

December 23rd, 2020



The Honorable Jared Huffman
Representative – California 2nd District
United States House of Representatives
899 Fifth Avenue, Suite 290
San Rafael, CA 94901

Dear Congressman Huffman,

We're looking forward to discussing with you a range of climate change related issues when we meet on January 13th. We're providing here some of our thoughts to help frame that discussion.

Inspired by your House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis Report, a group of us has worked on prioritizing issues that we feel have value nationally and particular relevance for Marin. We divided into four teams, each choosing to focus on a pillar or pillars of the Report, based on our experience and on our interest in further involvement. Each team sifted through the specific policy actions proposed in the Pillars, identifying those most relevant for Marin and in some cases suggesting refinements based on local experience. We've highlighted Marin programs that might serve as models for climate action elsewhere—including many **“shovel ready”** projects worthy of additional federal support.

We offer you the fruits of our efforts thus far, hoping that they form only half of a two-way conversation. We'd like to get your views on the issues we outline as to likelihood of movement or passage in the near or foreseeable future, and perhaps the best approaches we might take toward working on them to secure their success in Congress or where decisions are made.

Pillar 1: Clean Energy, Transportation & Buildings

Priority: Building cleaner and more resilient energy, transportation, and built environment sectors of the economy. Pillar 1 contains 180 pages of policy proposals focused on moving us toward a just and resilient clean energy economy – a keystone for responding effectively to the climate crisis. All of these policies are needed. Here we focus on Pillar I strategies including clean energy, transportation and the built environment, and particularly on policy proposals that have more relevance than others for Marin.

Why clean energy is a priority: As society moves away from greenhouse gas-generating fossil fuels, it needs clean alternatives. The transportation, built environment and industrial sectors can reduce their carbon footprints to the extent that they can shift away from fossil fuels and toward

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electricity that is produced from clean and renewable sources. A broad spectrum of policy changes is urgently needed to secure clean energy production, distribution and storage.

Equity values: Changing from fossil fuels to cleaner energy sources offers the opportunity to decrease environmental destruction while increasing equity through new jobs, housing, and other solutions. Clean energy demonstration projects can address Marin’s underserved communities’ needs, improve grid reliability/resiliency, and bolster the local economy.

Relevance for Marin: Marin has pioneered community choice aggregation (CCA) through MCE Clean Energy (MCE), and has political and social conditions that generally favor progressive climate policies. We are a small and perhaps atypical county, but may be well placed to lead in energy policy through innovation. Like most of the country, we must deal with an energy infrastructure heritage developed largely in the twentieth century, which both needs, and tends to resist, updating.

Both MCE Clean Energy and the County of Marin’s planning staff are on the cutting edge of clean energy policies. MCE, for instance, is soliciting proposals for long-term energy storage, an area where technology innovation is needed. It is also promoting innovation in energy reliability with microgrids and distributed energy resources (DERs). The County has adopted a ‘reach’ building code and building electrification ordinance, with several local governments following suit. It also promotes switching from gas to electric heating and appliances through its countywide **Electrify Marin** program. An **EV Promotion** program has the highest GHG reduction potential of any Drawdown Marin solution.

Policy changes and, in some cases, better funding can further Marin’s demonstration of innovative policies and programs which can provide models for other parts of the country.

Clean energy policy changes of particular relevance for Marin:

- Develop comprehensive resilience strategies, standards and funding at state and federal levels to plan and prepare for climate change-related threats to the electric grid such as wildfire and extreme weather.
- Provide technical assistance and funding through revolving loan funds or grants to local and regional entities (such as MCE) for DER deployment including solar with storage.
- Reauthorize Congressional funding for the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant Program. Expand this program to include converting buildings from fossil fuels to electricity, both to reduce GHGs and to develop a Smart Grid-enabled building portfolio capable of providing emergency grid support during power outages.
- Expand existing government and utility programs to more effectively achieve energy/water efficiency in lower income rental housing, and in the small-medium business sector.

