NEWS FROM MARIN CONSERVATION LEAGUE

January—February 2012

*Port Sonoma / Carneros Ranch Project*

# 20-year plan to elevate farm with dredge spoils

Dru Parker

*The 528-acre Carneros Ranch (left) lies across Highway 37 from the Port Sonoma Marina, on the Sonoma side of the Petaluma river bridge. The olive grove on the east side of the ranch has been elevated seven feet above sea level with dredge material.*

Port Sonoma Marina lies just east and south of the Highway 37 bridge over the Petaluma River that divides Marin from Sonoma County. It is surrounded by low-lying ranch lands and wetlands that make up the large complex of former tidelands in Marin, Sonoma, and Napa Counties that were diked off from San Pablo Bay many decades ago. As a consequence of diking, most of these lands have subsided below mean sea level (MSL).

In July 2011, the owners of Port Sonoma, without full environmental review, were granted a permit by Sonoma County to receive 20 million cubic yards of dredge materials from sites around San Francisco and San Pablo Bays over a 20-year period and transfer them to the 528-acre Lower Ranch (also known as the Carneros Ranch) immediately north of the port and Highway 37. As in the other diked lands, the elevation of Carneros Ranch currently is about minus 1-foot MSL.

## *Background*

Located between Highway 37 and San Pablo Bay, Port Sonoma has been the focus of controversy on more than one occasion as the owners have sought to enhance its economic value. In 2006, Port Sonoma began pumping mud from dredging operations in Bel Marin Keys, across the Petaluma River, onto the Carneros Ranch, over which the Sonoma Land Trust holds an agricultural conservation easement. Although the land owner claimed it was a "demonstration project," the Land Trust was justifiably concerned over the owner's future plans and the threat to its easement.

In 2006 the Land Trust, joined by the Coastal Conservancy and the California Council of Land Trusts, filed suit to enforce the terms of the easement. After three years of litigation, a settlement was reached which allowed the landowners to place dredge material on

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# Managing water supply in a changing climate

*By Ann Thomas*

MCL's Water and Watersheds Committee hosted a talk at its November meeting on climate change science and efforts by water utilities to prepare their systems for an uncertain future with warmer temperatures, rising ocean waters and more variable precipitation.

**David Behar**, Climate Program Director for the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission and staff chair for the national Water Utility Climate Alliance (WUCA), spoke about the wide range of global climate forecasts and models that utilities use to try to predict changes that may take place. He cautioned that the models can only predict probability, not what will actually happen, and should be used "with a clear eye that they are problematic."

WUCA comprises ten major water utility districts that deliver water to a combined 43 million customers. Members include the San Francisco PUC, Metropolitan

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## *A Message from the President*

Here we are, ready or not, into a New Year! 2012 will bring the 78th anniversary of the Marin Conservation League, the 75th anniversary of the Golden Gate Bridge, the 100th anniversaries of the Tamalpais Conservation Club and Marin Municipal Water District, and the 50th anniversary of Point Reyes National Seashore! Sounds like a year of parties and milestones.

It will also be a year of Environmental Impact Reports (EIRs) and Environmental Impact Statements (EISs, the federal version). In just the last few months we have received documents addressing the Hanna Ranch in Novato, the Grady Ranch LucasFilm facility in Lucas Valley, Gnoss Field Runway Extension, Americas Cup, extension of the Drakes Bay Oyster Company's Permit in Pt. Reyes National Seashore, and San Rafael Airport Recreational Facility, among others. Does this mean that the economy has improved and things are going to pick up steam after a couple years of relative quiet? Time will tell. In the meantime, volunteers are being sought to do all the reading and reporting on these projects. Drafting letters and testifying at hearings are also needed. This is a great pastime for people who are retired, or who like to learn things about the Marin environment. I have yet to read an EIR that didn't teach me something new.

*MCL is seeking volunteers to read EIRs and report on upcoming projects*

Occasionally an EIR or EIS will trigger debate about an issue that develops a life of its own. This was the case with Drakes Bay Oyster Company's permit extension. Friends and sometimes relatives have disagreed on the merits of terminating the oyster farm permit or allowing it to continue for another ten years. A number of scientific studies have been done on Drakes Estero over the last few years, with often conflicting information. The MCL "family" was similarly conflicted. MCL has for years supported wilderness in the Estero and the termination of the permit as scheduled in 2012, but when it came to making a recommendation to the Secretary of Interior, who now has the authority to make that decision, a majority of the Board of Directors supported extending the permit for ten years at the current footprint. It was noted that the stewardship of the Drakes Estero must be upheld. The reasons of the majority varied, but a dominant theme seemed to be that the estuary differs from a true wilderness with a road running through it and with active dairy ranches dominating the watershed. Individual members wrote personal letters reflecting their personal perspectives. I will say that I was warmly welcomed at a meeting in West Marin where Ralph Grossi was speaking on Food in our Future. Perhaps, as Michael Straus said in the Point Reyes Light, "My parents were ranchers and environmentalists. They saw beyond the "us versus them" mentality that ran and still runs rampant in our community and country. They knew, beyond a doubt, that the future of Marin would depend on our ability to work together, to innovate, and, above all, to find common ground."

