Environmentalism, Environmental Justice, and MCL's Mission

San Rafael's Canal neighborhood is one of Marin's most vulnerable communities to sea level rise.

by Nona Dennis

Raise almost any environmental issue these days that impacts people and their health and well-being, and it will contain an element of equity: is a neighborhood or community bearing a disproportionate burden of harm, as from industrial air pollutants, or receiving fewer benefits than other communities from an environmental "good," such as access to clean water or affordable housing? Terms like "social justice," "racial justice," and "environmental equity" come to mind, along with terms that signal inequity such as "disadvantaged" or "underserved" communities. How do these concerns fit into MCL's traditional mission to "preserve, protect and enhance Marin's natural assets"? The mission has remained essentially unchanged since the 1930s, with an interesting shift at the end of the 1990s, discussed below. For that matter, how has traditional environmentalism incorporated concerns over equity into agendas that are often more attentive to the natural world – protecting rare plants, endangered wildlife, and wilderness – often considered the purview of a well-off, predominantly white public? Where are the points of intersection between equity and environment?

It is instructive to review the origins of "environmental justice" as a recognizable term and to chart its evolution into the mainstream of environmentalism.

A very brief history

The convergence of traditional environmentalism with "environmental justice" is

Status update

Point Reyes National Seashore — ranch lawsuit settlement

Those who have followed developments on Point Reyes National Seashore ("Park" or "Seashore") are aware that on July 12, the National Park Service (NPS) and three environmental nonprofits announced that they had reached a settlement in a lawsuit filed against the Seashore in 2016. The plaintiffs maintained that NPS' Ranch Comprehensive Management Plan (RCMP) process was taking precedence over the Seashore's obligation to update its thirty-five-year-old General Management Plan (GMP). The plaintiffs contended that the Park Service should prepare an Environmental Impact Study (EIS) pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The apparent goal of the suit was to block the NPS from extending long-term leases to the ranchers who operate within the Seashore, many of whom have been operating under one-year letters of authorization.

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A Message from the President—On “resilience”

We’ve been surrounded by environmental, societal, and political threats lately. At times, it’s too much. Like many, while trying to find ways to be of help or proactive, I also find myself wanting to insulate and tune out. That’s when I retreat to my backyard. But rather than tuning out, I tune in.

As I fill a water dish for our urban wildlife visitors, I see a hummingbird territorially buzzing toward the reflection of sunlight off water droplets squinting from the hose or observe a scrub jay picking berries off the hawthorn tree that may have grown from a seed dispersed by one of the jay’s ancestors. I hear birdsong from species resting from migration in nearby trees, and watch a grey squirrel trying with great effort to hide acorns in spot after spot of dry dirt.

A plan for redeveloping the former Golden Gate Baptist Seminary site on Strawberry Peninsula as an academic institution, along with housing open to the general public, is once again on the active list and continues to prompt community concerns. After more than 55 years occupancy, the Baptist Theological Seminary sold the site to North Coast Land Holdings Inc. in 2014, and the seminary relocated to southern California. North Coast partnered with the Branson School of Ross with a plan to relocate the school and expand its current student body of 320 to an eventual 1,000, rehabilitate the seminary’s academic buildings, expand the sports program, build a new theater, and develop housing on the site, among other plans. The Branson School abandoned their involvement in the project due to overwhelming public opposition.

Planning for resilience is most critical where stressors or disruption will have the most impact, both in at-risk communities and in sensitive ecosystems.

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Opportunity knocks as County eyes San Geronimo Golf Course

by Ann Thomas

Marin County’s acquisition of the San Geronimo Golf Course for community use would be a welcome gift for the entire county. The property, which this summer seemed destined to be sold to a developer, has instead been purchased by Trust for Public Land (TPL), a national conservation nonprofit. It will be transferred to the county if the intent to purchase process, which was approved at the October 10 Marin County Board of Supervisors meeting, is successfully concluded.

