NEWS FROM MARIN CONSERVATION LEAGUE

March - April 2019

NRDC top litigator Michael Wall to speak at MCL Annual Dinner

At a time when foundational laws and regulations that have protected every facet of the nation's environment for more than 40 years are under threat by the current administration, we rely on organizations like the Natural Resources Defense Council to deploy its resources of 600 scientists, lawyers and policy advocates to "safeguard the earth – its people, its plants, and the natural systems on which all life depends" and "to ensure the rights of all people to the air, the water, and the wild." No one carries out this ambitious charge more ably than the organization's co-lead litigator Michael Wall.

MCL is pleased to announce that Michael Wall will be the keynote speaker at its Annual Dinner on April 5. We are fortunate that Wall is based in NRDC's San Francisco Office and is able to join us to share his experience and insights into an era when the courts seem to be first, last, and often only recourse to defending the environment. Wall litigates major cases to

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To golf or not to golf?

San Geronimo Valley debate raises larger issues

Kirsten Nolan

In addition to offering a rare opportunity for habitat enhancement and wide public benefit, the San Geronimo Golf Course debate raises troubling land conservation and planning issues.

By Sarah Loughran and Nona Dennis

The ongoing debate around the 18-hole public golf course that occupies157 prime acres in San Geronimo Valley has become increasingly complicated with ardent voices on both sides, plentiful media attention, a lawsuit won and under appeal, and a looming ballot initiative. The County, while still eager to see the land as public open space, has stepped back from its effort to acquire the land, leaving it in the hands of an owner whose ownership was supposed to be temporary. And now, residents of Marin will most likely face a ballot initiative that could set a dangerous precedent for community planning throughout the county. What are the key events in this twisted tale, and what does the future hold for the site, as well as for land conservation and community planning in general?

Background and timeline

The San Geronimo Golf Course was established in 1965. When it was listed for sale by its owners in 2017, the County of Marin sought to prevent the land from being purchased by a private entity with

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A Message from the President - Tending to the Wild

Dear Members and Friends,

M. Kat Anderson, in her 2013 book, Tending the Wild, chronicles how indigenous peoples used fire, digging sticks, and other tools for living lightly on the land to achieve a balanced subsistence. How we achieve a similar balance today between visiting wild lands and preserving them requires the help of the entire community. In the Cascade Canyon Open Space Preserve (CCP), the Marin County Parks Department (MCP) is directing focused efforts to protect sensitive habitat and manage the oak woodland plant community, while also enabling visitors to enjoy the open space.

Linda Novy

Linda Novy joined Marin County Parks Volunteer Coordinator Greg Reza, second from left, at a recent habitat restoration project in Cascade Canyon Preserve.

Both themes, caring for habitat and living with wildlife, are critical in preserving our wild places. In the CCP, the yellow legged frog[1] habitat along the Cascade Creek needed a physical buffer to protect this animal's breeding grounds from visitor activities. With assistance from Novato's Scout Troop 200, MCP Volunteer Coordinator, Greg Reza, and Ranger, Mike Warner, assisted by Coast Guard Cadets, installed 500' of spilt rail fencing with signage to guide visitors away from pools where frogs lay eggs in clusters on rocks in the creek.

With this work complete, Greg returned with the Conservation Corps North Bay – Ecology Crew, to remove Douglas fir saplings encroaching into CCP's oak woodlands. I had the pleasure of helping and meeting the outstanding crew. Although fir trees are native, they can encroach into different habitats and change the whole ecosystem by overtopping shade-intolerant oaks, leading to their decline. Typically, fir trees are managed by periodic fires, but with the lack of fire, the Ecology Crew, Greg, and I took its place by removing these trees. Once the firs were removed, the oak woodlands structure and understory of shrubs, forbs and grasses, gained more space and sunlight. We also discovered a stand of French broom and hand-pulled over 5,000 plants. All work was recorded on Cal Flora, a vegetation management tool that educates the public and tracks in its data base the distribution of native and invasive plants throughout California.

Marin Conservation League is focused on stewarding our public lands. Learn more about this and the other issues MCL is studying through our web site, www.marinconservationleague.org. We'll be celebrating 85 years of advocacy at our April 5 Annual Meeting Dinner. Hope to see you there.

With warm regards,

Linda

1 See MCL Jan – Feb 2019 article, page 7 describing the Yellow Legged Frog, a species listed by California Agencies as a Species of Special Concern, http://www.conservationleague.org/images/stories/Newsletters/NL_JanFeb_2019_web.pdf

New MCL committee addresses fire in the environment

In late 2018, MCL formed a Fire and the Environment Working Group (FEWG). At the prescient initiative of MCL President Linda Novy and motivated by her own involvement in Cascade Canyon's (Fairfax) local FireWise program, plans to form the committee were begun in the early fall. The subsequent catastrophic wildfires added even greater urgency, especially considering the large vulnerable population that resides within Marin County's extensive Wildland Urban Interface (WUI).