Susan Stompe

# 680 Trail completed, open to hikers

Marin County Parks has completed construction of this new, nearly 3-mile long, multi-use trail linking the Loma Alta Open Space and the Terra Linda-Sleepy Hollow Divide. The trail is closed to bicycles and horses until after the rainy season.

Dru Parker

*Status Updates*

## Lucasfilm at Grady Ranch, Lucas Valley

A draft supplement (DSEIR) to the approved 1996 Final Environmental Impact Report for Grady Ranch/Big Rock Ranch Master Plan was released at the end of October and was the subject of a hearing before the County Planning Commission on December 12. A Skywalker Properties Ltd. (Lucasfilm) representative recounted the long history of planning for the Grady Ranch facility, including tours of the site and neighborhood meetings; and a dozen and a half residents of Lucas Valley and Marinwood neighborhoods asked for a more detailed analysis of impacts of the project.

The Commission hearing on the merits of the project is scheduled for February 27. At that time, the final SEIR will also come back for review and approval.

Dru Parker

*The Planning Commission will hear the merits of Skywalker Properties Ltd.'s proposed Grady Ranch project on February 27.*

Lucasfilm's much delayed plan to develop Grady Ranch in Lucas Valley is the second phase of the Master Plan approved in 1996 that also includes the now-completed facilities at Big Rock Ranch. The DSEIR evaluated a somewhat revised plan for Grady Ranch, compared to the Master Plan, which has reduced the main building to a 270,000 square-foot digital technology-based film production studio with two stages, offices, restaurant, general store, screening rooms, costume storage, dressing rooms, overnight accommodations for 20 employees, guest suites, a basement parking garage, and a 40,000 square-foot wine cave. Even reduced in size, the building footprint is the equivalent of one-and-a-half football fields, and its height is 55 feet, with two 85-foot towers. The development site is at the eastern end of Grady Ranch, directly adjacent to the western-most residential neighborhood in Lucas Valley. Of the 239 acres remaining after Lucas granted 800 acres to Marin County Parks, 52 are developable.

MCL's concerns focus on the massive reshaping of the landscape that includes excavating 240,000 cubic yards (c.y.) of soil, raising a 300+ foot knoll to screen the building from neighbors' views, and restoring Miller Creek and small tributaries by depositing 68,000 c.y. of fill to raise the creek bed by about seven feet. This contrasts with the Big Rock Ranch facility, which has a low profile that adapts to the existing landforms.

MCL found that the Draft SEIR failed to consider or mitigate a number of potentially significant impacts of the development. Among them are the construction-related impacts of rebuilding the creek on the downstream habitat of the threatened steelhead trout in Miller Creek, which the restoration is intended to enhance in the long-term. MCL will review the Final SEIR carefully when it becomes available to ensure that gaps in the environmental analysis have been filled.

## SB 375 Sustainable Communities Strategy Public Meeting in Marin

In the continuing effort to reach out to the public in the nine Bay Area Counties, the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) and Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) will host a second series of public meetings throughout the region to consider next steps in developing a Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS), pursuant to SB 375.

**The meeting in Marin is scheduled for January 17th at the Marin Center, 10 Avenue of the Flags, San Rafael, from 5:45 to 8:30 p.m.**

Last spring's public workshops focused on an "Initial Vision Scenario." This was the first step in planning for future land development and housing growth near transit directed toward reducing automotive greenhouse gas emissions. The focus of the upcoming January meetings will be on several alternative scenarios showing what the Bay Area could look like in 2040. These have been developed to show options and to consider tradeoffs that might guide transportation investment priorities.

Further information about the ongoing SCS process in the Bay Region can be found at onebayarea.org.

*The San Francisco Bay region*

## San Rafael Airport Recreational Facility

At its November 15, 2011, meeting the San Rafael Planning Commission delayed a decision on recommending certification

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*Events*

# MCL's Holiday Party

*Nearly a hundred MCL members and guests attended the annual holiday party on December 2nd and contributed a barrel of food (and cash) to the Marin Food Bank. Many thanks to holiday party Chairs Betsy Bikle and Amy Marr and all the MCL staff and board members for making this such a fun evening. Below: Door prize winner Pat Holden; Isabelle and Penelope Sonnet*

Dru Parker

Jana Haehl

# Walk Into (Conservation) History #10—Starkweather Shoreline Park, Jan. 21st

Jean Starkweather has devoted a large portion of her adult life to preserving the natural beauty of Marin County. "I was born busy," she says. That has been evident ever since she and her husband John moved to Marin County in 1956. First it was an outdoor nature education program for fifth and sixth graders. Then it was being a docent at Audubon Canyon Ranch, followed by leadership in the Marin Audubon Society, Marin Conservation League, and Save San Francisco Bay Association—and then involvement in the politics of protecting wetlands.