Clean transportation and built environment policies:

- Extend consumer tax credits, provide cash discounts at point of sale, tiered by income, and enact other policies to promote the purchase of electric vehicles. Conduct nationwide consumer education and awareness programs for EVs.
- Establish a Zero-Emission Vehicle (ZEV) goal for all light-duty vehicles sold by 2030 and medium and heavy-duty vehicles by 2035. Set target dates when federal fleets should be all electric.
- Invest in rapid expansion of public DC fast charging (DCFC) that is accessible to all vehicles.
- Provide financial incentives for building electrification, and for switching appliances from fossil fuel to electric, including increased funding for energy efficiency, weatherization, green job training, and the Low-Income Housing Energy Assistance Program, as well as expanded on-bill financing of electric space and water heating appliances and EV charging equipment.
- Fund research and review barriers to deployment of vehicle-to-home (VTH) and vehicle-to-grid (VTG) energy systems.
- Establish a national Environmental Product Declaration database to track GHG emissions of building materials from cradle to grave. Fund research for low-emission materials like cement.

Clean energy market and innovation policies:

- Remove subsidies for fossil fuels and level the playing field for renewable sources. Include ‘externalized costs’ such as carbon pollution in energy pricing.
- Maintain California’s ability to lead in setting clean energy and vehicle emission standards that are stricter than federal standards.
- Revise federal policy at FERC, DOE and elsewhere to encourage shifting all economic sectors away from specific technologies and toward regulation based on performance, with GHG reduction from cradle-to-grave being a major criterion.
- Pursue market reforms that better integrate renewable energy, storage, advanced energy management, demand response, and other innovations into the wholesale energy markets and also require transmission providers to proactively identify and evaluate these non-transmission alternatives (FERC).
- Properly value energy resilience by requiring the Department of Energy to propose a reliability standard for the bulk power system that addresses extreme weather resilience. Funding is needed for resilience planning, hardening the grid at all levels, and deployment of distributed energy resources (DERs).
- Fund innovative DER research, development and deployment. Review and remove regulatory barriers to DER deployment at federal and state levels.

Pillar 4: Break Down Barriers to Clean Energy Innovation

Pillar 4 calls for carbon pricing and eliminating fossil fuel tax code breaks. It also states that carbon pricing should complement policies that achieve deep pollution reductions, strengthen community resilience to climate threats, and correct for any adverse impacts on environmental justice communities.

CARBON PRICING

Priority: The Pillar calls for a price on carbon to facilitate clean energy technology dissemination. The rationale is straightforward: rising fossil fuel prices make clean energy alternatives more attractive and economic.

Why Carbon Pricing is a Priority: A carbon price (carbon “fee”) removes the largest fossil fuel industry subsidy—not having to pay the external costs of the CO² pollution dumped on society.

Carbon pricing is a priority because it has cross sector impact. It re-enforces most of the House Climate Report mitigation recommendations (Welch). It addresses other key priorities—innovation, equity, financial risk, and timely action—without adverse impact on the economy and jobs (Metcalf).

Cross Sector Impact: Carbon pricing will impact investor and consumer decisions across the electricity, industry, transportation, and building sectors (Hsu, Shi Ling).

Innovation: A predictable long-term rising carbon price will accelerate private sector innovation and help target public investment in research and development (Romer, Hsu).

Equity & Economic Values: The bottom two-thirds of households could come out ahead or break even with a carbon dividend, resulting in their becoming long-term climate policy advocates (Department of Treasury). At a minimum, low and middle income households should receive dividends. A dividend could help address the finding that some current clean energy subsidies, such as those for energy efficiency, solar, and electric vehicles, have mostly benefited higher income households (Borenstein and Davis).

Financial risk: The current misalignment of trillions of dollars of private (and public) investment due to underpricing fossil fuels creates systemic risk. Carbon pricing can systematically reorient investment and lending to low- and no-carbon options (CFTC and Business Roundtable).

Timely Action: The urgency of climate action can be met with carbon pricing in place in as little as nine months (British Columbia, Canada and UK experience) compared to major regulatory actions that under federal administrative procedures require more time. Timely action makes clean energy economically viable sooner, so subsidies can be redirected to other climate priorities.

