



February 2016
Volume 53 No. 2

SANTA LUCIAN



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Santa Lucian
Santa Lucia Chapter of the Sierra Club
P. O. Box 15755
San Luis Obispo, CA 93406

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



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Coastal Commission On the Brink

The fight that will determine the future of California's coast is happening on Feb. 10 in Morro Bay

by Tarren Collins

The California Coastal Commission will hold a public hearing during its February 10-12, 2016 meeting in Morro Bay to consider the continued

employment of its Executive Director, Dr. Charles Lester. The public hearing to consider the possible dismissal of the Commission's Executive Director is

tentatively scheduled for Wednesday, February 10.

So reads the dry text of the press release sent out by the California Coastal Com-

mission on January 19. Absent some gross malfeasance they might pull out of a hat, all the evidence points to Dr. Lester doing an exemplary job since assuming his post in 2011. But that in itself is not the reason why every resident of San Luis Obispo County should care about this, and why you need to be in Morro Bay on February 10 to speak out against the attempt to fire the Commission's executive director.

There's one reason why you can still hike Ontario Ridge, Hearst Ranch doesn't have five resorts and an airport on it, Fiscalini Ranch is not a gated community of second-home mansions, and Harmony Headlands State Park exists.

It's because the staff of the Coastal Commission stood up to connected, politically powerful development interests and recommended the denial of projects that were obviously inconsistent with the California Coastal Act, giving the commissioners the backup they needed to make a hard vote.

In 1996, those development interests persuaded Governor Pete Wilson to try to fire Coastal Commission Executive Director Peter Douglas. The Governor failed.

Now, coastal developers are working hard to confuse and misguide some Coastal Commissioners in an effort to remove Mr. Douglas's chosen successor and replace him with someone more to their liking. For the sake of our coast, they, too, must fail.

Developers have long coveted the land regulated by the commission. It has grown in value in part because it has been kept relatively pristine. The commission regularly clashes with some of the state's wealthiest and most powerful interests.

- L.A. Times, 1/20/16

Whatever your experience may have been with a particular coastal project or an appeal before the Commission, this is the time to see the big picture and the long view. The tradition of an independent, professional staff — with whom commissioners are free to agree or disagree on a case by case basis — is the basis of California's coastal program, which is the envy of the world. The key to the success of this program has



And nothing but the truth ONMS Regional Director William Douros (inset) led a panel of experts on the national marine sanctuary program before an SRO crowd at the Morro Bay Veterans Building on January 6.

Facts vs. Fantasy

False arguments against a national marine sanctuary implode at Morro Bay meeting

By Andrew Christie, Chapter Director

On January 6, senior staff from several of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's west coast national marine sanctuaries came to the Veterans Memorial Building in Morro Bay at the invitation of the city council.

The meeting was the result of the September 22 council meeting on the proposed Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary, when fear-mongering sanctuary opponents failed to persuade the council to renew the City's historically reflexive opposition to sanctuary, a hallmark of their recent predecessors. Instead, the council decided to ask NOAA to come to town and present the facts of what national marine sanctuaries are and what they do. (See "Morro Bay Takes a Step Toward Sanctuary," Oct. 2015.)

William Douros and Lisa Woonnick from the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries, joined by sanctuary superintendents Chris Mobley (Channel Islands) and Paul Michel (Monterey Bay), laid out those facts for the nearly 200 attendees in the standing-room-only crowd that braved the first major onslaught of El Nino

to make it to the evening meeting. Additional subject specialists manned information tables around the room that provided attendees with everything they needed to know about national marine sanctuary volunteer programs; education and outreach opportunities for

for the unique marine environment off the Central Coast, beginning with a proposal by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 1977, through a recommendation by a NOAA expert panel in 1983 and a 1991 submission by SLO County that was accepted by

NOAA for placement on its Site Evaluation List. The accepted nomination for a Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary is a result of six years of requests to NOAA from around the country to either revive the moribund Site Evaluation List or create a new process to

resume the designation new marine sanctuaries.