Her biggest wetlands victory, and still an ongoing struggle, was the planning for preservation of two miles of Bay shoreline extending east and south from the San Rafael Canal Area, now known as the Jean and John Starkweather Shoreline Park. As the former San Quentin Landfill (closed in 1987) and surrounding lands were gradually developed (e.g., for office buildings, residential neighborhoods, Home Depot and now the planned new Target), remaining ponds and wetlands were saved from being filled in and built on. In one project, five hundred thousand dollars were raised to purchase and rehabilitate ponds and replant the area around them. The ecosystem is re-establishing and bird habitat and wetland vegetation have made a comeback.

To document the bird use of these habitats and keep an eye on current conditions, a dedicated group of birders organized by Jean has conducted monthly morning surveys for 22 years along the length of the park trail.

*Jean Starkweather keeps the count at the November birder survey*

*photos by Dru Parker*

Of the three properties remaining for acquisition or rehabilitation, Jean's biggest wetland challenge is the preservation of an area along that shoreline called "Canalways." A Canalways development would destroy eighty-five acres of diked wetland. With a never-ending series of building plans, the land is still under private ownership, so remains unprotected. Conservation history is still being made!

Jean and others will lead a Walk into (Conservation) History along the Jean and John Starkweather Shoreline Park trail on January 21, 2012, from 9:30 to noon. Parking is along Canal Street, east of the Pickleweed Park Community Center. This walk is free and open to the public. Please visit www.marinconservationleague.org/events to pre-register.

*Events*

## Business-Environment Breakfast, Thursday, February 16, 7:30 AM

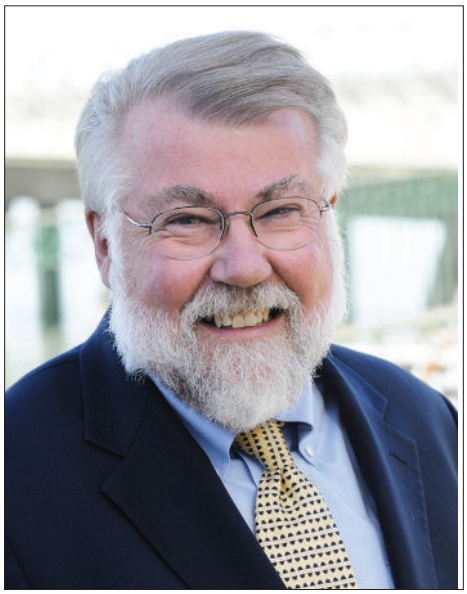
# WILL TRAVIS: An Integrated Regional Climate Strategy—An Impossible Dream?

On Thursday, February 16th from 7:30—9:00 AM, **Will Travis** will speak at MCL's Business-Environment Breakfast at the Embassy Suites in San Rafael, 101 McInnis Parkway.

Will recently retired from his post as the executive director of the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission, commonly called BCDC, which is the state agency that regulates development in the Bay and along its shoreline.

He has spent most of his career working for California state coastal management agencies. Will spearheaded the public acquisition of 10,000 acres of privately-owned salt ponds along the northern shoreline of San Francisco Bay so the ponds could be restored to coastal wetlands.

With 240 square miles of low-lying filled land along the Bay shoreline, Will has become a strong advocate for a regional strategy to address climate change and sea level rise in the Bay Area. At this event, he will review efforts by BCDC to build regional awareness of impending sea level rise and the need to develop adaptive strategies to protect vulnerable lowlands around the Bay. He will give special attention to



the North Bay and Marin County. There will be an opportunity for the audience to ask questions after the presentation.

Tickets are $25 for MCL members and $30 for non-members. Pre-registration is required, sign up at www.marinconservationleague.org/events, or mail in the registration form below.

## *Save the Date!*

**April 20, 2012**

Marin Conservation League's Annual Dinner with guest speaker

**Dr. Charles Lester**

On Friday, April 20, MCL returns to Homeward Bound's Key Room at Hamilton in South Novato for a third year.

Our honored speaker will be Dr. Charles Lester, the new Executive Director of the California Coastal Commission.

Invitations will be mailed and online registration opened in mid-February.

