year search for a safe place to permanently store the “nasty stuff” also bears some evidence as to how easy it is to deal with, volume-wise or otherwise.

Yes, spent nuclear fuel is nasty stuff, but volume-wise, it’s exceedingly easy to deal with.

Yes, some little fishies meet their demise in this process.... But when you look at the footprint of the facility and the small stretch of coastline it occupies in relation to the vast ocean beyond, Diablo Canyon’s presence and negative physical impacts seem minute in the grand scheme of things.

This view is vehemently contradicted by the California Department of Fish and Game: The science of ecology has now generally recognized that

the destruction or disturbance of vital life cycles or of the balance of a species of wildlife, even though initiated in one part of the world, may have a profound effect upon the health and welfare of people in distant parts; like pollution it does not cease to be of vital concern merely because the problem is created at a distant point.

- “Licensed to Kill,” Nuclear Information Resource Service

The water enters gently through this filter system in a quiet cove inhabited by sea otters and exits somewhat less so (and a bit warmer) in an adjacent cove to the north.

The Department of Fish and Game stated that, as a result of the routine operation of Diablo Canyon, mortality does occur in species found in Diablo Cove and that substantial

decreases in formerly indigenous species continue to take place. The department concluded: “This is because the temperatures that are found in the affected areas are in excess of the upper temperature limits for survival, growth, and reproduction of several indigenous species.” The agency concluded: “The question presented is whether the degradation of the marine environment near DCCP is acceptable to the Department of Fish and Game. Based on review of law and policies administered by the Department, and other laws requiring enhancement and protection of the marine ecosystem, the answer is no.” Water temperatures in north Diablo Cove now prevent the successful developmental growth of black abalone and red abalone, both indigenous coastal water mollusk species. PG&E had first predicted that black abalone would not be at risk from the reactors. From 1988 to 1991, following reactor startup, the red and black abalone population in Diablo Cove declined by almost 90 percent as the result of withering syndrome, a chronic progressive disease exacerbated by elevated sea water temperatures.

- “Licensed to Kill,” Nuclear Information Resource Service

A certain amount of sacrifice is acceptable in pursuit of the greater good. Diablo Canyon -- as it is operating today -- already meets that threshold.

In February and March 2000, the Department of Fish and Game and the Water Board drafted a cease and desist order for Diablo’s discharges into the ocean cove. A memo from Fish and Game stated: “Overall, the effects of the

discharge include loss and degradation of habitat, decreases in several species’ diversity and density, and loss of entire species. It has been shown that the effects continue to expand beyond Diablo Cove and are greater than predicted. The discharge does not provide for the protection of propagation of species and does not provide habitat suitable for indigenous species.” The proposed cease and desist order cites that 97 percent of the cove’s surface kelp forest (Bull Kelp) has literally been clear-cut from its former habitat, with more kelp forests potentially affected beyond the cove. As a result, the intertidal communities of Diablo Cove are now devoid of historically abundant quantities of perennial algae cover. Surfgrass, once the predominant plant thriving in continuous bands throughout the cove, survives only in isolated locations.... Despite publicly documented evidence, and even evidence of its own, PG&E argued that no mitigation action was needed. Using a threat to outspend environmental regulators in legal actions appealing the cease and desist order, PG&E forced the authorities to back down.

- “Licensed to Kill,” Nuclear Information Resource Service

A few of us here had the pleasure of touring Diablo Canyon a couple of weeks ago to see the operation up close.

No doubt the pleasure was mutual. And if the tour participants happened to return to their

keyboards afterward and unquestioningly regurgitate all they were told by PG&E about the insignificant impact Diablo Canyon has on the marine environment... hey, bonus!