Economy: A carbon fee policy does not adversely impact economic growth or jobs (Metcalf).

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Relevance for Marin: The intention of a 2017 Marin Board of Supervisors Resolution endorsing a carbon fee and dividend would be realized. The California legislature has also endorsed this solution in 2016

A steadily rising carbon fee will reinforce other priority actions--transportation, renewable energy and efficiency—contained in the Marin County, San Rafael and other Climate Action Plans, and Drawdown Marin, while meeting economic and equity goals and addressing consumption-based GHG emissions that are not readily subject to local regulations or incentives. California and Marin frequently endorse or implement initiatives with national and global relevance. This is one of them. Forty countries are pursuing carbon pricing.

California uses a cap and trade system to price carbon. The House Select Committee Report focuses on Federal legislation recommending a carbon tax or fee/dividend approach, our focus here.

Why Carbon Pricing is Achievable—Now and in the Future: The unprecedented COVID expenditures and budget deficit enhance the prospects for a carbon pricing policy. If revenue neutral, it will provide more space for expenditure-based climate policies in the Biden Plan. Without carbon pricing, most climate mitigation measures will cost more and take longer. With policy appeal to both Democrats and Republicans, the closely divided Congress could find common ground. With support in both chambers and growing external support, there may be a window of opportunity in the new Congress.

Climate policies must be politically achievable and sustainable for the long term. Bipartisan approval combined with a household dividend could create a national constituency for the steadily rising fee.

REMOVING TAX CODE BREAKS FOR OIL AND GAS COMPANIES

Why removing tax breaks is a Priority: Current fossil fuel industry tax breaks—intangible drilling costs (\$13 billion over 10 years) and percentage depletion allowance (\$12.1 billion over 10 years) make it harder for clean energy technologies to become competitive and gain market share. Consequently, larger clean energy programs are needed.

Relevance for Marin: Removing fossil fuel subsidies would make Marin efforts on clean transportation more effective.

Why removing tax breaks is achievable—Now and in the Future: It is unclear if rescinding fossil fuel tax breaks will have sufficient support or if the political cost will be worth the annual gain of \$2.5 billion. (A \$15/ton/CO₂ carbon fee would yield approximately \$80 billion.)

<https://storage.googleapis.com/proudcity/sanrafaelca/uploads/2019/06/Att-D-CCAP-2030-Final-Draft-4-23-19.pdf>

<https://www.marincounty.org/-/media/files/departments/cd/planning/sustainability/climate-and-adaptation/draft-climate-action-plan-2030.pdf?la=en>

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Pillars 8 & 10: Capture the Full Potential of Natural Climate Solutions

INVEST IN AMERICAN AGRICULTURE

Priority: Increase agricultural Carbon Sequestration and Resilience through Climate Stewardship Practices. Agriculture is one of the largest sources of greenhouse gas emissions in Marin, generating an estimated 32% of emissions in the unincorporated area of County, and 8% countywide. Increased carbon sequestration is necessary throughout the county to reach Drawdown Marin’s goal of net zero emissions. Restorative agriculture and carbon farming will improve carbon sequestration, local food security, the job market, water quality, riparian habitat, and open space management.

Innovation: Marin County has a unique environment with a large agricultural land trust, agriculture occurring in national seashore and recreational areas, and a community interested in climate change sustainability and eating locally grown food. Many in the ranching community are already employing restorative practices on their lands. The potential for this innovation is great with the continuing support of UC Cooperative Extension, Resource Conservation District (RCD), and interested small family farms—if adaptation management funds become more available. Marin County has carbon farming and restorative agriculture in the climate action plan and the National Park Service has it in their General Management Plan Amendment.