The purpose of the working group is to provide an environmental perspective on fire preparedness and safety and to cooperate with other individuals, organizations, and agencies who are already working on this issue. While MCL is justly concerned about the critical protection of human life and the built environment from wildfire, the natural environment – including both destructive and beneficial impacts of wildfire on ecosystems and the resilience of wildlife habitats to wildfire due to climate change – is also an important factor. The committee's initial focus will be on understanding and assessing the existing jurisdictional planning and regulatory frameworks in Marin for fire prevention and response, managing fire hazard, and managing the vegetation that plays such a critical role in wildfire behavior and also provides habitat for Marin's diverse wildlife.

Meetings are open to the public and are held on the second Monday of the month, from 3:00 to 5:00 p.m., at the MCL office. In mid-February, the working group met with Todd Lando: Council Coordinator of FIRESafe MARIN; Christie Neill, Battalion Chief, Vegetation Management, Marin County Fire Department (MCFD); and Sue Piper, President of the Oakland Firesafe Council, a grassroots community-based organization founded by survivors of the 1991 Tunnel Fire. By studying Marin's community-wide wildfire protection plans, infrastructure and funding needs, land-use planning and the built environment, government leadership relating to these concerns, and lessons learned from neighboring counties, FEWG hopes to simultaneously educate MCL members on best practices and engage the broader community.

Reprint from CNPS Flora

Living with Fire

By Greg Suba, CNPS Conservation Director

The 2018 wildfire season was California's most tragic and difficult to date. Each of us have been affected in some way, and each fire event has been equally tragic no matter how frequently we now live through it. California is left to face and solve the challenges of living with wildfire. And doing so will require three things:

1. an understanding of how our relationship with fire has evolved,
2. a vision of how we want the future to look,
3. and the means to achieve that vision.

A broken relationship

Fire is as much a part of California as the wind, rain, wildlife, and people that come and go across the landscape. The first people knew this and know it still, using fire as a tool to manage their landscapes. But for centuries now, Californians have departed from a natural relationship with fire by removing native people and their practices from the land, actively suppressing wildfire, and reforesting burned areas in ways that favor dense, homogeneous "pines-in-lines" that contribute to high-intensity forest fires. Meanwhile, California's population has nearly doubled since the 1970s, from around 20 million to nearly 40 million today. People and development are encroaching on once sparsely populated areas more vulnerable to fire. That growing population – with vehicles, power lines, and human carelessness – is now the number one cause of wildfire ignition in California. Against this backdrop, we witness our changing climate bringing rising temperatures, longer droughts, and drier vegetation. Together, these volatile conditions are responsible for both the frequency and severity of our 21st century wildfires.

Now, we face a seemingly paradoxical challenge at either end of our state: Our northern forests suffer from fire suppression, which contributes to the build-up of fuel and megafires. In the south, our chaparral landscapes are experiencing more ignitions and unnaturally frequent fire, leading to their conversion from shrublands to more easily ignitable non-native grasslands.

When it comes to California wildfire, we can say three things with confidence: wildfire is natural and inevitable; mixed-conifer forests see too little fire; and established chaparral landscapes see too frequent fire.

Start with the humans

If our fundamental challenge with fire is to learn how to live more harmoniously with it, we've got to start with people. It's no longer enough to focus on managing and rearranging vegetation. We must soberly consider where and how we build communities. First, we need to change our development patterns to avoid building and living in harm's way, as recently suggested by retiring CalFire Director Ken Pimlott. For existing and new homes, we will need to retrofit and construct our neighborhoods with fire-retardant materials and design elements. We also must work together to reduce the sparks and ignitions that jump from a growing population into wildlands.

Then the plants

Vegetation is much more than the stuff that burns. Our plants are wildlife habitat, a commodity, a community amenity, part of a global carbon engine, a sacred responsibility, wildfire fuel, and more. Good solutions will look at these realities holistically, especially amid dangerously inaccurate claims.

Contrary to recent statements from some officials, we won't solve the challenges of wildfire by placing blame or making threats,

Elizabeth Kubey/CNPS

Rebuilding in Sonoma County after the 2017 Tubbs fire.

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Guest column on climate action

MCL's Climate Action Working Group continues to serve as a forum for the array of issues, initiatives and actions that come under the rubric of "climate change," and the organizations and agencies that are actively pursuing them. At the forefront of current discussion is the mandate for electrification, particularly of transportation. In Marin, among all sectors, transportation is the largest emitter (greater than 50 percent) of GHGs, nearly double emissions of goods and services, and private automobiles constitute a significant portion. Converting from internal combustion to electric vehicles provides an obvious means to reduce that percentage. The MCL Newsletter has invited Dale Miller, President of Golden Gate Electric Vehicle Association*, an avid promoter and early adopter of EVs, to present the Association's arguments in this Guest Column.*

Electric cars help slow climate change

By Dale Miller

Electric cars offer one of the best solutions for Marin residents to mitigate climate change caused by greenhouse emissions (GHGs). The California Air Resources Board 2018 GHG Emissions Inventory shows that 41% of GHGs in California are from transportation. Driving electric cars helps to eliminate those greenhouse gases and reduces air pollution as well. Unlike gas and diesel vehicles that exhaust carbon dioxide and harmful particulates, electric cars produce no emissions.

