



ENVIRONMENTAL FORUM OF MARIN

Fall 2008

NEWSLETTER



PROMOTING A SUSTAINABLE WORLD THROUGH ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

We Are All Guests In This House

Ethics for the 21st Century DAVID WECKLER (31)

Most of us don't need more evidence to convince us that human activity is putting at risk the very natural systems that have enabled human societies to flourish. We're all struck by the number, diversity and urgency of initiatives to protect or restore threatened elements of our world, virtually all of which seem important, worth supporting. And yet, despite all this activity, all this advocacy, all these initiatives, we haven't yet seriously begun to meet our biggest challenges. Carbon emissions, climate change, and their sequelae are the obvious planet-wide threats to human civilization. Destruction of water and soil habitats, collapse of fisheries and agricultural productivity, clearing of forests, loss of wilderness, water shortages, economic shocks from oil scarcity and skyrocketing food costs, and the rising population and consumption that drive all these effects are increasingly global in distribution and scope. The damage caused by human activity can all be traced, one way or another, back to our exploitation of earth's constituents and systems, and the waste streams we create in the process.

What can we do about it? It seems to me that we humans need to learn, quickly, how (1) human activities are producing the effects we observe (as well as those we haven't yet noticed) on the earth's life-enabling systems; (2) to mitigate and cease the destructive effects we are having; (3) to restore and sustain earth's life systems; and (4) to conduct ourselves individually and collectively to accomplish the first three. As communities, as societies, as a civilization, our survival may depend on "learning how to learn" to achieve these outcomes.

The task is enormous. We've never before been in the situation of dealing with the global effects of the human footprint. We know more about (1) above than (2) through (4), because the effects are there to be studied, and are increasingly evident. Even so, we don't understand very well how human conflict, political gridlock, and economic assumptions and systems contribute to the basic problems, nor how human capacities and institutions may help solve them. We can see that the exponential growth of the human population is the overwhelming driving force behind ecological overshoot, but we know little how to slow or reverse our growth, or to reduce our consumption. Yet if we don't, the earth's limits will.

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Update: Marin Clean Energy

BOB SPOFFORD (32)

Marin Clean Energy - our local brand of Community Choice Aggregation - continued its steady march toward becoming reality with two important public meetings in late June. MCE is Marin's plan to form its own agency for buying greener electricity; it's the biggest step any of us could take to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

This past spring, a joint County/Cities Task Force, working with several top energy consultants, completed a two-year process of evaluating the feasibility of CCA and drafting the MCE business plan. Now, the process has moved out to the individual cities. By November, each City Council must decide whether or not to join a new MCE joint powers authority. To that end, each city is now conducting public education events and council study sessions to evaluate this decision.

On June 23, Mill Valley held a public education event for an overflow crowd at the Mill Valley Community Center. Actor and Mill Valley resident Peter Coyote delivered an informal keynote that captured the excitement of being able to do something truly significant in the fight against global warming. Dawn Weisz of the county's Sustainability Team then presented the details of how MCE would work. She was followed by a representative of PG&E, who outlined their reasons for opposing it. (PG&E has admitted that their opposition represents the interests of their stockholders and not necessarily those of their customers.) Supervisor Charles McGlashan and Mill Valley Mayor Shawn Marshall also spoke expressing their support. The evening ended with an unplanned, informal straw poll in which virtually

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In This Issue

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Meet Our New President

As the Environmental Forum of Marin moves into its 36th year, we welcome new President Vicki Rupp. Vicki graduated from Class 33 and has been an active board member ever since.

Vicki first served for two years as Treasurer. Like many graduates, she thought the Environmental Forum's program was terrific and wanted to give back by supporting the Forum. Because Vicki had earned an MBA at Stanford and had a background in business – she was vice president for global procurement for the Americas at American Express until retiring in 2001 – the treasurer's role came naturally to her.

Even while Vicki was serving as Treasurer, the nominating committee asked her to consider becoming vice-president, which would have put her in line for the presidency. In the past, the president served two years as vice-president, two years as president, and then two years as past-president for a total of six years on the Board. When she met with current President David McConnell to discuss this possibility, they decided to accelerate the process because both of them had already spent a significant time on the Board. They decided to suggest to the nominating committee that she take over the presidency without serving as vice-president and David advance to the position of past president. They pledged to work very closely together and are both happy with the decision.

