

Help Acquire Mira Monte Marina

by Ann Thomas

Marin Conservation League has joined Marin Audubon Society, Marin Baylands Advocates and other conservation interests working to purchase the **Mira Monte Marina**, a complex of wetlands, mud flats and oak upland north of Novato across Highway 101 from Olompali State Park. The 57-acre site, straddling the Marin/Sonoma line where San Antonio Creek flows into the Petaluma River, include a seven-acre wooded hill known as Burdell Island, a name that reflects its former condition as an island prior to placement of levees that blocked tidal waters.



Historic Landscape

The Mira Monte wetlands are part of the Petaluma Marsh system, about 4,200 acres extending inland seven miles from the mouth of the Petaluma River. It is the largest intact ancient marsh remaining in

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Marin Conservation League Supports MMWD's Measure S



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MMWD receives about 20% of its water from the Russian River, which includes diversions from the Eel River. This water flows down the Russian River to the Wohler Pump Station, near the historic Wohler Bridge (shown)

From time to time, environmental issues come along that prove, once again, that the environmental community in Marin is not a monolith. Environmentalists who may have similar long-term aims may differ in tactics or on specific goals. The current issue of a vote on Marin Municipal Water District's (MMWD) plan to construct a desalination plant is one such case. Desalination as a possible future source of water supply has been under consideration by the District for at least 20 years, seriously for the past ten years. Jared Huffman, a former member of the MMWD Board and champion of desalination, said in 2002: "Desalination is the ultimate drought-proofer!" But the closer the concept has come to reality, the more controversial it has become and the more vocal the opposition. Meanwhile, for a variety of reasons—the continuing drought

in 2009, the growing effectiveness of District conservation programs, increased public awareness—water consumption is down, casting further doubt on the necessity of continuing to explore costly and energy-intensive desalination. Despite this, MMWD has kept desalination on its list of options.

Opponents of desalination took matters into their own hands early in 2010 by

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A Message from the President— Loving and Saving Our State Parks



This summer I "discovered" yet another of our State Parks: Emerald Bay, known by millions for its iconic viewpoint of Lake Tahoe. I had experienced that view many times over the years without ever visiting the actual Park. In late June, I hiked down the mile-long trail with friends, enjoying the shifting views and early-blooming wild cherry during the 500-foot descent to the shore. There, set back from the sandy beach among the pines and firs, was the historic 1929 Vikingsholm estate, now a central feature of the Park.

When I was growing up in the 1930s and 1940s, my family spent summers at a rustic family cabin on the South Fork of the American River, not far from Tahoe. By family,

I mean an extended family that included lots of cousins! The cabin was in a tract of summer "homes" (sans electricity and indoor plumbing at the time) on U.S. Forest Service land, one of a number of tracts that had been opened up in El Dorado National Forest as new stretches of Highway 50 were improved to ease the arduous trip to the Lake. One still had to negotiate the steep, winding Echo Summit ("Johnson Pass") grade when driving on the uphill in a car loaded with cousins returning from a day's outing on the Lake. More than once we had to pause on the return trip to let our car cool down before continuing over the 7,382-foot crest of the summit. The destinations for our outings around the Lake invariably would include a beach: Pope, or Bliss, or sometimes Zephyr Cove on the Nevada side. Our favorite was D.L. Bliss State Park, which already had been donated to the California State Park System in 1929.

ordinary folks like my cousins and me.

Early this summer, as I trudged back up the trail (which, on the ascent from the shore, seemed to have doubled in length!), I marveled at the State's good fortune in acquiring the 1,464-acre Park that now comprises the entire Emerald Bay, including the archaeological artifacts underwater, the mysterious Fannette Island, and the surrounding shoreline! It is a

D.L. Bliss was the first State Park at Lake Tahoe in 1929

story worth knowing. How many of our State Parks, Beaches, Recreation Areas, and Historic Parks share similar histories? None of them was a simple acquisition—we know that just from the histories or our own well-loved State Parks in Marin County! Throughout the State, millions of people have their local favorites. How can we imagine the loss of any of them—through closure or just plain neglect? Emerald Bay may be one of the crown jewels in the State Park System, but in its way it symbolizes the unique importance of each of the 278 Parks that make up the State's legacy of special lands. They all deserve our support!