Drivers like the far better driving experience, the convenience of never going to a gas station, the higher safety ratings, and lower lifetime costs. But, the general public still appears to be unfamiliar with electric cars and seems to have misconceptions about their benefits.

Eliminating the need for petroleum creates a major disruption in the world's oil based financial markets and threatens the future profits of the petroleum and automotive industries. The California Energy Commission reports that California drivers burned nearly 19 trillion gallons of gasoline and diesel in 2017 amounting to more than $50 trillion in sales. Therefore stakeholders with a financial interest in these industries are promulgating negative myths about electric cars.

It's helpful to evaluate the benefits of electric cars, and electric transportation in general, to understand why we should be moving to electric transportation very quickly.

Detractors of electric cars claim that electric cars do not reduce GHGs, but simply transfer the GHGs from the car exhaust pipe to the power plant smokestack. However, the electricity used by drivers in Marin is at least 88% fossil fuel free. Drivers with solar on their homes have an even lower carbon footprint and 100% fossil fuel electricity can be purchased. California regulations and the lower cost of solar and wind electricity are resulting in an increasing amount of greenhouse gas-free and fossil fuel-free electricity delivered to Marin. Electricity generation worldwide is increasingly fossil fuel-free.

CoolTheEarth

Fossil fuel-free and GHG-free electricity is available for those drivers who wish to sign up for MCE's Deep Green.

Exhaust from internal combustion engine vehicles is not the only source of GHGs and pollution from transportation. The entire supply chain for gasoline and diesel releases GHGs and pollution at each step of the production process. The well to wheels process begins with drilling and fracking oil wells. This process frequently results in the release of methane, a potent greenhouse gas. Fracking has the potential to contaminate ground water with harmful chemicals. Land based drilling and fracking equipment uses diesel engines and offshore drilling requires ships and helicopters that produce significant amounts of greenhouse gases. As of February 8, 2019 there were 1049 new oil wells being drilled in the United States. Unfortunately that is seventy-four more than a year ago.

Once the oil is extracted, it is transported by ships, pipelines, or rail to the 13 refineries in California that produce gasoline and diesel fuel. Ships and trains also burn fossil fuels and produce GHGs and pollution. There are risks of oil spills and fires from these shipping methods. Even though the United Staters is a major exporter of petroleum, California gas car drivers are using gasoline that has been refined from crude oil transported from Alaska, Middle East, South America, Canada, and California.

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EVs *from page 4*

Refineries release a variety of pollutants and generate a significant amount of greenhouse gases. The Bay Area Air Quality District Management District lists refineries as the dominant source of GHG emissions accounting for 16 percent of emissions in our region. According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, refineries in the United States used 48,563 million kilowatt hours of electricity in 2017. That's enough electricity to drive electric cars 147 million miles each year if that electricity wasn't being used by the refineries.

Once it is refined, the gasoline is transported to gas stations in diesel trucks. Gasoline spills and vapor leaks at gas stations add to the air pollution and ground water contamination. Replacing a gas car with an electric car results in the immediate cessation of the use of gasoline and lubricating oil and eliminates the GHG's and pollution they cause.

Another often stated myth is that manufacturing electric cars is more greenhouse gas intensive than manufacturing gas cars.

Gas cars and electric cars differ primarily in the drive train. Manufacturing the car body, seats, windows, wheels and tires, entertainment system, and other components is essentially the same for both cars. The difference in greenhouse gases depends primarily on the difference between manufacturing the automatic transmission and the internal combustion engine and its related fuel and exhaust components and manufacturing an electric motor and battery.

Very little reputable analysis of the greenhouse gas produced by manufacturing batteries appears to have been done except for a report by the International Council on Clean Transportation. That study analyzed battery manufacturing in Europe where the electricity used for battery manufacturing was primarily generated by coal. The study concluded that any excess emissions over a gas car from battery manufacturing was mitigated in one and half years if the electric car was charged with GHG-free electricity.

Battery manufacturing in the United States is being done in solar powered factories. Battery chemistry and battery manufacturing is improving rapidly as demand for batteries increases. These improvements are lowering GHGs from battery production. In addition, new electric cars are made from recycled materials and are designed to be recycled.