Vicki's primary objective for her presidency is to ensure that the Environmental Forum does the best job it can in pursuing its mission to provide environmental education. Vicki recognizes that there's been a huge shift in people's concern for the environment. As a result she has asked the Board to undertake a strategic planning initiative – EFM hasn't done one since 2002 – to make sure the Environmental Forum continues to offer in-depth, accurate, unbiased environmental education in the most efficient and effective manner in this rapidly changing world.

When asked where she sees the Environmental Forum in the next five years, Vicki replied: "I envision that the Environmental Forum will be more recognized for the vital role it plays in educating people to make intelligent decisions about the environment and sustainability."

The Environmental Forum is in very good hands. We wish Vicki the best of luck in her tenure.

Remembering Harry Moore

(1926 - 2008)



The Environmental Forum of Marin notes with regret the passing of one of its most influential graduates, Harry Moore. Harry graduated from Forum class 19. As his class project, he, along with his wife Callita, also a member of class 19, established a Forum-like program in Sonoma County. In serving the public in a variety of positions, Harry was a vibrant promoter of environmental values, ensuring that the environment was an important part of discussions and decisions. Open space, parks, and sustainability were always part of his personal agenda as a Novato City Planning Commissioner, Novato City Councilman, Marin County Supervisor, and member of the College Board. Most recently, Harry was influential in the formation of Sustainable Novato. We are proud that he was a Board member of the Environmental Forum in 2005. We extend our deepest sympathy to his wife, Forum member Callita(19), and his family.

A moving memorial service was held on Saturday, July 12 at the Margaret Todd Center in Novato. Contributions can be made to the EFM Scholarship Fund (P.O. Box 150459, San Rafael, CA 94915-0459) or Sustainable Novato a, 852 Diablo Ave.#106, Novato, CA 94947.

Student Project Spotlight - Gina Farr (35)

WILD SOUND STORIES - SIX-MINUTE ADVENTURES IN NATURAL SOUNDS



Graduate **Gina Farr** (35) connects us to the wild heart of the world. Her Environmental Forum project was the impetus for a career shift to multimedia environmental education as a natural sound recorder and sensory storyteller.

What's the secret to helping people to care about the plight of a wild place and it's inhabitants? Ask Gina and she'll tell you that it's about quickly creating an emotional connection. "We're a society of busy people, in part, because of technology. Technology allows us to learn and communicate at lightning

speed... and requires that we learn and connect at lightning speed. We operate in a state of overwhelm much of the time." Gina believes that the majority of us care about our environment but may overlook opportunities to act on its behalf in favor of more immediately motivating demands. "Effective communication connects us to our emotions. When we feel our unique place within our larger community, it's easy to take caring action."

With high demands on our time, Gina knows she needs to connect the conservation message quickly while also making it enjoyable. "As EFM graduates, we're compelled by what we've learned to communicate the concepts of sustainability, stewardship and personal responsibility. If we lecture, offer numbers and argue policies, we're not going to get the mindshare we need to build a movement. We've got to be magnets." Gina claims that we communicate the message best by evoking emotions. "Wild Sound Stories are my solution to raising awareness about what I care most deeply about -- the needs of wildlife and preserving wild places in our rapidly changing world." Gina reports that her brief, yet powerful, sensory stories connect the viewer with the feeling of wild by accessing the senses and appealing to imagination. "Experiencing a Wild Sound Story is like being a child again. You can float as a fog bank, howl with the coyotes and swim with the whales. And it takes no time at all to get a full experience."

Gina's sound stories are a mix of authentic natural sounds, recorded on location, and compelling images woven together into a short story without words. From there, her newly launched website, wildSoundStories.com, expands on the experience by providing opportunities for field explorations, building community and listening to personal stories of those on the front lines of conservation. Wild Sound Stories have been featured at our National Parks, on radio and are moving quickly via the Internet. "I'm just doing my small part and loving it", Gina says.

