Marin Conservation League

NEWS

MAY - JUNE 2005

Showdown over the Dunes at Dillon Beach
Shifting Sands – Shifting Times

The future of one of Marin County's most spectacular and environmentally sensitive natural systems – the Dunes at Dillon Beach – will soon be in the hands of the public. At stake is the largest unprotected dune system in central California, home to at least 14 rare, threatened and endangered species and only one of eight sites in North America where Pacific golden plovers overwinter. The 900-acre "Dunes" is a wetland paradise, with the richest collection of seasonal wetlands--known collectively as "dune slacks"--in central California. It is also the largest RV campground on the coast of California.

The Dunes system on Tomales Bay is one of Marin's most unique landscapes

In the coming weeks, the County of Marin will release a Draft Environmental Impact Report for public comment. At issue will be how well the Dunes are protected and what, if any, commercial activity will be permitted in this fragile ecosystem. MCL Board member Catherine Caufield, who has been watch-dogging this project for years, insists that, "Any Master Plan for the area must make the protection of this fragile ecosystem paramount."

Three of the most critical issues to be addressed in the Draft EIR are the level of camping to be allowed, protection of wetlands, and the impact of a proposed new leachfield on local groundwater and wetlands. Individually and cumulatively, the expanded activities will have significant adverse environmental impacts on the area's water quality, fish and wildlife resources and aesthetics. "MCL is primed for action," said President Jana Haehl, "and will mobilize its members around this issue the instant that the Draft EIR hits the streets." …cont. on page 2

From the Executive Director

Marin's Environmentalists
~ A Passionate and Caring Community ~

Dear Friends:

I recently represented the Marin Conservation League at the Marin Community Foundation's Annual Public meeting held at the Dance Palace in Pt. Reyes Station. While struck by the diversity of the participants, I was even more impressed by the strength of community and the passion that residents of West Marin hold for their air, land and water.

Time and again, speakers and audience members alike spoke to the importance of protecting West Marin's natural resources. Area farmers, business leaders, teachers, educators and land managers consistently stressed the need to promote environmentally sustainable practices and embrace a land ethic. That afternoon, as I drove back "over the Hill" to San Rafael and marveled at the expanse of lands protected in West Marin, I understood what fuels the love that folks have for this very special part of our County.

As you'll note in our lead story, "Showdown over the Dunes at Dillon Beach," we all have an opportunity - indeed a mandate - to help protect one of the most remarkable ecosystems in West Marin. Regardless where we live - Sausalito, Fairfax, Novato, Mill Valley, or San Rafael - we must unify our collective voices and speak out on behalf of the Dunes. Please take the time to learn more about this issue and take action!

Here's to enjoying a relaxed and rejuvenating summer - and I'll look forward to seeing you on July 23rd at our second annual Picnic on the Porch!

Sincerely,

J. Scott Feierabend
Executive Director

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MMWD Opens Spigot On Desalination Pilot Project
~~But Many Environmental Issues Remain "At Bay"~~

On June 9th, the Marin Municipal Water District's Seawater Desalination pilot plant went online. Located on the shores of the San Francisco Bay at the Marin Rod and Gun Club in San Rafael, the MMWD is evaluating desalinated Bay water as a source of supply, and is piloting the latest technology for nine months. The results of the pilot plant operations will be used by MMWD to refine the design requirements and costs of a full-scale desalination facility. The pilot plant will also provide additional data that would be included in any environmental impact report prepared for a desalination plant.

Despite glowing reports flowing from the MMWD, MCL's Water Resources Chair, Tim Rosenfeld, cautioned that, "Although the MMWD has made significant strides in its water conservation efforts, there is still a long way to go." There are also a number of outstanding environmental issues and information gaps that need to be filled before we see how desalination fits into the overall strategy of addressing Marin County's long-term water supply needs. "Only through the lens of a rational and scientifically credible EIR can we assess how a full scale desal plant will effect Marin's water quality, fish and wildlife resources and quantify the large amount of energy required to operate the system," Rosenfeld observed.

