

NEWS FROM MARIN CONSERVATION LEAGUE

To preserve, protect and enhance the natural assets of Marin in a changing environment.

Nov - Dec 2023



Celebrating 50 years of the Endangered Species Act

By Nona Dennis

Before the year 2023 closes, it is fitting that we take time to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Endangered Species Act (ESA, or ACT) signed into law on December 28, 1973. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries (NOAA Fisheries), the public trust agencies responsible for administering the ESA, have been celebrating this summit of conservation laws all year! In today's political climate, we might also celebrate a time when political parties could unite around a shared understanding of need.

Introduced to the Senate in June of 1973, the ESA passed by 92-0; two months later it was passed by the House, 390-12! In late December, Republican President Nixon came out of seclusion at his San Clemente retreat, during the throes of Watergate, to sign the Endangered Species Act before the end of the year. In a few words of praise, he congratulated Congress "for this important step in providing needed authority to protect an irreplaceable part of our national heritage—threatened wildlife."

The success of the ESA in the fifty years since turning that "important step" into a national and international conservation movement can be measured in a number of ways.

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Photo: Jessica Weinberg / Parks Conservancy

An urgent connection: A road, a water supply line, and the survival of coho salmon in Redwood Creek

By Terri Thomas and Nona Dennis

An opportunity to benefit a species in peril

This past winter, 2022-23, is the first on record in which there were no signs that coho salmon had spawned in Redwood Creek. Once abundant in Marin coastal streams, populations have dropped to just one percent of historic levels. Like Lagunitas Creek (Mt. Tam's primary water-producing watershed), the Redwood Creek watershed is also habitat for the endangered Central California Coast evolutionary significant unit (ESU) coho salmon whose populations have been in sharp decline throughout their range. Already burdened by impacts from human activities—urban development, logging, overfishing—coho salmon and their aquatic cohabitants now face extreme weather events, such as drought and flooding, due to a changing climate. Altered hydrology, reduced habitat complexity, and water diversions have all taken their toll. The

need to reverse the imperiled status of coho in Redwood Creek has become particularly urgent for their long-term survival!

The road

In October, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) presented a 30-percent design update on the long-planned FHWA and County of Marin project to rehabilitate the degraded Muir Woods (aka Frank Valley) Road. The road parallels Redwood Creek for 2.4 miles between Muir Woods National Monument and the CA State Route 1 intersection at Muir Beach. The project is designed to repair structural integrity, improve drainage, stabilize slopes, and widen and resurface the roadway to uniform width to improve safety. It also entails repairing and replacing malfunctioning culverts to reduce water quality impacts to Redwood Creek habitat

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President's Message

Taking action

I live in a delightful floating home on Richardson's Bay.

Each morning as I sit on my porch overlooking the water, I'm entertained by egrets fishing, pelican's diving, and seals barking. In January, herring return to the Bay to spawn on eelgrass and a circus ensues as marine mammals and flocks of bay birds follow, swirling and cawing and diving, in a kaleidoscope of dance between sky and sea.

Observing wildlife thrills me, yet I know of the threats that sea level rise (SLR) and anchoring in the bay pose to eelgrass, the foundation of this ecosystem. It is the eelgrass that provides a protective nursery for fish and shellfish. Pacific herring lay their eggs in eelgrass beds. Herring and their roe are two of the most important food sources for birds and marine mammals in the bay. The connection between eelgrass and herring is so entwined, that it is often called the eelgrass-herring ecosystem.

With knowing, comes responsibility to act. I act by going to meetings and researching how eelgrass can be included in SLR adaptation planning. I've become active in advocacy for eelgrass protection—showing up, speaking up, and getting involved makes a difference. Worrying about climate-related threats such as wildfire,

sea level rise, and drought, or human-caused threats, doesn't protect wildlife. Action does.

Rachel Carlson wrote of two roads, but not the roads described by Robert Frost:

We stand now where two roads diverge. But unlike the roads in Robert Frost's familiar poem, they are not equally fair. The road we have long been traveling is deceptively easy, a smooth superhighway on which we progress with great speed, but at its end lies disaster. The other fork of the road – the one less traveled by – offers our last, our only chance to reach a destination that assures the preservation of the earth.

Marin Conservation League's mission is to take the road that prioritizes preservation. Help us strengthen the voice for nature.

What inspires you? The beautiful, yet endangered Tiburon paintbrush, (only seven small populations occur in local serpentine bunchgrass communities, four of them in Marin) are threatened by non-native invasive species and off-trail recreation. Woodrats, a favorite prey of Marin's northern spotted owls, live in nests built over generations, some 60 years old. The nests need protection from accidental clearing during

vegetation removal for wildfire prevention. Native Olympia oysters, once common in San Francisco Bay, nearly disappeared due to over-harvesting and lack of suitable substrate. Now artificial reefs are creating new habitat attracting the native oysters back along Marin's Baylands. Together the reefs and the native oysters may slow sea level rise.

Protection of Marin's natural assets doesn't depend on one agency or one environmental group, but on many people speaking up and working together. That includes you!

In this newsletter, you will learn about the plight of coho in Redwood Creek and the most recent effort to increase their chances of survival, of 50 years of the Endangered Species Act and its importance to Marin, and about the "Actions" of MCL's Climate Action Working Group in mitigating greenhouse gas emissions—the causes of climate change. Finally, we hope you will join us as we begin our 90th year, and as we welcome Kate Shilvock, MCL's new Executive Director.

