Marin Conservation League NEWS

September - October 2008

MCL URGES A 'NO' VOTE ON SMART

In November 2006, Marin's voters rejected the proposal for a ¼ cent sales tax to support a Sonoma-Marin Area Rail Transit (SMART). In case you have missed media articles recently, SMART is again on the ballot this November as Measure Q. MCL opposed SMART in 2006 and it opposes SMART this year also.

Between 2006 and 2008, MCL's Transportation and Land Use Committees continued to closely follow the progress of the SMART proposal, reviewing and commenting on environmental studies, requesting financial and operational data, and conducting its own financial analysis. We found that the SMART project basically remained the same as proposed in 2006, except that startup would be delayed even further – until 2014. The current SMART proposal, like the one in 2006, provides only marginal and highly debatable environmental benefits that are not cost-effective.

The '08 SMART is basically unchanged from the '06 model!

Proponents of SMART claim three key benefits from the project:

- Reduced traffic in the 101 corridor, i.e., relief of traffic congestion, reduce time spent in commuting, and reduced vehicle miles traveled (VMT);
- Reduced greenhouse emissions and other air pollution; and
- Transit Oriented Development around stations (TOD) to minimize travel.

These are laudable benefits with which MCL agrees – but SMART's own studies fail to show whether they can all be accomplished by this particular train. MCL's analysis shows that each of these claims is either flawed, unrealistic, or can be achieved

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2008 a Busy Year for Parks and Open Space Committee

In the 1960's, the Marin Headlands very nearly became "Marincello," a 20,000 resident housing development *© iStockphoto.com/Anne Cutler*

We often hear that 85 percent of Marin County is already protected by a combination of federal, state, and locally-owned watersheds, parks, open space, and recreation areas, coupled with conservation easements and strict zoning laws in agricultural areas of the county. The implication is that Marin Conservation League's environmental advocacy is no longer needed because these lands can "take care of themselves." This idea could not be more wrong!

MCL's Parks and Open Space Committee has never been busier. In recent months it has worked on park and open space management plans, a proposed countywide tax measure, vegetation management and fire protection plans, invasive species removal, and related issues concerning public lands. Here are a few of the details:

Open Space Measures

Along with other interested stakeholders, MCL worked closely with the Marin Parks and Open Space District, Marin County Fire Department, and Marin Agricultural Land Trust (MALT) over the past months in developing the expenditure plan for a proposed ¼ cent sales tax ballot measure for parks and open space, fire protection, and agricultural land preservation. Unfortunately, the measure did not obtain the four votes needed from the Board of Supervisors to place it on the ballot this fall. Nonetheless, the Supervisors said they intended to bring this measure to the voters in the near future. MCL will continue to work vigorously in its support.

GGNRA/PRNS Plan Updates

MCL is taking a special interest in the current plan update process for both Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA) and the Point Reyes National Seashore (PRNS, or "Seashore"). MCL had an important role in the establishment of these parks and has long worked with park officials on management issues. MCL is now working on both updates and submitted a five-page letter of comment to the NPS regarding the Marin components of the proposed GGNRA General Management Plan, including Muir Woods National Monument.

Other well-known sites on which MCL commented include the Marin Headlands, Highway 1 and Slide Ranch, Tennessee Valley, and Ft. Cronkhite. In its letter, MCL urged that the plan focus on the "Preservation and Enjoyment of the Coastal Ecosystem Alternative." Of the alternatives being considered, this one best recognizes the public's interest in maintaining natural wildlands in close proximity to urban communities. It places the greatest emphasis on preserving and promoting the coastal ecosystem, while not excluding visitor and educational uses in less sensitive locations. (To learn more, a copy of

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A Message From the President:

On Taking Risks

You will read in this newsletter that the MCL Board of Directors voted on August 19th to reaffirm our opposition to SMART, now scheduled for the November ballot as Measure Q. As we did in 2006, we took this action in 2008 only after careful study and renewed debate, because the SMART proposal, in our view, provides little environmental benefit and, in fact, poses some environmental harm. We also identified a suite of non-rail alternatives that could achieve SMART's twin objectives of reducing traffic congestion on 101 and benefitting the environment at a fraction of the $1.4 billion projected for SMART. As in 2006, we also recognized that not all members of MCL would agree with the Board's action.

MCL's modus operandi has always been one of serious study and analysis, often over a period of years! When, as in this instance, MCL opposes an issue as ill-conceived, we generally offer well-studied alternatives. In dealing with an issue as emotionally charged as the SMART proposal has become, the MCL Board recognizes that we will not please all of our members – that our position may not be popular or even downright risky!

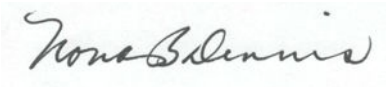
That is why I was struck by the recent comment of a local environmental icon: "How many years has it been since the (Marin Conservation) League has taken risks?" The context was an interview (Pacific Sun, April 4, 2008) in which he went on to say : "I remember Harold Gregg, head of the Marin Conservation League long ago; he went and laid (sic) down before logging trucks up on the North Ridge. It's a wonder he didn't get killed, 'cuz those big trucks don't stop easily going downhill. And by gosh, we established statewide forest policy by his initial act for the Marin Conservation League—getting out front and taking risks."