Diablo Canyon’s operating utility and licensee, PG&E, has long attempted to minimize and obfuscate the facts about its impact on the marine environment. In 1982, PG&E, under its obligation to the water quality control board’s San Luis Obispo office, submitted a series of reports about the plant’s effect on the surrounding marine environment in Diablo Cove. However, in 1994 the regional board finally discovered, through revelations by the Department of Fish and Game, that PG&E’s data contained only information that showed the plant had little or no effect on the marine environment around its reactors. “Evidence indicates PG&E omitted more than half of the actual test results which showed up to a 90 percent reduction in sea life as it passed through the cooling system,” the state and federal environmental protection agencies said in a joint statement after the discovery that PG&E had suppressed data detrimental to its claims. The concealed data included infrared images indicating more extensive thermal plume impact zones than previously admitted and time-series photographs showing the progressive deterioration of biologically important marine habitat in coastal waters around the reactor. The damage was catastrophic to the indigenous marine life community, including the near obliteration of the already threatened black and red abalone populations. These findings had never been reported to state or federal agencies. PG&E eventually settled with California for \$14.04 million and was required to reanalyze the effects through an independent review. This fine was 7 times higher than any fine ever levied by the federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission for any violation and one of the largest environmental settlements since the Exxon Valdez disaster in 1989.

- “Licensed to Kill,” Nuclear Information Resource Service

One of the PG&E guys leading our tour said they lose about one -- ONE -- dinner-sized fish a day to the intake pumps.... Honestly, it is a very small price to pay for the benefit we receive.

does not provide habitat suitable for indigenous species.” The proposed cease and desist order cites that 97 percent of the cove’s surface kelp forest (Bull Kelp) has literally been clear-cut from its former habitat, with more kelp forests potentially affected beyond the cove. As a result, the intertidal communities of Diablo Cove are now devoid of historically abundant quantities of perennial algae cover. Surfgrass, once the predominant plant thriving in continuous bands throughout the cove, survives only in isolated locations.... Despite publicly documented evidence, and even evidence of its own, PG&E argued that no mitigation action was needed. Using a threat to outspend environmental regulators in legal actions appealing the cease and desist order, PG&E forced the authorities to back down.

Upshot: PG&E’s track record of withholding data, for years and even decades, on the reactors’ actual discharge impacts has further undermined the company’s credibility. These revelations have led to extensive litigation between PG&E and state water authorities, revealing the lengths to which PG&E is willing to go to cover up facts, avoid mitigation, and stall or withdraw from negotiations. Meanwhile, Diablo Canyon’s ongoing operation further degrades the marine environment. - “Licensed to Kill,” Nuclear Information Resource Service.

Political mailer, paid for by Blakeslee for Senate 2010, June 2010.

Summary: In honor of the extended political season, "Taking Issue" breaks with our usual format to take a closer look at a political mailer -- in particular, one that portrayed state senate candidate Sam Blakeslee as a friend of the coast and champion of opposition to offshore oil drilling.

"Sam Blakeslee has led the fight to protect our scenic coastline..."

As a member of the Assembly Budget subcommittee that

approves all budget items for environment-related departments, Blakeslee consistently voted against *any* budget augmentation for the California Coastal Commission, including funding that would have allowed the Commission to work on alternative energy projects. The Commission has expertise in how underwater seismic tests are conducted so they don't harm marine mammals, but when Blakeslee authored a bill that required PG&E to do more testing of the earthquake fault off Diablo Canyon, rather than requiring consultation with the Coastal Commission in setting up the models for the testing, Blakeslee refused to amend the bill to include the Commission. Blakeslee has voted to render enforcement of the California Coastal Act and sanctions against violators ineffective or impossible. He voted against every coastal bill that came before the legislature in 2009. "Fighting to protect our scenic coastline" is the least plausible environmental claim Blakeslee could make based on his record.



Blakeslee bravely stood up when he spoke on the Assembly floor, broke with his party, and voted to keep the oil drilling moratorium off our coast.

This was a non-binding, symbolic vote on the federal

offshore oil moratorium – a subject on which a state legislature is free to express its opinion -- that could have no effect on actual policy. As far as breaking with his party, if Blakeslee wants to assure voters that once in a while he *doesn't* vote like the rest of the Republicans in the legislature, always eager to run over the environment to deliver the goodies for big business backers, then voters should be glad to know that Blakeslee's opponent, John Laird, *never* does that.

Blakeslee author[ed] the successful DREAM initiative that protects twelve miles of our scenic coastline near Morro de Oro State Park.

