



GGNRA Chief David Smith will speak at MCL's Annual Dinner

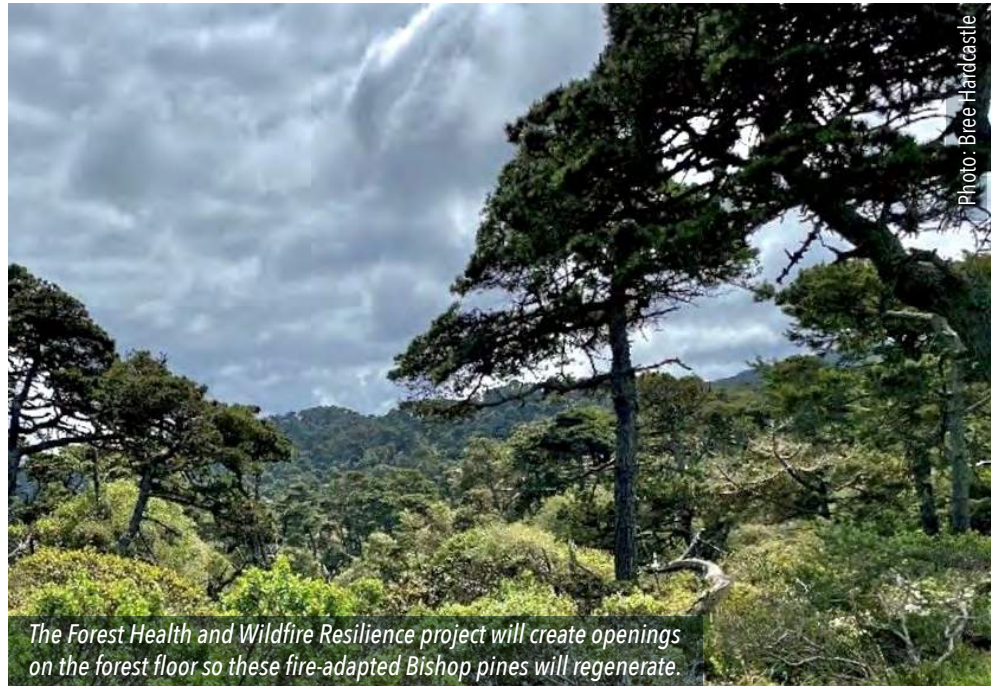
Golden Gate National Recreation Area's Superintendent, David Smith, will keynote MCL's Annual Dinner on April 26. "The Work's Not Over: Golden Gate and the next 50 years" is an apropos theme for this year's event. As MCL celebrates its 90th year and we pay tribute to an outstanding list of MCL's 2024 Environmental Achievement Awardees, we also elect new MCL officers and directors and commit to the work ahead.

Superintendent Smith is particularly well-suited to give this year's address. He has gained a reputation for building partnerships while taking responsibility for the Bay region's legendary park, sprawled across three counties that includes 37 sites, among them Muir Woods. During his 31-year career with the National Park Service he has built relationships with nonprofit park partners, local communities, Tribal governments, and public officials at all levels.

Please join us as we return to the Key Room at Homeward Bound in South Novato. Invitations will be mailed in March and preregistration is required. No tickets will be sold at the door.

More on Superintendent Smith, page 10

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The Forest Health and Wildfire Resilience project will create openings on the forest floor so these fire-adapted Bishop pines will regenerate.

Tomales Bay State Park Forest Health and Wildfire Resilience—the project advances

by Nona Dennis

In late 2022, California State Parks' staff kicked off the approval process for a ten-year program to restore the ecological health and wildfire resilience of Tomales Bay State Park (TBSP). The Tomales Bay State Park Forest Health and Wildfire Resilience Project (project) was first introduced to MCL a year ago by Bree Hardcastle, Environmental Scientist with Bay Area District, California State Parks, at MCL's February 2023 meeting of the Parks & Open Space Committee. The main elements of the project were also described by MCL Board Member Mike Swezy in MCL's March-April 2023 [newsletter](#). Swezy referred to the TBSP project as an example of how a variety of mechanical and manual treatments of vegetation, along with prescribed pile and broadcast burning and other treatments, can be employed to reduce accumulated understorey of dead and live plant material to manage overgrown forest habitats toward healthier and

more wildfire-resilient conditions. In the case of TBSP, this involves treating degraded stands of iconic Bishop pine as well as mixed hardwood forests, coastal scrub, and grasslands.

Over the past year, the TBSP project has moved closer to actual implementation. This past December, California State Parks (CSP) staff and consultants released a draft Public Works Plan (PWP) that provides programmatic guidelines for the planned work. CSP solicited public comment over a six-week period ending January 29 and during a public hearing. Because the TBSP is in the Coastal Zone, the PWP, when finalized after considering public comment, will go to the California Coastal Commission. During a public meeting, the CCC will determine whether to certify that the project is consistent with the Coastal Act. MCL is tracking the process—supporting a project that will bring essential technical help

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A Message from the President

Time to pivot: Enhancing fire resilience and reducing habitat disturbance

The earth's vegetation is part of a web of life in which there are intimate and essential relations between plants and the earth, between plants and other plants, between plants and animals. Sometimes we have no choice but to disturb these relationships, but we should do so thoughtfully, with full awareness that what we do may have consequences remote in time and place. – Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*

The growing history of devastating wildfires in Northern California and elsewhere requires attention to the lurking threat of wildfire in our own county, and of the Marin agencies and fire districts that are managing (removing, “disturbing”) vegetation to reduce that risk. We have forged agreement with Marin fire professionals that potential wildfires that threaten public safety are more likely to be wind-driven than fuel-driven, and that vegetation is more than fuel—that it is indeed a fundamental “part of a web of life.” Removing vegetation throughout the county to reduce wildfire risk must be done “thoughtfully, with full awareness that what we do [today] may have consequences that are remote in time and place.”