Emerald Bay State Park, Lake Tahoe

©Ride To Dine/Flickr Creative Commons

Other State Parks were still to come: Ed Z'berg Sugar Pine Point, farther north; and Washoe Meadows State Park and Lake Valley State Recreation Area on the Upper Truckee River. Emerald Bay was still a few decades away from becoming a State Park. Like the Bliss Estate had been, Emerald Bay was still the playground for the very wealthy—unavailable to

Barbara Ford: MCL Volunteer

Every Thursday around 10:00 a.m., volunteer and longtime MCL member Barbara Ford arrives at the MCL office to spend three or four hours sifting through stuffed file drawers, sorting clippings, letters, notes, and other information collected over years but not always filed in order and not all equally worth preserving.

Barbara is a Mill Valley native with a long-standing interest in local history. A founder of the Mill Valley Historical Society, Barbara has led the Society's annual Memorial Day Sunday Walks into History (from which MCL borrowed our current series of MCL's Walks into History). We are grateful for her knowledge and her assistance in putting MCL archives in order.

Thank you for supporting MCL at Whole Foods!

Marin Conservation League is grateful to the Central and Southern Marin communities for their recent support of the League through the **Whole Foods Markets Nickels for Non-Profits** donation program. To all the shoppers who brought their own, reusable grocery bags to Whole Foods, a tremendous **THANK YOU!**—for designating your nickels to MCL AND for keeping single-use bags out of the waste stream.

Want newsletters via email? Email mcl@marinconservationleague.org with "ENews Only" or "ENews plus Paper" in the subject line.

November State Ballot Measures

MCL Supports

Proposition 21: State Parks and Wildlife Conservation Trust Fund Act of 2010

On November 2, 2010, California voters will have the opportunity to save state parks by approving Prop 21, which would create the State Parks and Wildlife Conservation Trust Fund Act of 2010. The fund will provide a stable and reliable source of funding for essential park repairs and maintenance, for wildlife conservation, and for increased and equitable access to those resources for all Californians. The basics of Prop 21 are as follows:

- The Trust Fund revenues will be spent only on state parks, wildlife, natural lands and ocean conservation programs.
- The Trust Fund will be funded by an \$18 annual State Park Access Pass surcharge on all California cars, motorcycles and recreational vehicles that will be collected by the Department of Motor Vehicles as part of the annual vehicle license fee. Larger commercial vehicles, mobile homes and permanent trailers will be exempt.
- Vehicles subject to the surcharge and all occupants of those vehicles will have free day use admission to all state parks throughout the year.
- Trust Fund revenues will amount to approximately \$500 million each year (based on about 28 million registered vehicles); 85 percent will be allocated to state parks and 15 percent to other state wildlife and ocean protection agencies.
- With a new revenue stream in place, approximately \$130 million of General Fund dollars—that provide a portion of overall state parks funding—would now be available for other vital needs, like schools, health care, social



services or public safety.

- The Trust Fund will be subject to an independent audit by the State Auditor and review of expenditures by a Citizens' Oversight Committee. Administrative costs will be limited to one percent of the annual revenues.

Marin Conservation League believes that state parks are an important state resource and a legacy for future generations. They must be

*Read the full text of Prop. 21 at
www.yesforstateparks.com*

saved! California's state parks are suffering from decades of chronic under funding. Today, there is a backlog of more than \$1 billion in badly needed maintenance and repairs. Twice in the past two years, numerous state parks were on the brink of closure, including several in Marin County. Fortunately, the National Park Service came to partial rescue and offered temporary financial aid to keep Tomales Bay and Samuel P. Taylor State Parks open. Marin parks continue to suffer from shortage of staff and funds, with a backlog of \$38 million in deferred maintenance and another \$108 million in maintenance waiting for authorization.

MCL urges you to support Proposition 21 and provide a long-term answer to support California's state parks.

MCL Opposes

Proposition 23: Dirty Energy Proposition? Or California Jobs Initiative?

In 2006, the California State legislature passed the California Global Warming Solutions Act, AB32, which requires California's greenhouse gas emissions to return to 1990 levels by 2020 and identifies

a potential trajectory to meet a goal for 2050 of cutting emissions 80 percent below 1990 levels. This legislation put California in the forefront of efforts to meet the world-wide threat of rising greenhouse gas emissions.

Proposition 23, if it were adopted, would constitute an enormous step backwards. It would suspend implementation of AB32 until unemployment in California fell below 5.5 percent for four consecutive quarters. As a practical matter this would indefinitely suspend AB32 because California unemployment has not been that low in 20 years.

The proposition is funded largely by two Texas-based oil companies who claim that AB32 will cost the state more than 1 million jobs, drive up gas and electricity prices, and place economic burdens on small businesses. These claims are contradicted by

*Prop. 23 would be an
enormous step backward*

the California Air Resource Board, which has found that measures needed to implement AB32's requirements could save residents more than \$2 billion in household and transportation fuel spending and spur \$1.5 billion in residential efficiency measures and investments in "cleantech."