The 157-acre golf course sprawls along both sides of Sir Francis Drake Boulevard in Marin County if the intent to purchase process, is successfully concluded. I see a sliver of the blue of San Pablo Bay lying beneath the apple trees down below. We've been sur-rounding by envi-ronmental, societal, and political threats lately. At times, it's too much. Like many, while trying to find ways to be of help or proactive, I also find myself wanting to insulate and tune out. That's when I retreat to my backyard. But rather than tuning out, I tune in.

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Transportation Vision for Marin
by Doug Wilson

Ever wonder who decides how our public transportation money gets spent? Or by what criteria and by what processes those decisions are made? These are questions that may come to mind as you ride in 101 traffic on a typical, congested morning commute.

Marin’s recently released draft Strategic Vision Plan of 2017 addresses those and other questions. Prepared by the Transportation Authority of Marin (TAM), the draft plan updates an earlier planning effort from 2003, which preceded the passage of a twenty-year ¼ cent sales tax and a $10 vehicle registration fee in 2004. The new 2017 Strategic Vision Plan accounts for how that money has been used. It also records the results of recent polling efforts to identify the public’s priority concerns and provides an opportunity to revisit Marin’s transportation planning needs. Probably most important is its outline of priorities for future planning and spending.

Electric vehicles lined up to charge.

The 86 page document provides a concise snapshot of current transportation infrastructure and travel modes in Marin. Marin’s options are limited by terrain and by availability of funding. A variety of tables, graphs and accompanying text provide such basic demographic information as population growth, jobs, commute patterns and travel modes, including foot, bike, auto and school bus.

How are these decision made? In preparing the Vision, TAM staff engaged the public in a workshop, through an online survey, and by seeking feedback at numerous public events. Not surprisingly, the public singled out major highway projects as high priority, such as a direct 101/S80 connector, and completion of the Marin Sonoma Narrows. Relieving congestion on local streets and intersections such as Sir Francis Drake, Tam Junction and East Blithedale in Mill Valley were also cited as high priorities for improvement, as was completion of SMART with shuttle connections to transit hubs and ferries. There was strong support for bike and pedestrian projects, such as completion of the North-South Greenway, including reopening the Alto Tunnel, and completing the full SMART bicycle/pedestrian pathway. Particular constituencies pushed for other projects, such as more convenient options for senior transportation, school buses and other transportation options for children, and more parking near transportation hubs. How feasible are these projects? A variety of tables, graphs and accompanying text provide such basic demographic information as population growth, jobs, commute patterns and travel modes, including foot, bike, auto and school bus.

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As stated in the Vision, TAM’s three main goals are: to support the economy, promote environmental health and safety, and ensure equity. The Vision Plan sets out strategies to support these goals. These are intended to form a flexible framework for making choices about how to spend limited resources. Work on Highway 37, for example, may strengthen the economy as a major thoroughfare for workers and affect equity among highway users and/or the various levels of government. It also may help protect the environment by adapting the heavily used route to rising sea levels. Marin Conservation League is paying particular attention to the environmental aspects of the Vision Plan, as they relate to both preserving Marin’s natural beauty and minimizing damage to the larger environment from a changing climate. Marin County’s Climate Action Plan update of 2015 found that about two thirds of the greenhouse gases (GHGs) generated within County limits are caused by transportation – the majority of which still consists of single occupant vehicles with combustion engines. Emphasis in 2004 was on reducing congestion. In 2017 the vital need is to reduce GHGs, and TAM is urged to do much more to promote that effort.

The Vision Plan acknowledges the fluid and difficult-to-predict future of transportation, and it calls for innovation in response. Electric buses, various shared mobility services, even autonomous vehicles are considered. Electric cars and charging stations are mentioned but not in much detail.

TAM’s Strategic Vision Plan of 2017 presents a complex array of transportation options. Perhaps the central challenge will be finding the right balance of priorities as we try to plan for the future.

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SB 5 (DeLeon) Parks and Water Bond to go to voters in June 2018

Voters in the June 2018 election will have an opportunity to pass a $4 billion parks and water bond. The bond, the first substantive state park bond measure in 15 years. Senate Bill 5, authored by Senate Leader Kevin de Leon, was one of two similar bills in play when MCL last reported in the September-October Newsletter (AB 18 [Barcia] was the other). SB 5 garners the support of both legislative bodies and was signed by the Governor. If approved, SB 5 will give voters the opportunity to make badly needed investments in California’s water infrastructure, parks, recreation facilities, and protection of the state’s natural resources. “California’s aging infrastructure is in dire need of new investment, from our parks to our dams and reservoirs,” said de Leon.