In 2022, Marin agencies used a variety of tools and treatments to reduce vegetation on 5,000 acres. Since then, thousands more acres have been treated or are in various stages of planning. MCL has participated in conversations regarding treatments, vegetation, and residential fire safety.

We now are contemplating with fire professionals: Are the vegetation practices (“disturbances”) currently employed to reduce wildfire risk being done as “thoughtfully and with [as] full awareness” as possible to ensure the continuing relationships of Marin’s plants with soils, wildlife and with each other?

In February, MCL’s Parks and Open Space Committee convened a meeting of fire ecologists, Marin County and Moraga-Orinda fire chiefs, Audubon Canyon Ranch’s Fire Forward program, Marin Wildfire Prevention Authority (MWPA), Marin Water, and our local land

management professionals. The discussion zeroed in on four strategies for vegetation removal that might transition—i.e., pivot—to a “better” way.

Pivot #1: Move away from the terminology “fuel breaks” or “shaded fuel breaks” which describe corridors where vegetation is reduced and removed, that are miles long and often hundreds of feet wide. Pivot instead to the concept of “expanded defensible space”, which is similar to that which describes protected areas around homes. “Fuel breaks” provide access for fire professionals to defend structures, but rarely prevent the spread of wildfire like the words imply. Research shows that wildfires, in coastal areas like Marin, spread mainly by winds carrying hot embers, not fuels in vegetated open spaces. Fire hardening homes and creating and maintaining “defensible space” close to structures are key to protecting homes, and also firefighter safety.

Pivot #2: Look increasingly to modelling fire behavior in relation to topography, vegetation, weather and other factors, overlain by mapping the presence of sensitive natural resources, as a guide to strategically locate treatments where they will be most effective in reducing fire spread, speed, and intensity and, at the same time, incur the least ecological damage on the landscape.

Pivot #3: Increase the use of prescribed burning as a way of ecologically removing vegetation in appropriate landscapes. Marin County land agencies and fire departments are collaborating to begin identifying appropriate areas to prioritize for burning. Buoyed by the experience and expertise in Audubon’s Canyon Ranch Fire

Forward Program, there is general interest by Marin’s professional fire community.

Pivot #4: Fund a study or monitoring program to document the effectiveness and impact (positive and negative) of vegetation treatments. Marin County citizens deserve to see the effect their tax dollars are having in reducing wildfire risk while protecting Marin’s valued environment. Existing monitoring programs by Santa Cruz Mountain Stewardship Network and Mid-Peninsula Regional Open Space can help guide Marin and create a Bay Area-wide approach. Their protocols for monitoring fuels, tree canopy, vegetation understory, and wildlife will be discussed at MCL’s May 9 Parks and Open Space Committee meeting.

Implementing these pivots collaboratively has the potential to both improve the fire resiliency of Marin and reduce habitat disturbance. As I close out my term as President of MCL, I encourage you to support these pivots, as I do, while the County’s various vegetation management programs move forward.

I’ve enjoyed the opportunity this past year to serve MCL as president. I also look forward to returning my focus back to serving as chair of MCL’s Parks and Open Space Committee. As we begin MCL’s 90th year, the work of the organization continues. I hope to see you at future committee meetings, speaker events, and our Annual Dinner in April.

There’s much to be done. We will do it together.

 Terri

MCL's 2024 Environmental Achievement Awards

2024 Environmental Achievement AWARD WINNERS

Peter Behr Lifetime Achievement Award

PAUL DA SILVA

Marin Green Award for Environmental Leadership

ED NUTE

Ted Wellman Water Award

ED UEBER

Youth Award for Environmental Leadership

FINN DOES

John M. McPhail, Jr. Green Business Award

**CHARLOTTE TORGOVITSKY,
HOME GROUND HABITS**

MCL Volunteer Award

BOB MILLER

MCL Special Award for Environmental Achievement

MIA MONROE

This year we celebrate the achievements of seven unique and accomplished awardees.

We are honored to present MCL's **Peter Behr Award for Lifetime Achievement** to **Paul da Silva**. This Award is presented to a person whose lifetime achievements reflect exemplary standards for preservation and protection of Marin's natural assets. Paul was chosen for his lifelong passion and commitment to environmental stewardship as a scientist, a College of Marin faculty member and Trustee, a decades-long board member of the Marin Chapter of the California Native Plant Society, and as founder of the Marin Biodiversity Corridor Initiative.

The **Marin Green Award for Environmental Leadership** will be presented to **Ed Nute** in recognition of his outstanding contributions toward preserving and protecting the natural assets of Marin County. Ed and his firm designed the Las Gallinas Wastewater Treatment ponds to provide habitat for wildlife. The ponds have been visited by hundreds of species of resident and migrating birds over the years. Ed assisted Marin Audubon in the purchase and maintenance of Baylands properties. As a board member on the Tomales Bay Foundation, Ed recently helped obtain a \$250,000 grant for the ongoing Chicken Ranch Beach Wetlands Enhancement Project.

MCL's **Ted Wellman Water Award** is presented to an individual who maintains Ted's high standards for protecting and preserving water resources in Marin and the state. MCL is pleased to announce that this year, the award recognizes **Ed Ueber**, the former superintendent of the Gulf of the Farallones, Cordell Banks, and a portion of the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuaries, some of the most diverse and bountiful marine environments in the world. Ed is currently Vice President Emeritus of the Greater Farallones Association which he helped establish in 1995. Ed is also a longstanding member of MCL.