Relevance for Marin: Many partners are already in place to achieve a showcase restorative agriculture focus in Marin, which is where the Marin Carbon Project was launched. Drawdown Marin has endorsed both **Carbon Farming** and the Agricultural Institute of Marin as priority programs, and the County Climate Action Plan (CAP 2030) prioritizes agricultural practices. There are a combined 165,00 acres of private and public agricultural lands in Marin, including 54,00 acres with Marin Agricultural Land Trust (MALT) easements and 28,00 acres of agriculture in Point Reyes National Seashore (PRNS) and Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA). Marin RCD, UC Cooperative Extension and many local non-profits such as The Marin Carbon Cycle Institute and Center for Regenerative Agriculture are already working in partnership on much of this land, and Marin’s CAP 2030 proposes extending programs and services to the full expanse. PRNS is writing ranch plans next year, and Marin has the potential to complete plans on additional ranches that are interested. Increasing agricultural carbon sequestration and resilience through climate stewardship practices has the potential for reducing 265,162 MTCO₂e annually. Restorative farming practices are well documented, with the RCD permitting plans. At least 19 ranches already have plans, with more coming.

Working Lands Priority Policy Actions:

- Increase federal capacity to provide technical assistance through Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) programs going to the RCDs, and by directing funding through NRCS Contribution and/or Cooperative Agreements. This will allow the RCDs to have a federal match that can be leveraged for more funding opportunities.

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- Review and improve approval processes for restorative agriculture projects at all levels, removing barriers such as holding up restorative agriculture approvals until completion of marginally related work.
- Provide tax credits or payments to motivate protecting riparian and other sensitive ecosystem areas and support carbon farming.
- Prioritize climate and restorative agriculture practices in the 2023 renewal of the Farm Bill.

PROTECT AND RESTORE AMERICA’S LANDS, WATERS, OCEAN, AND WILDLIFE

Priority: Protect and Conserve large landscapes for biodiversity and carbon sequestration.

Marin County, the Bay Area and California are recognized locally, nationally and internationally as a center for biodiversity. Increasing efforts to protect and conserve natural landscapes is an important regional priority. *The California Floristic Province* is the only biodiversity hotspot in the United States. Biodiversity hotspots include 30 areas of the world that Conservation International has identified as both biologically rich and deeply threatened. *The Nature Conservancy* analyzed the United States ecoregion and identified the San Francisco Bay Area as *one of only six “hot spots of diversity” to serve as “beacons of conservation evoking not only scientific curiosity but also awe for nature’s intricate beauty and a powerful sense of urgent need to protect those places and the species they harbor.”*

Relevance for Marin: Resulting from over a century of conservation efforts, 80% of Marin remains open space. However, the potential for catastrophic fire and flooding from sea-level rise could greatly decrease Marin’s ecosystems in size, health, biodiversity, habitat availability, and their ability to sequester carbon. Enhanced conservation and management of these environments can further all of these values. Marin County is part of *The Golden Gate Biosphere Reserve (GGBR)* encompassing urban, multi-use managed areas, and wildlands that include marine and aquatic ecosystems as well as terrestrial ecosystems. Marin’s ecosystems are rich and diverse, from evergreen forests (including the iconic and endemic Coast Redwood), oak woodlands, chaparral, coastal scrub and prairies, rare serpentine grasslands, as well as wetlands, eelgrass beds, and both bay and ocean ecosystems. Through a collaborative approach, Marin County can help protect the natural and cultural resources of the dynamic North-Central California coastal bioregion, including strengthening these resources to better withstand climate change while also capturing more carbon.

Sixty-four countries of the UN, President-elect Biden’s climate change initiatives, and the California Governor’s 30/30 Order all make natural landscape conservation and management a priority. Collaboratives such as One Tam, The Golden Gate Biosphere Reserve, Marin Wildfire Prevention Authority (MWPA), and the Estuary and Oceanic Science Center work together for funding and implementation of scientifically derived ecological practices. Drawdown Marin has endorsed a **Biomass Recovery** solution to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and optimize carbon sequestration, in alignment with MWPA ecologically sound practices for vegetation management to reduce wildfire hazards.