The proposition flies in the face of the views of California residents. A recent survey by the Public Policy Institute of California found that despite the difficult economic times, climate change is still important. Over two-thirds of Californians favor AB 32 and about half believe that not enough is being done by state and federal governments to combat climate change. When asked how the state's climate policy would affect employment, almost half of Californians stated it would create more jobs. This poll makes clear that Californians understand that clean energy and smart climate policy will not only benefit the environment and public health, but can boost efforts to improve our economy.

MCL believes that Proposition 23 would take California in the wrong direction and recommends a "no" vote.

Status Updates

Drake Blvd. Rehab

MCL recently submitted comments on the Sir Francis Drake Blvd. (SFDB) Rehabilitation Project Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR). The report describes the environmental consequences of a project that would rehabilitate a 5.2 mile section of Sir Francis Drake Boulevard through Samuel P. Taylor State Park between Shafter Bridge and Platform Bridge Road. This is a highly scenic route along Lagunitas Creek through the Park's redwood forest. All who have

Option A would remove eight large redwoods alongside Sir Francis Drake Blvd.

traveled that route are familiar with the badly degraded roadway and the problems of safety for pedestrian and bicycle users.

A major objective of the Project is to protect the area's sensitive environmental resources while improving the roadway, stabilizing slope failure along the creek bank and paving occasional traffic turnouts. MCL has two major environmental concerns about the proposed work: first, and foremost, the Lagunitas Creek habitat for the endangered Coho salmon must be protected from pollutants and sediment during construction and then from traffic impacts; and second, the removal of larger redwood trees that edge the roadway must be minimized.

The EIR for the Project examines three basic alternatives: (1) No Project, i.e., no change in existing conditions (required by the California Environmental Quality Act); (2) Resurface Roadway Alternative, i.e., repave the road surface with no other improvements; and (3) Mitigated Roadway Alternative, which would entail roadway resurfacing, paving of five pullouts, removal of more than 20 informal pullouts, construction of a 200-foot-long retaining wall for slope repair, and replacement of culverts and other drainage improvements. This Alternative would remove three smaller coast redwoods and five California bay trees. Option A to the Mitigated Roadway Alternative, would widen or realign several sections of roadway to improve sight distance and remove an additional eight redwood trees ranging in height from 70 to 120 feet and one 35-foot coast live oak.

MCL opposes Option A. The DEIR identifies the Mitigated Roadway Alternative (without Option A) as the environmentally superior alternative. Even as to this Alternative, MCL is concerned about the work possibly causing long-term damage to the root structure of redwoods that will not be removed and that the DEIR underestimates the impact of the increase in volume and speed of traffic that may occur when the pavement is improved. Finally, MCL questions the Draft EIR's conclusion that all significant impacts have been mitigated to less-than-significant levels.

To review the DEIR for this project, visit marinconservationleague.org/advocacy/211-sfd-rehab.html and click on the link at the bottom of the page.



Touring cyclists head eastward on the disintegrating roadway of Sir Francis Drake Blvd.
Dru Parker

San Geronimo Valley Riparian Vegetation Protection Ordinance

This Newsletter has reported previously on the Salmon Enhancement Planning (SEP) process in San Geronimo Valley and the County's efforts to meet a basic goal of its January 2008 agreement with Salmon Protection And Watershed Network (SPAWN): "To prepare a plan that supports the restoration of natural biological and hydrological functions in the San Geronimo Creek watershed," and the SEP, accepted by the Board of Supervisors last year, provides much useful information and direction toward fulfilling this goal. The SEP emphasized how important riparian (creekside) vegetation is for stabilizing stream banks, moderating water temperatures by shading, trapping and filtering sediments and other water pollutants, and providing wildlife habitat. This is hardly a new concept; numerous federal, State, Marin Municipal Water District (MMWD) and County-sponsored programs such as the Marin County Stormwater Pollution Prevention Program (MCSTOPPP) are already in place devoted to recovery of coho salmon and steelhead trout habitat in the Lagunitas Creek watershed. A missing piece, however, is a County ordinance that specifically protects riparian vegetation. Any restoration effort in a populated area (about 75 percent of San Geronimo Valley is developed) will also



This coast redwood is one of eight that would be removed under "Option A"
Dru Parker

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Business-Environment Breakfast

Is California Water Planning Paralyzed?