Marin Energy...CONT. FROM PAGE 1

everyone in the room enthusiastically agreed that we should move ahead with MCE.

The next night, the San Rafael City Council held their official Study Session on MCE. Again, the County team and PG&E presented their opposing points of view, and a representative of the California Public Utilities Commission presented the "big picture" on the future of renewable power sources. All were closely questioned by the members of the council. The mood was more serious and subdued than in Mill Valley, but when the time came for public comment, all but one speaker expressed strong support for MCE.

The key take-away from both meetings was that forming a MCE joint powers authority is the prudent next step in evaluating this opportunity. MCE must solicit actual bids for renewable electricity and thus replace "dueling estimates" (the County's and PG&E's) with real costs. Then, we can make an informed decision about moving ahead to make Marin a clean energy leader. For more information, go to <http://www.MarinCleanEnergy.info/>.



Scientists and policy advocates (most recently, Al Gore) increasingly propose measures to address the risks to the survival of human civilization. We do have some experience influencing biological processes on a planetary scale, like eradicating some diseases, and removing some of the more destructive toxins from the environment (for example, DDT, at least in North America). But we have never intentionally altered the dynamics that produce large scale climate outcomes, or collaborated effectively with other nations to restore or sustain marine fisheries, or implemented constraints on the extraction and concentration of toxic substances and the waste associated with them. We have never ceased large-scale harmful practices entirely, much less reversed their effects to net zero.

So, how are going to get there? We can build on some of our experiences with smaller local reversals of misfortune - returning toxic sites to wood and grasslands, rivers polluted with volatile chemicals igniting spontaneously to fish-bearing waterways, festering landfills to parks. These can be case studies for the experimentation that lies ahead. Mostly, we need to learn how to coordinate with and support the amazing restorative powers of nature itself. There are so many elements of so many interacting systems, all evolved over billions of years, that it is probably the height of folly and arrogance to imagine that we can intervene effectively in whole systems. Rather, we can look first to what we've created, to the human terms of the equations, and strive to make them fit back into a solvable set that define one-world conditions in which we can all live well. As best we can, we must ally ourselves - our individual and collective practices and goals - with natural systems.

We need to have a vision that can be shared, that can act as a guide in the face of uncertainty, among all people, all institutions, all levels of government, all nations. We need a relatively simple criterion that can shape action, from individuals, families and communities to businesses large and small, to all levels of government, non-governmental and international organizations. Humans are, it must be admitted, rather clever. Technology will no doubt figure significantly in solutions. But we must carefully guide the ultimate purposes that technology, and the economic incentives that facilitate its development, serve.

We need to become more adept at understanding systemic relationships and effects, how our institutions can be manipulated, and how to enlist human ingenuity and motivation without rewarding destructive outcomes. And we need to become more quick and nimble at experimenting with initiatives, measuring and observing their effects, and revising or junking them and trying something else. We need these skills from the level of individuals and local governments and organizations to national and international actors. Being human, none of us is perfect, nor has perfect knowledge or wisdom. We're in this together and have no choice but to learn together.

If we don't learn quickly, we're likely to repeat mistakes. For example, recognizing the harmful consequences of powering transportation by burning hydrocarbons, we seized on biofuels as important means of reducing atmospheric carbon emissions. But the U.S. corn-based ethanol experiment, at least, appears to be an abject failure, neglecting to account for the distortion of food systems, cultivation and chemical assault of sensitive land, and the likelihood that there is little or no net emission savings. We failed to incorporate in policy how systems act and interact. There needs to be a wholesale shift in the tenor of solutions we consider, so that earth's life-support systems come first, not the maintenance of habitual levels of consumption, or the realization of economic opportunity.

We can learn from this example - to make fast incremental improvements, and model and test better, bolder solutions. Rather than affix blame, and turn away in disgust and despair from what seems to be deliberate self-serving dysfunction, let's instead quickly return to the table, turn up the heat and the light, reinforce what seems constructive, and continue working together. To reach our goals, we need inquisitive exchanges of ideas and flexible trial of behaviors. We need to cultivate our sense of humor, as it can help us disagree without taking offense, without shutting down our laser lock on the ultimate goal of returning our biosphere to a healthy state that can sustain itself and, thereby, the human enterprise.