Storage tanks in the desalination process

The process used to convert Bay water uses an intake system that draws water from the San Francisco Bay and pumps it into the pilot plant. Small screen openings are designed to prevent fish and other marine life from entering. Bay water is then cleaned of silt and other particles before being processed by a reverse osmosis desalination system to remove salts and other dissolved impurities.

"The Marin Conservation League will be closely involved in the EIR process," Rosenfeld stressed, "and will alert its members with a call to action when the time comes to engage our activists in the public process." County residents can visit the pilot plant to learn more about the process and to taste the water by visiting www.marinwater.org.

Showdown
…Story continued from page 1

MCL is committed to working with Marin's other environmental organizations to ensure that the final Master Plan provides the greatest level of protection for the Dunes at Dillon Beach and its magnificent natural resources. Please keep an eye out in the coming weeks for our "Call To Action" on this important issue or call the office if you would like more information.

Mill Valley's Friends of Bayfront Meadows On The Move!

Two years ago, MCL partnered with Mill Valley's Friends of Bayfront Meadow to help launch the fledgling community group that is committed to preserving open space on the east side of Bayfront Park. MCL serves as FOBM's fiscal sponsor, and, as visitors to Bayfront Park will see, the organization is on the move! Through FOBM's efforts, the Mill Valley City Council designated seven acres in the area as "Bayfront Meadow" which is currently being transformed to a field of wild flowers that will be in full display next Spring! These improvements are being funded by a combination of donations to FOBM and in-kind services arranged by the Park staff. If you would like additional information on the project or care to donate to the effort, contact FOBM at tomallen2@comcast.net, or write to FOBM, P.O. Box 1253, Mill Valley, CA 94942.

Planning Efforts Underway For One of Marin's Natural Wonders
~~The Marin Islands National Wildlife Refuge~~

The management plan for the Marin Islands National Wildlife Refuge is being reviewed and updated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The Marin Conservation League will be participating in the formulation of this plan to ensure that it provides the highest level of protection and stewardship for the living resources of this unique ecosystem. We ask you to join us in this important work of helping protect and preserve Marin's natural assets.

Situated in San Pablo Bay, but a stone's throw from the Starkweather Shoreline Park in San Rafael, the Marin Islands NWR is home to the largest egret and heron colonies in northern California. Comprised of two small islands, the colonies nest on West Marin Island and are most active during the spring and summer months. The Refuge also provides habitat for many other resident and migratory songbirds, shorebirds and waterfowl.

West Marin Island's native buckeye and coast live oak stands provide the primary nesting area for the egret and heronry colony. Fortunately, non-native vegetation is sparse because there has been no recorded human activity on the Island. By contrast, the highly invasive French broom dominates East Marin Island and poses one of the greatest threats to existing native plant populations on that Island.

Refuge staff expect to release a Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment later this year. The Marin Conservation League will participate in this important process and hope you will join us to make sure that this natural treasure of East Marin is protected and preserved!

Tuesday, August 2nd

The Honorable Congresswoman Lynn Woolsey
6th Congressional District, U.S. Congress

Will speak about "Environmental Challenges in the Current Congress" at MCL's first Business Breakfast of 2005!!!

For full schedule and more information please turn to page 4

"Tracking" SMART
~~Jury Still Out On Proposed Rail Line~~

SMART – the **S**onoma **M**arin **A**rea **R**ail **T**ransit – is headed down the public process tracks this summer and coming to a station near you! SMART is the rail line being promoted as a remedy to the traffic congestion now plaguing the Highway 101 corridor from Santa Rosa to Sausalito.

Marin County officials have not yet taken a position on SMART and there is considerable skepticism by many County residents regarding the project's costs and its financial viability. Then there are the potential environmental impacts associated with siting the line along the abandoned rail right of way that parallels Highway 101, including filling wetlands and destruction of valuable baylands habitats.