California is in dire need of breaking a 40-year-old deadlock on water planning and policy. Factions in the water fight—environmentalists and farmers, agribusiness and fishing, Democrats and Republicans—are at a

*MCL's Business—
Environment Breakfast
Friday, September 17
7:30–9:30 am
Embassy Suites,
San Rafael*

stalemate, while the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta ecosystem continues its collapse. The \$11-billion bond measure cobbled together late last year has been pulled from the November ballot under pressure from the Governor.

In the meantime, does State water

policy stand still or move forward?
Is there a compromise in sight?

Assembly Member **Jared Huffman**, Chair of the Assembly Committee on Water, Parks, and Wildlife; Attorney **Cynthia Koehler**, California Water Legislation Director for Environmental Defense Fund; and **Jonas Minton**, Senior Policy Advisor to Planning and Conservation League, will address these questions at **Marin Conservation League's Business-Environment Breakfast Forum on September 17, 2010**, from 7:30 to 9:30 am, at the Embassy Suites in San Rafael, 101 McInnis Parkway.

Tickets are **\$25** for MCL members and **\$30** for non-members and a full, organic breakfast buffet is included.

Advance registration and payment are required by September 10. Register via phone at 415-485-6257 or return the form below to MCL, 1623-A Fifth Ave., San Rafael, CA 94901.



Speakers are Assembly Member Jared Huffman (top), Environmental Defense Fund attorney Cynthia Koehler (bottom) and PCL Water Advisor Jonas Minton (not pictured)



REGISTRATION FORM BUSINESS—ENVIRONMENT BREAKFAST: "CALIFORNIA WATER," 9/17/2010

Name(s) _____
 Title/Org. _____
 Street _____
 City _____ State _____ Zip _____
 Phone _____
 MCL member \$25 Non-member \$30 Total Due \$ _____
 Check enclosed, payable to MCL Charge my Credit Card the amt. shown above
 card # _____
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 card sec. code _____ signature _____

Ticket price includes full organic breakfast.

Pre-registration required by 9/10/2010

Make checks payable to MCL or pay total due by credit card. Fax form to 415-485-6259 or mail to MCL, 1623-A Fifth Ave., San Rafael, CA 94901

Refunds given only if the event is canceled.

BB10B_NL

Events

A Perfect Day for a Picnic on the Porch

The MCL Annual Picnic on the Porch was held on Saturday, July 28, and attended by approximately ninety picnickers who enjoyed BBQ, beer and wine, delicious desserts and fresh salads prepared by MCL board and staff. Many thanks to **Upper Crust Pies** and **Marin Brewing Company** for their donations to this annual party, and to **Marin Sun Farms** and **Let's Be Frank** for providing grass-fed burgers and hot dogs at a deep discount.



Photos by Dru Parker



Courtesy Doty LeMieux

Saturday, September 25: Coastal Cleanup in Novato, Sausalito, San Rafael

Join MCL on Saturday, September 25, 2010, from 9 a.m. to noon for the **26th Annual California Coastal Cleanup**.

MCL will host three locations for the annual cleanup. Novato volunteers will begin at the **Scottsdale Pond Gazebo at 9:00 a.m.** (The Gazebo is south of Rowland Blvd. on Redwood Blvd.) People with small children will clean around the Pond and marshes. More adventuresome types will be dispersed to Novato Creek, Warner Creek or Ignacio

Creek. There will be creek captains to work with the creek cleaners. Creek cleaners should wear boots or shoes that can get wet. For more information call Susan Stompe at 897-1610.

San Rafael volunteers will meet at the **MCL Office, 1623A Fifth Ave. (at F)** at 9:00 a.m. and head to Mahon Creek. For more information, contact the MCL office at 415-485-6257 or mcl@marinconservationleague.org.

The Southern Marin site will

be at the **Sausalito Waterfront**, meeting at the Bay Model at 9:00 a.m. Contact Vicki Nichols with questions, 331-5071.

All volunteers should bring gloves, water and sunscreen, and wear their work clothes and sturdy shoes. Garbage bags will be provided.

In 2009, 1,861 volunteers in Marin collected 10,146 pounds of trash over an approximate distance of 90 miles! Be part of this year's solution to marine pollution!

Events

Fall BayWood Artists Exhibit to benefit Open Space

This year the BayWood Artists show will benefit the Marin Open Space District and the Marin Open Space Trust (MOST). The artists are professional “pleine aire” painters dedicated to environmental preservation.

BayWood Artists past shows have benefited many local organizations including MCL. Their beautiful paintings have helped promote the need to protect our natural surroundings. This year's show will open with a reception on Friday evening October 22 and run until November 20 at the Bay Model in Sausalito. It will include paintings of the spectacular lands on Tiburon Ridge threatened with development and other familiar Marin open spaces.