Terri Terri



Photo: Courtesy of Robert Hinz

Richardson Bay is home to wintering waterbirds and spawning Pacific herring that depend on its unique subtidal eelgrass beds.

Introducing MCL's Executive Director, Dr. Kate Shilcock

MCL is delighted to announce that we have a new Executive Director!

Dr. Kate Shilcock is a nonprofit executive, as well as a governance expert, seasoned fundraiser, and operations specialist. She brings 20+ years of experience as a community volunteer, and has proven leadership success in established and emerging organizations. One thing Kate is passionate about is ensuring that everyone has a seat at the table and that all voices are heard.

Dr. Shilcock holds a Bachelors in Sociology from Wake Forest University, a Masters in Non-profit Administration from the University of San Francisco, and a Doctorate in Organizational Change and Leadership from the University of Southern California.

President Terri Thomas recently introduced Kate by stating, "Kate brings the management skills to thrive, and a shared enthusiasm for

the mission. She will steer the organization to its next level of community impact. Kate has a proven track record of bringing teams and stakeholders together for action, making her uniquely prepared to lead MCL inclusively and effectively at this important moment as MCL begins its 90th year of milestone accomplishments."

Kate has expressed her enthusiasm in joining MCL, "As a long-time resident of Marin, I am thrilled at the potential Marin Conservation League has to deepen its connection to preserving and protecting the beauty of our shared community. In our changing world, enjoyment of the abundant natural assets around us and equitable conservation of our resources for future generations is a vision we can all share."

Dr. Shilcock lives in Novato with her husband and two children. She began her new role at MCL on November 1, and will soon become a familiar face and voice within the organization.

Please feel free to reach out and introduce yourself. Her email is kate@marinconservationleague.



An urgent connection...Redwood Creek *cont. from page 1*

and replacing the 80-year-old Muir Woods Road bridge. While the County owns the road and is partner in the project, eighty-nine percent of the project's funding is supported by a federal program that assists local transportation infrastructure impacted by activities on federal lands. The FHWA Project Manager announced that the project, first introduced in 2016, is now on track to begin construction in 2026, pending environmental review and final design.

Water supply

Independent of the road project, ongoing discussions have been seeking possible solutions to improve resiliency of the Muir Beach water supply system, both during the dry season and in anticipation of increasingly dry years. The small Muir Beach community of 430 is wholly dependent on water pumped from a well in the shallow groundwater of Redwood Creek. The seasonal low flows, when compounded by groundwater pumping, strongly impact creek flows for habitat. Beginning in the vicinity of the Muir Beach well near Santos Bridge, stream flows are reduced by more than half during dry months, especially in dry years, leaving

the downstream reach of Redwood Creek a disrupted series of disconnected pools. Without doubt this has been the major factor in the diminishing coho population.

An obvious solution to both water problems would be to extend a water supply pipeline from a connection at Muir Woods to Muir Beach. The pipeline would bring reliable, potable Marin Municipal Water District (MMWD) water to the Muir Beach community and could end years of pumping from the creek's shallow groundwater, at least during late summer-fall months or as deemed necessary to avoid interrupted streamflow, relieving significant stress on the aquatic habitat.

The project area lies within Supervisor Dennis Rodoni's District 4. The Supervisor is well aware of the environmental values of Redwood Creek and the need for the additional habitat improvements. He also has studied the vulnerabilities of the Muir Beach community's water system and has met quarterly with the coastal water district managers on their water supply. Since the FHWA project cannot shift from its current timeline, the Supervisor has acknowledged that the best time to put in a water supply pipeline would be

before the road is reconstructed in 2026. He has stated he believes that the pipeline is viable and has taken a first step by initiating a feasibility study in cooperation with Marin Water.

The question at hand: Can a pipeline be designed, approved, and installed in time to synchronize with the coming road project improvements? If not, the next opportunity to install a pipeline would not be for at least five years after the completion of the road improvements, according to FHWA construction rules. That's more than ten years into the future—much too late to rescue the coho!

A meeting of minds

It is a rare occasion that six public agencies, in this case those with shared interests in the two projects outlined above, come together to contribute their knowledge and ideas. That is what happened on October 12, when MCL convened a panel at its Parks and Open Space Committee meeting. Representatives of FHWA, Golden Gate National Recreational Area (GGNRA), Marin County, Marin Water (MMWD), California State Parks, and the Muir Beach Community Services District (MBCSD), considered the "case" for the

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An urgent connection: A road, a water supply line,

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water pipeline extension and how the project might be synchronized with the Muir Woods Road improvement project.

They discussed the environmental values at stake, the needs of the fish, the status of the scheduled road project, the needs of the Muir Beach community, and other factors that must be addressed in determining the feasibility of the pipeline, and furthermore, its timing relative to the road reconstruction. Momentum began and collaboration is accelerating, beginning with the feasibility study.