## REGISTRATION FORM Business—Environment Breakfast: Will Travis on Climate, February 16, 2012

Name(s) _____

Title/Org. _____

Street _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

❒ MCL member $25 ❒ Non-member $30 Total Due $ _____

❒ Check enclosed, payable to MCL ❒ Charge my Credit Card the amt. shown

card # _____

exp. date _____ name on card _____

card sec. code _____ signature _____

*Ticket price includes full breakfast buffet.*

*Pre-registration required by Feb. 8*

*Make checks payable to* **MCL** *or pay total due by credit card. Mail form to* **MCL, 1623-A Fifth Ave., San Rafael, CA 94901, 415-485-6257 or register online at www.marinconservationleague.org/events.**

*Refunds given only if the event is canceled.*

# Status Updates *from Page 3*

of the Final EIR on a $6-8 million indoor recreational facility at the San Rafael Airport off Smith Ranch Road.

The Final EIR for this proposal, which would construct an 85,700 square-foot building containing two soccer fields and a dance and gymnastics court, outdoor soccer field and parking for 284 cars, was reviewed closely by Marin Conservation League's Land Use Committee and a detailed comment letter was sent to the Commission. The central issues continue to be the potential impacts of the project on endangered species inhabiting Gallinas Creek, and interpretations of the covenant signed in 1983 that would limit uses on the site. **The Planning Commission will take up the Final EIR again at its January 10 meeting.**

## Golden Gate Baptist Seminary Master Plan Amendment

The County Planning Commission held a workshop meeting on December 19 to study the proposal by Golden Gate Baptist Seminary on Strawberry Peninsula to amend its campus Master Plan. The revised Master Plan would allow the Seminary to subdivide and build up to 93 net housing units, including 38 residences on visually prominent Seminary Point opposite Richardson Bay Bridge (pictured), and townhouses, condominiums and other faculty and student housing elsewhere on the campus. Some units would replace existing student housing.

As proposed, the plan would require an amendment to the Strawberry Community Plan and therefore could present significant planning issues. The outcome of the workshop could not be predicted at press time, but it seemed clear that the Seminary's proposal will also face major neighborhood opposition as well as planning obstacles.

## Local Coastal Program Update

The arduous three-year process of updating the 1980-81 Marin County Local Coastal Program (LCP) is winding down over the next two months! **The optimistic schedule calls for concluding hearings before the Planning Commission on January 9, 23, and February 13,** at which time planning staff hopes to get a recommendation from the Commission to take a final draft to the Board of Supervisors.

Page by page and word by word, staff and Commissioners have been crafting policy that will guide development and protection of coastal communities, recreation, agriculture, biological and water resources, cultural and scenic resources, environmental hazards and other aspects of Marin's coastal zone for the next twenty to thirty years.

Several organizations and individuals have tracked the process and influenced the direction of policy, including Environmental Action Committee of West Marin, MCL, Marin Audubon Society, and a coalition of individuals with a single agenda, which is to prevent industrial-scale wind energy installations in the coastal zone.

MCL continues to work to ensure strong protections for environmentally sensitive habitat areas such as streams and riparian corridors, wetlands, and habitats of endangered species, and to preserve the scenic beauty that makes the Marin coastal zone unique.

## Hanna Ranch

The Novato City Council approved the Hanna Ranch Development on December 13, as requested by the developer, Urban One of Los Angeles. The Hanna Ranch is the hill area south of Vintage Oaks shopping center. The plan includes two free-standing restaurants, a 116-room hotel and two commercial buildings.

In commenting on the project and the attendant environmental documents, MCL pointed out that the setbacks from the two ponded wetlands are inadequate and in conflict with the city General Plan which requires 50 feet from *top of bank*. The project proponent argued that because these ponds were man-made, the top of bank should be at the water's edge. They also encroach upon the county-owned Beverly Ehreth Ecological Preserve with an amphitheater and decks.

The Council also vacated a floating easement they held over the property originally created to enable Rowland Blvd. to connect to Highway 37. No reason was given other than it is "no longer needed". MCL objected to eliminating the potential to ever improve circulation and safety access to both Vintage Oaks and the Hanna Ranch.

*Dru Parker*

*38 homes are proposed for Seminary Point's tree-covered hill under the proposal.*

# Gnoss Field Proposes Runway Extension

The long-awaited environmental analysis of the County's proposal to extend the runway at Gnoss Field was finally released for public review in December after a three-year wait. MCL submitted extensive recommendations for the scope of the environmental analysis in August 2008. Because both the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and the County are required to fulfill their respective federal and California State environmental requirements, the report consists of two parallel, almost identical, volumes—a Draft Environmental Impact Report (Draft EIR), and a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (Draft EIS), plus a Technical Appendix. **The County Board of Supervisors will conduct a hearing on the documents on January 10, 2012, at 1:30 at the Civic Center.** Public comments can also be submitted to the County in writing, on or before February 6, 2012.