MCL Holds Workshops on EIRs and CEQA

Twenty-five attended a recent free workshop held by MCL on July 28th, which featured the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The 40-year-old law, which plays a central role in virtually all public decisions, requires Environmental Impact Reports (EIRs) to be prepared for proposed projects that may have a significant impact on the environment. Lesser projects may be analyzed in a so-called Negative Declaration of Impact (Neg. Dec.), based on the finding that the project will have no significant impacts on the environment that cannot be mitigated to levels of insignificance.

CEQA consultant Greg Zitney, Novato, gave an overview of the CEQA process, explained important terms, and, with the help of Paul Jensen, Planning Manager for San Rafael, and Nona Dennis, retired CEQA consultant, led a discussion on how the public can review often massive EIRs efficiently and submit meaningful public comments that may influence decisions on the project. MCL

plans to hold a similar workshop later in the fall. Contact MCL at 415-485-6257 or mcl@marinconservationleague.org for the date.

Walk into History #5: Marincello

MCL's 5th Walk into History (held on Saturday, August 28th, was a commemoration of the 45th anniversary of the County's decision to approve the infamous “Marincello” development project. Retired Marin attorney Bob Praetzel, who played the winning legal card to stop the project, and long-time resident of Wolfback Ridge, Peter Erickson, a leader of citizen opponents, and Howard Levitt, Chief of Public Affairs for the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, led the hike and shared their stories of Marincello's eventual defeat. The route, up the Bobcat Trail from Rodeo Lagoon, offered constant views of the beautiful Gerbode Valley, which could have been filled with a planned community of between 20,000 and 30,000 residents on 2,138 acres had not the determined opposition of a few people turned the tables.

It took the Board of Supervisors only a year, in November, 1965, to approve developer Thomas Frouge's Gulf Oil-backed Marincello Master Plan on a three-two vote. Petitions protesting the project were brushed aside.

Interestingly, most of the opposition, even by Supervisors Peter Behr and Byron Leydecker, was based not on whether there should be any development on the Headlands, but how dense the development should be.

More aggressive action against the project was taken initially by attorneys Bob Conn and Richard Breiner, who were subsequently forced to withdraw. Later, attorneys Robert Praetzel, Martin Rosen, and Douglas Ferguson challenged the county's failure to give adequate public notice for the zoning approval process. Construction, which began on an entry boulevard in Tennessee Valley, was stopped in 1967, in part due to the pending law suits. Frouge then had a falling out with his backer at Gulf Oil and local opinion began to shift against the project. In November 1970, a state appellate court found that the plan had failed to comply with the law in the zoning approval process and therefore must be submitted all over again. The Board of Supervisors withdrew their support for the project the following day!

At that auspicious time, a national park around the Golden Gate was just coming to life. In 1972, Huey Johnson, western director of The Nature Conservancy, met with Gulf Oil representatives and negotiated purchase of the land for \$6.5 million and turned it over to the burgeoning Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

Mt. Burdell Open Space Preserve: October 16

MCL turns to North Marin for our sixth Walk into History on **October 16th**. The location will be Mt. Burdell Open Space Preserve, owned and managed by the Marin County Open Space District. The story of how Mt. Burdell was saved from development will be told by Don Dickenson and Gail Wilhelm, who originally chaired the Committee to Save Mt. Burdell. The walk will start in San Marin at 9:30 and return at approximately 1:00. More details will be distributed to MCL members and the public in mid-September.



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require collaborative and voluntary effort of residents, but to be successful, such efforts need an underpinning of standards and enforceable rules. The County elected to adapt an existing Native Tree Preservation and Protection Ordinance for this purpose, modifying certain terms of the ordinance to protect individual trees and to address the immediate needs in San Geronimo Valley. A "Woody Riparian Protection Ordinance" was drafted by planning staff with the intent of supplanting that ordinance in two years with a county-wide ordinance covering all Stream Conservation Areas, consistent with policies in the 2007 Countywide Plan. The County Planning Commission recommended expanding the draft by substituting "vegetation" for "woody," thereby adding protection for herbaceous plant species on stream banks (e.g., sedges, ferns, native grasses, etc.) that help stabilize soils and filter pollutants.