This is another entry from the realm of symbolic votes. The DREAM Initiative, a local

ballot measure that urged future long-term conservation of the lands around Diablo Canyon, was merely advisory, an unenforceable set of goals that "protects" nothing.

He supported a bi-partisan plan to "early retire" oil drilling platforms to stop tragedies like the Gulf oil spill.

The plan that Blakeslee supported was the bid by

Texas-based Plains Exploration and Production Company (PXP) to drill 30 new offshore oil wells in California waters. This was opposed by a coalition of 105 environmental groups statewide. The State Lands Commission and the Attorney General rejected the proposal, concluding that it was not in the best interests of the state of California because its promises to shut down oil production on other PXP oil rigs in exchange for new drilling permits were unenforceable, it would encourage new federal oil leases off our coast, and increase the risk of an oil spill. Regardless of those findings, Blakeslee then voted to slip the measure into the 2009 state budget package. When that failed, he introduced a bill that would have gutted the process by which oil and gas leases are reviewed, avoiding both the legislature and the State Lands Commission in order to get the PXP deal done.

Upshot: Tallying up real, non-symbolic votes on real issues, where a legislator's vote will actually have an effect on our lives and the world we live in, Assemblyman Blakeslee's Sierra Club environmental voting scorecard stands at a career average of 25 percent. In his six years in the State Assembly, John Laird scored 100 percent – every year, for six years. In his 25 years in politics, Laird has not only opposed offshore drilling, he has actually crafted measures that have blocked it. Blakeslee moved heaven and earth to bring oil rigs back into state waters, and is now trying to "spin" those actions away.

Morro Bay/Cayucos

continued from page 3

cost-effective MBR plant in the world.

At the meeting, hours of debate ensued over whether to accept a \$75,000 Construction Design Report (CDR) from PERC on their \$28-million project and find out exactly how much the proposed alternative would cost. Lame duck Morro Bay Mayor Janice Peters, leading the reactionary/obstructionist contingent, tried to divert the discussion to a comparison of technologies instead of costs, delay the practical move of accepting a CDR, perhaps forever, and instead initiate a value-engineering peer-review study of... well, no one was sure of what... and *then* think about asking PERC for a Construction Design Report or not. (Cayucos Sanitary District member Hal Fones inquired, "Why would we do a study of value engineering when we don't know what we're studying?")

Morro Bay Councilwoman Betty Winholtz wasn't having it, and vocally

and successfully insisted that the purpose of the meeting, and the focus of the discussion, should be how much each project would cost the citizens of Morro Bay and Cayucos.

City staff strained mightily to cast doubt on the interloper company, emphasizing all the extra work they would have to do, threats to their project schedule, etc. Mayor Peters, ever mindful of the need to restrict and marginalize the public, limited all speakers to one minute. Members of the public were eloquent nonetheless, and spoke overwhelmingly in favor of their communities taking a serious look at an alternative that promises to deliver greater benefits at substantially lower cost. "Give us a technology for the long haul rather than building a dinosaur," was typical of the comments.

Just as the reactionary forces on the JPA board were poised to shut down consideration of an alternative and

win the day, PERC representatives offered to eat the \$75,000 cost and deliver a CDR to the City for free. Mayor Peters tried to continue in her chosen style of leadership — complaining, chiding, scolding, and warning of impending doom – to no avail, as no one could argue against getting a report that could save the two communities millions and was marked down from \$75,000 to zero.

All credit to Morro Bay City Councilpersons Betty Winholtz and Noah Smukler and the CSD's Michael Foster, who grasped the potential benefits early on of studying the alternative, and that its proposed funding method could free up State Revolving Fund loans and the City's bonding capacity to pay for infrastructure for a recycled water delivery system.

Smukler and Winholtz won the votes and the day through determination, genuine leadership ability, and a

superior vision of their city's future.

"The WWTP Upgrade Project will be the largest single investment in public infrastructure in the history of both Morro Bay and Cayucos," said Smukler. "I'm thankful for the support of my fellow JPA Board Members and relieved that our community will now have the opportunity to evaluate additional project delivery models and systems. The PERC proposal introduces a strong competitive element to the design process and provides us a 'Plan B' that will feature guaranteed project life-cycle cost analysis, neighborhood compatibility, and a water reclamation/recycling philosophy."