The proposal to extend the runway to the north by 1,100 feet beyond its present length of 3,300 feet has been in the Airport Master Plan since 1989. The stated need for the project is to allow existing aircraft to fly at design capacity when the air temperature is high (around 100 degrees F) and under other adverse weather conditions. The project also involves extending the adjacent taxiway and Runway Safety Areas. The extension will require realigning drainage channels and extending a levee to protect the runway and taxiway from flooding.

*MCL will be particularly concerned with the mitigation plan for loss of wetlands, and potential growth*

It is not surprising that a number of environmental issues examined in the draft documents stem from the airport's location in an area of diked former tidal marshlands. Gnoss Field lies within the original floodplain of the Petaluma River, whose wetlands comprise the largest remaining intact salt marsh system in the San Francisco Bay Region. The original airport dates from 1939, when a grass landing strip was built on the diked field. Since that time, as the airport has expanded to its current condition, levees and drainage channels with pumps have played an essential role in preventing the facilities from flooding.

*Gnoss Field Aerial photo © Bob Minkin, Gnoss Field Community Assn.*

The extension will require filling 74 acres of wetlands and about 2 ½ acres of channels. Various agencies, including the County, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and others will have to determine whether the proposed fill and mitigation plan, still to be developed, is consistent with wetland and waterway protection policies.

The Draft EIR has identified a number of areas of potential controversy that will be addressed during public review and may represent tradeoffs between different policy objectives:

- The proximity to Redwood Landfill and the potential for bird strikes
- Concerns of residents south of the airport about aircraft noise and overflights
- Possible increase in air contaminants and greenhouse gas emissions
- Potential for flooding from sea level rise due to climate change
- Construction noise and traffic concerns

The public has also expressed concerns over the potential for increased air traffic and larger planes to use the airport. Pilots who are familiar with the operational characteristics of the field assure that numerous obstacles such as the proximity of Mt. Burdell to the northwest, and the KCBS radio towers to the southeast make this growth unlikely. Others are not so certain and believe that larger aircraft will come with the extension.

*Dru Parker*

At this writing, MCL had not examined the documents in detail. We will be particularly concerned with the mitigation plan for loss of wetlands, which is likely to involve an off-site mitigation bank, a least preferred alternative. MCL will also analyze the growth potential that might result from the extension and associated impacts of noise and air quality.

# State Park Closures—Olompali and China Camp still under threat

Marin State Parks are looking for a solution to a dilemma. Four Marin state parks were on the list of 70 state parks scheduled for closure next July 1, which means there are only a few months left in which to act. Once a park closes it could take a year or more to be reopened. Personnel will have been reassigned, budgets set, equipment moved.

Two of Marin's four state parks have a one-year reprieve—they are being rescued by federal parks. Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA) is providing resources to keep Samuel P. Taylor open and Point Reyes National Seashore is assisting Tomales State Park.

However, Olompali State Historic Park and China Camp State Park are still on the closure list.

If closed, both parks will be left unguarded and unmaintained. The 700-acre Olompali, with its year-round stream, is little-visited now but was inhabited continuously from about 6,000 B.C. until the 1850s by native peoples. These people found the unique location within a bowl-shaped area bounded by Mount Burdell with its many streams and the expansive marsh and slough system of the Petaluma River to have ideal conditions for fishing, hunting, gathering and basket-weaving. Today, near the barn, visitors can find "Kitchen Rock," a large boulder used as a mortar in which the original inhabitants ground acorns and seeds into flour.

Native American tribal leader Camilo Ynitia, who was later granted the property by the Mexican government, constructed an adobe on the land in about 1837. This adobe dwelling was later protected by the Burdell family, who incorporated it into the structure of their 26-room mansion, which was severely damaged by fire in 1969. State Parks acquired the site in 1977 after intense grassroots organization by local preservationists and the County of Marin. Volunteers and park staff at Olompali have since reconstructed several Miwok dwellings and have created a native plant garden. Sections of the adobe are still protected, although deferred maintenance on all the historic buildings at the Park has taken its toll. Now, these decades of effort are threatened by park closures.

Conversely, China Camp State Park, which is the only California State Park with an historical Chinese fishing village museum, is heavily used by hikers, runners, picnickers, campers and mountain bikers from around the Bay region. The access road through the park belongs to the County of Marin and most users park along the roadside rather than in the fee parking lots, so even if the park were officially closed it would very likely continue to be used—but not patrolled, cleaned, or maintained. In the early 1970s, local neighborhood activists sought help from MCL to save China Camp from development by Gulf Oil and preserve this land for all state residents.

