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Marin Independent Journal
4000 Civic Center Drive, Suite 301
San Rafael, CA 94903

Proposition 68 is Good for Marin County

By Linda Novy, President, Marin Conservation League

Proposition 68 on the June ballot seeks voter approval for the \$4.1 billion California Clean Water & Safe Parks Act. Marin Conservation League urges a yes vote on this far-sighted and important measure.

Californians have faithfully supported the state's environmental resources, periodically approving bond measures to maintain and improve the state's conservation heritage. General obligation bonds are routinely used to pay for public infrastructure for which governments do not have funds on hand, and they must be approved by voters. The last water and parks bond measure was \$5.4 billion Proposition 84 in 2006, funds now about depleted. It is time for a new round of support.

Proposition 68 is visionary in addressing a long list of environmental threats and needs, a more sweeping mandate than prior efforts. According to the ballot, it would authorize \$4 billion in general obligation bonds for "creation and rehabilitation of state and local parks, natural resources protection projects, climate adaptation projects, water quality and supply projects, and flood protection projects."

Money would be grouped into three broad categories: parks and recreation, habitat protection and land conservation, and water infrastructure, including groundwater and flood protection. Within these categories some funds would be distributed evenly around the state on a formula basis and other funds would be provided according to project merits. Each county in California is promised at least \$400,000 for parks, and Bay Area communities, besides being qualified for competitive grants, are guaranteed at least \$250 million. More than \$200 million would be designated for restoration and water quality of our beleaguered Bay and Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta.

None of the bond money could be used for new dams or Delta tunnels.

Funding pots specific to the Bay Area for which Marin would be eligible, include \$21 million to the San Francisco Bay Conservancy Program, and \$20 million available to match grants awarded from Regional Measure AA revenue this is the "Clean and Healthy Bay" parcel tax approved in 2016.

The Conservancy is a vital partner for many Marin projects, with funds now at work on projects including sea level rise planning; marsh restoration in Corte Madera and San Rafael; invasive plant removal at Creekside Park in Kentfield; and climate change adaptation countywide. The first Measure AA grants, announced in April, include flood control work at Deer Island wetlands in Novato. More Marin projects are in the hopper for coming years, and matching funds will be needed, which Prop 68 could provide.

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Other opportunities of interest to Marin County include: \$30 million for trail and greenway investments, a total of \$443 million to various agencies for climate preparedness, habitat resilience, resource enhancement, and innovation; and \$1.1 billion for local water supply and management, and flood protection.

Proposition 68 would also replenish the state's agricultural land conservation and stewardship accounts, making badly needed funds available for Marin agricultural lands. Included would be \$30 million to plan, develop, and implement innovative farm and ranch management practices and protections that improve climate adaptation by improving soil health and farm and ranch land habitat; \$20 million to protect, restore, and enhance working and agricultural lands and watersheds, and \$20 million for agricultural operations to implement irrigation systems that save water.

In the last century when forests were being felled and marshes filled for urbanization, Marin's early leaders had the wisdom to save natural areas from land speculation – a legacy now under public stewardship. These woodlands and wetlands are also a potent defender of the planet's health, soaking up emissions that accelerate the rate of climate change. Proposition 68 is truly an investment that would return multiple benefits. Please vote yes on June 5.