Marin Conservation League NEWS

MAY–JUNE 2004

WHERE WE STAND

Sales Tax Measure Needs More Work to Ease Transit Woes

Marin County is preparing to put a transportation funding measure on the November ballot, and MCL wants to make sure that if the measure passes, the money will be wisely spent, go toward easing traffic congestion, and improve public transit services.

The measure, a half-cent sales tax increase, is expected to raise $19 million a year. MCL believes that a sales tax measure is the best option for funding transportation projects, and we are pleased that the draft expenditure plan now includes our recommendations for providing some support for bus service between Marin and San Francisco and using performance measures to select projects.

Congestion Relief, Transit Alternatives Are Key

However, MCL remains concerned that the plan cites congestion relief as a goal only in relation to closing the San Rafael Gap and improving access to schools. We want the plan to identify congestion relief as a main goal and to include strategies for restoring transit alternatives for commuters.

Congestion relief also ranks high among Marin citizens: respondents to the Marin County Transportation Sales Tax Voter Survey, released in early April, said reducing traffic congestion along Highway 101 is their most important issue.

This points up the urgency of completing the San Rafael Gap closure as soon as possible to create a continuous HOV lane through the Highway 101 corridor. Until the Gap is closed, traffic congestion won't improve. And while the current draft expenditure plan allocates 9 percent of the new funds to the closure, that may not be enough to finish the project in a timely way. Officials say that even if the measure passes, the project won't be completed until 2008.

Along with transportation services and the Gap closure, the tax measure will fund infrastructure improvements such as roads, bike paths, and pedestrian paths (22 percent), as well as measures to improve school-related congestion (9 percent). These are important elements of the expenditure plan that will go to the voters in November.

Making Sure Marin Residents Get What They Vote For

MCL wants to make sure that an expenditure plan crafted after substantial public input and approved by voters can't be changed unless a majority of city councils and the Marin Board of Supervisors approve those changes.

MCL has also recommended to the Board and the Congestion Management Agency that any changes to strategic plans that identify specific projects funded by the sales tax measure must be approved by a majority of Marin's city councils and the County, representing at least 51 percent of the population.

continued on page 5

Tomales Plan Puts Park Under Stress

California's proposed general plan for Tomales Bay State Park stresses accommodating more visitors over conservation needs, according to MCL reviews of the plan and draft environmental impact report.

Of special concern for this environmentally sensitive area are proposals for expanding facilities at Heart's Desire Cove to allow 15 new sites for car camping, adding multiuse and connector trails to Point Reyes National Seashore lands, and adding recreational facilities to the already degraded Marconi Cove beachfront.

Dangers to Heart's Desire At Heart's Desire, MCL is worried that added traffic could seriously affect the nesting spotted owls in the area by reducing habitat and attracting predators such as ravens. More campsites will increase the risk of wildfire and detract from the experience for hike-in campers. On top of those problems, the cash-strapped state parks system—which has closed hike-in camping at Heart's Desire due to lack of funds—seems unlikely to be able to support more facilities.

"The Plan encourages increased visitor use beyond historic levels with a call to provide the public with high-use and

continued on page 5

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Environmental Heroes: MCL recognizes leaders, young activists..... 3

Meet the New Board: MCL elects board members with water use, planning experience..... 4

Nature Notes: Find favorite wildflowers and seldom-seen rarities on Marin's coastal prairie..... 4

Conservation Action: Updates on the San Rafael general plan, the Marin County plan, and open space..... 5

MCL BOARD 2004–2005

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

President
Jana Haehl
Corte Madera

First Vice President
Kathy Lowrey
Fairfax

Second Vice President
Nona Dennis
Mill Valley

Secretary
Susan Stompe
Novato

Treasurer
Ken Drexler
Fairfax

BOARD MEMBERS

Sarah Allen
Fairfax

Charles Brousse
Greenbrae

Catherine Caufield
Pt. Reyes Station

Kathy Cuneo
San Rafael

Don Dickenson
San Rafael

Robin Kohn Glazer
Mill Valley

Jim Goodwin
San Rafael

Randy Greenberg
Tiburon

Brannon Ketcham
Fairfax

Charles McGlashan
Mill Valley

Roger Roberts
San Rafael

Tim Rosenfeld
Mill Valley

Lawrence Smith
Nicasio

Jean Starkweather
San Rafael

David Weinsoff
Fairfax

From the Executive Director

MCL Strategic Plan Charts The Next Three Years

Dear members,

The Marin Conservation League's board of directors has put the finishing touches on our new strategic plan, which provides us with the tools to anticipate emerging issues and gives MCL the vision and organizational blueprint to strengthen our position as Marin County's environmental watchdog.