Winholtz, who is running for mayor, received the most votes in the June primary and is the Sierra Club-endorsed candidate in the run-off this November. Go to www.winholtzformayor.org to see why.

Los Osos

continued from page 3

main environmental “opponents” of the project. County officials called our national offices in hopes of getting the local chapter to stand down. Attempts were made to split our chapters’ governing bodies and to agitate our membership to demand that our boards change their position, roll over, and play along with whatever configuration of the project the County was promoting at the time. Other environmental groups from out of the area with no knowledge of or involvement in the project were solicited to write letters to the Coastal Commission supporting the County’s position and opposing ours. When it was suggested that the site the Public Works Department preferred -- which would have impacted 600 acres of prime farmland with a wasteful outside-the-basin sprayfield disposal scheme -- was a bad idea, Public Works staff editorialized in *The Tribune* that such criticism was “inaccurate,” “inflammatory,” and “irresponsible.” The County’s “community survey,” distributed to

determine if residents of Los Osos would rather have a gravity system or a STEP system, was virtually a self-parody of the “pick a card, any card, pick the one in the middle” genre of stacked-deck push-polling, with leading questions designed to elicit only the desired (gravity) response.

In short, instead of conducting a genuine public process, the County behaved as though it were running the war room of a political campaign and trying every trick in the book to get its guy elected.

The outcome

On the down side, the County and the Coastal Commission brushed aside copious evidence that the world’s oldest wastewater collection and conveyance technology is more environmentally destructive, more prone to leak and overflow, and more likely to undercut the measures included in the project for water conservation than newer, cheaper pressurized STEP system technology. Coastal Commission staff, under the gun of a fast turnaround so the project could make an application

deadline for federal funds, accepted the County’s gravity sewer bias as reality and included the County’s anti-STEP boilerplate in their staff report.

Due to the County’s insistence on a gravity sewer, a great deal more money will now be spent on construction, monitoring and maintenance (or, worse, as often happens in gravity-sewered communities, money promised to be spent on maintenance will be insufficient, or will be diverted to other local needs that, unlike sewer issues, aren’t out of sight/out of mind until they turn into crises). Inevitable sanitary sewer overflows are in the future for Los Osos and the Estuary. All this could have been avoided.

On the up side, we (hopefully) saved the aquifer, and saved the project from certain denial of the development permit by the Coastal Commission by forcing improvements into the permit, always over the County’s vigorous resistance and denial that any changes were necessary.

The Coastal Commission must now approve plans for water conservation and the recycling/reuse of wastewater as conditions of the project’s permit.

To that end, after we helped persuade the Commission to take jurisdiction over the project, the Sierra Club urged SLO Green Build to bring its expertise and badly needed focus on innovation and new technology to the table in order to assure the development of an effective water conservation plan. We advised and consulted with SLO Green Build on a proposal they submitted to the Coastal Commission as a conceptual framework for a conservation program.

The measures we drove into the project to recycle wastewater on agricultural land and for Low Impact Development via “green streets” (bioswales that keep rainwater on site, replenishing groundwater no longer fed by leach fields instead of letting it run off) are crucial to assure protection of the aquifer and sensitive habitat.

The County will post its draft plans for the conservation and recycling programs (right, Supervisors?). If the past is predictive, those plans will need public input before they can be approved.

Thank You, Mr. Ripley

The most important single environmental improvement won for the Los Osos project — over the protests of the Public Works Department — is the recycling of wastewater, which will do more than anything else to reduce pumping of the aquifer and curb seawater intrusion. The plan for the agricultural reuse of that water in over-the-basin ag operations was Dana Ripley’s plan, prepared for the Los Osos CSD by Ripley Pacific Company in 2006 and essentially incorporated into the County project by the Planning Commission in 2009, after Public Works said it couldn’t and shouldn’t be done.

Ripley was also the driving force behind the imperative to seal the sections of the collection system to be laid in areas of known high groundwater.