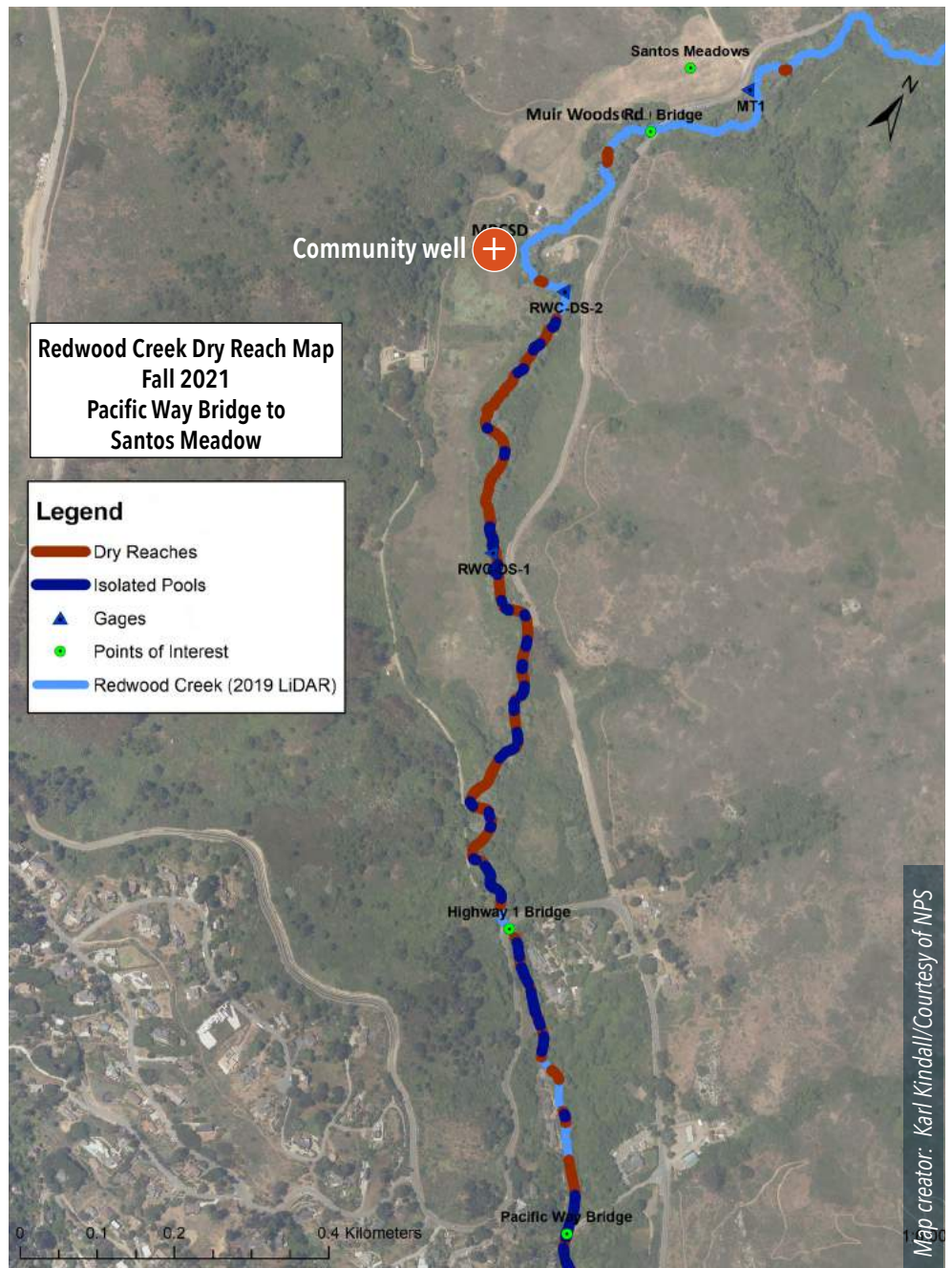
Factors under discussion

National values at stake

Originating in a nine square-mile watershed from the top of Mt. Tam's southern face, Redwood Creek and its main tributaries pass through chaparral, grasslands, woodlands, mixed-evergreen forest, the magnificent redwood groves of Muir Woods and the alder-willow riparian floodplain beyond, to eventually reach Big Lagoon at Muir Beach, a sand bar, and eventually the Pacific Ocean. Redwood Creek is the lifeblood of the watershed. No "natural asset" in Marin County is more significant than this complex of towering redwoods, spawning salmon, and spotted owls. The watershed has long been celebrated and recognized as an ecological haven, offering a primeval experience for our enjoyment in our own back yard, and visited by tourists from all over the world.

Coho at risk

The fate of the coho in Redwood Creek is dire. Millions of dollars have been invested over a span of decades through a collaboration of agencies and a non-profit – the National Park Service (NPS), Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy, California State Parks, Marin Water, One Tam, and the County – to restore the integrity of the ecosystem and the creek habitat. For twenty-five years, NPS teams, during winter months, have conducted weekly counts of redds (nests of salmon eggs), coho adults, and carcasses. Despite restoration efforts, the coho populations continue to decline, such that two of the three-year classes of returning salmon in



Below the vicinity of the Muir Beach well, NPS surveys (during the drought year Fall 2021) measured stream flows reduced by more than half, leaving the downstream reach of Redwood Creek a disrupted series of disconnected pools.

Redwood Creek are at risk of extirpation.