The plan was a major undertaking: months in the works and supported by a grant from the Marin Community Foundation, it will guide MCL's priorities and activities for the next three years.

Although our mission—to preserve, protect, and enhance the natural assets of Marin County—remains unchanged, the plan prescribes an ambitious set of goals that will make MCL Marin's environmental leader and a recognized authority on environmental policy.

MCL will accomplish its goals by adhering to these guiding principles:

- Give environmental concerns first priority.
- Be scientifically credible.
- Be creative, tenacious, and passionate.
- Encourage environmentally responsible behavior.
- Forge partnerships.
- Advocate aggressively for environmental interests.

Finally, the plan identifies MCL's goals in three key areas: protecting and enhancing Marin's natural assets; organizational development; and outreach, education, and marketing. Focusing on these areas will allow us to advance our agenda for land-use planning, natural resources protection, and resource conservation while developing the tools and strategies needed to strengthen and improve MCL's operations, membership support, and public outreach.

We'll be completing implementation details in the coming weeks, but it's already clear that the plan charts a course for MCL that ensures we'll achieve our mission and better serve you, our members.

If you'd like a copy of the plan, give me a call at (415) 485-6257 or drop me an e-mail (sfeierabend@marinconservationleague.org) and I'll be glad to send you one.

Sincerely,

J. Scott Feierabend
Executive Director

Annual Appeal

Help MCL Fight the Good Fight

MCL has set an ambitious agenda for protecting Marin's spectacular environment—the dramatic seashore, lush farmlands, wildflower-covered hillsides, and other natural wonders we all enjoy. Preserving these resources for everyone is a constant battle for MCL's volunteers and members—as you can see from the reports in this newsletter—and we need your help.

Each year we make a special appeal to members and supporters to provide an additional gift so that we have the resources necessary to fight the good fight. Our needs this year are as great as they have ever been, so watch for our appeal in the coming weeks. When it arrives, please give generously so we can continue to be Marin's environmental watchdog.

Thank you.

MCL Honors Young Activists, Dedicated Leaders

MCL presented its first Youth Awards for Environmental Leadership at its annual dinner April 2. The two winners, who share their thoughts below, were selected from a field of five outstanding student activists, and share with their fellow nominees—Lizzie Porter-Roth, a junior at the Marin Academy; Rachel Stern, a senior at Terra Linda High School; and Alanna Torres, a junior at Redwood High School—a deep concern for preserving and protecting Marin's natural assets. In its five established award categories, MCL also recognized a group of tireless leaders who've devoted many years to environmental work.

Youth Award Winner: Rachael DeWitt

Rachael, a junior at Sir Francis Drake High School, teaches young children about environmental issues, serves on the steering committee of the Environmental Education Council of Marin, and is active in the Environmental Youth Education Council of Marin.

How did you get involved? Being in Marin, it's all around you. My parents are environmentally conscious, I enjoy being in nature, and that got me to think about preserving it.

What keeps you going? There's plenty to get angry about. It's disturbing but it's also motivating. I can't picture myself being happy unless I'm close to the forests and the mountains—in nature. Just being outside keeps me motivated.

What's the most important environmental issue? The most important thing I see is the lack of public awareness and the lack of government initiative to do anything about it.

Youth Award Winner: Kimberly Smith

Kimberly, a senior at College of Marin, has been president of the college's Environmental Action Club for almost four years. Her activities have included bringing activist Julia Butterfly Hill to campus as part of a large-scale event to raise funds and awareness, and organizing a visit by Leopards Etc., which helps save endangered big cats.

How did you get involved? In school, in classes that identified the problems, I saw how people are consuming, consuming, consuming. That has guided me in wanting to help change things.

What keeps you going? Faith—faith that things will work out and people will change and realize what they're doing.

What's the most important environmental issue? Probably water. All the water is in serious trouble on this earth. It's polluted even in the most remote places.

Gordon Bennett, Inverness

The **Green Award for Environmental Leadership** went to Gordon Bennett for his unrelenting commitment to preservingMarinCounty's natural assets. As one of Marin's leading policy advocates, he has worked with Marin Conservation League, Golden Gate National Recreation Area/Point Reyes National Seashore Advisory Commission, Audubon Canyon Ranch, Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary, Sierra Club Executive Committee, and Environmental Action Committee of West Marin.