MCL's **Youth Award for Environmental Leadership** recognizes Marin students who have made significant contributions to the community by seeking innovative solutions to environmental problems and issues. This year MCL recognizes the achievements of Marin Academy senior, **Finn Does**. As a climate justice community organizer with the Bay Area Youth Climate Summit, Finn was a leader and co-organizer of the 4th Annual Summit last October. Finn worked to build connection between climate activists, to

broaden understanding of how different people and groups are impacted by the climate crisis, and to investigate who has the power to make change.

The **John M McPhail, Jr. Green Business Award** is awarded to a Marin enterprise that exemplifies environmental sensitivity. This year's award honors **Charlotte Torgovitsky** and **Home Ground Habitats**, the native plant nursery and habitat gardening educational facility she founded in Novato. The nursery propagates and sells native plants, conducts workshops for teachers and home gardeners, and participates in habitat garden events. It also donates plants to restoration sites, school gardens and the California Native Plant Society's native plant sales. In a time of climate crisis and prioritization of home firescaping, Home Ground Habitats provides important resources for sustaining local biodiversity.

The **MCL Volunteer Award** honors a volunteer who has generously shared his or her time and talent to help MCL realize its mission. This year's award goes to MCL past president and current chair of MCL's Climate Action Working Group (CAWG), **Bob Miller**. As president, Bob led adoption of MCL's strategic plan that, for the first time, integrated a commitment to adaptation and mitigation of climate change in all of its advocacy. Bob also chairs a technical subcommittee, MCL's Clean Energy Group. Bob works tirelessly at expanding CAWG's reach for greater impact on climate issues and is a consistent MCL leader.

Annually, Marin Conservation League bestows six awards for outstanding environmental achievement. On rare occasions, MCL also selects an individual for an **MCL Special Award for Environmental Achievement**. This year, MCL will present **Mia Monroe** with this award. Mia began her lifelong commitment working a few hours a week for the campaign, People for a Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA). Once established, Mia then joined the National Park Service and has worked for GGNRA for the past forty years. As Site Superintendent for Muir Woods, Mia educated hundreds of thousands of visitors from around the world. She currently serves as the Park Service's Community Liaison for Marin County. In her personal life, Mia co-founded the Xerces Society's "Western Monarch Count." Mia has a special gift for inspiring others by her devotion to nature. In her words, "Nature is where I believe we get hope."

To learn more and meet these special individuals, please join us April 26 at MCL's Annual Dinner.

Tomales Bay State Park Forest Health and Wildfire Resilience

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The forests rise from the beaches on the west shore of Tomales Bay forming a dense tangle of oaks, bay, madrone and undergrowth.



Photos: Kate Powers

forests (including the rare Marin manzanita, *Arctostaphylos virgata*, which regenerates only by seed and not by root burl as do many other manzanitas), dense understory including invasive species, and deep layers of litter and duff that inhibits regeneration by seed. The survey also found extensive shrub encroachment into grassland. The assessment confirmed that the primary culprit leading to a cascade of other forest problems such as disease, death, and invasives, has been the absence of natural and cultural fire for many decades.

to the beleaguered TBSP ecosystems and actions to assure that ecosystem benefits of the project are long-lasting.

History and a forest in need

Tomales Bay State Park covers 2,400 acres of shoreline, grasslands, and forest ridges in seven parcels on the east and west sides of Tomales Bay. It's managed in accordance with the TBSP General Plan to preserve native plant and habitat diversity, restore the natural role of wildfire to the ecosystem, improve Bishop pine regeneration, reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire, reestablish forest structure, and collaborate with local communities in creating their own defensible space. The forests of TBSP rise from the coves and beaches that dot the west shore of Tomales Bay to the top of Inverness Ridge, forming a dense tangle of large oaks, bay, and madrone, and extensive undergrowth of huckleberry, wax myrtle, salal, rhododendron, fern, manzanita, blackberry, and poison oak. Scattered amidst the hardwood thickets are Bishop pines. Notably a large grove has become a semi-wilderness of standing pines, both dead and alive, amongst downed trunks and branches, and plant litter.

The only way to penetrate the undergrowth in this part of the park is by way of the Bruce

Johnstone Trail, which links Shell Beach in the south with Heart's Desire Beach to the north—roughly eight miles roundtrip. Midway it intersects the Jepson Trail, which descends through the Jepson Memorial Bishop Pine Grove, named for University of California's preeminent botanist Willis Jepson, a staunch supporter of the campaign that made TBSP a state park. To venture off these trails is to become easily lost. To venture onto them, however, is to be reminded of a crucial piece of early MCL history. Just beyond the Johnstone Trailhead at Heart's Desire Beach is a plaque dedicated to the memory of Bruce and Elsie Johnstone "whose imagination and dedicated effort helped bring this park into being, November 8, 1952, ~ The Marin Conservation League." (See Sidebar, p. 6)

What has been understood for years—that the park's forests are badly in need of management intervention—was confirmed by a Forest Inventory conducted in 2019. The assessment found high levels of tree disease and mortality, declining regeneration of Bishop pine and hardwood

This assessment, along with findings of a more recent comprehensive, countywide Marin Regional Forest Health Strategy and availability of necessary funds from the state Board of Forestry and Fire Protection, helped lay the groundwork for the CSP project. The objectives are to create openings in the forest floor for regeneration, emulate important ecological functions of fire to fire-adapted species like the Bishop pine (e.g., it takes heat to open cones to release seed), reduce current fuel loads to improve resilience of the forest to future wildfire and at the same time reduce risk of wildfire for public safety and welfare—clusters of some



The rare Marin manzanita

1,000 residences are dispersed along Inverness Ridge. As stated in Swezy's article, the CSP is also collaborating with the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria to examine vegetation practices that could mimic Coast Miwok burning practices. Hardcastle, in her introduction to MCL a year ago, enumerated other vegetation treatments that might be applied, such as limited herbivory (grazing goats), or judicious applications of herbicide to follow manual and mechanical treatments.