Withdrawal from shallow groundwater, together with seasonal low flows in the summer-fall, notably during drought years, are contributing factors. During the drought year 2021, NPS observers found most of the dry sections of Redwood Creek were located

downstream of the Muir Beach Community Services District's well. Fifty-six percent of the creek was dry below the Santos Bridge near the well, dividing the creek into a series of disconnected pools downstream, poor in water quality and oxygen-deficient. The isolated pools contained coho juveniles ill-prepared to survive adult life in

and the survival of coho salmon in Redwood Creek

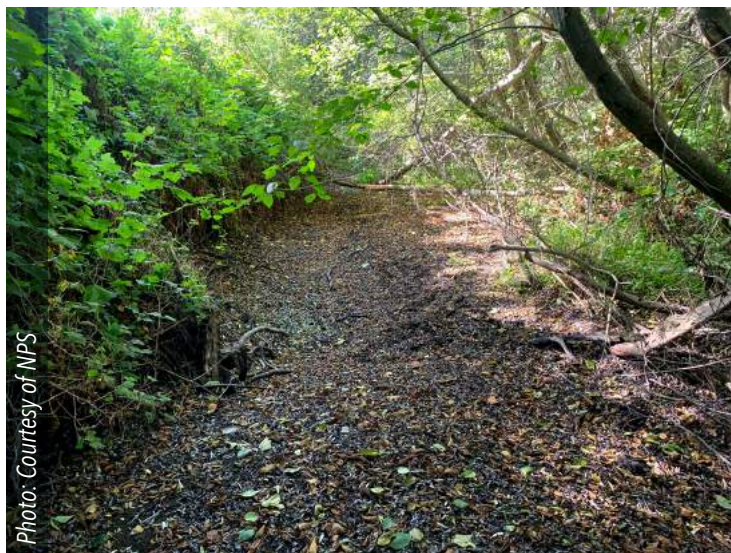


Photo: Courtesy of NPS

Dry stretch of Redwood Creek



Photo: Courtesy of NPS

Disconnected pool in Redwood Creek below Pacific Way bridge

the ocean and a return to spawn. Approximately 100 juveniles were rescued in buckets that year and brought upstream to Muir Woods. Further, a field study in 2023 identified that streamflow below MBCSD's well mirrors the well's pumping schedule. Both natural and human-caused drying of the creek reduces the creek's ability to support aquatic life.

Water for Muir Beach

Muir Beach is a small town that since the 1920's has depended on wells that draw from Redwood Creek's shallow groundwater or "underflow" as a source for both potable water and water for fire protection. The term "underflow" in California Water Code refers to water moving through the sands and gravel under or next to a stream channel. It's considered part of the stream and subject to the same riparian and appropriative rights that regulate rights to the stream itself. The MBCSD well's right to access the underflow is secured through a post-1914 appropriative permit from the California State Water Resources Control Board. MBCSD also owns a second well that is intermittently used as a backup source typically when water from the primary well is unavailable due to routine maintenance or repair.

In 2005, MBCSD's water rights permit required the preparation of an Adaptive

Management Plan (AMP) "to provide the District with a dependable water supply for municipal use while preserving instream flows necessary to protect threatened and endangered fisheries and other public trust resources in Redwood Creek." The CSD currently manages its own water system consisting of the two wells, pumps, pipeline, storage and distribution. The AMP established a limit of gallons that can be drawn per day from the wells; it added an additional storage tank; and implemented policies to conserve water and only pump at night. Importing water from Marin Water has been of interest to the community but not as a primary source—rather as a supplemental source for dry months and during drought. Questions of operation and cost-sharing are paramount. MBCSD could not fund a pipeline alone.

Marin Water

Although establishing an extension from the water supply pipeline at Muir Woods National Monument to the community of Muir Beach would solve streamflow problems, the obstacles of funding and timeline remain. Marin Water is participating in the feasibility study. Since Marin Water's service area ends near the top of Mt. Tam, questions that must be addressed for a pipeline to proceed include the following: Who would own the pipeline? Who would be

responsible for construction and operation of it? Who would pay Marin Water for water usage? A high-level cost estimate for the pipeline is nearly \$6 million; is funding available from resiliency infrastructure programs of federal agencies like the Bureau of Reclamation, the Army Corps of Engineers, or the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration?

Challenge and hope

The work to sequence these two projects is challenging. The Muir Woods Road improvement project's scope and budget, as well as approval to proceed beyond 30-percent design, have been established. A Draft Environmental Assessment/Initial Study is planned to be out for review in spring 2024. Because the water supply connection would have to occur before, not coincident with, road reconstruction, multi-jurisdictional support must continue now and momentum must build.

MCL is in full support of the pipeline project and will continue to advocate and help facilitate agency collaboration, as possible, to enable implementation before the road repair takes place. Recovery of the iconic Redwood Creek ecosystem and its populations of endangered coho and associated cohabitants will depend on it. 🌿



Photo: US Fish and Wildlife Service

At less than half-an-ounce in weight, the **Salt Marsh Harvest Mouse** (fondly known as "saltie") is adroit at perching on a branch of pickleweed. It was one of the first species listed as endangered in the U.S., primarily due to loss of its coastal and bay marsh habitat.

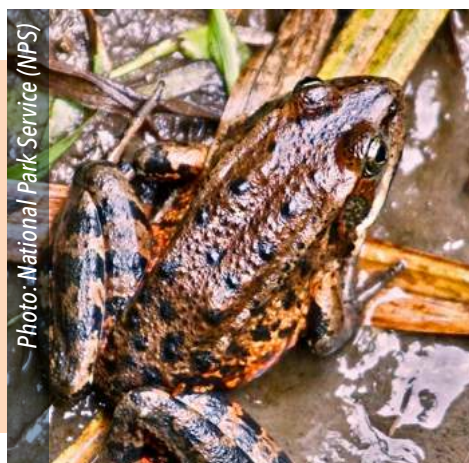


Photo: National Park Service (NPS)

Mt. Tam – notably the Redwood Creek watershed– is part of a core area identified by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for the recovery of the threatened **California Red-legged Frog**.