Priscilla Bull, Kentfield

Priscilla Bull received the **Ted Wellman Water Award** for her tireless efforts to safeguard Marin's water resources and promote sound conservation policy. An active MCL member since 1987, she served on the board for nearly 20 years and was president from 1995 to 1996. Her leadership of the Water Resources Committee kept MCL at the forefront of one of Marin's most pressing issues. And as one of the county's most respected advocates for water conservation, she played a key role in defeating the Russian River pipeline.

Gerald Meral, Inverness

Gerald Meral received the **Peter Behr Award for Lifetime Achievement** for his vision and activism as executive director of the Planning and Conservation League from 1983 to 2003, and his long record of success in protecting California's environment. He began his career working to protect water resources, and he continues to pursue that goal. He was a founder of Friends of the River, Tuolumne River Preservation Trust, Protect the American River Canyons, and Restore Hetch Hetchy. He sits on the boards of the Environmental Action Committee of West Marin, American Land Conservancy, Sierra Fund, and National Wildlife Federation, among others.

Steve McNamara, Mill Valley

Steve McNamara received the **John P. MacPhail Jr. Business Award** for exemplifying environmental sensitivity in business and improving communications between the environmental and business communities. He has been editor and publisher of the *Pacific Sun* for 38 years. During that time, the *Sun* has consistently provided perceptive coverage of environmental issues, and Steve's editorials support conservation as a key component of a strong economy. Among the causes he has championed are green building, energy efficiency, affordable housing, public transit, and environmentally sustainable land use.

Don Wilhelm, Novato

The **MCL Volunteer Award** went to Don Wilhelm, whose unflagging work keeps MCL on the front lines in our efforts to relieve transportation problems in environmentally sound ways. Don has generously given his time and effort to advance MCL's mission and chair the MCL Transportation Committee. As a respected public advocate with deep knowledge of the land-use and planning implications of transportation alternatives, he helps MCL understand complex and contentious issues.

New Board Members 2004–2006

Brannon Ketcham of Fairfax and Roger Roberts of San Rafael join MCL's board this year. They share their thoughts on environmental challenges below.

Ketcham, a third-generation Californian, has a master's degree in environmental management and spends his days on Point Reyes overseeing fisheries, water quality, wetlands, and water resource management and monitoring as a hydrologist for the National Park Service.

Roberts, a recently retired consultant on international trade and project finance, is an active member of MCL's Land Use Committee. He is an avid participant in San Rafael's planning process, and has served on the board of Marin Citizens for Energy Planning and as a Larkspur City Council member from 1976 to 1980.

Brannon Ketcham, Fairfax

What interests you about working with MCL?
I've been working at Point Reyes for the last seven years, so it is a great opportunity to get involved with the rest of the county. The other thing that intrigues me is MCL's history. There's something about the longevity of the organization and the original foresight that makes me want to contribute.

What do you bring to the organization?
I study water quality and fisheries issues, and I've worked a lot in restoration and protection of watersheds. I think having an understanding of the reality on the ground helps in addressing policy issues.

What's the biggest challenge for Marin?
Marin is one of those rare places where the huge issues have been dealt with—more than half the county is protected in some way. The big issue now is balancing resource needs with development pressures.

What keeps you going?
The work I do in fisheries—habitat protection for coho salmon and steelhead trout. It gets me out on weekends. Seriously, I try to understand the systems. What are the habitat needs of these fish and how do we protect them? It's trying to speak for those things that don't have their own voice.

Roger Roberts, San Rafael

What interests you about working with MCL?
I'm concerned about maintaining the quality of life in Marin County. There are lots of areas where MCL can be effective, and I'd like to be a part of that. I want to advance the protection of the environment, now and in the future.

What do you bring to the organization?
Transportation is a big issue, and I have a background in project finance, so I hope I may be some help in that arena. I'm just an ordinary citizen doing what I think is right.

What's the biggest challenge for Marin?
It is—and always has been—pressure from development. Lurking in the background is what to do about water and agriculture—there's the whole issue of maintaining water quality in western Marin.

What keeps you going?
I'm a practical person. I've always been concerned about sprawl and keeping Marin County what it is.

NATURE NOTES

Wildflowers Bloom on Coastal Prairie

By Kathy Cuneo

When you venture outdoors this spring and summer, make a point of visiting the grasslands along the ocean-facing slopes of the outer and middle coast ranges of Point Reyes and northwestern Marin.

You'll be rewarded with a look at coastal prairie areas rich in native turf and bunch grasses that mottle the landscape with a wonderful range of greens and grays and browns: Pacific hair grass (*Dechampsia caespitosa ssp. Holciformis*), California fescue (*Festuca californica*), Pacific reed grass (*Calamagrostis nutkaensis*) and California oat grass (*Danthonia californica*).