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Natural Lands Priority Policy Actions:

- Protect at least 30% of US lands and ocean areas by 2030, prioritizing high-quality conservation by enabling public land agencies to protect and restore forests, grasslands, wetlands, oceans, biodiversity and wildlife habitats in general, and specifically where wildfire and sea-level rise most threaten these ecosystems.
- Assess the condition of America’s natural areas, wildlife, wildlife habitat, ocean health, watersheds and wetlands, and other natural systems and monitor to protect and improve their capacity to mitigate climate change and increase their resiliency to its impacts.
- Support the efforts of private landowners to conserve natural areas, and increase financial incentives for private land conservation.
- Provide grants for scientific study of wildfire resiliency, perhaps similar to the Marin Community Foundation’s “adaptations to sea level rise” grants, enabling the development of innovative ecological solutions and scientific approaches for large-scale fuel reduction.

Pillars 9 & 6: Environmental Justice and Resilience to Climate Impacts

Priority: Demonstrate equity-driven, community-based climate adaptation and carbon drawdown actions that build community capacity and leadership, support resilience for ecological, social, and built environment systems, support Marin’s critical regional transportation network linkages and local equity-supporting transit needs, and train and employ local residents – with a focus on sea level rise threats.

Why Climate, Ecological, and Community Resilience Is a Priority: Urgency cannot be overstated. Bringing resilience actions to fruition takes years and can be costly. Starting *yesterday* increases our chance of having a modicum of success by tomorrow. The challenge of climate change is that the earth’s systems change *slowly* – it has taken centuries for humanity’s loading of the atmosphere and oceans with fossil fuel emissions to bring us to today’s ever-increasing impacts. Even if we stopped emitting greenhouse gases tomorrow, impacts are baked in for decades. Nonetheless, our actions today can ready us and Marin’s natural systems for inevitable threats, shorten the time when the system can begin to reverse itself, and lessen the intensity of change in the years to come.

Equity Values: Piloting community-based planning and raising up expertise and leadership in underrepresented communities directly advances equity, while simultaneously showing how to make equity an integral part of climate change mitigation and adaptation. For example, adaptation strategies for critical transportation routes in this area could integrate **Plan Bay Area 2050 transportation strategies** to supporting community-identified transportation needs. Reducing GHG emissions could be achieved by working toward a more efficient and seamless mobility experience for those that are transit dependent. Enhancing local transit frequency, constructing safe bicycle and pedestrian pathways, and implementing a Vision Zero pedestrian safety policy through street design are other examples. Conservation Corps North Bay, located in the Canal neighborhood and employing mainly Canal residents, routinely contract with local agencies for fuel reduction and have also been involved in sea level rise projects.

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Relevance for Marin: Marin is ripe to realize change – it has invested intensively in addressing climate change and is within a region that has similarly invested. **Drawdown Marin** just launched. Voters just established the **Marin Wildfire Protection Authority**. The County just completed its **Climate Action Plan 2030 Update** and **Local Hazard Mitigation Plan** (which facilitates access to **FEMA funds**). Its cities and towns have similar plans in place or coming soon. Most have responded positively to a recent **Marin Grand Jury Report** calling for collaborative adaptation planning and action countywide, continuing the work initiated by the **BayWAVE** and **C-Smart** sea level rise studies. Marin Community Foundation sponsored a series of innovative projects in their **Advancing Nature Based Adaptation Solutions**. The region established the **SF Bay Restoration Authority** and taxed itself \$500 million to build projects. Statewide voters consistently support bond measures to fund actions like what is needed in Marin, **Prop 68** being the most recent. Wetlands and terrestrial natural systems protection and restoration have decades of effective outcomes in Marin County, spearheaded by several organizations.

San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission’s regional **Adapting to Rising Tides** report identified the Canal/Central San Rafael as one of three Bay Area communities vulnerable to just one foot of sea level rise. Tackling the needs of this area early could address the weakest links in Marin’s sea level rise vulnerability while helping set the stage for meeting the rest of the County’s adaptation needs. Yet not coincidentally, this area hosts Marin’s largest disadvantaged community. It has the least resources for adaptation and resilience. Actions intended to protect such communities can themselves trigger their displacement and the further loss of scarce affordable housing. For these reasons, integrating equity into adaptation and drawdown not only makes sense in Marin, but is a necessity.