The SEP planning and ordinance-writing process has engendered misinformation and aroused huge controversy in the Valley, fomenting dissension and outright hostility toward SPAWN. The issues are complex, and

The Ordinance must protect vegetation for stream function and wildlife habitat

Supervisor Kinsey, whose district includes the Valley, has done exceptional work in calming tempers at large public meetings and in smaller workshops, steering residents toward a more constructive role in the process. At this writing (August 16), the Board of Supervisors has weighed the recommendations of the Planning Commission and County staff and appears to be headed toward a compromise:

An ordinance which would protect most native trees and shrubs ("woody" species) within a 100-foot Stream Conservation Area, require a permit for removal of any individual native tree and most native shrubs, exempt already developed landscapes and allow removal of vegetation for purposes of fire safety and to avoid other possible hazards.

In MCL's view, this is a step in the right direction but does not fully recognize the importance of vegetative structure associated with streams that includes native herbaceous plants as well as trees, shrubs, and vines. The



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The proposed 680 Trail winds through habitat of the American Badger (Taxidea taxus), a California Species of Special Concern.

ordinance that is eventually adopted for San Geronimo Valley should serve as a model that will guide protection of creek habitats throughout the County.

The 680 Shared-Use Trail

The Marin County Open Space District (MCOUSD) released its Negative Declaration of Environmental Impact (Neg. Dec.) in July for the proposed new 2.8-mile, shared-use "680 Trail," which will link the Loma Alta and SleepyHollow/Terra Linda Divide Open Space Preserves (OSPs). The trail's proposed

alignment crosses steep terrain above Sleepy Hollow, San Anselmo, and Fairfax at elevations that range between 750 feet and roughly 1,470 feet at the western end. In past years, the link between the two OSPs was accessed by crossing private ranch lands on fire roads. Access is now fenced off by a property owner. The 680 Trail would bypass this barrier. The project description in the Neg. Dec. makes it clear that this is not a simple "path." To accommodate hikers, mountain bikes, and equestrians, the trail would be five feet wide with eight-foot turnouts. It would make 14 crossings of ten streams, requiring eight bridges and nine rock-ford crossings.



Marin County Open Space District rangers led hikers on the 4th proposed alignment of the 680 Trail in early June

Dina Parker

Two areas of weak and saturated soils would require a total of 250 feet of compacted turnpike structures. Numerous retaining walls varying from 30 to 50 feet long and from one to four feet high would be required. Special features intended to reduce bike speed would be

Continued next page

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installed ("pinch" points, cobbles, etc).

MCL recognizes that this is an important connection between two popular preserves. As a network of social trails has been created in part by people attempting to skirt the barrier, a single well-designed trail could well reduce the growing damage caused by these.

At the same time, the evidence shows the physical and ecological fragility of the route across a steep and relatively pristine terrain and the need for many engineering remedies. The geotechnical report rates soils along the entire length as susceptible to "severe" and "very severe" erosion; two large landslides

The 680 Trail would cross steep, unstable terrain with high biological value

along the route indicate the level of instability in the area, although the report admits "...it is difficult to predict large scale movement which may occur only every few decades..." Extensive retaining walls will be required to stabilize the trail. (Sediment-laden runoff from small drainages in the high grasslands discharges eventually into Corte Madera Creek.) The area also has high biological value and is relatively undisturbed. Native bunch grasses abound and cannot be entirely avoided; oak woodland is concentrated in the eastern segments of the trail; non-native plant species like broom have not yet invaded the area; wildlife such as badgers and coyotes roam at will.

The Neg. Dec. claims that all significant impacts of construction and use of the trail on these resources will be mitigated to "levels of insignificance." MCL is challenging some of those conclusions. In such a sensitive area, impacts should receive the highest priority of mitigation, which is *avoidance to the extent feasible*. (*Repair* is of lower priority and *replacement of resources off-site* is the lowest priority mitigation solution.) MCL submits that greater use of existing fire roads not encumbered by private property would expose fewer new areas of soil to erosion and invasion by non-native species, such as goatgrass and several species of thistle. The current proposal makes use of only 0.4 miles of existing fire roads.

Thus far, the public has been given

limited reasons for accepting this as the only possible alignment. District staff has considered and rejected other alignments for the 680 Trail and selected the proposed trail as the best route. The public and decision makers need environmental justification for that choice. To enable selection of the "environmentally superior" trail alignment, the environmental impacts of other alignments that make greater use of existing fire-roads (such as San Domenico fire road) but have been rejected, should be compared. Trail gradient should not be the sole criterion. MCL has asked the District to consider redesigning the trail to reduce impacts and/or examining mitigation measures and alternatives more thoroughly in either a Focused EIR or a substantially expanded Neg. Dec.