The sanctuary panel described NOAA's award-winning programs. Most sanctuary activities are non-regulatory, with the regulatory portion of a sanctuary's designation document occupying about "a page and a half," while non-regulatory programs to enhance and protect the marine environment run to hundreds of pages.

SANCTUARY continued on page 2

schools; protection of resources and habitat from oil and gas development, ship strikes on whales, acoustic testing, etc.; historical maritime resources; collaborations in support of harbors and fishing; sanctuary science and adaptive management; water quality issues; and community partnerships.

The speakers presented the long history of the efforts to secure national marine sanctuary protection



Sign here Type in the URL above to add your name to the list of people urging NOAA to designate the Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary.

Stopping Oil Trains Starts Now

County Planning Commission needs to hear from you on Feb. 4 and 5.

Across the country, the oil industry is trying to turn oil-by-rail into the new normal.

The glut of tar sands and Bakken shale crude oil -- which Big Oil is trying to cloak in sham arguments about energy independence while aiming straight at the export market -- is what has caused the skyrocketing use of oil trains, which are all about picking up the surplus production, beyond the capacity of pipelines, so that the richest industry in the history of the world can make even more money, at devastating cost to our air, water, and communities while hastening the cooking of the planet.

That's the big picture that the Phillips 66 Santa Maria Refinery Rail Spur Project fits into.

But even without this big picture, there would be plenty of reasons for SLO County residents to come down to the County Government Center on February 4 and 5 and urge the Planning Commission to say no to the company's plans to bring more than 12 million gallons of tar sands crude into our county every

week, on trains weighing 15,000 tons -- some of the heaviest rolling stock on the rails -- through some of the highest derailment threat areas in the state, over aging infrastructure that wasn't designed for it.

Don't take our word for it that this is a bad idea. The following is verbatim from the Final Environmental Impact Report, describing the project's Class 1 environmental impacts -- i.e. impacts that will remain significant and unavoidable no matter how many mitigation measures are put in place to reduce the impact:

●The project could result in effects that impair adjacent agricultural uses along the UPRR mainline in the event of a derailment and/or spill, including the generation of contaminated air emissions, soil and water contamination, and increased risk of fire, which have the potential to adversely affect adjacent agricultural areas.

●Operational activities associated with the Rail Spur Project within SLOC

TRAINS continued on page 2



Join us on Feb. 4 from 12 - 1:30 p.m. at Monterey & Osos, across from the County Government Center.

COASTAL continued on page 3

Trains

continued from page 1

(i.e., on the project site (SMR) and on the mainline within SLOC) would generate criteria pollutant emissions that exceed SLOC APCD thresholds.

- Operational activities of trains along the mainline rail route outside of SLOC associated with the Rail Spur Project would generate criteria pollutant emissions that exceed thresholds.

- The Refinery associated with the Rail Spur Project would generate toxic emissions that exceed SLOC APCD thresholds.

- Operational activities of trains along the mainline rail route associated with the Rail Spur Project would generate toxic emissions that exceed thresholds.

- Operational activities associated with the Rail Spur Project would generate GHG emissions that



exceed SLOC APCD thresholds.

- Crude oil transportation along the UPRR mainline could result in a crude oil spill that impacts sensitive plant and wildlife species and wetlands.

- Train traffic associated with the importation of crude oil to the project site could result in a derailment or a material spill, which could result in the disturbance and destruction of cultural resources along the mainline routes.

- The potential for a crude oil unit train derailment would increase the risk to the public in the vicinity of the UPRR right-of-way.

- Operations of the crude

oil train on the mainline UPRR tracks would increase demand for fire protection and emergency response services along the rail routes.

- A rupture or leak from a rail car on the UPRR mainline track could substantially degrade surface water and groundwater quality.

In short, the project would generate air emissions that not only impact air quality but also public health, in violation of the County's air quality standards. Some of these pollutants are known to cause lung damage, cancer and smog. In addition, the project – including the rail emissions – would increase greenhouse gas emissions and contribute to climate change.