Expenditures would be distributed across a broad categories, including water infrastructure, flood protection, regional and start parks, and local parks, notably in disadvantage communities. MCL is particularly interested in its provisions for investment in California’s state parks. Marin County can boast the first park under the state park system authorized in 1928 (Mt. Tamalpais State Park). In total, Marin hosts seven State Park units; all are suffering from aging infrastructure and lack of staff and resources to make repairs.

According to Semprevirens Fund, decreased and unpredictable annual operating funding has left the state parks system with more than a $1 billion backlog in deferred maintenance and repair needs. It is also nearly impossible for the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) to adequately steward the natural, cultural and historic resources in its care, or to ensure access for all Californians to state, regional or local parks. The statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Plan of 2015 found that 38 percent of Californians live in areas with less than 3 acres of parkland per 1,000 population – a recognized standard for adequate parks – and 2 million people do not have a park within a half mile of their home.

SB 5 attempts to remedy the challenges of stewardship and access by including more than $200 million to restore and preserve California state parks and over $700 million for local and regional parks, as well as critically-needed funding to protect the state’s coast, wildlife and drinking water. Semprevirens Fund summed up the need to pass the bill. “Californians from all walks of life, love, and need, parks. After 15 years of neglect, it is time to again induce some funding into our parks to ensure they are safe and accessible to all and to ensure that park agencies are able to properly manage the incredible resources we entrust to their care.”

If you plan to marry and operate a dairy some day, the dream might as well begin in a show ring at a county fair. Two future dairy ranchers, Jolynn Mendoza and Robert McClelland, were fourteen when they met as Future Farmers of America (FFA) while exhibiting the animals each had raised. Jolynn was a fourth generation of dairy ranchers on her father’s side and sixth or seventh on her mother’s. She grew up helping her parents and grandparents run a traditional dairy on the B Ranch on Point Reyes National Seashore. Robert McClelland was the third generation son of dairy farmers (his grandfather came from Ireland), first in Novato and then in Sonoma County. Like other FFA teenagers, they had fed, groomed, and cared for their animals, and were now competing for the blue ribbon. Competition led to friendship and eventually to marriage.

Both Robert and Jolynn knew that they wanted to be dairy ranchers. It was in their blood. In 2005, Robert was able to start up his own dairy in the Valley Ford area of Sonoma County by renting land from his father. In exchange for wages from working for his dad, he gradually built up a herd of 350 cows. They now milk 250. Then in 2009, the historic L Ranch, one of the oldest in-tact dairy ranches on the Seashore – listed on the National Register of Historic Places – became available, and they made the decision to restart the ranch dairy as an organic operation.
Events

MCL Business-Environment Breakfast: Wildlife Corridors

MCL members and community guests filled the McInnis Park Club Restaurant for the September 15th Business-Environment Breakfast on Wildlife Corridors which featured speakers from Wildlands Network, Pepperwood Foundation, and the Golden Gate National Recreation Area. Visit www.conservationleague.org/events for all upcoming MCL events.

Photos Clockwise from left: Guest speakers flanked by MCL 1st VP Linda Novy and MCL President Kate Powers. A robust Q&A session followed the presentation, and guests continued discussions at the conclusion of the event.

It’s time for a party! We look forward to seeing you December 1st.

Environmentalism

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not new, but accounts of the origins and history of events that led to the convergence vary. The early roots of the environmental movement are complex and decades old, but we commonly trace the origins to the 1960s. The publication of Rachel Carson’s Silent Spring in 1962 created a widespread awareness of pollutants in the environment that was heightened at the end of the decade by the Santa Barbara Oil Spill, leading to the first Earth Day in 1970.