Scope of project

The overall treatment area is 1,200 acres, but individual treatments will be dispersed according to priority and feasibility. For example,

defensible space treatments will be prioritized adjacent to communities and road corridors; natural and cultural resources, access, slope, density, aesthetics, and other factors will be taken into consideration in wildlands. Particular attention will be paid to removing dead, downed, and standing trees, reducing ladder fuels to prevent crown fires, and creating openings in mineral soils to promote regeneration. As Swezy points out, the intent is to recreate a mosaic of Bishop pine in seral stages, promote natural "safe" wildfire recurrence and resilience to future wildfire, and treat hardwood forests to support biodiversity, while also reducing biomass and fuel levels. Vegetation material removed will be consumed on site in burn piles, chipped into trucks, lopped and scattered, or masticated and dispersed on site. Prescribed fire will be utilized only according to detailed burn plans that consider many factors. The primary intent in the east park is to reduce coyote bush encroachment and thatch in grasslands and enable reemergence of native forbs (wildflowers).

A complex administrative process

As sponsor, CSP will be in charge of implementing the project and ensuring environmental compliance. Two other state agencies are also involved: California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) for funding, standards and specifications, and compliance at a program level with the California

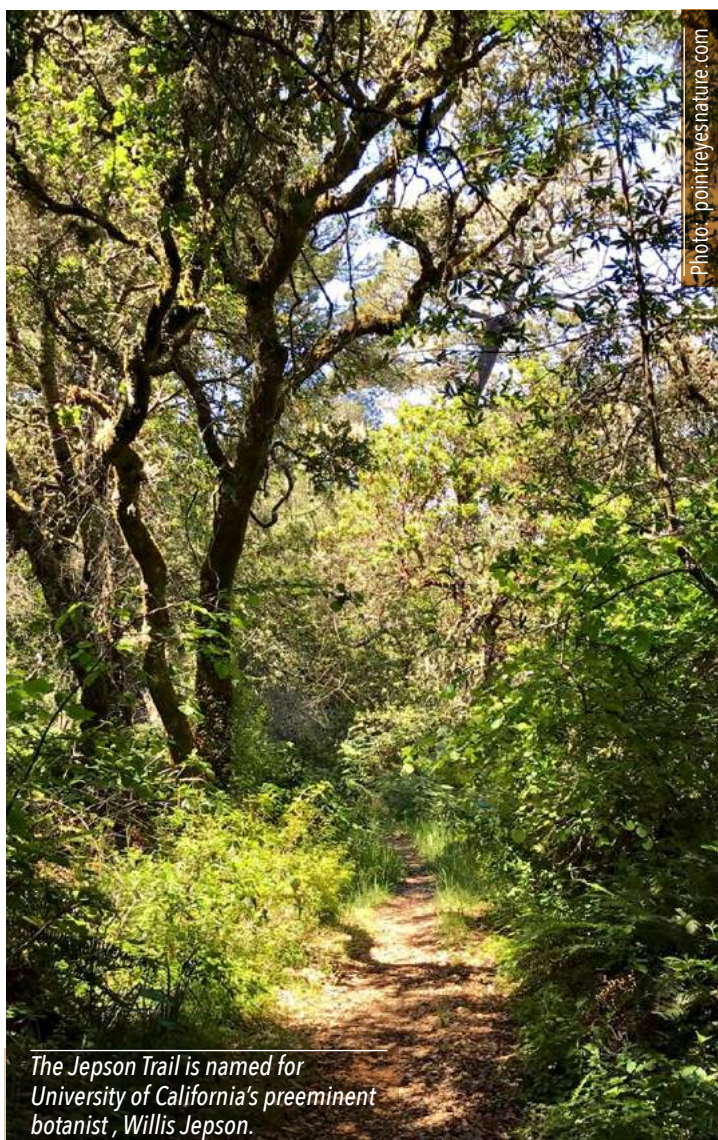
Environmental Quality Act (CEQA); and the California Coastal Commission (CCC), which must certify that the project is consistent with the California Coastal Act. Each has administrative and regulatory requirements that together make for a complicated process. It will take attention and diligence for the local public to keep track of actions within the park as they occur over the ten-year life of the project.

CAL FIRE is key to the project. In the mid-2000s, with the alarming rise in devastating wildfires in the state's forests and adjacent urban areas, CAL FIRE took the lead in preparing for preemptive vegetative management across the state by commissioning a comprehensive study of all the actions that might be employed in a multi-pronged attempt to protect more than two-million acres of forests from future wildfire. The study described hundreds of possible treatment specifications; it examined their potential impacts on the environment; and it identified mitigation measures that could be applied to reduce or eliminate such impacts. It also itemized many best practices (called "standard project requirements" in this context) that would be routinely observed to avoid harm to plants and wildlife, such as pre-activity nesting bird surveys and rare plant surveys.

The result was the 2019 statewide California Vegetation Treatment Program (CalVTP) and Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR). The CalVTP specifications have become the guide for hundreds of projects throughout the state, including those carried out by the Marin Wildfire Prevention Authority and fire agencies in Marin. For the TBSP project, CSP staff and consultants are incorporating CalVTP specifications, mitigation measures, and standard project requirements in a Project-Specific Analysis (PSA) and Addendum to the CalVTP PEIR. In turn, CalFire must approve the PSA/Addendum as being consistent with the CalVTP PEIR.

The project must also comply with California's Coastal Act, as determined by the CCC, which will take the lead in public review. The recently prepared PWP provides the planning framework for coastal compliance. When finalized by CSP, the PWP will be submitted to the CCC for certification. It must also comply with Coastal

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The Jepson Trail is named for University of California's preeminent botanist, Willis Jepson.