An oil spill from the refinery, associated pipelines, or rail cars would impact a significant portion of the County's coast. As we have learned from the recent Refugio oil spill in Santa Barbara County, oil spills result in devastating impacts to the environment, public recreation, and the economy. They are virtually impossible to prevent, and

Phillips 66 P.R. Gets Fact Checked

False advertising removed from project support website

After we reported that the Phillips 66 oil-by-rail project support website was falsely representing the words of their supporters and Phillips 66 refinery staff as “news” attributed to local newspapers (“No Support? Just Lie!,” Jan.), we alerted all three papers. *The Tribune* subsequently forced the site to remove *The Tribune's* logo and identify the dubious quotes that had appeared below it as what they are: letters to the editor -- not citations from a news story or the position of the paper's editorial board. Here's the “before” and “after”:



difficult to clean up.

Coastal Impacts

Because the Phillips Rail project is located in the coastal zone, the strong environmental protection policies of the Coastal Act apply. The County cannot approve the project unless it complies with the Coastal Act and the County's Local Coastal Program (“LCP”).

TRAINS continued on page 4



Ready or not for 15,000 tons a day Above and right: the deteriorating rail crossing at the south end of Paso Robles, dating from the horse & buggy era. Far right: Debris and silt accumulating against the Arroyo Grande Creek rail crossing in Oceano, illustrating “the need to modify, raise or strengthen this bridge” per a hydrologist's report. Lower right: the bridge's cracked and crumbling supports.



Sanctuary

continued from page 1

Attendees also learned:

- A recent NOAA study found that California's north coast sanctuaries have contributed \$127 million to their local economies.
- In Santa Cruz, the new Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary visitor's center attracts 100,000 visitors a year and has become a community hub and gathering place.
- In the Channel Islands, after designation of the sanctuary, oil companies relinquished the active oil leases within its borders. The sanctuary saved blue whales by getting a shipping lane relocated a mile away from the whales' feeding grounds.
- In the Monterey watershed, the voluntary, non-regulatory Ag Water Quality Alliance has improved the health of the bay by helping farmers reduce the runoff of herbicides and fertilizers from their land.
- In Morro Bay, the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary collaborates with the National Estuary Program on water monitoring projects.
- In all sanctuaries, local universities seeking major federal grants to conduct marine research have a significantly better chance of securing funding if a national marine sanctuary is on hand to partner in that

The national marine sanctuary debate is over. Go to Youtube and search “1.6.16 NOAA” to view the Jan. 6 NOAA National Marine Sanctuaries Information Session.

research.

- Marine sanctuaries have the best planning tools available for the proper siting of offshore wind or wave energy projects, as sanctuaries are based on marine spatial planning, i.e. the best way to balance the need for additional sources of renewable energy with the need to protect sensitive habitat from development impacts.

Opponents answered

Panelists dispelled the primary myth peddled by sanctuary opponents – that national marine sanctuaries are somehow detrimental to fishing or have caused economic harm to the fishing industry – with real numbers: catch statistics showing 1.6 billion pounds of fish, worth \$515 million, landed at ports immediately adjacent to the Monterey Bay sanctuary since the sanctuary was designated in 1992.

On opponents' second-most popular myth – that sanctuaries are somehow an impediment to the necessary dredging of harbors – Monterey Bay Superintendent Paul Michel pointed out that all the existing dredge disposal sites were grandfathered in when the sanctuary was designated,

and since then “we've approved 98 percent of what they want to do.”

Despite the formidable array of facts on offer and the panelists' repetition of the words “we are not fisheries managers” and “we're not looking to become fisheries managers” and “we don't regulate fishing” about half a dozen times, paranoid dreams die hard. A small contingent of sanctuary foes, attempting to whip up the hysteria that is their hallmark in local government meetings and letters to the editor, trooped up to the microphone and found themselves in the least hospitable environment: facing a panel of experts who know what they're talking about.

One opponent attempted to conjure the specter of a federal agency with the temerity to actually enforce sanctuary regulations, which she was sure would mean an army of jack-booted thugs descending upon us should we get a national marine sanctuary on the Central Coast. (Nope: There are a dozen uniformed officers for the entire federal sanctuary program, which otherwise relies on the state fish and game wardens and the U.S. Coast Guard.)