In a parallel fashion, the history of civil rights has deep roots but was particularly marked in the mid-1950s by Rosa Parks and the Montgomery bus boycott, and in the 1960s, by the Birmingham protests and Martin Luther King’s “I have a Dream” speech in 1963, the march from Selma to Montgomery in 1965, and Kings’ assassination in 1968.

The more recent origins of the branch of environmentalism known as “environmental justice” (EJ) are generally traced to a protest in Warren County, North Carolina in 1982, when the state tried to deposit 6,000 truckloads of PCB-contaminated soils in a newly constructed hazardous waste site in the small, predominantly black community of Afton. For six weeks, residents marched and staged non-violent street protests. The 500 arrests made at that time became the first arrests in the U.S. over the siting of a landfill.

The protestors of Afton lost their battle, but the story gained nationwide attention and became a first milestone for people of color to engage in an environmental protest. It also energized and set a new direction for the civil rights movement, applying many of the same tactics. Veterans of the 1960s civil rights movement joined the growing campaign, among them the United Church of Christ’s Commission for Racial Justice (CRC). The CRC undertook a national study of the racial and socioeconomic characteristics of communities with hazardous waste sites. Not surprisingly, their report published in 1987 found a strong statistical correlation between race and the location of hazardous wastes sites in communities of color – a correlation that was not a coincidence but rather the intentional result of local, state and federal land-use policies.

The Environmental Justice (EJ) movement was born primarily out of this report. With powerful voices like that of the Bay Area’s Carl Anthony, who founded Race, Poverty & Environment in 1990, the EJ movement picked up momentum and looked for allies among the traditional, predominantly white environmental organizations that were engaged in protecting wilderness, endangered species, clean air and water, but had no involvement in the siting of hazardous waste facilities. Under pressure, some mainstream environmental organizations (known as the Big Ten and including the Sierra Club, Natural Resources Defense Council, Environmental Defense Fund, and others) developed new EJ initiatives that acknowledged the intersection of environment with public health and race.

William Reilly, head of EPA in the first Bush Administration, recognized the need for government action at the federal level and agreed to meet with EJ activists, leading to the creation of the EPA’s Office of Environmental Equity. In the Clinton administration that followed, EJ became official federal policy with Clinton’s signing of Executive Order 12898 in 1994. EO 12898 directed all federal agencies to “identify and address disproportionately high adverse health or environmental effects of their policies or programs on low-income people and people of color” and to look for ways to prevent discrimination by race, color or national origin in any federally funded programs dealing with health or the environment.

California was one of the first states to codify environmental justice in statute in 1974, defining it as “the fair treatment of all races, cultures, and incomes with respect to the development, adoption, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. Environmental justice programs are now integrated into all state agency programs with the basic aim of lifting the unfair burden of pollution from those most vulnerable to its effects.

Fast forward, and emerging differences

EJ has come a long distance as a free-standing environmental discipline and now permeates governance at all levels. The convergence of EJ with traditional environmentalism, however, has not always been easy. Long-active environmentalists have found EJists distinctly human-centered agenda to clash on occasion with the need to protect the biological and physical systems that sustain the earth and are felt to transcend (and undergird) human needs or demands. Debate about population control has all but disappeared from environmental discourse with the widening influence of EJ and the complimentary Advocacies for social and racial justice. The more recent “sustainability agenda” has merged social interests with biophysical initiatives to a degree, but also is primarily human centered. Although these apparently conflicting values need not represent either/or choices, priorities for environmental action often do not agree.

MCL’s traditional yet shifting mission

MCL’s history does not reveal specific references to civil or human rights. Nor has MCL been confronted with the siting of many hazardous or noxious facilities. (A proposed nuclear power plant in Bodega Head, the threat of off-shore oil drilling, and the expansion of Redwood Landfill are exceptions, but equity was not at issue.) MCL’s interest in people within the environment was manifest from the beginning, however. In 1934, protecting nature per se, was not as critical as protecting scenic beauty and the recreational opportunities of Marin’s coastal lands for the public. That is what prompted the founders to embark on Marin’s coastal lands for the public. That is what prompted the founders to embark on

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Point Reyes

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At a July 28 meeting of Marin Conservation League’s Agricultural Land Use Committee following the announcement, a packed crowd of 30, including ranchers from the park, had an opportunity to learn from park officials about the terms of the agreement and their planned course of action and to ask questions and express concerns.

had been authorized by then-Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar in 2012. The RCMP and EA would take about two years and would address a broad range of ranching matters, including but not limited to management of the elk.