©Fred Davis/Flickr Creative Commons

*Above: The fire-damaged Burdell Mansion at Olompali State Historic Park. Below: Portions of the original adobe wall are now barely protected from the elements .*

©Andrew Ranta/Flickr Creative Commons

At the well-attended November meeting of the Marin Open Parks Coalition, hosted by Assemblymember Jared Huffman and Dr. Thomas Peters of the Marin Community Foundation, a number of potential park funding solutions were floated, such as regional vehicle fees, a ballot measure, state tax return donation boxes, charging for parking along the county road through China Camp, mountain bike fee passes, county-wide state park passes, and so on.

Danita Rodriguez, the Marin District Superintendent of California State Parks, said that operating Olompali only two days a week would cost $55,000 annually, while keeping the park open full-time would cost

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## Parks *from Page 8*

$265,000. If China Camp were to be kept open five days a week, the annual cost with one enforcement employee would be $355,000, while seven days would require two enforcement personnel and would run $595,500. Estimates include salaries for one seasonal and one maintenance employee for both scenarios, as well as operating expenses such as water service and trash collection.

### *What can you do?*

- **Join the effort to publicize the fact that these parks are closing.** Many people are not aware of the pending closures.
- **Lobby the County of Marin** and encourage its participation in keeping these two parks open.
- Participate in Marin State Parks Association efforts to inform residents and raise funds at **marinstateparks.org.**
- Follow efforts to support state parks at the California State Parks Foundation website, **savestateparks.org.**

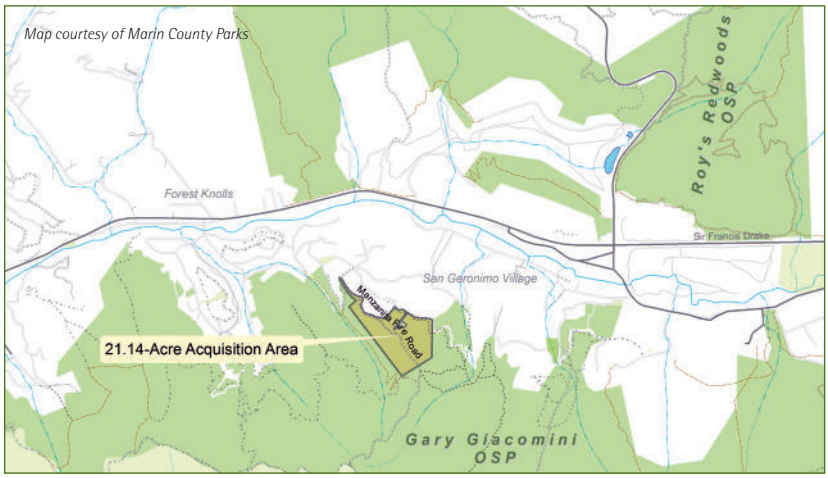
*©Rene Rivers/Flickr Creative Commons*

*Portrait of two children at the Chinese fishing village at China Camp State Park. The village dates to the 1880s and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.*

# Campaign to Secure Treasured San Geronimo Open Space

*By Ann Thomas*

The final leg of an effort to purchase a critical 22-acre habitat corridor and access trail leading to one of the San Geronimo Valley's most treasured open space areas is close to reaching its goal. The campaign to acquire the Manzanita Fire Road to the Spiral Circle has until August of this year in which to raise $100,000 needed to close the gap on the $650,000 purchase price.




The Marin County Parks Department this fall secured a year-long option to purchase the site, an undeveloped forest and chaparral habitat surrounded on three sides by the Giacomini Open Space Preserve. (See map) The Department is contributing $100,000 and the State Coastal Conservancy $450,000 toward its purchase. A group that includes the Marin Open Space Trust (MOST), San Geronimo Planning Group and San Geronimo Valley Land Trust is now working to raise the remainder with community contributions.

### *Habitat values*

The Manzanita site supports two rare plants, the Mt. Tamalpais and Bolinas manzanitas, and provides nesting habitat for the northern spotted owl. In addition, the property is an important piece of the San Geronimo Valley watershed, one of the last places along California's central coast to host a wild Coho salmon population. The purchase would allow the County to continue efforts to reduce the erosion and sedimentation into San Geronimo Creek, which smothers eggs of the endangered Coho. The Manzanita Fire Road is also a key access point to the Gary Giacomini Preserve. Long used by hikers, bicyclists and equestrians alike to reach what is known as the Spiral Circle, the site and road are beloved by Valley residents. As long as the road/trail remains under private ownership, there can be no guarantee of future access.

### *Development threats*

The "Montgomery property," as it is commonly known, has been subject to multiple development proposals dating from the early 20th century. In the 1980s there were plans for luxury estates as part of the Skye Ranch subdivision. In 1995, the county purchased much of Skye Ranch to create the 1,500-acre Giacomini Preserve, but this remainder parcel was retained by the owner. In recent years the property was proposed to be subdivided. With this purchase, subdivision will be prevented, public access will be assured in perpetuity, and the health of the creek can be restored.