Another opponent railed at the panelists for establishing the network of Marine Protected Areas and Marine Reserves that restrict or prohibit fishing within their borders, allegedly betraying fishermen after “we worked with you.” (Nope: that was the California Fish and Game Commission, implementing

the state Marine Life Protection Act.)

Another opponent told the panelists how much he hated the regulations imposed by the National Marine Fisheries Service, which is not the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries.

Another opponent told sanctuary staff to get off this marine sanctuary kick and do something about the threat of geo-engineering – aka chemtrails, beloved of conspiracy theorists everywhere.

Prior to the meeting, the right-wing lobby group COLAB had exhorted its members to attend, painting a fact-free portrait of national marine sanctuaries as dedicated to the notion that “nature should be left alone” and all “the industries that provide food, fiber, minerals and energy supplies” should be shut down. Marine sanctuaries, COLAB assured its membership, are “in control of all of the private land that abuts the sanctuary,” and once “demanded a halt to the runoff from a farm 100 miles inland.”

All false. COLAB's big kahunas were in attendance in Morro Bay to witness the collapse of their fearful fairy-tale castle before the onslaught of reality.

For those who reside in the reality-based community, if you haven't already signed the petition to NOAA and the White House Council on Environmental Quality urging the commencement of the designation process for the Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary, you can do so here:

<http://bit.ly/10QmZKf>

Santa Lucian

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The *Santa Lucian* is published 10 times a year. Articles, environmental information and letters to the editor are welcome. The deadline for each issue is the 13th of the prior month.

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Greg McMillan
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Lindi Doud, Patrick McGibney
TREASURERS

The Executive Committee meets the second Monday of every month at 5:30 p.m. The Conservation Committee meets the second Friday at 1p.m. at the chapter office, located at 974 Santa Rosa St., San Luis Obispo. All members are welcome to attend.

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Printed by University Graphic Systems
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services courtesy of Silver Streaks.



Coastal

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been a professional staff with thousands of hours of experience in interpreting the Coastal Act. The attempt to remove the executive director is a bid to dismantle California's coastal program,

SLO County coastal advocates have a statewide reputation for turning out when it matters. This is one of those times. On February 10, the rest of the state will be looking to us to do what we do best: Show up and speak out when it really counts.

While the deed can't be done in darkness because Dr. Lester has exercised his right to have it heard as an agenda item at the Commission's February 10 meeting, but the Commissioners can simply hear public comment and retire to closed session without saying a word, making their deliberations and taking the vote behind closed doors.

Which is why everyone at that meeting needs to demand that *the Commission's deliberations and vote be held in public, not executive session* — on the record.

And we need to ask our

local Coastal Commissioner, Erik Howell, to do the right thing: Oppose the firing of the Executive Director and ensure that the deliberations and vote are taken in public.

TAKE ACTION

● Call or e-mail Erik Howell at (805) 556-4640 or ehowell@pismobeach.org and ask him to oppose the firing of the Executive Director, stand up against the development lobby and for the continued independence and integrity of California's coastal program.

● Attend the February 10 Coastal Commission meeting at the Inn at Morro Bay, 60 State Park Road.

This is item number 8 on the agenda for the Feb. 10 meeting, but we strongly recommend showing up at 9 a.m. Count on having two minutes to speak.



Remember when? In 1998, the Hearst Corp. was not able to put five resorts, a golf course and an airport on Hearst Ranch because Coastal Commission staff had the courage and independence to recommend denial of the plan.

“These are commissioners whose interests are not aligned with those of 40 million people; they're aligned with very narrow interests of developers.”

-Former commissioner Steve Blank, “California Coastal Commission members to consider firing executive director,” by Tony Barboza, *L.A. Times*, 1/20/16.