After all, we are only visitors, guests for just a short while on this remarkable life-generating sphere. Whatever our beliefs may be, it behooves us to act like quests: to honor and respect one another, to acknowledge our own foibles, to look after the "house" we're visiting, whose integrity it is in our power to harm or protect. It's up to us, and by mucking it up, we're not just endangering ourselves and our children and their children; we're putting the entire human experiment at risk. The earth may not, ultimately, care. But we do. To paraphrase Einstein, although we might not be able to solve our problems with the same consciousness that produced them, we can cultivate a different consciousness. Besides, as Abba Eban said, "history teaches us that men and nations behave wisely once they have exhausted all other alternatives." We're just about there!



Annual Meeting & Luncheon Highlights

Closing the Door on Year 35

May 2008

This year's annual meeting and luncheon on May 16 was a grand success. Outgoing President David McConnell(27) graciously led the meeting, as well as the tribute to the founders, most of whom were in the crowd to accept their honors. Incoming President (and outgoing Treasurer) Vicki Rupp(33) presented a comprehensive budget for 2008-09, and the new slate of board members.

The meeting adjourned and open discussion ensued. Many graduates thanked EFM, and Chrise deTournay Birkhahn(35), our new publications chair, unveiled the hot-off-the-press newsletter and called for submissions by all members for all future publications. Valerie Merrin(34) and Barbara O'Grady(31) discussed the Committee to Inspire Advocacy, another way to keep members involved and spread the word. David closed with a request that members identify the up-and-comers in the community and tell them about the EFM. Thus we turned the last page in our 35th year

Photo by Kathy Cuneo



Founders & Class One members Nona Dennis, Pam Lloyd, Barbara V. Bouche, Inka Benton, Marty Griffin, Phyllis Faber, Gini Havel, Kathy Cuneo attended.

of incomparable advocacy training and welcomed the next chapter in the history of the Environmental Forum of Marin.

Highlights included: Phyllis Faber presented lifetime memberships to founders and Class One members Barbara Boucke, Pam Lloyd, Inka Benton, and Ann(13) and Doug Christensen. Assemblyman Jared Huffman recounted the dark environmental days of 1972, when EFM began, and then honored the organization by giving certificates to the founders. David Weckler(31) presented the Golden Acorn Award to Pax Scientific, a local engineering research and product development firm that uses biomimicry.

Book Review

BREAK THROUGH: From the Death of Environmentalism to the Politics of Possibility

by Michael Shellenberger & Ted Nordhaus, reviewed by Bruce Ackerman(34)

I've heard several people say this provocative book was very important to their thinking. It is well worth reading, and I see why it has been either loved or resisted by many in the environmental movement since its first incarnation as an essay in 2004. A central thesis of the book is that "environmentalism" has focused heavily on placing limits on human behavior, arising in part from the issues it has addressed: pollution, habitat destruction, and other ills that it has sought to minimize. The authors also point out that historically, societies embrace preservation of the environment when people are feeling affluent and confident in their future. In Maslow's hierarchy of needs, people tend to address the need for a clean and just world only after their more basic needs are well in hand.

The authors argue, however, that climate change and the transformation of our energy economy are a different kettle of fish, requiring a different approach. If one comes at the energy issue with the primary message that we must limit energy consumption, then this pits environmentalists against human joyfulness. In a time in which we face economic contraction and a general uncertainty about the future, the response to a call for personal limitation may not be as well received as were the calls for societal improvements during a more confident era. Further, the solutions we need to make such a profound transition go well beyond cutting down on our consumption: they require all the creativity we can muster, and hence we need to unleash the creativity of our species, not suppress it.

Instead of "the politics of limits", the authors advocate large government-industry partnerships to invent the future, similar to what the authors document was essential to developing space travel, microprocessors, and the internet. Indeed they are involved with the Apollo Alliance with just that vision. Gore's recent speech calling for 100% renewable energy in 10 years seems in sync with the authors' approach, which focuses on an upbeat, "can-do" message, highlights technical progress already being made, and calls for swift action by government and industry.