The acquisition is supported by **Marin Conservation League, the California Native Plant Society, Marin Horse Council, Bay Area Ridge Trail Council, Marin County Bicycle Coalition, Salmon Protection and Watershed Network**, and many others.

### *How to help*

Contributions to purchase the Manzanita Fire Road Trail to the Spiral Circle are welcomed. Checks made out to "Marin Open Space Trust", earmarked for "Manzanita," should be mailed to **Marin Open Space Trust, P.O. Box 4133, San Rafael, CA 94913.**

# Water committee *from Page 1*

Water District of Southern California and San Diego County Water Authority, among others. WUCA's goal is to assemble information, analysis and forecasts sufficiently reliable to be the basis for capital investments needed to maintain systems and adapt to a changing climate. For further information on utilities' efforts, he recommended the WUCA website at www.wucaonline.org.

David Behar is also a member of the Marin Municipal Water District Board, but his discussion with the committee focused on broad climate issues.

## *Forecasting and models—uncertainties exist*

Behar expressed concern that California's official projection for sea level rise, "up to 55 inches by 2100", doesn't accurately portray the science behind the models. "Make no mistake," he stressed, "there is no disagreement on whether or not the world is warming and ocean levels are rising." However, he contends that it would be more accurate to say that sea level is estimated to rise from 21 to 55 inches by 2100, with wide variation in the projections of scientists wrestling with the issue.

The future, he added, can no longer be understood in the context of the past and there is incomplete understanding about how many factors affecting climate will evolve.

*Over the next 20 years, $335 billion will be needed to keep drinking water systems in good repair nationwide*

The sensitivity of the climate to carbon dioxide, for example, is not well understood, and a National Academy of Sciences climate study does not include land ice modeling because it is so complicated.

He listed three main uncertainties in climate projections:

- Emissions (how well will we get a handle on greenhouse gas emissions?)
- Internal variables (natural changes)
- Model uncertainty (the degree to which models can predict the future)

For the water utility industry, he said, this is a time for assessment and planning.

*David Behar* *MCL file photo by Tim Rosenfeld*

In particular, districts need information downscaled from global models to a watershed level in order to plan changes in reservoir operation, transportation and distribution systems that will be needed to meet users' needs. Downscaling from global climate models to a resolution that shows what is happening locally is needed because adaptation will take place on a regional level.

## *Rising waters and rising costs—where the rubber hits the road*

"Money is where the rubber hits the road for the water utility community," Behar said. Over the next 20 years, $335 billion will be needed to keep drinking water systems in good repair nationwide. Adapting systems to respond to climate change could potentially cost U.S. water utility ratepayers $1.7 to $2.2 trillion dollars between now and 2050.

His employer, the San Francisco PUC, will spend $40 to $60 million to boost its resiliency to backflow in anticipation of increased inundation from rising bay waters. Only six to ten inches are needed, he noted, to make the situation worse.

## *The Wild West of modeling—many initiatives, no coherence*

Behar listed numerous initiatives providing data and models on changing climate. These include the following: U.S. Fish and Wildlife's landscape conservation cooperatives, EPA's Climate Ready Utilities, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) climate services, the U.S. Global Change Research Program (a 13-agency effort), and the White House Office of Science and Technology's National Climate Assessment. He expressed some dismay about the lack of consistency among initiatives.

NOAA's Regional Integrated Science and Assessments (RISA) he said is "a good program." RISA supports research that addresses complex climate sensitive issues of concern to decision-makers and policy planners at regional levels.

"Ultimately," he said, "adaptation starts with science, or else you have mal-adaptation... If we can invest now in data storage and computing power we should do so."

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MCL's Water and Watersheds Committee currently meets on the fourth Thursday of the month at 4:30 PM in the MCL office. MCL members and guests are welcome.

**The next committee meeting, on January 26, 2012, will feature an update by Jack Curley, the county's project manager for Flood Control Zone 9, on the Ross Valley Flood Control and Watershed Program.**

This long-term $129 million plan to help control flooding and improve watershed function in the Ross Valley is partially funded by a storm drainage fee on property within the Flood Zone 9 district that was approved in 2007.

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*New Director Profile*

# David Schnapf

*This is the final installment of Marin Conservation League New Director Profiles for new Board Members elected in 2011. The next election will be held April 20, 2012.*

David Schnapf is a retired attorney with a lifelong interest in environmental issues. After graduating law school from the University of Washington, David handled land use issues in the Seattle area, successfully challenging the development of a major regional shopping center in an undeveloped agricultural valley north of Seattle.