Thank you, Mr. Wimer

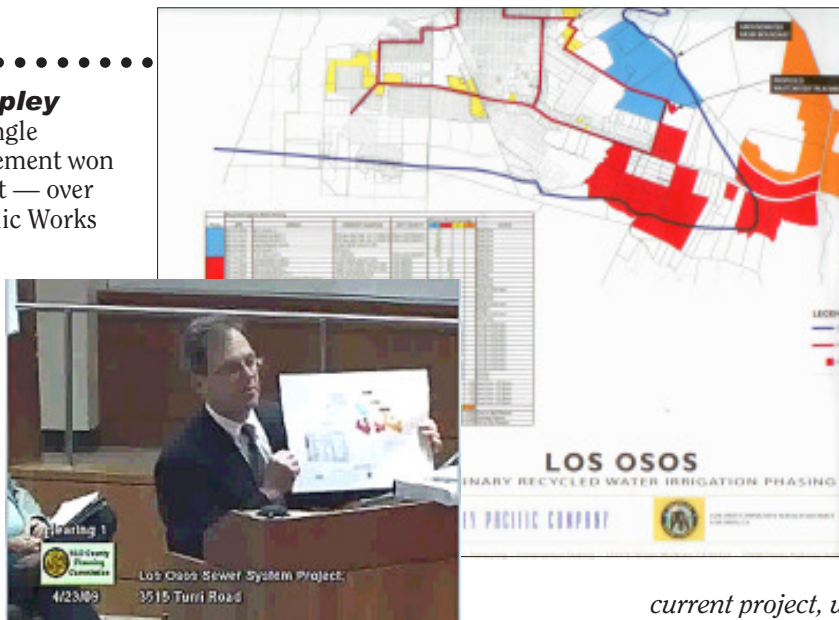
Keith Wimer, founder of the Los Osos Sustainability Group and high on the County’s list of Least Favorite Persons in connection with the Los Osos sewer project, was steadfast in sounding the alarm on seawater intrusion and the necessity that the problem be addressed in and integrated with the wastewater treatment project, not separately and sometime later. Wimer, doing his own calculations, announced that seawater intrusion was more severe and moving faster than official estimates more than a year before the County’s geological consultants came to the same conclusion (in a yet to be released draft report). He got the project modified accordingly.

Thank You, Ms. Christie

The County can thank its lucky stars that Sarah Christie was Chair of the Planning Commission when the Los Osos Wastewater Project came before them for a permit. She showed the County Supervisors what a public process is. Under her leadership, the Planning Commission didn’t just give people three minutes or less to talk about sewer issues, send them on their way, do whatever staff told them to do, and move on to the next agenda item. After years of being ignored at the Board of Supervisors, it was something of a shock for community activists, wastewater treatment experts and environmental advocates to find themselves actually listened to at Commission hearings with Christie presiding. And their suggestions were incorporated into the project, greatly improving it. Christie used public input to guide a remake of the project, making it possible for it to receive a Coastal Development Permit. She ordered field trips and site visits, and never took a fact on faith. Thanks to that diligence, Public Works staff were repeatedly forced to admit that their information was incorrect, their data was incomplete, or their numbers were off. She caught them asserting as facts statements that turned out to be bad guesses. The staff was wrong, the public was right. Another good lesson for our County Supervisors to learn.

Thank You, Troublemakers

A frame has been placed around the Los Osos sewer saga that is in need of adjustment. The need for that adjustment can be detected in a web post by the



County’s Los Osos Wastewater Project team when it blogged the following last December:

We believe that the changes that have occurred since the 2005 LOCSO Project provide an excellent opportunity to deliver a Project for Los Osos that will cost less, provide greater equities, and will be better and more acceptable than the 2005 Project.

And in this footnote from the Coastal Commission’s June 11 staff report:

The prior LOCSO project included roughly 21 acres of habitat impacts and 80 acres of habitat mitigation (all at Broderson) whereas this project has reduced the habitat impacts to roughly 9 acres, and increased the mitigation package to approximately 100 acres. Furthermore, the current project, unlike the LOCSO project, includes tertiary treatment and thus the enhanced ability to address habitat issues on a broader scale in relation to overall groundwater health and sustainability.