Marin’s small size means solutions are relatively manageable and total costs could be relatively low. These two frontline communities are ‘shovel ready’ for comprehensive resilience planning and implementation pilots that could demonstrate best practices for other coastal communities:

- 1) **The Canal and Central San Rafael** are ready to move forward. **Shore Up the Canal, The Canal Alliance, and the Multicultural Center of Marin** are established organizations deeply engaged in the community. The Metropolitan Transportation Commission has designated the Canal District as a **Priority Development Area**. This will provide support for planning what the community wants and needs. Nature-based adaptation projects are already located here– one is close to implementation (Marin Audubon’s Tiscornia Marsh), another has a planning start (City of San Rafael’s Spinnaker Lagoon), and an important science study is right offshore (San Francisco State University’s Oyster and Eelgrass reef study). The City recently applied for **Prop 68 funds** to carry out community engagement around adaptation, which is called for in its Climate Action Plan and **General Plan 2040** scheduled for adoption in 2021. The area was one of ten **Resilient by Design** study areas. Further, Central San Rafael’s “watershed” encompasses the Canal as well as downtown and Point San Pedro, including two freeways and the important transportation corridor around to China Camp where community-based adaptation planning is also underway.

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- 2) **Marin City** also has a strong foundation. Graduates of the “**Designing Our Own Solutions**” course developed as part of Resilient by Design have continued the work together to advance resilience strategies. They formed a steering committee and launched a new organization called **The Marin City's People's Plan** with seed funding of \$250,000. Participants will co-design green infrastructure strategies to address flooding as well as create more food security in Marin City. This work has also involved **Shore Up Marin City**, and inspired a community driven resilience planning process in Boulder, Colorado.

Resilience Policies of Primary Importance:

- Establish a National Climate Resilience Program to deliver technical assistance and to support planning and investment in community and natural systems resilience projects. Include recommendations for potential funding strategies at all levels, such as assessment districts, community-based redevelopment financing, public improvement expenditures, transfer of development rights, and certificates of preference for those displaced by climate impacts.
- Match funding for climate adaptation with funds mitigating the causes of climate change.
- Direct highway and transportation funds to projects that are resilient to climate impacts, and that help protect existing development from sea level rise where applicable.
- Identify ways that shoreline locations can benefit vulnerable communities, for example with affordable houseboat developments or bayside restaurants on floating structures.
- Revise the tax code to incentivize resilience in state, local, and private investments.
- Increase investments in resilient pre-disaster planning and disaster recovery.
- Build local workforce capabilities and provide good jobs in resilience preparations and recovery.
- Develop a national wildfire mitigation strategy and increase federal investment in wildfire resilience, in alignment with the Wildfire Defense Act (H.R. 5091).

Environmental Justice Policies of Primary Importance:

- Put Environmental Justice at the center of climate and environmental policy and funding.
- Prioritize EJ communities for funding clean energy improvements and infrastructure, including green affordable housing and multi-modal transportation and transit systems.
- Provide for federal funding without requirements for matching funds, which often can be challenging for EJ communities.
- Increase the capacity of EJ communities to participate in policymaking.
- Support research on the impact of policies on EJ communities.

We hope you have a chance to consider these ideas, and again we very much look forward to discussing them with you in a few weeks.

Those taking part in this effort are: Bob Archer, Citizens’ Climate Lobby; Bill Carney, Sustainable San Rafael and Lead on Climate; Belle Cole, OFA and Lead on Climate; Carleen Cullen, Drive Clean Bay Area; Tom Flynn; Norma Fragoso, Environmental Forum of Marin; David Kunhardt, Corte Madera Vice Mayor; David Lewis, UC Cooperative Extension; Bob Miller, MCL President;

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Dale Miller, Golden Gate Electric Vehicle Association; Lawrie Mott, Drive Clean Bay Area; Kate Powers, MCL; Pam Reaves, MCL; Peter Schwartz; Nancy Scolari, Marin RCD; Stuart Siegel, S.F. State U. and Sustainable San Rafael; Ken Strong, MCL; Terri Tomas, MCL; Doug Wilson, MCL Climate Action Working Group Chair.

As always, thank you so much for representing us so well in Congress.

Sincerely,



Doug Wilson
Chair, Climate Action Working Group