The authors delve deeper, weaving other themes around their central tenet, including an excellent description of the dynamics within Brasil. In doing so, they reveal a certain frustration with mainstream environmentalism that either explains the resistance with which some have received the book or possibly is caused by that resistance. But at its heart, this is a joyful and optimistic work, which will expand your thinking. And the authors are certainly right that we need that. If there is interest in discussing these issues, contact the Community Education Committee (cec@marinefm.org): perhaps this could be a First Thursday?

For a longer review and excellent summary by the authors visit <http://www.calcars.org/calcars-news/863.html>.



Meet Cathy Rosenkrans (20) Membership Chair & Volunteer Coordinator

I graduated from the Environmental Forum 15 years ago, with Class 20. At that time, I was a mother of a four-year-old and found myself immersed in volunteering at my daughter's school. When my daughter was a senior in high school, I started attending First Thursdays. One evening, the discussion was about single use plastic bags, which had been the subject of my advocacy project. I ran into others who were also interested in this subject, and soon began "tabling" with the Environmental Forum's Past President, Solvig Palm-Nicholls,

for Green Sangha's Rethinking Plastics Campaign. Because I had such fond memories of my Environmental Forum experience, I could not resist Solvig's invitation for greater involvement. Of course, the environmental cause has never been in such great need of volunteers.

I have taken on the role of Membership Chair and Volunteer Coordinator. I am motivated by the idea that, at a time when the very existence of our species on this planet is at stake, the Environmental Forum is here to help our members network around various aspects of this challenge and lend their time and energy to our mission. It is exciting to think about ways in which members can connect: in their localities, through their advocacy projects, and by volunteering. I feel truly privileged to be in the position to ask those who share my values to advance the Environmental Forum's mission of promoting a sustainable world through environmental education.

In this newsletter, I am calling upon members to help form point teams in their localities (See "Think Globally, Volunteer Locally"). We will be working throughout the year to find new ways for members to network and to get involved. I appreciate this opportunity to contribute after a 15-year hiatus. I hope to inspire others to reconnect as well.

SEF 2008-09 Schedule of Classes

- Sept 9 - Orientation Day
- Sept 16 - Geology
- Sept 23 - Plant Communities
- Sept 30 - Wildlife
- Oct 7 - Agriculture & Mariculture
- Oct 14 - Baylands
- Oct 21 - Bay/Oceans/Estuaries
- Oct 28 - Water Resources
- Nov 4 - Advocacy & Environmental Education
- Nov 11 - Resource Recovery
- Nov 18 - Advocacy (speeches)
- Nov 25 - (no class) Thanksgiving
- Dec 2 - Land Use
- Dec 9 - Energy
- Dec 16 - Transportation & Energy
- Dec 23 - (no class) Winter Break
- Dec 30 - (no class) Winter Break
- Jan 6 - Intro to Sustainability
- Jan 13 - Economics of Sustainability
- Jan 20 - Environmental Philosophy
- Jan 27 - Student Projects
- Feb 3 - Graduation

Members in Action

Many EFM grads participated in "Vision Green", the City of San Rafael's kick-off event to develop its Climate Change Action Plan. On July 26, San Rafael invited residents, business owners, and community members to brainstorm about how San Rafael can achieve a sustainable future.

Just before the brainstorming session, Adaptation Green Team member **Ellen Obstler** (35) presented facts on sea level rise. Energy Green Team member **Sue Spofford** (32) addressed energy use.

EFM grads participating in the workshop included Green Ribbon Committee members **Chrise de Tournay Birkhahn** (35), **Kay Karchevski** (35), **Kiki La Porta** (32), and **Damon Connolly** (3A), and **Leigh Kenny** (35), **Nancy Boyce** (4A), **Ed Boyce** (35), **Bob Spofford** (32) and **Maeve Murphy** (4A).



photo by Baird & Driskell Community Planning.

Ellen Obstler (35) and Maeve Murphy (4A) listen attentively to the speakers at San Rafael's "Vision Green" public event.