Almost 1,700 animals and plants in this country and just under 700 foreign species are protected (i.e., listed as threatened or endangered) under the ESA. At a minimum, 99 percent of these species have avoided becoming extinct since the law's enactment. More to the point, hundreds of species are now either stable or improving with protective action, and a hundred-plus species have been either delisted entirely due to their recovery, or downlisted from endangered to threatened as their populations approached recovery. Although the Act focuses on protecting individual species or subspecies (as well as distinct populations), its success should also be measured by its landscape-level protection of associations of species and their habitats, such as old-growth forests, serpentine barrens and grasslands, deserts, and riparian corridors.

These successes must be countered, of course, by the numbers of species whose protection came too late to avoid extinction, and by the hundreds of species that must wait in "extinction limbo" before being considered for protection—like the Bi-State sage-grouse, whose genetically distinct population on the border between California and Nevada has managed to survive ten years of politics before the USFWS agreed this year to reconsider listing on the basis of scientific evidence alone.

Another way of measuring success of the ESA is the diversity and power of partnerships in many locations that have crossed jurisdictional boundaries to join in concerted efforts to protect species—federal and state agencies working with local governments and sovereign

tribes, nonprofits, commercial enterprises, and private landowners, and scientists, conservationists, and ordinary people all dedicated to conserving species. Success must also be attributed to the power of litigation. The story of the ESA is rife with legal challenges by those who have claimed economic or other hardship. On the other hand, a veritable army of conservation lawyers are on the frontline, prodding agencies into faster action in listing an imperiled species or defending an agency's disputed critical habitat or recovery plan or, as in the case of the Bi-State sage-grouse, using the law as a tool to rescue a species from possible extinction due to shifting politics.

A capsule history of the ESA

Why did the need for better protection of the nation's wildlife become desperate by the 1960s and 1970s? One could point to the ignominious death of 29-year-old Martha, the last passenger pigeon who died in the Cincinnati Zoo in 1914, as a point that initiated the slow groundswell of public awareness of diminishing species over the next sixty years. Or it could have begun earlier with the Lacey Act in 1900, enacted at a time when the only protection of wildlife was in the states' hands. The Lacey Act was intended to outlaw interstate traffic in birds and other animals illegally killed in their state of origin, but even that could not protect the hundreds of thousands of water birds, at one point more than 50 target species like the brown pelican and egret, that were being destroyed by the plumage trade. Numerous attempts were made to stop that wholesale slaughter, notably

by determined women boycotting the feathered hat industry, before the landmark Migratory Bird Treaty Act was signed in 1918. The Bald Eagle Act was passed in 1940 (extended in 1962 to cover golden eagles) in an attempt to save the nation's revered symbol from being hunted to extinction by sportsmen, taxidermists, and farmers. (The bald eagle, after years of protection, has made a successful comeback across the country.)

For much of the 20th century, the states' responsibility for protecting local wildlife left the federal government to play a secondary role in regulating only the transport of live or dead animals across state lines. Congress did not take its first major step to protect imperiled species at a national level until 1966, when it passed the Endangered Species Preservation Act, requiring Congress to list and publish species to be protected. Only native fish and wildlife were included. Over the next seven years, it was superseded by two similar statutes and finally replaced by the 1973 ESA, which itself was amended numerous times. Plants and invertebrates were added. A definitive provision was still to come in a Supreme Court ruling in 1979.

Concurrent with the 1973 ESA debates, the survival of an "obscure fish"—the snail darter—was being pitted against the fate of the almost-complete, \$100 million dam across the Little Tennessee River to create a vast reservoir. The image of the snail darter has been lost in time; it was listed as "endangered" under the new ESA—that is, until more populations were found in other states and other rivers, thus reducing its status to "threatened." The dam was delayed but eventually completed under

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the Endangered Species Act

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Photo: NPS / Jessica Weinberg McClosky



Look among the bush lupines on the Marin Headlands between March and early July and you may be rewarded by a sighting of the endangered **Mission Blue Butterfly**.

Photo: Courtesy of Samuel Lei



The endangered **Tiburon Paintbrush** has only seven known populations; all occur in the Bay Area, three on the Tiburon peninsula within Ring Mountain Open Space Preserve.

a "hardship" exemption in 1979. The Supreme Court's decision on the *Tennessee v. Hill* case made an indelible imprint on the law however—conservation was not to be sacrificed for economic or other goals, no matter how worthy. The permanent legacy of the Hill decision was the command to "halt and reverse the trend toward species' extinction, whatever the cost." Other sections of the Act later opened the door for ameliorating considerations such as economic hardship, and now science alone is applied only in the initial listing of a species as threatened or endangered.

What about the northern spotted owl?

It would be a grave omission not to mention how the northern spotted owl (spotted owl), one of Marin County's most celebrated protected species, fits into this history. The Pacific Northwest timber wars— which occupied several decades of the past century but are seldom thought of now—centered on the impacts of logging old-growth forest on the northern spotted owl's habitat. Long before those years, however, the spotted owl had been given limited protection (in 1938) under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918. In the 1970s, Oregon acknowledged the regional nature of the spotted owl's tenuous condition and formed an interagency endangered species task force. That marked the beginning of years of intense scrutiny of the spotted owl—its habitat requirements for surviving, and its place in the future disposition of millions of acres of old-growth and successional forest habitat. During those years, the Forest Service filled thousands of pages of environmental impact statements

(EISs) that examined alternative forest management plans, trying to retain sufficient habitat for the owl against commercial timber demands; residents of the region protested against dire economic hardship as lumber mills closed; conservationists came from afar to block continued timber cutting; and lawsuits were filed against FWS for its delays in considering the spotted owl for listing under the ESA. The spotted owl simply held out through the decades, its numbers plummeting as forests were being logged at the rate of 1,000 acres a day, to finally be listed as threatened in 1990.