Driving an electric car rather than a gas car to slow climate change is not a sacrifice. With prices of popular new electric cars starting at $29,900, far lower maintenance costs, and rebates and tax credits, electric car drivers pay less for a car that is quiet, clean, smooth, accelerates quickly, and is more enjoyable to drive. Driving an electric car saves the typical driver who drives 13,500 miles per year $767 each year because electricity costs less than gas.

Drivers who care about slowing climate change and want the best driving experience at a lower cost should choose a fully electric car when leasing or buying a new car.

Fire *from page 3*

especially at a time best spent focused on helping with recovery efforts. Nor will we adequately address the challenge of wildfire by pointing to catastrophic fires driven by uncontrollable conditions (dry vegetation, high winds, embers flying for miles) as a reason to cut big trees and clear wildland vegetation for fuels reduction. Neither the Camp nor the Woolsey fires occurred in densely forested areas; high winds and low humidity fueled these fires. Neither lack of raking nor poor forest management were factors in these fires.

Looking ahead

As we're seeing with the problem of wildfire, California's native vegetation now sits at or near the center of major environmental considerations, from climate change and carbon sequestration to housing and biodiversity. As native plant advocates, we can add our voices to solution-oriented initiatives for fuels reduction, reforestation, and carbon interventions that keep biodiversity preservation as a co-equal goal.

The opportunities are real, as are the risks. As we transition to a new administration, a new legislature, and a carbon-neutral California, CNPS remains committed to working with legislators, agency staff, and other organizations to balance new demands for vegetation management with biodiversity preservation in ways that restore a healthy relationship with wildfire.

Go to cnps.org/fire-recovery to learn more, download a free copy of the CNPS Guide to Fire Recovery, or contribute to the effort.

California Native Plant Society

Events

Saturday

April 27

Walk into History: Wildflower Walk at Mt. Burdell

9:30am - 12:30pm

Nature in Novato

Join docents for a beautiful spring wildflower walk at Mt. Burdell. Wildflowers that should be blooming are buttercups, owl clover, larkspur, sun cups, iris, brodiaea species, and more! Bring water, comfortable walking shoes, and a camera to capture the spectacular blooms. This walk is free and open to the public.

Visit MCL's website for specific route information:
conservationleague.org/events/calendar

Full house for Senator McGuire at Jan. 11 Business-Environment Breakfast

Kirsten Nolan

Carole Mills

MCL members, elected officials, and community members packed the McInnis Park Club to hear Senator Mike McGuire speak about sea level rise, wildfires, transportation issues, and much more at the January 11 Business - Environment Breakfast. To view all photos from the morning, visit MCL's Facebook page: facebook.com/marinconservationleague. **Save the Date for the next scheduled Business - Environment Breakfast: Friday, May 10, 7:30 am - 9:00 am.**

CELEBRATING 85 YEARS

Upcoming events to celebrate MCL's 85th Anniversary

2019 marks Marin Conservation League's 85th Anniversary and we are planning special events to celebrate throughout the year. Visit MCL's website often to find upcoming opportunities to get engaged: www.conservationleague.org/events

Kristin Jakob

Nature Note

A Tour of Tam's Grasses

By Andrea Williams [1]

Of all the different kinds of plants growing on Mt. Tamalpais, around 10% of them are grasses. And they're not just in grasslands; you can find grasses in forests, woodlands, chaparral—even serpentine barrens! Over 60 native (and another 60 non-native) grasses occur nearby, but in keeping with the percentage above I'll only introduce you to six. For now.

Our earliest-blooming grass is also our sweetest-smelling: vanilla grass, also known as California sweet grass (*Anthoxanthum occidentale*, formerly *Hierochloe occidentalis*; *Hiero*="sacred" *chloe*="grass"). Vanilla grass grows in broad-leaved clumps, its open-branched inflorescence of oval spikelets pearly above emerald. It begins blooming in January, perhaps taking advantage of winter light in the forest understory. The best stands of vanilla grass are at the western end of Kent Lake and the eastern end of Phoenix Lake, although they can be found in many forested areas throughout the watershed.

California fescue (*Festuca californica*) is another handsome native grass, often found at moist edges of woodlands and forests. Clusters of blue-green leaves grow as tall as three feet and tussocks can reach four feet across; single flowering stalks reach six or more feet in the air. The plant keeps its flowering stalks and stays mostly green year-round, keeping things visually interesting as the seasons turn. This species is becoming more common in landscaping as a specimen grass, joining its local native relatives red and Idaho blue fescue. I find it most useful as an indicator of a really nice oak woodland, and the stands along lower Shaver Grade, west of Bon Tempe Dam, near Azalea Hill, and along Bolinas-Fairfax Road are some of the finest anywhere.