Classifieds

Next issue deadline is **February 12**. To get a rate sheet or submit your ad and payment, contact: Sierra Club, P.O. Box 15755, San Luis Obispo, CA 93406 or sierraclub8@gmail.com

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4 Outings and Activities Calendar

Santa Lucian • February 2016

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

Sat., Feb. 6th, 9 a.m. Gaviota Wind Caves Hike. Seven-mile, moderately strenuous hike on Beach to Backcountry Trail in mountains of Gaviota State Park, with beautiful coastal outlooks, wind caves, and walk along ridge trail above Hollister Ranch. Trip will involve a shuttle from meeting place. Bring water, snacks, sun protection, and dress in layers for changing weather. From SLO, drive south on Hwy 101 past Buellton towards Lompoc, turning left on San Julian Rd. Go past the school to trailhead at end of road. Threat of rain cancels. Leader: Andrea Ortiz, 934-2792 or kenya683@msn.com.

Sun., Feb. 7th, 2 p.m. Historic Walk: Victorian-Age San Luis Obispo. Guided stroll past

21 stately, century-old homes and churches in the Old Town Historic District, SLO's former "Nob Hill." See residences of past mayors, newspaper editor, and Cal Poly founder. Eavesdrop on the lives of the newly rich who dominated SLO in the horse-and-buggy days. Duration about 1 1/2 hrs. Meet in front of Jack House, 536 Marsh St. Leader: Joe Morris, 549-0355.

Fri., Feb. 12th, Mojave Nat. Preserve Restoration. Meet at 9 a.m. to remove tamarisk, fan palm, sunflowers along Zzyzx Rd. and Desert Studies Center. Bring water, sunscreen, hat, and lunch. Tools provided. Beforehand for more information, contact Sid Silliman at gsilliman@verizon.net.

Sat., Feb. 13th, 9 a.m. Santa Margarita Lake

Bird and Plant Walk. Join Audubon and Calif. Native Plant Society leaders on south lakeshore walk for 2 miles to see freshwater fowl or on 3.5-mile Grey Pine Trail to see both birds and plants. Meet at Santa Margarita County Park, telling ranger you are in the birding group. Rain cancels. Leader: Bill Waycott, 459-2103.

Sat., Feb. 20th, 8:30 a.m. Rinconada to Big Falls Hike. Strenuous, 11-mile, 1800 ft. gain, hike to see one of largest waterfalls in the county, in Lopez Canyon area of Santa Lucia Wilderness. Some poison oak on trail. Can go part way and return. Meet at Pacific Beverage Co, in Santa Margarita. Rain will postpone hike to later date. Leader: Carlos Diaz-Saavedra, 546-0317.

Sat., Feb. 20th, 10 a.m. Islay Hill Trekking-Pole Hike. Two-mile, 400 ft. gain hike to demonstrate and practice trekking-pole proficiency, with spectacular views of Edna Valley and morros. From Broad, go east on Tank Farm Rd, turn right on Wavertree, left on Spanish Oaks, and veer right onto Sweetbay and park near cul-de-sac. Rain cancels. Leader: David Georgi, 458-5575 or hikingpoles@gmail.com.

Thurs., Feb. 25th, 10 a.m. Coon Creek Loop Hike. Three-mile, 450 ft. gain, hike in Montana De Oro State Park for ocean, mountain, creek, and flower views. Meet at Coon Creek parking lot, 3.8 miles after park entrance. Leader: Vicki Marchenko, 528-5567 or vmarchenko57@gmail.com. Rain cancels.



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.

The Sierra Club Needs You!

Become an Outings Leader

- Lead hikes and camping trips
- Introduce others to nature
- Explore the outdoors
- Make new friends
- Protect the environment
- Get healthy exercise

For further information contact:
Joe Morris, Outings Chair
Sierra Club, Santa Lucia Chapter
(805) 779-1875
dji1942@earthlink.net

Island Hopping in Channel Islands National Park

Apr. 3-5, May 8-10, Jun. 12-14, Jul. 17-19, Aug. 21-23, Sept. 25-27, Oct. 23-25. Join us for a 3-day, 3-island, live-aboard cruise to the Channel Islands. Hike windswept trails bordered with blazing wildflowers. Kayak rugged coastlines. Snorkle in pristine waters teeming with colorful fish. Swim with frolicking seals and sea lions. Look for unusual sea and land birds. Watch for the endangered island fox. Or just relax at sea!



All cruises depart from Santa Barbara. \$650 cost includes an assigned bunk, all meals, snacks and beverages plus the services of a naturalist-docent assigned by the national park to help lead hikes, point out items of interest and give evening program. For more information contact leader: Joan Jones Holtz; 626-443-0706; jholtzhl@aol.com.