Photo: Courtesy of Carlos Porriata



The Marin population of the threatened Northern Spotted Owl is relatively stable in its favored forest habitats, threatened less by human disturbance these days than by competition from the larger, more aggressive barred owl.

and California) region. Conservationists rightly observed that the spotted owl had served as a valuable indicator species for this diminishing habitat, assuring protection also for the marbled murrelet, salmon, and many other species. Fast forward to today—even after those intense years, success of the threatened northern spotted owl has to be qualified. The northern populations of spotted owl continue to fall at the rate of about 3% per year despite ESA protection. These days it is not just logging on private land that is to blame; rather it is the fateful competition from the larger and more aggressive barred owl, a migrant from the east coast that is now threatening much of the spotted owl's northern range.

Fortunately, Marin's population of northern spotted owl is not threatened by logging. As a listed species, it is protected from most human disruptions, monitored regularly throughout the county by both agencies and nonprofits, and valued by residents. Populations remain stable—that is, until the barred owl makes its next

move, even as agencies are preparing for that eventuality. With some unease then, we can celebrate 50 years of ESA protection and continue to tend all of Marin County's beloved listed plants, fish, and wildlife to ensure their continued survival and, where possible, their eventual recovery to self-sustaining populations. 🌱

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Climate Action Working Group: ADVOCACY TO SLOW CLIMATE CHANGE

by Robert Miller, CAWG chair

Ever wonder what MCL's Climate Action Working Group (CAWG) is all about? Here is the what and the why.

The purpose of the Marin Conservation League (MCL) Climate Action Working Group (CAWG) is to advocate for faster greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduction and carbon removal to slow climate change. Climate change damages biodiversity, both in Marin and globally, and is the single biggest health threat to humanity. CAWG develops and advocates for positions on innovative, emerging technologies and policies that can accelerate electrification, decarbonize the grid, and remove carbon from the atmosphere. We advocate to decision makers and their staffs in local jurisdictions, in county and regional agencies, and to our state and federal representatives. Other MCL committees advocate for policies to adapt to, and prepare for, climate change.

While climate change is a global problem, MCL as a local organization aims to lever Marin's advantages—income, education, progressive politics, history of environmental leadership—to promote innovative technologies and policies locally, then spread them elsewhere.

CAWG's goals

1. Educate to motivate action. As we develop positions and advocate for them, we educate ourselves, MCL members, the public, and public policy decision makers and their staffs about:

- a wide range of technology, policy, and regulatory developments and options,
- the state of climate change,
- what models say about likely outcomes for global warming, and
- how weather is reacting to incremental warming

2. Electrify everything. We advocate for faster:

- building electrification, especially using heat pump technology, and
- vehicle electrification, especially for electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure and for increased EV options in multi-family units with low- and moderate-income residents, and for bidirectional charging.

3. Decarbonize electricity. We advocate for:

- 24/7 renewable energy: Match renewable energy to electricity load on an hourly basis.

- virtual power plants: Shift when electricity is used, increase energy efficiency, and expand local commercial and residential solar and batteries as power sources to create a cheaper, more resilient substitute for utility-scale generation.

- increased electricity transmission and distribution capacity: Responsibly expand access to clean energy, including by using distributed energy resources.

- alternative forms of renewable energy: Increase research and development for engineered geothermal, long duration storage, green hydrogen, and other forms.

- establish a tax on carbon that's effective and equitable.

4. Remove carbon from the atmosphere.

Fund research and development of technologies and policies for natural and engineered solutions that remove and sequester carbon.

To develop policies, sub-groups of CAWG members engage in research, discuss positions, and draft and carefully vet advocacy letters that will go to decision makers that MCL aims to influence. MCL's Board President or MCL's Board of Directors reviews and must approve all positions.

To influence policy, CAWG members advocate in letters and discussions, through participation at public meetings, and via MCL outreach and social media to:

- elected representatives and their staffs (local, state, and federal) to support them in taking bold action on climate change,
- county and regional agency managers, staff and boards, especially MCE Clean Energy, Transportation Authority of Marin, and County and local jurisdiction sustainability teams,
- MCL members and the public,
- other Marin climate advocacy organizations.

CAWG's recent actions

- **Building electrification:** MCL sent four letters to Marin jurisdictions since July 2022; [we propose an ambitious and integrated countywide plan to decarbonize buildings.](#)
- **Electric vehicles:** In a letter to Transportation Authority of Marin (TAM), [MCL stated that TAM needs to do much more to prioritize greenhouse gas emissions reduction,](#) which is part of TAM's mission

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- **Carbon removal from the atmosphere:** An MCL letter to the California Air Resources Board (CARB) warned that its proposed greenhouse gas reduction scoping plan relied heavily on unproven, high-cost methods of carbon removal.