vanilla grass

Don't tell the other grasses, but California oatgrass (*Danthonia californica*) is my favorite. Most grasses, California oatgrass included, reproduce through wind-pollinated flowers that turn into seeds. But oats, California oatgrass included, are tasty and can be browsed down before they have a chance to become a new plant. California oatgrass has contingency sets of seeds inside the sections of its flowering stalk. These flowers are cleistogamous, meaning—like nuns in a cloister—they are kept shut away. The flowers self-pollinate inside the stem, and when the upper (chasmogamous, opening, like a yawning chasm) wind-pollinated flowers have ripened into seeds and are ready to drop, the stem itself detaches from the basal clump of leaves. California oatgrass, once established, is a hardy and forgiving plant that tolerates mowing well. It does prefer wetter areas in grasslands, where it mixes with blue-eyed grass and the cheery yellow of California buttercups. On Mt. Tamalpais, our oatgrass tends to have three to five fat spikelets above a clump of slightly greyish green leaves and a little eyelash winking at you where the grass blade met the stem. On the coast, or in very wet spots, plants tend to be a little greener.

An iconic grass of California's grasslands—perhaps the tussocks under the grizzly's paws on our state flag—is purple needlegrass (*Stipa pulchra*, formerly *Nassella pulchra*). And as the grizzly is our State Animal, purple needlegrass is our State Grass! Unlike the grizzly, you can still find it throughout much of the state and in most of the grasslands of Mt. Tam alongside our State Wildflower (golden poppy) and State Bird (California quail). Individual purple needlegrass clumps can live more than 150 years, so there may be plants alive today that have been around since before there was a California! Purple needlegrass is not only widespread and long-lived, but also quite distinctive in its look. Its inflorescence of delicate purple pennons wave above a mound of fine emerald blades. Some may mistake ripgut brome (*Bromus diandrus*) for purple needlegrass, but the former—a non-native annual weed—holds a fistful of red bristles on single stalks, with no basal clump of leaves.

Another state symbol common on Mt. Tam is our State Rock, serpentinite. Its metal-heavy chemistry weathers into harsh soils that support mostly specialist plants, including the rare serpentine reedgrass (*Calamagrostis ophitidis*). Almost half of the rare plants on Mt. Tam are restricted to serpentine soils; like wetlands and beaches, these habitat types are finite. Often, rare plants in these spots will be quite common and you may wonder why they're considered rare at all. Serpentine reedgrass prefers to grow at the edge of harsh barrens and in the interstices of serpentine chaparral, raising fluffy, open spikes one to three feet above clumps of deep green upright leaves. Some of the finest serpentine reedgrass grassland—a rare vegetation type—can be found along Pine Mountain Road opposite Azalea Hill.

Another denizen of serpentine soils is Torrey's melic grass (*Melica torreyana*). In serpentine grasslands and barrens, it grows with purple-tinged spikelets held tight above a lump of thin green blades, often mixed with purple needlegrass. Shockingly, Torrey's melic also grows in the deep shade of redwood forests with vanilla grass, although Torrey's melic there is more leggy, open and green. Still, it "wins" for most dissimilar habitats on Mt. Tam!

Stipa pulchra, also known as purple needlegrass

photos by MMWD staff

1Andrea Williams is Vegetation Ecologist at Marin Municipal Water District.

San Geronimo *from page 1*

unknown intent for development. To do so, they requested assistance from the Trust for Public Land (TPL), a 45-year-old non-profit with a stellar record for assisting local communities in conserving lands for the public. TPL purchased the golf course in December 2017, with the understanding that the County would purchase the land from TPL for $8.85 million by December 2018. The County's intention was to access State Wildlife Conservation Board grant funds of $3.4 million and Measure A funds to complete the purchase. The County intended to engage in a robust community planning process to determine the best uses of the land, including, but not limited to, substantial restoration of natural habitat. An Environmental Impact Report (EIR) would be completed to evaluate the plan developed through that public process.

The golf course was closed and many golfers who enjoyed using the course appeared before the Board of Supervisors to protest the closing. TPL and the County agreed to reopen the golf course on a temporary basis and provide a $140,000 annual subsidy from the County to keep it in operation until the planning process was complete.

Joining the protesting golfers, the San Geronimo Advocates, a group of private citizens, filed suit under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) to block the County's acquisition. The suit claimed that the County had unlawfully relied on three categorical exemptions under CEQA that generally allow lands to be acquired for wildlife conservation purposes, create parks, and/or preserve existing natural conditions without preparing an environmental report. The San Geronimo Advocates claimed that the County, in applying for grant funding, had made commitments to certain uses, not including golf, and therefore, should conduct an environmental study prior to the acquisition. In October 2018, the Marin County Superior Court sided with the Advocates. In November 2018, the County rescinded its offer to purchase the land from TPL and stopped funding the golfing operation effective at the end of 2018. This left TPL still owning the land and future ownership uncertain, given that TPL did not intend to hold the land and typically does not engage in long-term land ownership. TPL has appealed the court's ruling, and the case is pending.