HISTORY OF TOMALES BAY STATE PARK

The founding of Tomales Bay State Park was formally recognized in a ceremony at Heart's Desire Beach on November 9, 1952. Even in the absence of services and amenities, thousands of visitors came that first year to visit the hitherto little-known, now-public beaches. The story behind its acquisition really begins in the first months following MCL's founding—at the League's fourth-ever meeting in early 1935—when Inverness rancher George Burbank attended and “stressed the urgent need of preserving beaches on Tomales Bay.” With similar treats on the horizon, the beaches on Tomales Bay were at the top of the League's list of priorities for conservation. Serious involvement did not begin until the early 1940s, however, when 190 acres around Shell Beach were threatened with development.

Bruce Johnstone, an Inverness resident, County Planning Commissioner, and early MCL Director, persuaded the would-be-developer to reduce his price, and together with Caroline Livermore, convinced the Board of Supervisors to match MCL's offer of \$15,000. The Board agreed, and in a maneuver that became a hallmark of MCL's conservation tactics, Livermore and Johnstone went back to the MCL Board and spearheaded a fund-raising campaign for the \$15,000. Shell Beach thus became a County Park, setting off a chain of parkland acquisitions. To set the stage, Johnstone and his wife Elise had invited MCL Board members to boat trips followed by lunch in their beautiful home in Inverness. A strong supporter of the acquisition campaign was University of California's pre-eminent botanist Willis Lynn Jepson, who recognized the botanical value of the Bishop pine grove within the acquired parkland. He died in 1946, and the grove was named in his memory.

As more development threatened along the shore of Tomales Bay, the campaign expanded to the State Parks System, which had the ability to purchase parkland only if half the purchase funds came from non-state sources. To gain their interest, Livermore, with the Johnstones, invited State Park Commissioners for a Coast Guard boat trip to see the beautiful beaches that line Tomales Bay and to be entertained at the Johnstone home. By 1948,



Plaque near the entrance to Johnstone Trail (above) reads “In Memory of Bruce and Elsie Johnstone whose imagination and dedicated efforts helped bring this park into being. November 3, 1952. The Marin Conservation League.”

the County had agreed to give Shell Beach to the State, plus \$26,000, and MCL had added another \$10,000, all together to match the State in purchase of a 840-acre parcel of beach and forest. By 1951, the state had agreed to an area that included five beaches and waterfront, a grove of Bishop pine forest, and many more acres of scenic and botanical splendor. In 1980, the new **Johnstone Trail** was completed, connecting all the west park's beaches.

That was the year Carlos Porrata—recipient of MCL's 2023 Peter Behr Award—began his 24-year service as resident Ranger for the Park, among many other activities, imparting the legends of Native American inhabitants of Tomales Bay to thousands of elementary school children. In his retirement years, Carlos has helped to keep the State Parks in Marin open and their legacy alive! Tomales Bay State Park now covers about 2,400 acres of shoreline, grasslands, and forest ridges in seven parcels on the east and west sides of the Bay.

Tomales Bay State Park

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Photo: James Scott



Photo: Greg Lavaty

According to CDFW, the project area may contain suitable habitat for several species including the tricolored blackbird (L) and the California black rail (R).

Vegetation Treatment Standards (appended to the PWP) to ensure that vegetation treatments will not harm “environmentally significant habitat areas” (ESHAs) in the Coastal Zone. (Communities in the park that qualify as ESHAs include Bishop pine forest, coast live oak woodland and forest, tan oak forest, and California bay woodland and forests.)

The project also must meet requirements of the Marin County Local Coastal Program, be consistent with the TBSP’s General Plan, and meet the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) and the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) requirements for threatened and endangered species. Once the PWP is approved, the PSA can be finalized for review by the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection. The two documents go hand-in-hand in describing the proposed work. The PSA will be posted on the CalVTP web viewer two weeks in advance of the review meeting.

Once that process is complete, the project returns to the CCC and a Notice of Impending Development (NOID) will be issued. This is a critical step, as it is then that the more specific project details will be released for public comment. The approval process thus far, has not provided the details needed to adequately evaluate the environmental effects of the project. Permitting agencies will be providing comments to the NOID that will be important for the public to fully grasp an understanding of the project. Once complete, treatment plans in the areas identified in the NOID will be implemented without future formal public notice. It is possible that more than one NOID will be submitted within the ten-year period.

MCL’s comments and concerns

Ten years is a long time to keep track of a series of vegetation treatments that will be dispersed over time and space. As Hardcastle explained recently, many environmental variables and seasonal restrictions (e.g., for sensitive species) must be considered for each treatment project, such that work windows are few and limited during any one year. Work must be planned far in advance to avoid these restrictions. The ten-year span allows TBSP to plan ahead and implement small treatment areas at appropriate times of the year.

MCL’s concerns focus on two issues: (1) how the work will be monitored, both before treatment activities occur and after they have been completed, and (2) how the public will be notified of pending activities. We have been reassured that standard project requirements and mitigation measures in the CalVTP call for pre-project surveys for sensitive plant and wildlife species. These surveys are reinforced by protocols required by CDFW and USFWS for listed species, like the northern spotted owl. MCL supports CDFW comments that call for protection of nongame birds, birds of prey, and their nests and eggs. The project area may contain suitable habitat for tricolored blackbird, California black rail, marbled murrelet, California tiger salamander, California red-legged frog, and western bumblebee. The project area is known to contain suitable habitat and positive detections for Northern spotted owl (CDFW file information). CDFW recommends appropriate avoidance, minimization, and/or mitigation measures.

MCL encourages CSP to include post-project monitoring at regular intervals. MCL has been working to promote a set of monitoring protocols that could follow all fire fuel vegetation management activities in Marin. There is need for a consistent approach to measuring—post-project—the effectiveness of treatments, especially to note any shifts in habitats or impacts on sensitive species, determine the threat of invasive species, and to estimate treatment recurrence intervals. We urge CSP to confer with other land managers to develop and carry out such protocols. The TBSP General Plan also calls for annual monitoring of park conditions.