JOIN US

MCL's CAWG meets every 3rd Wednesday of the month, 10 am-noon. Recent topics and speakers that address CAWG's priority issues include:

- **Educate to motivate action:** Speakers on GHG emissions reduction legislation and regulation included Representative Jared Huffman and Assemblymember Damon Connolly; Marin County Supervisors Mary Sackett and Eric Lucan discussed local decisions.
- **Electrify everything:** Speakers addressed countywide building electrification and EV acceleration plans, and vehicle electrification options for lower-income groups.
- **Decarbonize the grid:** Speakers addressed 24/7 renewable energy, virtual power plants (including the role of MCE's FLEXMarket & EV load-shifting programs), vehicle-to-grid integration, and off-shore wind energy.
- **Carbon removal from the atmosphere:** Speakers described technology and policy options, both natural and engineered.

Because renewable energy issues are many and complicated, **MCL is seeking additional people interested in helping us add to our research and advocacy** on slowing climate change. For more information on our meetings and how you can become involved in our work, contact mcl@marinconservationleague.org or robertmiller454@gmail.com

Jean Berensmeier's enduring legacy in San Geronimo Valley

An update on Wilderness Way and the SGV Community Center

by Paul Berensmeier

Wilderness Way, the beginning

Wilderness Way was originally the Berensmeier's name for fun family outdoor projects in the San Geronimo Valley. "We grew up together", Grandpa Berensmeier proudly said. Learning outdoors gave the family a great perspective of the valuable role nature plays in a child's upbringing. This fostered a desire to share nature with the children of the Valley in order to promote healthy individuals and future stewards of the land. A family of teachers at college level, Jean (Physical Education), Lee (Art), and Paul (Track & Field), the Berensmeier's voluntarily taught 158 class meetings in environmental education in 2000. Their program included activities and projects taking children outdoors and bringing the outdoors in. Children, parents, and teachers loved it, so Wilderness Way incorporated in 2001, creating a specific environmental education program appropriate for the needs of children in a highly technological world.

Wilderness Way today

Within a week of Jean's passing (March 15, 2023), Wilderness Way was approached by the Coast Miwok Tribal Council of Marin (Huukuiko). Their dream: create a Coast Miwok Living Cultural Center at Wilderness Way. Synchronicity! Jean's dream has always been to work hand in hand with the native peoples of this land and create the space and opportunity for them to teach our children (and adults!) about their "native ways" that have worked so



successfully since time immemorial. WW is honored to support the Miwok in creating a Living Cultural Center here in the Valley! We look forward to continuing "Jean's Legacy" in such an honorable way. Jean, thank you for Wilderness Way and your continued guidance with the Miwok (we know you had something to do with this!). Aho!

San Geronimo Valley Community Center

The Community Center, next to Lagunitas School, has worked intimately with the children, expanding daycare, after school classes, and teen programs of such variety that they have been recognized nationally as a state-of-the-art community-based school. This unique relationship of the school and Community Center has been used as a successful template nationwide. The school has now been renamed the Lagunitas "Community" School. Jean Berensmeier founded the Community Center in 1969. She would be so proud! So, her legacy is being carried on not only through Wilderness Way, but also the Community Center. Interesting how both play such intimate roles in Valley children's education, which was foremost in Jean's heart. Thank you, Jean! To learn more about Jean Berensmeier's life and legacy, see MCL's [May-June newsletter](#). 🌿

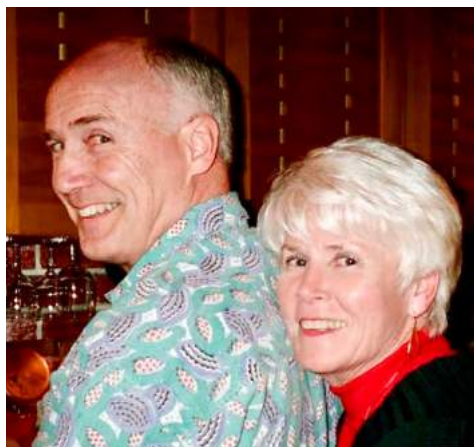
TIME TO RENEW YOUR MCL MEMBERSHIP!

Help us ensure the preservation, protection, and enhancement of Marin's natural assets for generations to come.

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IN MEMORIAM: Friends of MCL, friends of the environment

Marin County recently lost three highly respected environmental leaders. Their accomplishments were many— for the environment, and for their communities. As we mourn their passing, we share deep appreciation for their commitments to conservation and for their influence in preserving Marin's natural world. They were our friends and our mentors. They led and inspired us, each in their own way.



Roger and Dee Roberts

Roger Roberts

Contributions by Jana Haehl and Erik Krumrey

where they lived quite happily until Dee unexpectedly passed away, in 2019.

Roger was an active member and leader of MCL for more than two decades. He served on MCL's Board for thirteen years, three of those as President. His long commitment to MCL was evident through his generosity and through the ongoing attention he gave to MCL's work which included his focus on water issues. He furthered MCL's goals through his connections with national and other local environmental organizations, and through individuals who depended on Roger as a source of information and wisdom. Roger was awarded MCL's Ted Wellman Water Award for protecting and preserving water resources in Marin and the state, and MCL's Volunteer Award for generously sharing time and talent to help MCL realize its mission.

Roger served as City Councilman for the City of Larkspur in the 1970s. He was on the board of Marin Citizens for Energy Planning, and on various citizens advisory and action committees over the years.

Roger was good company, often full of stories relating to his experiences around the world. He had a great sense of humor. Many who knew Roger had close, enduring friendships with him.