Which is to say: There are now possibilities at hand for solutions to problems thanks to three decades of evolution in thinking about the way we treat waste water — and, it must be said, thanks to three decades of Los Osos not being able to build a sewer. The State Water Quality Control Board has now issued guidelines for water recycling, to apply to all wastewater treatment projects, because California is running out of water. And today (we hope), no one could propose to build a sewage plant just uphill from an estuary and assert in the Environmental Impact Report that there could be “no impacts” on that estuary from that project. But nine years ago, an EIR said just that about the Tri-W sewer plan for Los Osos.

The 2005 Los Osos Community Services District board fought the entire state of California and incurred a loan default, bankruptcy and a tidal wave of lawsuits to keep that sewer from being built on that spot. Subsequently, the Ripley Pacific Study, the National Water Research Institute, the Los Osos Wastewater Project Technical Advisory Committee, and the County all confirmed that a gravity sewer in that location would have been a bad idea. A better project ensued.

In the end, the Los Osos sewer saga was not a spectacle or a soap opera, nor endless, wall-to-wall strife and divisiveness for its own sake. Enough of the dust has settled for this much to be clear: The citizens of Los Osos have racked up a record of civic courage above and beyond the call of duty. And as it turns out, that was a smart move. Had a sewer been built three decades ago, or even ten years ago, that project would not have contemplated groundwater loss and the peril to the aquifer from seawater intrusion, let alone ways to solve those problems. Instead, it would have greatly aggravated them, and disaster would have followed.

And the potential solutions to those problems would not be part of the project today if the Sierra Club, Surfrider, the Los Osos Sustainability Group, SLO Green Build, and concerned residents hadn’t spoken up and insisted on being heard despite constant shouts to shut up and sit down and “just do it.”

The “secondary issues” have been forced onto the table, where they can no longer be dealt with later. They must be dealt with now.



Classifieds

Next issue deadline is **August 10**. To get a rate sheet or submit your ad and payment, contact:

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 P.O. Box 15755
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Thanks to Nicolette Hightower, Ginny Dawkins, and Frank and Nancy Butz for their donations to the Chapter in lieu of gifts in honor of the wedding of Chuck Tribbey and Kathryn Reid.

Thaks to Kathleen Haruf and Eric S. Jacobson for their donations in memory of Gary Brockett.




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Outings and Activities Calendar

Seller of travel registration information: CST 2087766-40. Registration as a seller of travel does not constitute approval by the State of California.

All our hikes and activities are open to all Club members and the general public. If you have any suggestions for hikes or outdoor activities, questions about the Chapter's outing policies, or would like to be an outings leader, call Outings Chair Joe Morris, 772-1875. For information on a specific outing, please call the outing leader.

Wednesday, July 7, 14, 21, and 28, 5:30 p.m. Informal Hikes Around San Luis Obispo. 1-2 hour hikes around San Luis Obispo, 5-6 miles rt, with elevation gain around 1200 feet. For information or sign up for Hikers List, send email to Gary Felsman (check website).

Sat., July 10, 9 a.m. Explore the hills of Montana de Oro State Park on this 8 mile 1500 foot elevation outing. Bring water, snack and dress for the weather. Poison oak may be present along the trail. Meet at Ridge Trail Parking Area MDO SP. Possible eats after for those interested. Details: Gary, 473-3694.

Saturday, July 17, 8:30 a.m. She'll Be Comin' Round the Mountain With the Sierra Club. Meet at the main parking lot at Laguna Lake for a walk around Cerro San Luis. Moderate pace with one steep uphill near the beginning. Enjoy views of most of SLO. Information: Mike Sims, 459 1701 or email msims@slonet.org

Sat., July 18, 9 a.m. Ontario Ridge Shell Beach Bluffs Hike. Meet at east end of Sycamore Mineral Spring Resort parking lot, on Avila Beach I one mile E of Hwy 101. Walk to top of Ontario Ridge and ocean bluffs for magnificent ocean views. 4.5 mile hike, 1,500 feet gain, duration about 2.5 hrs. Bring sturdy hiking shoes, clothing for range of temperatures, water, snacks. Please note: there is very steep descending portion of trail about 300 feet, suitable only for those with adequate hiking experience. Hiking poles useful for this descent. Info: Bill Waycott, 459-2103, bill.waycott@gmail.com

Fri., July 23, 10 a.m. City Walk of Victorian-Era SLO. A guided stroll past 20 historic century-old houses and churches in the "Nob Hill" district of downtown SLO. See the homes of the then mayor, newspaper editor, and founder of Cal Poly. Learn about the ranches, coming of the railroad, and the lives of the newly rich who transformed the city. Duration about 1 1/2 hrs. Meet in front of Jack House, 536 Marsh St., SLO. Info: Joe Morris, 772-1875.