David then joined the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in Washington, DC, where he worked on water pollution and hazardous waste regulation and enforcement, transferring to EPA's San Francisco "Region 9" in 1980. After leaving EPA, David served as the executive director of the Lawyers' Alliance for Nuclear Arms Control.

Afterwards, David practiced patent law until his retirement, representing high technology clients including manufacturers of pollution control and environmental monitoring equipment. During this time he was a partner at the New York-based international law firm, Coudert Brothers, and with the California-based Sheppard Mullin firm.

David and his wife Julie settled in Greenbrae in 1992. He enjoys hiking, biking, wildlife viewing and gardening.

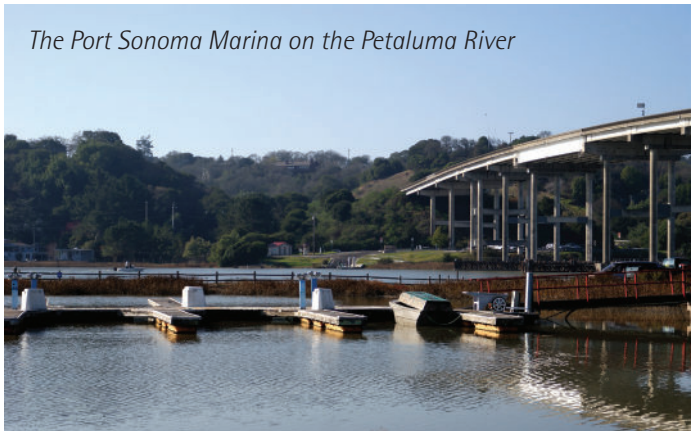
# Dredging *from Page 1*

the ranch according to strict protocols and performance standards, with the requirement that the affected farm land would remain in permanent agricultural production.

## *Impacts of the operation*

In granting Port Sonoma a permit to transfer the dredge materials, the Sonoma County Board of Zoning Adjustments (BZA) required a Mitigated Negative Declaration of Impact to be prepared, but did not require an Environmental Impact Report (EIR), even though the potential impacts of the project are substantial.

According to the permit issued by the BZA, the port will barge and truck over one million cubic yards of dredge spoils per year for the next 20 years, with the objective of raising the elevation of the ranch to about 7 feet above mean sea level. Although most of the dredged material will be shipped to Port Sonoma by barge and then pumped to the site, the permit would allow over 20 percent to be shipped by truck over local highways.



*The Port Sonoma Marina on the Petaluma River*

*Dru Parker*

*Over 20% of the dredge spoils would be trucked to the site on local highways*

Among other environmental concerns, the air quality impacts from the large number of diesel powered barges and trucks need to be evaluated, as do traffic impacts on Highway 37 from up to 7,400 annual dump truck trips. The large volume of barge traffic anticipated by the project also could impact the quality of Bay waters. In addition, if used as a dredge material transfer facility, the port, which is currently zoned for marina and visitor serving recreation, would become a *de facto* industrial facility. Raising the elevation of the ranch also presents a future threat to its continued use for agriculture and suggests a possible long-term plan to eventually convert the filled land to some other use, notwithstanding the agricultural easement and its enforcement.

Additionally, filling the land would preclude the option of ever restoring it to its historic, wetland condition.

## *Environmental opposition*

The Sonoma Group of the Sierra Club appealed the BZA decision to issue a permit decision without an EIR to the Sonoma Board of Supervisors. **The appeal is tentatively scheduled for January 17, 2012**.

In spite of Port Sonoma's proximity to Marin County across the Petaluma River, no Marin County entity received notice of the permit hearing. MCL learned about the project only recently and has participated in a series of meetings with the Sonoma Group Sierra Club, Marin Audubon Society, Black Point Improvement Club, Sonoma County Water Coalition, and others.

The appeal focuses on the need for an EIR to be prepared before a project of this magnitude can be permitted, given the potential for long-term significant impacts on Bay waters, air quality, transportation, Petaluma River wetlands in both Sonoma and Marin Counties, growth potential and other impacts, and the need for mitigation.

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*Board of Directors meetings are held the third Tuesday of the month at 7:30 PM and are open to the public.*

**Staff**:
Dru Parker, Operations Manager
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**Contact Information**
1623-A Fifth Avenue
San Rafael CA 94901
415.485.6257
www.marinconservationleague.org

**Committee Meeting Schedule**

*Land Use and Transportation:* 1st Wed. of the month, 9:00 - 11:00 AM

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

*Water and Watersheds:* 4th Thurs. of the month, 4:30 - 6:30 PM

*North Marin Unit (NMU), Climate Action:* Call 415.485.6257 or see our website for meeting details.

*Meetings (except for NMU) are at 1623-A Fifth Avenue, San Rafael*

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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