Wildflower Mosaic On clear days at this time of year, wildflowers form a mosaic of great beauty across these coastal prairie zones, from the ubiquitous blue and purple lupines, common California buttercup (*Ranunculus californicu*), and blue-eyed grass (*Sisyrinchium bellum*) to bluedicks and ookow (*Dichelostemma capitatum* and *congestum*), yellow-tinged larkspur (*Delphinium decorum*), butter-and-eggs (*Triphysaria eriantha ssp.rosea*), farewell-to-spring (*Clarkia amoena,* also called herald-of-summer) and footsteps-of-spring (*Sanicula actopoides*).

If you are very fortunate you may see two rare flowers on Point Reyes. In the grasslands, look for San Francisco owl's clover (*Triphysaria floribunda*), a member of the snapdragon family. The plant looks like its relative, butter-and-eggs, and has creamy white flowers with rounded lower lobes. You'll see Point Reyes checkerbloom (*Sidalcea calycosa ssp.rhizomata*), a wild hollyhock (or mallow), in swales and marshes. It has five petals in pale purple to white.

Fog Effect The rich, varied plant life of Marin's coastal prairie evolved and thrives because of fog and chilly, damp summer days. Plants lose less moisture from their leaves in this environment, and the fog creates a natural irrigation system as it collects on the plants and drips to the ground.

A long, moist growing season combined with plentiful organic material has fostered rich, deep soil. That not only gives west Marin its visual beauty, it also explains why the area has been a leading producer of dairy products from its earliest settlement.

Countywide Plan Lacks Protections

Adoption of Marin's new Countywide Plan is a year away, but now is the time to ensure that this vital blueprint protects and enhances the county's environmental resources.

MCL is concerned that the draft plan, released at the end of February, fails to adequately protect baylands, allows too much commercial development, and doesn't do enough to protect agricultural lands in western Marin. MCL's Land Use Committee is attending public workshops and hearings to press for revisions.

MCL wants the plan to include more of the St. Vincent's/Silveira properties in a baylands corridor, which would protect shoreline habitat, and to reduce the amount of new commercial development. The plan should also strongly address the development pressures that threaten western Marin farmlands.

"It's critical to get it right, because this is the document against which all the county land use and development policies have to be evaluated," says Kathy Lowrey, member of the Land Use Committee and MCL past president. The plan covers all unincorporated land in Marin—which means it applies to the vast majority of the county's land and affects about half the population—and will guide land use at least through 2020.

Public hearings before the Marin County Planning Commission are slated to continue through June; the document will then go back to county planners for revisions. Additional public hearings will be held this fall, and the plan is expected go to the Marin Board of Supervisors for approval in 2005. The draft plan is available at Marin libraries or www.co.marin.ca.us/depts/cd/main/comdev/advance/cwp/index.cfm.

MCL Supports Core Open Space Policy

MCL has sent detailed recommendations to the Marin County Open Space District aimed at ensuring that policy changes strengthen the backbone of its core mission to manage lands primarily for resource protection.

The District is seeking public input on its policies to see if, after 30 years, they need revising. (See the lead story in the February–March issue for details.) MCL supports policies such as restricting recreational developments, using several minor access points rather than concentrated trailheads, and prohibiting public parking on Open Space lands. MCL has asked the District to add policies on endangered species and nonnative plants and animals.

After analyzing the District's policy white papers, MCL concluded that the District has remained true to its mission to "enhance the quality of life in Marin through the acquisition, protection, and responsible stewardship of ridge lands, bay lands, and environmentally sensitive lands." The District has said this mission will guide future decisions, and 89 percent of Marin residents polled for a District survey agree with that direction.

"Given the pressures and changes in the county, that support is amazing," notes Jean Berensmeier, chair of MCL's Parks and Open Space Committee. "It's confirmation that the District is doing the right thing."

The policy review is expected to conclude at the end of this year. The remaining public workshops will be held May 12, June 9, and September 9. For meeting details or policy documents, go to www.co.marin.ca.us/depts/pk/main/mos_web/htdocs/index.html.

San Rafael Recognizes Wetlands' Value

MCL is pleased that San Rafael has recognized the importance of conserving the 85-acre Canalways wetlands—the largest privately owned portion of critical shoreline habitat remaining in the city—by identifying the site as a "high-value resource" for conservation in its draft general plan. The plan also makes it clear that the City Council is no longer interested in annexing the St. Vincent's/Silveira properties.