Sat-Mon, July 24-26, Guzzler Cleanup in Mt Grafton Wilderness. Join us as we carry out pieces of an old, unneeded guzzler from this wilderness area about an hour's drive south of Ely, just off U.S. 93. Guzzler will have been cut into manageable size pieces. To make toting downhill easier, bring a frame backpack to strap on pieces. We will work with John R. Miller from the Ely BLM. Participants should be in good shape for working at altitude. Central commissary (optional) \$15. High clearance recommended. Contact leader Vicky Hoover 415-977-5527, vicky.hoover@sierraclub.org. CNRCC Wilderness Committee.

Thurs., July 29, 7-9 p.m. Bimonthly Meeting: Life After the Gulf Oil Disaster. Cal Poly profs Chris Kitts (microbiology) and Yarrow Nelson (environmental engineering) share



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See Paul McCloskey's work on display through August at the Halcyon General Store, 936 South Halcyon St., Halcyon, CA. www.paintingwithlightstudio.com

their thoughts on the Gulf spill and how the ocean and shoreline may recover over time. Both have had long experience with oil spills, such as the one at Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes by Unocal, one of the largest on land in U.S. history. Steynberg Gallery, 1531 Monterey St., SLO. Info: Joe Morris, 772-1875.

Wednesday, Aug. 4, 11, 18, and 25, 5:30 p.m. Informal Hikes Around San Luis Obispo. 1-2 hour hikes around San Luis Obispo, 5-6 miles rt, elevation gain around 1200 feet. For information or sign up for Hikers List send e-mail to Gary Felsman.

Sat-Sun, Aug. 21-22, Bristlecone Pines Car Camp. Come to beautiful White Mountains to camp, hike & relax. Saturday, we'll hike the Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forest on a moderate 5-mile round trip interpretive trail, followed by lunch and short optional hike to a mining cabin. Back at camp, we'll enjoy Happy Hour, potluck and campfire. Sunday pack up & head home. Group size strictly limited. Send \$8 per person ("Sierra Club"), 2 large SASE, H&W phones, email, rideshare info to Reserv/Leader: Lygeia Gerard, P.O. Box 294726, Phelan, CA 92329, (760) 868-2179). CNRCC Desert Committee.

Tues., Aug. 24, 10 a.m. Guided Walk of Mission-Era SLO. Join us on an

easy stroll past the Mission, adobes, and Chinatown to learn of the beginnings of SLO, its early pioneers, and the Chumash. Walk by the homes of the first physician, the founder of the newspaper, and location of the public gallows. Families and

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

children over 7 welcome. Duration about 1 1/2 hrs. Meet at NW corner of Monterey and Osos Sts., SLO Info: Joe Morris, 772-1875.

Sat-Sun, Sept. 4-5, Tamarisk Bash/Car Camp in Surprise Canyon. Remove invasive tamarisk from Surprise Canyon north of Ridgecrest, CA. Warm weather, year-round stream will let us soak and cool. Work Saturday with BLM coordinator; Sunday hike to cooler elevations. Car camping, potluck dinner. Craig Deutsche, craig.deutsche@gmail.com, (310-477-6670) CNRCC Desert Committee.

*Outings Sponsored by
Other Organizations*

Sun., July 4, 1-4 p.m. Octagon Barn Center Open House. Explore the Octagon Barn on this wonderful day. Enjoy a tour of the Historic Barn every half-hour and learn about the Land Conservancy's vision to open the site for community use. Receive a limited edition Octagon Barn Hat for donation of \$100. Suggested donation \$5, \$10 per family. 4400 S. Higuera Street (4400 Octagon Way). For more info call (805)544-9096.