Smith Ranch Pond

It's easy to drive down Smith Ranch Road on your way to McInnis Park without noticing the cluster of willows opposite the movie theater. But 32 native wildlife species, including Western pond turtle, herons, egrets, swallows, phoebes, hummingbirds—26 bird species in all—are very familiar with the freshwater pond that lies behind the willows.

Smith Ranch Pond has had almost as many lives as a cat, and still manages to survive, but in degraded condition. Jean Starkweather, former president of both MCL and Marin Audubon Society and long-time resident of



The Smith Ranch Pond: What appears to be a broad meadow is actually a pond choked by the invasive weed Ludwigia (aquatic primrose).

Dru Parker

Terra Linda has been watching over the 2½ to 3-acre-pond since long before there was a Smith Ranch Master Plan. She saved it from one early encounter with development when her husband John, then on the San Rafael Planning Commission, alerted her that a developer of apartments above wanted permission to fill the pond with rocks from hill-top excavation. That was just one threat. The pond has survived siltation as other lands within its 40-acre watershed have been built over; invasion by water hyacinth that teams of volunteers pulled out by hand over many months; and recently, invasion by the insidious "native water primrose," or Ludwigia, which now covers 80 to 90 percent of the pond. The resulting green-colored surface gives the impression that one actually could "walk on

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Mira Monte *from Page 1*

San Francisco Bay, a remnant of a once broad band ringing the western and northern coasts of San Pablo Bay. Over the past two centuries urbanization and diking diminished the North Bay's marshes, and the Mira Monte wetlands still exhibit many features characteristic of the earlier landscape.

Human Settlers

The Coast Miwok inhabited this area for several thousand years until they were displaced by European settlers in the mid-19th century. In 1852, land that includes Mira Monte was a wedding gift to dentist Galen

*Send donations to:
Marin Baylands Advocates
PO Box 2598
Mill Valley, CA 94942*

Burdell and his bride who grew the property into the 20,000 acre Olompali domain and diligently "reclaimed" many of its tidelands for agriculture. In 1895 Burdell's son built the Mira Monte Club, atop Burdell Island, a lavish sportsmen's retreat for San Francisco's elite, complete with modern plumbing and billiard room. The clubhouse was used for many years before being destroyed by fire in the 1960s.

A marina with concessions was built along the river early in the 20th century, and during Prohibition Burdell Island reputedly harbored bootleggers. An oyster bar on Mira Monte's waterfront was a popular hangout into the late 20th century. Mira Monte is now a collection of dilapidated buildings used for storage of marine equipment and RVs.

Habitat Value

Mira Monte's value is heightened by its location in the midst of a network of already protected areas extending along the Petaluma River from the northernmost reaches of the Petaluma Marsh south to Highway 37. The state Department of Fish and Game owns most of the marsh to the north and the diked seasonal wetland to the south.

Wildlife diversity on the site is high and includes the endangered California clapper

rail and salt marsh harvest mouse, as well as special status species. Species observed on the property's upland include American crow, Northern mockingbird, common barn owl, turkey vulture, bushtit, Say's phoebe, American kestrel, and red-tailed hawk.

Twelve fish species native to California are known to inhabit San Antonio Creek: one endangered species (winter-run chinook salmon), and four federally listed threatened species (spring-run chinook salmon, California coast steelhead, Central Valley steelhead, and North American green sturgeon), as well as Bay pipefish, California roach, Pacific herring, Pacific staghorn sculpin, prickly sculpin, shiner surfperch, threespine stickleback, tule perch, and yellowfin goby.

Restoring Our Marshes

Numerous efforts are underway to salvage and restore the Bay's historic marshes so critical to its aquatic health. MCL was an early partner in one of these efforts, the Campaign to Save Marin Baylands, which has led to acquisition of a number of sites along Marin's bayshore.

Marin Audubon is in contract to purchase Mira Monte for \$1.85 million and must raise these funds by March 2011. MCL has contributed \$1,000 from its Land Preservation Fund to the Mira Monte effort and will co-sponsor a fundraising event at the site on September 26 (watch for your invitation in the mail). Donations may be made to the Marin Baylands Fund at the Marin Community Foundation, and mailed to **Marin Baylands Advocates, PO Box 2598, Mill Valley, CA 94942.**



UPCOMING EVENTS

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 17
Business Breakfast (see page 5)

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 16
Mt. Burdell Walk Into History (see Page 7)

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 4
What Will You Do With That Turkey Carcass?

MCL's Fall Business-Environment Breakfast will focus on Food Waste to Resource—the new solid-waste frontier in Marin. Watch your mail for details about this timely forum, which will be sponsored jointly with Marin Sanitary Service.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 3
MCL's Annual Holiday Party
Benefits the Marin Food Bank

Status Updates *from Page 9*

water."