Following Roger's stroke, it was the quick action of close neighbors that provided family and friends from across the West time to arrive to visit with him, and it was through their online posts that other family and friends stayed informed. Roger is deeply and broadly missed.

On the day Roger died, Erik Krumrey, wrote this final post:

As I thought over what I knew of Roger's life, I imagined an 18-year-old Roger in 1954, newly an adult, wondering about his future. I think if

he had been told he would travel the world, work and live in foreign countries, making friends that would last a life time, move to California, meet the love of his life, spend several happy decades living with her in a cute, funky tree house, spend his retirement being respected and admired for his continuing contributions to his community, remain mentally and physically strong and active past his 87th birthday, and at the end of it all pass quickly, young Roger would have been overjoyed at his good fortune.



Photo: Courtesy Olivia Poitiers

IN MEMORIAM

Larry Smith *by Grace Rogers*

Larry Smith died on August 30th at home with his wife, Grace, by his side. Larry's life was filled with family, good friends, travel adventures and civic leadership. He was a well-respected member of his community and will be remembered for his commitment to environmental conservation, support of the arts, and church activities. Larry was also very much devoted to his multigenerational family.

A Bay Area native, Larry attended the University of California, Berkeley. He married and raised his family in San Francisco. Larry's successful career in finance included participating in the introduction of the Master Charge program in the late 1960's. Colleagues held Larry in high esteem and treasured his sense of humor.

Larry developed a passion to steward the land and its natural resources. When young, he spent summers in the high Sierra mountains with his father and his brothers. Later, he would return to that magnificent landscape every year, sharing the miracles of untamed nature with his family and friends. His dedication to preserving life's balance was a gift deeply appreciated by his children, grandchildren, and stepfamily.

Larry remarried and joined wife Charlotte's dedication to public libraries and their importance in serving residents of all ages and backgrounds, particularly children. Together they helped pass a parcel tax to augment the library budget, as well as establish the first Spanish language collection in the Novato library. Larry was appointed to the Marin County Library Commission and served a term as president.



Larry Smith

Larry's love of wild glorious landscapes led to his long and devoted involvement with MCL. He joined the MCL Board in 1985 and served for thirty years, thirteen as Treasurer. As the key officer overseeing MCL's finances and investments, he set high standards. In 1989, Larry received MCL's Volunteer Award which honors volunteers who have generously shared their time and talent to help MCL realize its mission.

The friendships he made during those years remained strong and fulfilling throughout his life. Larry and Grace were continuing regulars at MCL's community events. Larry had also been active in the Planning and Conservation League, the California Native Plant Society, People for Open Space, and the Save San Francisco Bay Association (later known as Save the Bay).

A longtime resident of Nicasio, Larry also served several terms as Treasurer for the Nicasio Landowners Association. Along with Grace, Larry was active in the San Geronimo Community Presbyterian Church, attending services regularly, and adding to the wider community spirit as greeter and ticket taker for their annual Holly Fair—a long community tradition at which he will be very much missed. A celebration of life for Larry was held at the Presbyterian Church earlier this month.

Marjorie Macris

Much has been written about Marjorie Macris, her dedication to innovative planning and environmental causes, and the determination and spirit that were very much at her core.

Marge grew up in the Midwest. She earned both a Master's of Journalism and of Urban Planning at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. She began her career in the Chicago Planning Department, becoming Assistant Director. Later she moved with her husband and two children to Mill Valley and began working for the Marin County Planning Department.

In a March 2021 article, published in Marin County Library's newsletter, Robert Harrison, a colleague of Marge's in the late 1960s, described her as perhaps **"the woman most responsible for the way Marin County looks today."**

In the early 1970s, Marge became principal author of the Marin Countywide Plan and later, as County Planning Director, she led its implementation. Harrison said, "Her work was pioneering not only for its substance, [countywide planning was new to Marin], but also because she was among the few women planning directors in the U.S. at the time." After leaving her County post, Marge served as the Planning Director for Berkeley, and subsequently as Interim Director for several other cities. She stayed active in several planning associations and was a role model and mentor for other women planners in leadership positions.



Marjorie Macris

After her retirement in the early 2000s, Marge served on MCL's Board of Directors and chaired the Land Use and Transportation committee. She was awarded MCL's Marin Green Award for Environmental Leadership in 2013 for her outstanding contributions toward preserving and protecting the natural assets of Marin County.

Marge also served on the boards of Marin Baylands Advocates, the Sierra Club Marin Group Executive Committee and the Marin Environmental Housing Collaborative. She was active in updating *Community Marin*, a consensus document among Marin's major environmental organizations that advocates for environmentally responsible land use planning.

An avid adventurer and traveler, Marge enjoyed hiking, camping and trekking. She was known for her intellect, her stamina and altruism, her good humor and wit. She balanced a demanding career with family life at a time when few women worked outside the home. She also had a strong connection with animals.

Marge passed away on October 16th, but her legacy lives on.



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Board of Directors meetings are held at 6PM on the 3rd Tuesday of the month.

ISSUE COMMITTEE MEETING SCHEDULE

(subject to change—check website)

Land Use, Transportation and Water

1st Wed. of the month, 10 AM–12 noon

Parks and Open Space

2nd Thurs. of the month, 3 –5 PM

Climate Action Working Group

3rd Wed. of the month, 10 AM–12 noon

Agricultural Land Use

Check website for times

North Marin Unit

Check website for times

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McInnis Park Golf Center

Light bites, no-host bar

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