Well, MCL is not exactly lying down in front of a train called SMART, because that train won't leave the station until 2014, even if the voters approve the tax measure. But MCL is clearly "getting out front" and taking the risk of differing with popular opinion that continues with a fervor to represent SMART as environmental and traffic salvation.

Although our position on SMART may be risky and unpopular, MCL will continue to take risks where analysis and study indicate, as here, that it is the environmentally sound position to take. Unlike our friend's assessment of present day conservationists in the Pacific Sun interview, above, we recognize that there is more to the environmental movement than "wrapping our arms around a redwood tree or small parcel someplace . . .and forgetting the world."

MCL agrees that there is an urgent need to address green house emissions and combat climate change. However, there are far better ways to achieve these goals, as we suggest in this newsletter. The Marin Clean Energy proposal is another such opportunity; MCL is out in front promoting this initiative because it will be one of the most effective things Marin communities can do to combat climate change – with little or no increase in utility cost.

Although MCL opposes SMART, it will continue to support cost-effective, environmentally sound transportation improvements in Marin County! A train will not make our traffic problems go away.



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at significantly lower cost than SMART's $1.4 billion price tag. In some cases these benefits could be realized sooner than the five-and-a-half to six years it will take for SMART to begin service. (Note that the tax measure would have to be renewed in 20 years after only 14 ½ years of operation.)

The proponents' first two claims are linked. They argue that if you remove cars from the freeway, you reduce CO_2 (greenhouse gases, or GHG) emissions and other air pollutants. Our detailed review of the SMART proposal, including the EIR, shows that the $1.4 billion total expenditure would generate only a miniscule reduction in GHG emissions (approximately two-tenths of one percent of the total North Bay Regional GHG emissions – a factor of 0.002). Numerous other less-costly alternatives would yield even greater GHG reductions. SMART would eliminate only one car out a 100. Is this significant traffic relief on 101 during peak periods? There are a variety of practical tools for reducing traffic (see "smarter" alternatives, below, and Marin IJ, August 17, 2008: "Some real alternatives to SMART," by Supervisor Hal Brown) which could be funded by employers at a fraction of SMART's cost. Also, a bicycle/pedestrian path could be constructed along the railroad right-of-way, independent of SMART.

The third "benefit" claimed by SMART proponents, TOD, is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it makes sense to concentrate densities around public transit and traffic hubs, where residents have walking access to transportation. However, doing this can induce unwanted growth in areas of existing congestion. In Marin, where only about 15 percent of new residents in a TOD would use public transit, the remaining 85 percent would then compound the congestion problem. As a real benefit, however, the advantages of TOD are not dependent on the presence of train stations per se; it can occur as planned

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A seagull waits in the waves at Point Reyes National Seashore © *iStockphoto.com/Jerry Downs*

Be a Part of Our 75th Anniversary!

As part of our upcoming 75th anniversary celebration, MCL is seeking your photos and stories of Marin's "natural assets" for possible inclusion in a multi-media project. We are especially interested in photos of Marin's lands, open spaces and habitats taken in the past 25 - 30 years, and accompanying narratives. Email your submissions to mcl@marinconservationleague.org.

Meet Your MCL Board Members

Three of the 20 ***volunteers*** *working to make a difference!*

Betsy Bikle, Mill Valley. Betsy is President of the Mill Valley Stream-Keepers, whose mission is to protect and restore Mill Valley's watersheds. Betsy has been active in MCL for a number of years, first as a part-time staff member, then as a member of the Parks and Open Space and interim chair of the Creeks, Wetlands, and Watersheds Committees. Betsy has concentrated her efforts on watershed issues working with property owners, homeowner's associations, city employees, planning and council members, MCSTOPPP, and other friends of streams groups in the county and bay region. Betsy earned a B.A. in Botany and Bacteriology and a Master in Landscape Architecture with emphasis on regional planning.

Michelle Passero, Tamalpais Valley. Michelle is the Senior Climate Policy Advisor to The Nature Conservancy, California office. She has over 12 years of experience working in land conservation and environmental law. Michelle's prior professional work includes serving as a Business Development Executive for Eco-Securities, Director of Policy Initiatives for the Pacific Forest Trust and a contract attorney for The Natural Heritage Institute. Michelle holds an LL.M. in Sustainable International Development from the University of Washington, and a J.D. from the University of San Francisco. She is also an active member of the California State Bar and its Environmental Law Section.

Tim Rosenfeld, Mill Valley, Tim is a principal in HMW International, Inc., a consulting firm specializing in the development of sustainable energy policies and programs. Tim has worked for over 25 years in the energy efficiency and renewable energy field, first with the California Energy Commission and later developing wind farms. Tim currently directs the Marin Energy Management Team, providing comprehensive energy efficiency and renewable energy services to Marin's cities, schools and special districts. At MCL, Tim has taken an active role in developing nominating committee guidelines and in advising the Board on local water and energy initiatives and State legislation, such as the implementation of AB 32, California's major initiative for reducing greenhouse gases and curbing global warming.