MCL is also advocating that the public be kept informed as work proceeds and has urged CSP to provide regular updates on upcoming projects, their accomplishments, and any adaptive management needed. This will improve public understanding of the ecological complexities of vegetation management, share lessons learned, and provide for future innovations. MCL urges CSP to collaborate with nearby communities on defensible space and home-hardening, neither of which is a direct TBSP responsibility. MCL can help support public outreach by providing a forum through MCL monthly Parks and Open Space Committee meetings or special speaking events.

Finally, MCL is encouraged that broadcast burning is included in the PWP as a potential management tool and hopes that the method becomes a long-term tool for maintenance of treated forest stands.

**Resource surveys on TBSP have been in progress over the past year, and actual program work could begin in 2024.
The TBSP website will provide updates.**

MCL adopts new Housing Policy Statement

by Paul Jensen, AICP

In November 2023, the Marin Conservation League Board adopted a comprehensive housing policy statement. This policy statement will be used by MCL to review and take positions on new housing development in Marin, as well as housing policies by local jurisdictions. The policy statement addresses current critical housing topics and issues including: the many State housing laws and mandates intended to promote new housing; climate change; social equity including housing for the underrepresented; and needed workforce housing. At the same time, this policy statement considers and respects MCL's longstanding mission to protect, preserve, and enhance the Marin environment. The adopted policy statement can be accessed on MCL's [website](#).

Although housing is not a primary mission or focus for MCL, it is not a new topic of interest to this environmental organization. Historically, MCL has taken positions on key housing policies and major development throughout Marin, relying on two resources—MCL's 1995 Housing Policy statement, and the 2013 update of Community Marin. The 1995 MCL Housing Policy statement is broad and generally supports the principles set out in the 1973 Marin Countywide Plan. For the most part, this earlier MCL policy focuses on minimizing sprawl and encouraging infill, primarily along the Marin Countywide Plan's "City Centered Corridor" (eastern, US 101 corridor and urban areas). Community Marin, which is a planning document that was developed in collaboration with other Marin environmental organizations, presents more specific policy recommendations. Collectively, these two resources have been used by MCL to review and take positions on major housing development projects through an environmental lens.

Changing times

A lot has changed in the last 10+ years, which became reasons to update MCL's housing policies and positions. First, there has been a heightened awareness of climate change at the federal, state, and regional levels, which resulted in new laws such as California's statewide mandate (SB32) to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 40% below 1990 levels by 2030. Second,

the housing crisis surfaced following the Great Recession of 2008 and 2009, which led to a flurry of new State laws relaxing regulations, processing procedures, and CEQA/environmental review for new housing development. Further, these State laws place "tall order" mandates on local municipalities to plan for the development of a substantial number of new housing units. This tall order is particularly challenging in Marin County, which is nearly built-out and where suitable sites for substantial housing development are sparse. Thirdly, Marin County has a growing workforce that cannot afford to live within the County because housing is too costly. This results in exhausting commutes and increased traffic, air quality impacts, and greenhouse gas emissions. Lastly, there is the need to address social equity, diversity, and inclusion. This is most relevant and critical in Marin County, which is the least demographically diverse county and has the highest disparity among household income levels in the Bay Area and statewide.

MCL's housing policy ad hoc committee

The development of MCL's new housing policy statement was a two-year process. This effort was led by the hard work of an ad-hoc committee of MCL members with different professional backgrounds, but all sharing a common interest in housing. The foundation for the ad-hoc committee's work was tracking and monitoring progress on the state-mandated Housing Elements being developed by the County of Marin and each Marin municipality. This effort was informative and timely as the local governments were each tasked by the State to develop a Housing Element to include a long list of newly launched requirements including a substantial increase in mandated housing development obligations (Regional Housing Need Allocation – aka RHNA) and new requirements spotlighting the need to address housing affordability and equity. To ensure consistency with MCL's mission, particular attention was given to following the Marin County Housing Element process to see how or if there would be significant changes to the longstanding structure of the 1973 Marin Countywide Plan. Marin County achieved adoption of a Housing Element that plans for

development of substantial new housing without compromising the 1973 Plan, by primarily concentrating new housing along the "City Centered Corridor," with some increased housing opportunities in West Marin where affordable workforce housing is sorely needed.

MCL's ad hoc housing committee completed a draft housing policy statement in summer 2023, followed by detailed review and editing by MCL's Land Use, Transportation and Water Committee, with adoption by the Board in November 2023.

Objectives

The objective of the housing policy statement is to guide MCL's active participation in local decision-making and commenting on local government policy setting and housing development projects to:

- » Support the preservation of the existing housing stock that serves the county workforce, and lower-income and underrepresented populations.
- » Encourage the placement of new housing throughout Marin, particularly in developed infill areas and within Marin's "City-Centered Corridor."
- » Discourage or oppose new housing development in environmentally sensitive or risk-prone areas and areas with limited utilities and infrastructure unless the environmental impacts of the development are first considered and addressed.
- » Protect the health and welfare, as well as the quality of life for the human environment.
- » Promote green spaces, trees, and native landscaping amidst housing.

MCL's housing goals and policy positions

The adopted MCL policy statement presents six goals, and 58 policies supporting the goals. The ad hoc committee worked to ensure that the new goals and policies address changing times while respecting MCL's mission and longstanding positions. While not summarizing

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each policy in MCL's adopted policy statement (available on MCL's website [link]), the discussion below focuses on selected policies of the six goals, coupled with a sampling of recent projects and actions that demonstrate how it is anticipated these policies will be interpreted, applied and implemented by MCL.