These moves, both strong MCL recommendations, will help preserve the Canalways wetlands and will allow the County of Marin to make planning decisions for the St. Vincent's/Silveiras properties. MCL will continue to press the city on other concerns, such as establishing a six-acre park at the end of Windward Way and appropriate use of a portion of the landfill site next to Home Depot.

The San Rafael Planning Commission will review recommended changes to the city's general plan at meetings May 25, June 22, and July 13, and is expected to forward the draft plan and related EIR to the City Council July 27. Public hearings are planned for the fall. For details, go to www.cityofsanrafael.org/generalplan.

Transit Tax

continued from page 1

The Board of Supervisors needs approval from more than half the county's 11 cities to place the measure on the ballot.

Advocacy Continues MCL will continue to press for improvements in the draft proposal at meetings of the Board of Supervisors, Marin Congestion Management Agency, and Marin Transit District.

To get a meeting schedule, a copy of the proposed expenditure plan, or the March voter survey results, go to www.marintraffic.org.

Tomales Bay

continued from page 1

high-cost activities that neither the Resource Code, the park landscape, nor the current state of the State Park Department's budget or personnel can sustain," states MCL in its March 12 comments to project manager Bob Hare.

MCL Recommends Among MCL's recommendations: reopen hike-in camping at Heart's Desire and reject proposals to build car camping facilities; keep Marconi Cove development at a minimum and do not permit rental facilities; allow only limited day-use parking; and do not add multiuse trails.

For more on the Tomales Bay State Park plan, go to www.parks.ca.gov/default.asp?page_id=470.

Committee Meetings

Meetings are held monthly at the MCL office in San Rafael.

Creeks, Wetlands & Watersheds
Meets third Thursday at 4 p.m.
Chair: Kathy Cuneo

Land Use
Meets first Wednesday at 8 a.m.
Chair: Don Dickenson

Parks & Open Space
Meets first Thursday at 3 p.m.
Chair: Jean Berensmeier

Transportation
Meets second Friday at 8 a.m.
Chair: Don Wilhelm

Water Resources
Meets third Thursday at noon
Chair: Tim Rosenfeld

Marin Conservation League
1623A Fifth Avenue
San Rafael, CA 94901

Marin Conservation League was founded in 1934 to preserve, protect, and enhance Marin County's natural assets.

Executive Director
Scott Feierabend

Office Manager
Patricia Sisco

Our board of directors and issue committees meet monthly. Meetings are open to the public. We welcome your membership and participation.

Contact us at:

Phone: (415) 485-6257
Fax: (415) 485-6259

mcl@marinconservationleague.org
www.marinconservationleague.org

NEWS
MAY –JUNE 2004

U.S. Postage Paid
Nonprofit Organization
Permit No. 151
San Rafael CA

Address Service Requested

Our Lasting Legacy

The Birth of an Advocate

By Jean Berensmeier

MCL was officially founded in 1934, but its origin can be traced to 1932 and a fortuitous convergence of determined women, a zoning plan, and a visionary consultant.

One of the women's favorite garden club luncheon topics was the impact the new Golden Gate Bridge would have on Marin. Knowing this, Albert Evers (husband of club regular Sepha Evers) asked if the group would help survey and map county districts for an emergency relief project to create a zoning ordinance.

They responded with an enthusiastic "yes!" The women called themselves the Marin Planning Survey Committee and set to work. They hired a consultant to produce the report—and its vision of recreation and preservation so impressed the women that they committed to implementing it.

To do justice to their endeavor, the women wanted a new name for their group that conveyed their covenant to preserve Marin's natural assets for all people, for all time. Thus, in 1934, they became the Marin Conservation League, and our advocacy work continues today in the spirit of those early activists.

CONSERVATION NEWS

Water Rates Rise

Marin's water use doubles during the summer, and those who use the most water are now paying far higher rates than those who use less under the Marin Municipal Water District's new rate structure.

As of January 1, the 1.25 percent of MMWD customers who use the most water—an average of 2,367 gallons per day—will see their bills rise more than $630 per two-month billing period. Most customers use an average of 221 gallons per day; their bills will increase by less than $5.

MMWD has a number of other programs designed to spur water conservation, including rebates for efficient washing machines, water-wise plants, and suggested watering schedules (half of summer water use is for irrigation). One incentive program helps organizations and schools replace natural turf fields with artificial surfaces—which saves nearly 1 million gallons of water per acre.

For details, go to www.marinwater.org/waterconservation.html.