Then, in early 2016, prompted by the park’s pursuit of ranch planning, three environmental groups – Resource Renewal Institute, the Center for Biological Diversity, and the Western Watersheds Project – filed the lawsuit claiming the Park Service was violating NEPA by considering extension of ranching leases without first analyzing the environmental impacts in an EIS. In addition to the suit, the settlement agreement requires the park to undertake a ranch management plan that prioritized ranching over wild- life. The proposed HOA will continue to participate in the GMP Amendment and EIS, which will be completed within four years of July 2016.

The settlement was announced, both sides claimed some degree of success. It was greeted largely as a victory for the three environmental nonprofit litigants. The Center for Biological Diversity said in a press release: “The public will get its long-overdue opportunity to weigh in on whether native wildlife and public access should trump commercial cattle ranching on Point Reyes national park lands.” Park Service officials were relieved that they could finally move forward with planning after two years of virtual paralysis. The ranchers’ response was more guarded. Five-year leases, which are generally renewed every five years, would still fall short of the long-term security needed by families who have made their livelihood for generations sustaining grazing livestock and dairy operations. As this Newsletter went to press, public meetings had been scheduled for October 25 and 26 to gather input on alternatives, including those required by the settlement, to be considered in the EIS. Comments were due by November 15.

At the MCL meeting, Mike Mietz responded that “... the key is understanding the impacts of the alternatives that will be analyzed through the NEPA process, including the economic, conservation, cultural, and ecological impacts ... there will be opportunities to discuss particular issues with park staff in one-on-one meetings over the next four years.” He also announced that Cicely Muldoon will return later this fall to the post of superintendent of the Park from her interim assignment as Acting Superintendent at Golden Gate National Recreation Area. The Martha project gate to the public? The Trust for Public Lands (TPL) has offered to meet with the owners and begin discussions of a fair market value that reflects not only the value of the real estate, but also the real world costs to build on this difficult site. MCL has twice urged the Reed family to consider public acquisition of all or part of the site, facilitated by TPL – an opportunity for the family to receive a return on their family estate and at the same time leave a legacy in their name for future generations to enjoy.

Environmentalism

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On 40 years of acquiring lands for the public, an interest that continues today. The mission of MCL for many decades was to preserve, protect, and enhance Marin’s natural assets for all people (emphasis added). Environmental issues involving human needs and interests, such as quality of life, housing, transportation, parks, agriculture, have always been among MCL’s preoccupations. In later years, as “ecology” and “biodiversity” became familiar concepts and threats to the natural environment intensified, MCL increased its focus on protecting ecosystems such as wetlands and other sensitive habitats from destructive human activities. At the end of the 1990s, the Board embarked on a study that reexamined MCL’s fundamental environmental obligations and questioned the mission statement itself. After considerable discussion, the Board agreed that MCL should be more “earth centered” and therefore agreed to drop “for all people” from the mission statement.

MCL’s priorities have fluctuated over the years, but that version of the mission statement has remained untouched for almost 20 years. The MCL Board is again examining its mission. In a community (Marin County) that has its own obvious inequities, where and how might “environmental justice” fit into MCL’s long-standing commitments to Marin’s environment?
It's that time of the year again!

MCL memberships are calendar year—
Renew for 2018 NOW!

SIGN ME UP AS A:

- $35 Steward
- $50 Creeks
- My check, payable to MCL, is enclosed

- $100 Baylands
- $250 Woodlands*
- $500 Redwoods
- $1,000 Peter Behr
- I will renew via credit card

Mail to MCL, 175 N. Redwood Dr. Ste. 135, San Rafael, CA 94903
or JOIN ONLINE at marinconservationleague.org

All contributions and dues are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law. MCL memberships are calendar-year based.