Goal A – Preserve, Protect and Enhance the Natural Environment

Through participation in Marin County's Housing Element process, MCL, along with others, successfully lobbied the County against rezoning the Bowman Canyon property in northwest Novato from the current A60 Agriculture zoning to a zoning district that would permit urban-type housing development. Bowman Canyon is located within the Marin Countywide Plan "Inland Rural Corridor". It is a rural site with high habitat and recreational values and no infrastructure to support urban development. By holding to the current A60 zoning, the County maintained and respected the longstanding planning corridor principles of the 1973 Countywide Plan and reassigned the planned housing units for Bowman Canyon to other housing opportunity sites in the county.

Goal B – Encourage and Optimize Housing Opportunities in the Built Environment, and Goal C – Promote Housing for the County's Workforce

Earlier this year, the State of California approved the Oak Hill Apartments housing development on an 8.3-acre, undeveloped portion of the San Quentin State Penitentiary property in Larkspur. Involving a partnership with developers EDEN Housing and Thompson Dorfman, the Oak Hill Apartment project is designed to provide 250 units of affordable workforce housing. MCL followed this project through the State-led public planning and environmental review process. Through comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Report, MCL expressed support for high density housing development on this site. In addition to being consistent with MCL's Housing Policy C2, which advocates for housing for all levels of Marin's workforce, the infill site is consistent



Artists' renderings: Oak Hill Apartments Development at San Quentin, Larkspur (above); One Hamilton Housing Development, Mill Valley (below)



with MCL's Policy B2 as it is within 1/2-mile of multiple modes of transit and is close to US 101. The Oak Hill Apartments project presents a rare opportunity to provide true workforce housing for our teachers, firefighters, public employees, as well as for many of our very low- and low-income service workers.

Goal D – Support and Promote Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

Most recently, MCL advocated support for the One Hamilton project proposed on an infill site

in Mill Valley. The project proposes development of 44 apartment units with all units affordable to qualifying low-income renters. MCL's Housing Policy D3 advocates to support development of 100% affordable housing projects, and advocate for projects that are designed and built in an environmentally sustainable manner.

Goal E – Adapt to Climate Change

MCL's Housing Policy E5 states "Encourage any new development near waterfronts or

cont. p. 10

New Housing Policy Statement *cont. from page 9*

shorelines be required to include an analysis of potential environmental impacts (e.g., flooding/sea level rise, biological and aquatic resources) and how they will be addressed." In July 2022, MCL commented on the Negative Declaration for the proposed 3.9-acre Liberty Ship Way project in Sausalito that would include three buildings and a large parking lot. The comments stated that MCL discourages or opposes new development in shoreline areas without considering future sea level rise and made several related recommendations for additional study.

Goal F - Maximize Resource Conservation

MCL has been an active participant in the development of Marin's Countywide Building Electrification Roadmap. The goal of this program is to promote county-wide regulations to transition home energy use from natural gas to electric. This effort is consistent with MCL's Housing Policy F5, which advocates for prohibiting the use of natural gas in new housing development.

It is inevitable that the urban landscape in Marin will evolve with new housing, and that the state of housing will continue to change. We should also expect that some new housing in Marin will be developed following "by-right" laws (SB35 and SB9), where there is no public review process or CEQA/environmental review. It's important for MCL to stay current on housing law and policy changes. While MCL's new housing policy statement will be used as a foundation for taking positions on local policy and housing development, it's critical that it be reviewed and updated periodically. 


MCL's 90th Anniversary Keynote Speaker, GGNRA Superintendent Smith



David Smith moved to the Bay Area in 2023 to begin his role as Superintendent of GGNRA. He oversees 300 park employees and is responsible for 82,000 acres of park lands including 60 miles of coast north and south of the Golden Gate Bridge, more than 130 miles of trails, and 1,200 historic structures. Seventeen million people, from as close as next-door, to travelers from around the world, annually visit GGNRA parks in one of the most urban and complex sites in the National Park System. David was excited to return to the park where he had served as a Ranger two decades ago.

David's reputation for relationship-building will continue to serve him well at a time when many parks confront overwhelming challenges. Regarding GGNRA staff, who he has called "some of the smartest people I have met in my whole life", David worries about the impact that the affordable housing deficit has on them and on his ability to hire additional staff. He is concerned about crime within the park - "people who come here need to feel safe." In addressing the ruinous effects of climate change, David has said that we (NPS) have to go beyond just limiting our own impact, possibly "reinterpret laws" and "align with changing ideas of park stewardship."

Born in Oceanside and raised in northern San Diego, David completed a BA in Forestry and Development Studies at UC Berkeley. His choice of a career with the National Park Service was "easy". After graduation, he made a 100-day road trip with his partner, now husband John Evans, to visit varied National Park units across the country. He found NPS staff without exception, dedicated "and happy", carrying out the 100-year-old park mission. While a ranger at Grand Canyon, David completed a MS in Resource Interpretation from Stephen F. Austin State University in Texas. He most recently served nine years as Superintendent of the vast 800,000-acre Joshua Tree National Park.

During his career David has served in numerous roles, from enforcement and rescue to biological technician, administrative and legislative staff, and cultural and resource interpretation. When asked what he did to prepare to be superintendent of a park, David replied, "All those things... everything you learn in the Park Service you will use again sometime in your career." Maybe due to his proximity to work, maybe it's his internal drive; David often runs to work.

We hope you will join us in April, as Superintendent Smith invites us to look into the future, and to be clear-eyed about the work ahead. 



MCL AFTER HOURS


2024 Update: New Housing Laws and their Impact on Development in Marin

SAVE THE DATE

Wednesday, March 13, 2024 ~ 7:00 - 8:30 pm

Via Zoom. Registration information coming soon



Joan Cox is an attorney and Sausalito's current Vice Mayor.