PJ Koening

In the meantime, the San Geronimo Advocates circulated a petition demanding a county-wide ballot measure to amend the San Geronimo Valley Community Plan to "prevent the Marin County Board of Supervisors, or any Marin County agency or officer, from allowing any change in the primary golf course use of the San Geronimo Valley Golf Course land without the approval of a majority of Marin County voters." In simpler words, if the ballot measure were to pass, the land could only be used for a golf course, unless more than 50% of all voters in the County voted that it could have other uses. On January 29, 2019, the County Board of Supervisors affirmed that the petition had enough signatures to qualify for a ballot measure, but voted unanimously to have the Community Development Agency first prepare a report to assess the possible effects of the ballot measure. The report, which was to be delivered to the Board by February 26, is expected to include information about the ballot measure's fiscal impact, effect on the County's general and specific plans, and effect on land use.

Potential for negative impact – countywide and beyond

MCL supports the conservation of the San Geronimo Golf Course land for its many environmental and public benefits. MCL's concerns about the lawsuit and the ballot measure go far beyond the San Geronimo property, however. Two environmentally damaging precedents could be set in this process.

1. CEQA and public acquisition of land for conservation.

The ruling by the Marin County Superior Court could impact future land conservation throughout the state by establishing a precedent that acquiring land for open space or parklands does not qualify for exemptions under CEQA. TPL has appealed the ruling because it would severely limit the ability of both public and private entities to acquire land for conservation due to the expense, uncertainty, and delay involved in conducting a full environmental review prior to purchase. Conservation organizations and communities across the state have voiced concern and support to TPL's appeal.

2. Determining land use and community planning by ballot initiative.

If this ballot initiative is successful, land use for 157-acres in San Geronimo Valley, which has been occupied by a golf course, will be determined by every voter in Marin County rather than by the residents of

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MCL member in the news

Phyllis Faber honored by Planning and Conservation League

By Nona Dennis

On January 5, an enthusiastic crowd gathered at Sam's in Tiburon to honor Phyllis Faber, long-time member of MCL, for almost four decades of contributions to the Board of the Planning and Conservation League, Sacramento. It was an occasion also to celebrate Phyllis' long commitment to protecting natural resources in California. President Linda Novy was present to add MCL's congratulations to the occasion.

The Planning and Conservation League was founded in 1965 by a group of citizens who sought to remedy the state's fast-paced development and the environmental destruction that accompanied it. One of the co-founders was William Evers, son of MCL co-founder Sepha Evers. Since then, PCL has literally changed the landscape of California through sponsorship of bond measures that have preserved thousands of acres of wilderness and parklands, miles of beaches, and many square miles of habitat for endangered wildlife. MCL consistently looks to PCL for sponsorship and/or analysis of important statewide environmental legislation.

Phyllis joined the PCL Board in the early 1980s after serving on one of the original Regional Coastal Commissions before the State Commission was created In the early 1970s, she had been at the forefront of the fight to attain coastal zone protection for California. She joined the PCL Board at a time when the organization was between executive directors and the board was particularly active. One PCL long-timer recalled at the reception: "There were two very strong – and different – women on the board at that time and Phyllis was one of them!" Anyone who has worked with Phyllis for any length of time will find "very strong" an apt characterization!

Phyllis graduated with a Master's degree in Microbiology from Yale University in the days when there were very few women there. She moved with her family to Mill Valley and, with children still in elementary school, became immersed in local environmental activities. In the late 1960s, she joined a small group of women biologists who called themselves Natural Science Education Resources (Remmy Kingsley, Nona Dennis, Kathy Cuneo, among others) and taught natural science training programs for elementary school teachers. The group also helped develop the first training programs for docents at Audubon Canyon Ranch and, subsequently, for the Environmental Forum of Marin. After more than 40 years, Phyllis continues to volunteer in the Forum as a session leader.

Phyllis is probably best known in Marin for co-founding with Ellen Straus the Marin Agricultural Land Trust (MALT) in 1980, the first organization of its kind in the nation. In its extraordinary success, MALT has enabled the preservation of almost half of Marin's ranches under agricultural conservation easements. Phyllis' work in long-term monitoring of wetlands in San Francisco Bay has influenced the direction of marsh restoration projects. She is the author of two wetland field guides. Under her ten-year editorship, the California Native Plant Society's journal, Fremontia, become one of the most influential native plant journals in the country. She has also served as a Senior Editor for a University of California Press series of books on the natural history of California.

Phyllis Faber and Albert Straus exchange memories of his mother Ellen Straus, co-founder with Phyllis of MALT.

Previous awards for Phyllis include the Marin Green Award from the Marin Conservation League in 1990, and Marin Women's Hall of Fame in 1995. Speakers at the January 5 reception noted that Phyllis combines talents in science, politics, education, environmental policy and citizen activism – and, one might add, determination!

San Geronimo *from page 8*

the San Geronimo Valley.