Think Globally, Act Locally

CATHY ROSENKRANS(20) / MEMBERSHIP CHAIR & VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR

As members of the Environmental Forum, we have been fortunate to receive an integrated education in many facets of Marin's environment. As we venture forth into our communities and our world, we bring a wealth of knowledge to any environmental endeavor we choose...or face. As we know, the environment has never needed us more. Our nearly 900 graduates include many who have gone on to become influential policy makers and community leaders. Our purpose – to promote a sustainable world through unbiased, fact-based environmental education – has never been more imperative.

Our challenge today is finding new ways to extend our reach into our local communities. Our goal is to educate even greater numbers of people who will then not only make more informed personal decisions, but influence decision making as well. This is where you can help. For each city, town, or County area, we want to form a point team of Forum members to help spread the word about EFM. Team activities could include staffing tables at local events, talking with community leaders and council members, and posting flyers. This is an opportunity to make a real difference in your own backyard and create new friends and colleagues in your own town or area.

Promoting the Environmental Forum in your area is only one of many EFM volunteer opportunities. We know many of you are already actively involved with other environmental organizations, but we hope you will consider lending your talents and exploring your interests by volunteering with the Environmental Forum. If you haven't been actively involved before, please consider doing so now. Please contact Cathy Rosekrans at katerine2@earthlink.net or, if you prefer to call, phone 388-5441.

There's Still Time! Recruit a Participant.

SEF Class of 36 Application

The program is held on Tuesdays each week (except holiday weeks), beginning September 9 and ending with graduation in February 2009. Spots are still available - Spread the word!

NAME: _____
Last First

ADDRESS: _____
Street City Zip Code

TELEPHONE(S): _____ FAX/E-MAIL _____

How did you learn of the Sustainable Earth Forum?

What do you hope to gain from the Sustainable Earth Forum?

Do you presently belong to any community organizations?

Do you presently read any environmental publications?

Do you have any special physical requirements?

Occupation/profession _____

Please accept my registration for the **Sustainable Earth Forum** beginning September 9, 2008. I have enclosed a check in the amount of \$50 made payable to the Environmental Forum of Marin. Upon acceptance into the Program I agree to pay the remaining balance of \$330.

Signature _____ Date _____

Mail this completed Registration Form together with the \$50 registration fee to the Environmental Forum of Marin at the above address. Upon receipt, you will be mailed a medical release form to complete and bring to the first class.

ENVIRONMENTAL FORUM OF MARIN P.O. Box 150459, San Rafael, California 94915-0459 (415) 479-7814



www.MarinEFM.org

P. O. Box 150459
San Rafael, CA 94915

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The Environmental Forum of Marin is dedicated to the protection and enhancement of the environment by educating its Members and the Marin citizenry about environmental issues. In furtherance of this purpose, the goal of EFM is to conduct training programs on environmental issues, provide continuing education for its Members and the public, and influence decision-making.

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

Scoops We need yours! We are always interested in your thoughts, actions and articles. For submission consideration, please contact the editor at efmpublications@comcast.net.

Newsletter Staff:

Editor & Graphic Design / Chrise de Tournay Birkhahn; Assistant Editor & Lead Writer / Ellen Obstler. Printed by ACE Printing in San Rafael. If you would prefer reading the newsletter on-line rather than receiving a hard copy, please contact us at efmpublications@comcast.net.



photo by Baird & Driskell Community Planning.

Kay Karchevski (35) brainstorms with her group at the City of San Rafael's recent "Vision Green" public event.

EFM Members - Get Involved!

Alumni Class Representatives Needed

We're looking for a Class Representative from each of the last five classes. Class Reps would act as the point person for their classes -- getting in touch with members when asked, arranging for class "reunions" or other get-togethers, gathering information on the environmental activities of their classmates and writing a brief class update for future EFM newsletters.

Calendar

Marin Farmer's Market - August 24th

We'll be at the Civic Center's Sunday market, a part of our increased effort to get the word out about our environmental education programs. Come join us!

Board Meetings - Third Thursday of each month

First Thursday Conversations on the Environment -

First Thursday of each month

2008-9 Sustainable Earth Forum (September 2008) - 18-week program. Registration still open - application inside!

Sustainable Communities Seminar (Feb 2009)

Visit www.MarinEFM.org for times, locations and information