Barbara Kautz is a Partner at the law firm, Goldfarb & Lipman LLP, and a former planner.

Together they will present a 2024 update on recent State housing legislation and how it affects the review and development of housing at a local level in Marin County.

John Hart's *Marin County Environmental History*: A legacy project advances

Marin County, a bridge away from San Francisco, is a gorgeous, problematic little world. Taxpayers nationwide have helped buy its magnificent parks; local efforts have placed half of its farmland under agricultural conservation easement. Its biodiversity is extraordinarily high, its human diversity extraordinarily low. Big choices lie ahead as the state brings pressure to house more people and as sea level rise and violent weather swings,

and results of global warming, upset old expectations. To help ground ongoing debates, Marinites and Marin-watchers need a deep knowledge of how the county got to where it is now: the marvelous natural endowment and its fortunes; the gains, losses, wrangles, transformations that have made Marin simultaneously an environmental model and for some a cautionary tale.

— John Hart

In May 2022, MCL helped launch a comprehensive, multi-year project that is the brainchild of Marin County historian, nature writer and poet, John Hart: a *Marin County Environmental History*. As the year 2024 begins, the project is very much alive.

John's writing career began in 1970 with a byline in Marin's weekly, the *Pacific Sun*. In the ensuing half century, John's work has stretched across "a vast landscape of environmental issues in 16 books and several hundred articles." Much of his work covers the California environment—from Mono Lake, through the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, to many locales in the San Francisco Bay-Delta Region. Four of his book titles have focused squarely on local Marin County affairs, including the award-winning *Farming on the Edge*. Many of his articles provide important background for understanding significant conservation wins in Marin, for instance those depicted in the film *Rebels with a Cause*. Far beyond the stereotypic themes of nature writing, John's books and articles probe every aspect of the natural world and its intersection with people and their cultures, economies, laws, and politics.

Marin's history is a tapestry of people and their cultures, spread over millennia, who have occupied this small peninsula at the edge of the continent—first gradually, then rapidly transforming it over recent centuries. Though it seems no one history can bring together the many-faceted human and geographic dimensions that have enabled the conservation of resources that distinguish Marin, John intends to tell in full and in a well-documented fashion, the Marin environmental story he has told piecemeal over the past 50 years.

The environmental history will begin with "The bones of the story: Geology and geography" and will continue with aspects of the county's distinctive natural setting, how it became a peninsula, and what makes it unique among the varied landscapes of California. Then it will proceed chronologically.



Topics and chapters will include:

- » A chapter on the 1930's with headings, "The first stirrings of County planning" and "The unique billboard ban" which promise to feature MCL's nascent preservation efforts;
- » "A startling turn: a revolution in planning" (1970s) which will detail the efforts leading up to Marin's first County-wide Plan (which recently marked its 50th anniversary) and the roles of Marge Macris, Sol Silver, and others;
- » Context to issues in the news today like: "Suburbia rampant", (1950s and 60s), "Water supply and growth debate" and "The 1976-77 drought" (1970s);
- » A chronicle of the practices of disconnecting Marin's creeks and watersheds from the Bay and filling wetlands and subsequent efforts to protect and restore them in "Filling the Bay" (1950's), "From creeks to ditches: wholesale channelization" (1960's), "New focus on Bayshore and wetlands" (1990's), and wetland restoration chapters (2000's and 2010's).

The relationship of these topics to today's issues, plus all the topics in the 2020's, speak to why this book will be an important compendium to refer to and learn from for years to come. It will tell the story of the place that Marin has come to occupy in both the region and beyond.

For the full outline and more details about the project, go to the website, marinenvironmentalhistory.org. It provides detailed information on John's background, his blogs, and bibliography. It will also provide an opportunity to donate funds—essential to a book project of this scope! Kicked off with enthusiastic support and seed funds from MCL, John's book project is now under the fiscal sponsorship of the non-profit MarinLink.



MARIN CONSERVATION LEAGUE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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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

Staff

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Martha Richter Smith, San Anselmo
Office Administrator

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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-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

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Marin Conservation League's Annual Meeting & Election - April 26, 2024 PROPOSED SLATE OF OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS 2024-2025

The Marin Conservation League's Nominating Committee, chaired by Ken Drexler, has nominated the following persons for election as MCL Officers and Directors at the 2024 Annual Meeting and Election. All MCL members are eligible to vote.

NOMINATED FOR ELECTION AS OFFICERS FOR 2024-2025:

President	Nona Dennis, Mill Valley
First Vice-President	Paul Jensen, San Rafael
Second Vice-President	Pam Reaves, San Rafael
Treasurer	Richard Jensen, Corte Madera
Secretary	Kate Powers, San Rafael

NOMINATED FOR ELECTION AS DIRECTORS NEW TO THE MCL BOARD:

Term ending 2027

Jack Liebster, Corte Madera
Bobbi Simpson, Fairfax
Ken Strong, Greenbrae

NOMINATED FOR RE-ELECTION TO THE MCL BOARD:

Term ending 2027

Mike Swezy, Fairfax
Greg Zitney, Novato

NOMINATED FOR ELECTION TO THE MCL BOARD:

Term ending 2025

Terri Thomas, Sausalito

Term ending 2026

Larry Minikes, San Rafael

Term ending 2027

Vicki Nichols, Sausalito

THESE DIRECTORS WILL CONTINUE TO SERVE EXISTING TERMS

Term ending 2025

Belle Cole, San Rafael
Ken Drexler, Fairfax
Nancy Hughes, Novato
Georgia McIntosh, Mill Valley

Term ending 2026

Jane Medley, San Rafael
Bob Miller, San Rafael
Aviva Rossi, Fairfax
Jeff Stump, Inverness