Land use planning by ballot initiative is risky public policy under any circumstances. It is also antithetical to local community preferences and control. Each of the many community plans in Marin County was developed with extensive local community input. The public lands in San Geronimo Valley may hold broad countywide appeal, but imagine if every voter in Marin could vote to determine the use of an open parcel in Tamalpais Valley, or Santa Venetia, or Bel Marin Keys, or Muir Beach! The possibilities for interference in community planning are endless.

MCL will continue to fight against legal impediments to land acquisition for the purposes of conservation. If, after receiving a report on of the implications of a ballot initiative, the BOS is unable to reach any satisfactory alternative, MCL will also speak out during the coming year against community planning and zoning at the ballot box!

Annual Dinner *from page 1*

prevent pollution, protect the environment, and preserve the rights of all Americans to seek justice in the courts. He led the plaintiffs' trial teams in lawsuits that reshaped federal and state water project operations in California's Central Valley; won a court order forcing the Maritime Administration to halt the illegal discharge of hazardous waste into San Francisco Bay; and won a court order holding the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation liable for drying out 60 miles of the San Joaquin River. He represented residents of Dickson, Tennessee, in a landmark environmental justice victory to address toxic chemicals in groundwater under their homes.

Before joining NRDC, Wall served as a trial attorney at the U.S. Department of Justice and practiced at a private firm. He graduated from Harvard College and Harvard Law School, clerked for the Honorable Edward E. Carnes on the Eleventh Circuit, and is a fellow of the American College of Environmental Lawyers and the American Bar Foundation. He has appeared once before at an MCL event in 2017, when he spoke at an MCL Business-Environment Breakfast Forum.

MCL's Annual Dinner is also an opportunity for presenting awards for outstanding environmental achievement, shown below, and for conducting the annual meeting to vote on the nominated slate of officers and new directors on the board. MCL bids farewell to two directors who have each served for 6 years. Sally Gale has been tireless and successful in melding the interests of environmentalists and the ranching community of West Marin, and Pam Reaves has played a key role in reestablishing and guiding the Climate Action Working Group. Their willingness to volunteer their knowledge and their enthusiastic support of MCL's mission will be missed!

The Annual Dinner will be held at Peacock Gap, 333 Biscayne Dr., in San Rafael, on Friday, April 5 from 5:00 – 9:00pm. Invitations were mailed to members the last week of February. Online reservations are scheduled to open early March: www.mcldinner19.eventbrite.com

2019 Environmental Achievement Awardees

Peter Behr Lifetime Achievement Award
Don Dickenson

Marin Green Award for Environmental Leadership
Marin Carbon Project

Ted Wellman Water Award
Beth Huning

John M. McPhail, Jr. Green Business Award
VenturePad

Special Award for Environmental Achievement
Fibershed

Youth Award for Environmental Leadership
Lori Gerstenfeld

MCL Volunteer Award
Kate Powers

Don Dickenson – a planner for all seasons

By Priscilla Bull and Susan Stompe [1]

At it's Annual Dinner every year, Marin Conservation League acknowledges the exceptional environmental achievements of an individual with its Peter Behr Lifetime Achievement Award. This year, MCL is pleased to present this award to Don Dickenson, invaluable defender and key promoter of efforts to preserve, protect, and enhance Marin's natural assets over more than four decades.

Who is Don Dickenson?

Don has resided most of his life in Marin, living in Fairfax, Novato, Mill Valley, and currently in the Dominican neighborhood in San Rafael. He attended Sir Francis Drake High School, graduated from Novato High School and received both Bachelor and Master of Architecture degrees from the College of Environmental Design at UC Berkeley. In his youth he loved hiking in the hills near his Marin Highlands neighborhood in Novato. As he watched the hillsides being desecrated by poor development practice, Don was inspired to pursue land use planning as a career.

While still a student at UC Berkeley, Don noticed a newspaper listing of a meeting of MCL's North Marin unit and joined. Don became an environmental activist, and the rest is history. Convincing Novato's development practices to preserve the natural environment rather than bulldoze hilltops into valleys was an early goal. Don first served on the Novato Environmental Quality and Design Review Committees. After the mansion burned at Olompali, Don

helped cover the Rancho's old adobe with plastic to preserve it. Then he helped prevent the whole site from being developed as a residential subdivision and instead become a State historic park. He worked on the ballot measure to make Mt. Burdell an open space preserve. Although Don had joined the County Planning Department, he

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Don Dickenson *from page 10*

continued to work on Novato issues such as preventing Hamilton Airforce Base from becoming a regional airport, and other Novato and county ballot measures.

Marin County Planner

Don joined the Marin County Planning Department and quickly established himself as a valuable staff member, researching and producing thorough, accurate reports for the Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors. In addition, he guided both the public and applicants through the sometimes baffling planning process with his lawyer-like intimate understanding of the County's Development Code.

Don was the staff planner for projects such as film director George Lucas' Skywalker Ranch and Christo's Running Fence. Don's guidance of Christo's complex and controversial Running Fence project enabled an internationally renowned work of art and assured Don's life-long friendship with Christo and his wife.