To hold a reservation, ma \$100 check to Sierra Club, and send to Joan Jones Holtz, 11826 The Wye St., El Monte, CA 91732.



In the market Stop by the Sierra Club booth at the Thursday night SLO Farmers Market. We'll be there on 2/11, 2/25, 3/17, 3/31, 4/14, and 4/28.

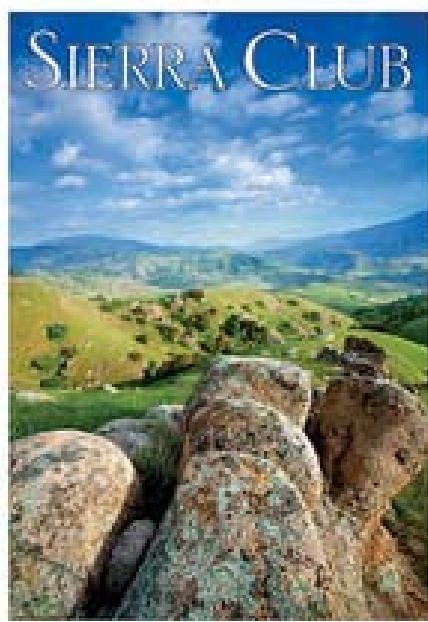
Clearance!

2016 Sierra Club Calendar

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Activities sponsored by other organizations

SLO Botanical Garden



Sat., Feb. 13th, 1 - 2 p.m. French Gardens Aesthetic Presentation. Join us for an inspiring presentation with Garden educator Ken Levine that will explore the beauty of two influential and historic French gardens on . Free docent-lead tour of

the Garden at 2 p.m. Info at slobg.org/french.

Fri., Feb. 26th, 6 p.m. Edible & Medicinal Plants of the Central Coast. Enjoy a presentation on the many useful plants of SLO County with herbalist Tellur Fenner, owner of the Blue Winds Botanical Medicine Clinic. Workshops on Sat. & Sun. Feb. 27 & 28 will be a hands-on experience and full of harvesting and herbal product crafting. Info and registration at slobg.org/useful-plants.



Trains

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These policies require protection of sensitive habitats, agriculture, views, and air and water quality.

Sierra Club, ForestEthics and the Center for Biological Diversity

hired the Environmental Defense Center to represent the groups in enforcing the Coastal Act. Through its investigation, EDC has identified several policies of the Coastal Act and LCP that would be violated if the project is allowed to proceed. Some of these violations are identified in the EIR.

Perhaps most significantly, the project would destroy more than twenty acres of native dune vegetation that provides habitat for sev-

eral rare and endangered species, including burrowing owls and Nipomo mesa lupine. The Coastal Commission, California Department of Fish and Wildlife and California Native Plant Society have all pointed out the importance of this habitat area. In addition, as the EIR points out, an oil spill at the site of the spur or along the rail line would impact a much larger area of significant and protected coastal habitats.

The project would also convert approximately 22 acres of agricultural land that is currently used for grazing. This conversion violates LCP policies protecting rural areas and open spaces from development. Finally, and most obvi-

ously, the increased risk of an oil spill from the Phillips project would violate LCP policies protecting coastal communities and vulnerable resources. The project conflicts with the County's policies discouraging continued reliance on fossil fuels and promoting conservation and alternative energy. The proposal would bring new, heavy crude oil to a county that has made a commitment, through its LCP and General Plan, to shift towards a cleaner energy future. As such, the project must be denied.



We're a Little Short This Month

This is an abbreviated issue of the *Santa Lucian*. The need to devote all our attention and resources to the issues on page 1 required that we choose between either getting a full-size issue to you later, or informing you ASAP about the critical hearings involving oil trains and the California Coastal Commission that are happening here in the first two weeks of February, and the petition you need to sign right now to secure designation of the Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary.

We went with the second option. See you next month at full size.

With Thanks

~ Anne Gibbons and Iva Braun made a \$50 donation in memory of Ted Case.