The City of San Rafael owns the 4.5-acre parcel, and over the years collected mitigation fees from developers and prepared a management plan for restoration of the pond in 1996. With changing personnel, however, the City has not moved forward with the restoration—until now. With the help of Marin Audubon Society, long involved in saving the pond, MCL is working with the City on a plan to remove the build-up of sediment and rid the pond of the noxious Ludwigia.

Freshwater marshes ponds serve as a rich habitat for birds and other wildlife, and those few remaining in Eastern Marin have survived filling, encroachment by buildings and parking lots, weeds, polluted run-off, debris accumulation, and other insults. The Smith Ranch Pond, even in its degraded condition, still serves as a small oasis for wildlife (such as an observed Western pond turtle) in an otherwise hostile urban environment. Stay tuned as we work with the City to once again "Save Smith Ranch Pond."

A panoramic view of Mount Tamalpais and MMWD watershed from the Meadow Club in Fairfax



©Ben Davidson Photography/bendavidsonphoto.com

Measure S *from Page 1*

launching a campaign and collecting 18,000 signatures, more than enough to qualify an initiative that would require voter approval before MMWD engaged in "...planning, engineering or construction of a desalination plant..." In response, the MMWD Board drafted its own competing ballot measure, which would require voter approval only for *construction* of a desalination plant but allow the District to continue *planning* for long-term water supply options, which could include desalination. Both measures require voter approval before construction of a desalination plant could begin. The difference between the two is the crux of the issue.

During heated debate at a special District meeting on July 26, many attendees claimed: "The people have spoken!" The question is: "What did they (the people) really say?" Many of those who signed the petition heard only the words:

"Do you want the right to vote on desalination?" How many actually read the initiative's fine print?

Several MCL directors and more than a few MCL members signed the petition. After careful review, however, ambiguity in the language of the initiative and motives of the proponents prompted the MCL Board unanimously not to support the campaign. For many people, the initiative offered the right to vote on a controversial and costly installation, but for others, it was, in effect, a "referendum" on desalination. Why else

would Dr. Bill Rothman, a primary backer, say at the June 26 meeting: "We wanted to put desalination in a 'straightjacket'?"

MCL's position on water supply for many years has placed highest priority on conservation and efficient use of local water from reservoirs in the Lagunitas Creek watershed. Recognizing that water is a precious and limited resource statewide, MCL more than once has opposed importing more water from the Russian River, which provides about 20 percent of our current supply. (Additionally, North Marin Water District receives 80 percent of its supply from the Russian River, which includes water diverted from the Eel River.)

All three watersheds that support MMWD—Lagunitas Creek, Russian River, and Eel River—also support endangered and threatened fish and are ecologically compromised. Because we are wholly reliant on these fragile biological systems for current supplies, MCL believes the district should not be "put in a straitjacket" as it plans how to serve its customers' water needs. The

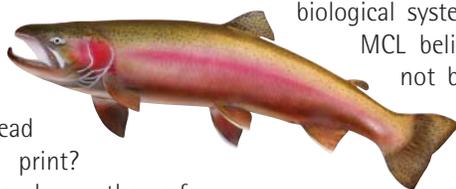
Monterey Peninsula has been forced to turn to desalination to replace some 10,000 acre feet of water annually because the habitat of the threatened steelhead trout fishery in the Carmel River, the Peninsula's historic source of water, is damaged and cannot be rehabilitated without water! Many issues differ in that situation—private ownership of the water, a different source

for desalination (converting brackish water from deep wells), and so on. Current trends suggest that desalination is not needed, but the unexpected can happen, forcing traditional sources to be re-examined.

Desalination in Marin should remain on the table as we face the uncertainties of climate change and as reverse osmosis technologies advance. Significant issues remain, even

All three watersheds that support MMWD also support endangered and threatened fish

after 20 years of study. First, however, the District's consumers must demonstrate that the recent downward trend in consumption continues long enough to be considered consistent and reliable. Conservation needs to be "hard-wired" into the habits of the District's users. The District's Measure S still leaves final control in the hands of the voters, who will have the opportunity to make the final decision before any desalination facility in the future could actually be constructed.



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

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**Monthly Committee Meeting
Schedule** (subject to change):

Land Use and Transportation:
1st Wed. of the month, 8:00 - 10:00 AM

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

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

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

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

MCL is a non-profit 501(c)3 organization.
All contributions and memberships are tax-
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September–October 2010

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Name _____

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