Upcoming Events

CALIFORNIA COASTAL CLEANUP DAY, September 20. *Did you know that since 1985, volunteers have picked up over 1 million bottle caps and over 300,000 bottles from our shores? Join MCL members and many others at 9:00 a.m., Saturday, September 20 to help clean up Marin beaches and shorelines! The California Coastal Commission is joined by Whole Foods in sponsoring the 24th annual Coastal Cleanup Day. Bring the whole family and meet at the MCL office at 1623A Fifth St., San Rafael, for a full morning of satisfying work and camaraderie.*

MCL's Quarterly BUSINESS-ENVIRONMENT BREAKFAST will be held September 30 at 7:30 a.m. at the Embassy Suites. *The topic is Marin Clean Energy (MCE). A panel of California energy industry leaaders will explain the California power market and opportunities for renewable generation. Watch your mail for details.*

Also watch for news about our ***November BUSINESS-ENVIRONMENT BREAKFAST****: "A Post-Election Crystal Ball View of the Environment."*

Our ***ANNUAL HOLIDAY PARTY*** *is* ***December 5,*** *from 4:00 until 7:00 p.m. at Marin Conservation League. This festive open house will launch a year of 75th Anniversary events.*

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MCL's letter is posted at www.marinconservationleague.org)

The GGNRA and the National Park Service are now reviewing public comments and developing a revised set of plan alternatives, including a "Preferred Alternative." The Draft General Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will be available for review in late 2008 or early 2009. The League plans to follow this issue until its expected conclusion in the fall of 2009.

This fall and winter, MCL expects to receive the initial draft General Management Plan Update and the accompanying EIS for Point Reyes National Seashore and the Northern District of GGNRA, which abuts the Seashore. The League's Parks and Open Space Committee will study them and provide input into this important planning process.

Angel Island State Park

The Parks and Open Space Committee is also working on the rehabilitation of "Founders' Grove" on Angel Island. This small group of four trees (of which only one remains) was planted in 1974 above Ayala Cove to commemorate the 40th anniversary of MCL's founding and, specifically, the role played by four founders (including Caroline Livermore, for whom Mt. Livermore was named) in preventing Angel Island from being auctioned for private development. As a project for MCL's upcoming 75th anniversary, and with the State Park's support, the League will relocate and replant the grove, placing an interpretive sign to commemorate MCL's influence in promoting citizen stewardship of the environment.

Other Public Lands

MCL is tracking other planning processes on public lands in Marin County, such as Marin Municipal Water District's update of its 10-year-old Vegetation Management Plan. Ongoing public workshops have focused on specific removal strategies for invasive plant species. (For more information, visit www.marinwater.org). MCL is also following the evaluation of alternatives for improving and widening Sir Francis Drake Blvd. through Samuel P. Taylor State Park.

As you can see, there is much to do to protect Marin's public open space lands and parks. We welcome all members who are interested in helping to work on these issues with us.

Please call the MCL Office at 415-485-6257 to get involved.

Marin Conservation League
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Board of Directors meetings are held the third Tuesday of the month at 7:30 PM at 1623A Fifth Ave., San Rafael, and are open to all members.

Dru Parker, Operations Manager
Jessica Leah Grace, Operations Administrator

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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.

Monthly Committee Meeting Schedule (subject to change):
Land Use: 1st Wednesday of the month. 8:00 - 10:00 AM
Parks & Open Space: 2nd Thursday of the month 3:00 - 5:00 PM
Creeks, Watersheds, Wetlands: 4th Thursday of the month 10:30 AM - 12:30 PM
Transportation and **North Marin Unit**: Call 415-485-6257
All meetings are at 1623A Fifth Avenue, San Rafael (Fifth at F)

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infill wherever appropriate services and transportation coincide and where existing congestion would not be worsened. We don't need rail stations for this kind of "smart growth" planning.

Finally, as stated earlier, there are "smarter" alternatives which would reduce traffic and curb global warming. MCL recognizes that traffic and transportation operations in Marin County generate as much as 50 percent of the county's CO_2 emissions. Marin Conservation League believes that it is mandatory that Marin take local action to address this global concern. However, local measures to curb global warming must be practical and cost-effective –and soon! Marin can't wait five or six years for SMART to leave the station, nor rely on its extremely limited benefits. We believe that a wide range of cost-effective activities should be pursued immediately. In the current tight economy, with uncertain public funding, projects must be selected to achieve maximum results at lowest cost. Consistent with our pledge to pursue viable alternatives, MCL will support public investments in the following:

- A full range of transportation alternatives, including expanding bus systems, support for employer incentive programs, such as ride-sharing, telecommuting, and "Green Commutes" employing public transit;
- Development and local utilization of alternative fuel technologies, such as a program to support the use of plug-in hybrid vehicles and other low-emission vehicles;
- Program funding to support the rapid retirement of older less fuel-efficient vehicles;
- Improvements in auto, truck, and bus fuel efficiency to reduce fleet emissions;
- Planning for multi-faceted and comprehensive transportation solutions that are cost-effective and enhance the environment as well as our quality of life.

We look forward to your support of these important goals!