Mill Valley Planning Director

Don moved on from the County to become Director of Planning and Building for the City of Mill Valley, where he served until his retirement. He led the development of a new General Plan for Mill Valley that accomplished the significant downzoning of all large undeveloped parcels in the city. This action drew several lawsuits from landowners, but thanks to his careful drafting, the city prevailed in each suit. Members of the grassroots neighborhood volunteer group Save Horse Hill report that, "Horse Hill would not be permanent open space without the efforts and guidance of Don Dickenson."

Volunteer activities

Throughout his professional career, Don continued to participate in many civic groups. In addition to MCL, he was a founding director of the Greenbelt Alliance, served on the Executive Committee of the Marin Group of the Sierra Club, two Marin County Grand Juries, the Dominican University Neighborhood Advisory Committee, Citizen Advocates for the Preservation of St.Vincent's/Silveira (CAPS), and Save Gold Hill Committee, a neighborhood group that fought off a subdivision and acquired 17 acres for permanent protection. He is currently a board member of Marin Open Space Trust.

St. Vincent's/Silveira

As you drive north on Highway 101 and encounter green open space spreading east to San Pablo Bay, say "thank you" to Don Dickenson for his persistent leadership in preserving the St. Vincent's/Silveira properties. Today's tranquil view of the historic St.Vincent's Chapel and dairy cattle grazing among grasslands and oak trees and wetlands, gives little hint of the years of controversy over this iconic 1,100 acre site that could have held a "new San Rafael community" of up to 2,100 housing units and commercial uses.

As founder of Citizen Advocates for the Preservation of St.Vincent's/Silveira (CAPS), Don actively fought the San Rafael Plan, participated in two citizen advisory committees, and campaigned in two elections opposing the city's plan. When the 1994 Advisory Committee voted to support the City's General Plan policies for the property, Don joined Barbara Salzman of Marin Audubon Society in submitting a Minority Report that called for maximum resource protection of the site. San Rafael abandoned its plan to annex the property, and the 2007 Marin Countywide Plan greatly reduced the development potential to no more than 221 housing units and prohibited a transit stop on the property. The goal continues to be public acquisition of this magnificent property. Again, "Thank you, Don."

County Planning Commission

Former County Supervisor Susan Adams appointed Don to the Marin County Planning Commission in 2003, where he continues to serve. Combined with his time on the County staff, his years of experience make him the only Commissioner with an institutional memory of the development of the 2007 Marin Countywide Plan and the plans that preceded that.

MCL

Through all these years, Don remained a faithful and valued member of the Marin Conservation League, serving a total of 13 years on the MCL Board, and as chair of the Land Use Committee. He continues to participate in the Land Use and Transportation committee. As an MCL member, Don contributed to the development of Community Marin, an environmental policy document created in 1992 in collaboration with other Marin environmental organizations. Among his crucial recommendations was the addition of a Fourth (Baylands) Corridor to the Marin Countywide Plan that would restrict development of historic tidal wetlands and adjacent upland habitats in favor of resource conservation and protection of public health and safety. The Corridor was adopted into the 2007 Countywide Plan and has significantly strengthened protection for baylands and adjacent upland areas along Marin's eastern shoreline. It will also provide a needed buffer as sea levels rise.

A quiet warrior

Don's quiet, thoughtful, and persistent manner has earned him the label "quiet warrior." This warrior's weapons in pursuing his passion for protecting Marin's environment include creative intelligence, mastery of local planning policies, codes, and laws, along with research skills used in the service of promoting environmental protection and effective planning practices. Always even-handed, civil, and polite no matter how contentious the circumstance, Don has earned the respect and affection of all those fortunate to associate with him.

Don's life-long dedication to preserving Marin's natural environment continues to be a great gift to us all.

[1]Priscilla Bull and Susan Stompe have both served several terms as President of Marin Conservation League

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Board of Directors meetings are held at 7:00 PM on the 3rd Tuesday of the month at the MCL office and are open to the public.

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Issue Committee Meeting Schedule (subject to change—check website)

Land Use and Transportation:
1st Wed. of the month, 1:00 PM—3:00 PM

Parks and Open Space:
2nd Thurs. of the month, 3:00—5:00 PM

Climate Action Working Group:
3rd Fri. of the month, 9:00 AM—11:00 AM

Fire & the Environment Working Group:
2nd Mon. of the month, 3:00-5:00 PM

Agricultural Land Use: meets quarterly;
Water and Watersheds, North Marin Unit:
Check website for times and locations

Marin Conservation League was founded in 1934 to preserve, protect and enhance Marin County's natural assets. MCL is a non-profit 501(c)3 organization. All contributions and memberships are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

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Nominated for re-election to the MCL Board:

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Arlin Weinberger, San Rafael
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