According to MCL Transportation Committee Chair, Don Wilhelm, "The League is keeping its powder dry on SMART until release of the draft EIR and EIS later this year." So that MCL can make an informed and fact-based decision on the project, Wilhelm added, "It is critical that we first have full documentation of the potential environmental impacts associated with the rail lines."

MCL will keep its members closely advised as the public process - which promises to be lively and controversial - gains steam in the months ahead!

Thanks To Our Business Members

Each year, MCL recognizes its Business Members, whose generous contributions make possible so many of our programs and projects. Please join us in saying "thanks" to our Business Members and be sure to support these local merchants whenever possible.

Academy Studios
AIB Business Consulting, Inc.
Aramark Muir Woods
Bank of Marin
Bartlett Tree Experts
Bay Model – U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Bunker & Co.
California Alpine Club
California Native Plant Society of Marin
Circle Bank
Corte Madera Towing
Frank Howard Allen Realtors
Friends of the Eel River
Gardener's Guild, Inc.
Greenbridge Gas and Auto Service
LaFayette French Pastry
Marin County Farmers Market
Marin Fence Co.
McPhail, Inc.
Novato Toyota
Pastel Landscapes
Quarryhouse, Inc.
R & G Toyota
Seagate Properties, Inc.
Serenity Knolls
Steve Stein Financial Sector Analytics
Sun Power & Geo-thermal Energy Co.
Triplex Direct Marketing
Weir Andrewson Associates, Inc.

Committee Meetings

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

Land Use
Meets first Wednesday at 8 a.m.

Parks and Open Space Committee
Meets second Thursday at 4 p.m.

Transportation
Meets second Friday at 8:30 a.m.

Water Resources
Meets third Thursday at noon

Creeks, Wetlands & Watersheds
Meets third Thursday at 4 p.m.

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
J. Scott Feierabend

Office Supervisor
Lora Martens

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
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www.marinconservationleague.org

NEWS

MAY - JUNE 2005

Non Profit Organization
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Permit No. 151
San Rafael, CA

We are looking for volunteers! If you have free time and would like support MCL with more than a check, please contact Lora at lora@marinconservationleague.org. We would appreciate the help and would love to get to know you better!

Call for Email! MCL is trying to reduce its use of paper by increasing our electronic correspondence. If you would like to receive emails from MCL please send an email to mcl@marinconservationleague.org so we can add you to our database.

Community Calendar

MCL's Popular Business Breakfasts Are Cooking Again!

After taking a temporary breather, MCL's ever-popular Business Breakfasts are back again – bigger and better than ever! We've lined up an all-star list of speakers, beginning in August with the Honorable Congresswoman Lynn Woolsey – 6th Congressional District of California. Mark your calendars now so you won't miss a single Breakfast! For reservations or more information, please call Lora (415-485-6257). See you there!

Tuesday, August 2nd

The Honorable Congresswoman Lynn Woolsey
6th Congressional District, U.S. Congress

Environmental Challenges in the Current Congress

Wednesday, September 7th
Brian O'Neill
Superintendent, Golden Gate National Recreational Area
Five Reasons Why the Environmental and Business Communities Should Care About The West Marin's Federal Estate

Come celebrate summer at
Marin Conservation League's second annual

Picnic on the Porch

Saturday, July 23rd
4:00-7:00 pm

At MCL Office, corner of 5th and F Streets, in San Rafael
BBQ, Door Prizes, Raffle and Great Company!!

Questions, or to RSVP, please call Lora at 415-485-6257

Native Voices Institute presents

Earth As A Sacred Site

A weekend conference featuring speakers representing Coast Miwok and Kashaya Pomo

July 29-31, 2005
Dominican University
Enrollment $40 for weekend, includes meals
For further information call (415) 482-3545