

POINT REYES LIGHT

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January 31, 2008



WETLANDS > Giacomini barn may cost a million dollars if converted for public use. /6



DILLON BEACH > Lawson's Landing final environmental report approved by county planners. /10



PARK > Protesters and media interfere with one day of culling, offer to buy out contract. /10



CALENDAR > Tomales girls show art today at a women's town hall meeting in Point Reyes. /20



Fishing boats appear dream-like from above the fog. Fishermen and oyster farmers are concerned that a new state law will dissolve their industry. Photo by Robert Campbell.

Experimental drug may cause abscess in deer

by **Jacoba Charles**

Gonacon Blue, the experimental drug used as birth control for 70 does in the Point Reyes National Seashore last fall, was recently found to cause internal abscesses in a closely related species of deer.

"It doesn't seem to really impair the deer," said Tony DeNicola, president of White Buffalo Inc., a wildlife management company contracted with PRNS. "They can still run and don't seem to be in any pain but it's definitely not a good sign."

Though the abscess effect has not yet been confirmed in the fallow deer that

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Our women will vote for Obama

by **Jonah Owen Lamb**

If it were up to the voters of West Marin, Senator Barak Obama would be the Democratic Party's nominee for the president of the United States, according to a poll conducted by the *Light*. Thirty-two percent of respondents plan to vote for Obama in the February 5 state primary. Senator Hillary Clinton trails with 18 percent, followed by John Edwards with 12 percent.

Respondents had a variety of reasons

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Extended Sheriff's call /3

>> The Vedanta Retreat, while forbidding any culling of fallow and axis deer on their land, has not opposed the extermination.

ENDORSEMENTS /12

I urge you to vote for the comsopolitan candidate

OBITUARY /14

Right wing veteran called for an end to deer culling

ASK MISSY /15

Vote not out of fear, and have some moral fibre

The marine life conundrum

by **Justin Nobel**

"Facing west from California shores, inquiring, tireless, seeking what is yet un-found, I, a child, very old, over waves, towards the house of maternity, the land of migrations, look afar."

Walt Whitman penned these words in 1855. Italians had just begun casting for crab, squid and salmon off the Marin Headlands. California's waters have changed in the past century and a half, although exactly how much remains unknown. In 1999, Governor Grey Davis signed the Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA), which declared this change has

been for the worst, and something must be done: "Coastal development, pollution, and other human activities threaten the health of marine habitat and the biological diversity of California's ocean waters," reads the legislation.

The act called for protection of a string of special plots of water up and down the state. Put together, these Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), would form the larger MLPA, with the goal to "protect habitat and ecosystems, conserve biological diversity, provide a sanctuary for fish and other sea life, enhance recreational and

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educational opportunities, provide a reference point against which scientists can measure changes elsewhere in the marine environment [and] help rebuild depleted fisheries.”

It was an ambitious plan, and twice the California Department of Fish & Game (DFG) failed to enact it, once because the public protested the process and once because DFG ran out of money. In 2007, an MPA was enacted for California’s central coast, and that same year, work began on one for the north central coast.

The process has put people who feed their families trawling the seafloor in the same room with those who have spent their lives preaching against these practices. Some environmentalists laud MLPA as a landmark opportunity to restore an imperiled patch of Pacific, while some fishermen lament it as an attempt to destroy their livelihood. But most agree that the north central coast of California is one of the most productive patches of water on the planet. How to manage this bounty is what’s at stake.

“I don’t think we have been the best stewards of our ocean environment and we’re trying to change that,” said Melissa Miller-Hensen, who is managing the north coast MLPA. “Oceans are what sustain us. If we destroy our ocean were destroying ourselves.”

Players

The North Coast MPA extends from Point Arena to Pigeon Point and includes waters around the Farallones Islands but not San Francisco Bay. The area spans from the high tide mark to three nautical miles offshore, which is where state water ends and federal begins. Estuaries and lagoons such as Drakes and Bolinas are included, but not Abbots, which is less affected by tides. The total area is about 760 square miles. There are 170 miles of rocky shores, 188 miles of sandy beaches, 52 miles of coast marsh and 61 miles of tidal flats. Most of the bottom is soft and sandy, and some of it is covered by seagrass and rocks. It is in these areas where marine life is most plentiful, making them the most vulnerable zones for both fishing and preservation.

The are four groups involved in the process of creating the North Coast MPA, the Blue Ribbon Task Force, the Science Advisory Team, a group of 36 stakeholders and the MLPA initiative staff. The initiative staff set up MLPA meetings, prepare documents and organize the process. The Science Advisory Team advises the stakeholders on the biology and ecology of the areas being examined and the stakeholders come up with the proposals of just how to implement the MPAs. The Blue Ribbon Task Force assesses the proposals for socioeconomic and policy issues and chooses which to pass on to the



Stinson Beach is smack in the middle of the North Central coast MPA. Photo by Justin Nobel.

California Fish & Game Commission, a five-member, governor-appointed panel that has the final say in what the law will look like.

The three-dozen stakeholders include sport fishermen, commercial fisherman, teachers, conservationists, California Coastal Commission staff, kayakers, abalone divers, scuba diving instructors, marine biologists and Point Reyes National Seashore staff, including Superintendent Don Neubacher.

This group was broken into three smaller groups by the initiative staff and charged with developing proposals that address what level of protection should accompany each section of the coastline. A marine reserve is the highest level of protection and means there is absolutely no fishing. Even shell collecting is prohibited. A marine conservation area allows for sport fishing and some commercial fishing and a marine park allows for just sport fishing.

Fisherman woes

The problem, explained Josh Churchman, a stakeholder and lifelong Bolinas angler, is that the areas chosen for conservation are the sweet spots for fishing. Churchman operates a 22-foot boat and is one of only three commercial fishermen who still operate out of Bolinas. He explained that larger boats can cover more ground, so closing one or two areas might not be devastating for them. To close one or two spots for a Bolinas fisherman means about half of the areas you fish in might be off-limits, explained Churchman.

“You fish Duxbury one day, go to Point Reyes another, and one of those times you will bump into a good day,” said Churchman, but you need to be able to move around. “That’s how fishing works.”

Bolinas fishermen are beset by other hardships, making the MLPA the straw that just might break the camel’s back, said Churchman.

“It’s not necessarily the fault of the MLPA,” he said, “but when you add it all

up it doesn’t look good.”

For one, the lagoon is drying up, which means they can only set out to sea at high tides. Closures in the troubled salmon fishery have limited their take of a former money making fish. A recent regulation will require them to briefly cross into federal waters while fishing rockfish, which would necessitate the use of a vessel monitoring system, a GPS unit monitored by DFG officials in an effort to make sure fishermen don’t fish off-limits waters. The units require a lot of power, said Churchman, but there is no hook-up in Bolinas and dragging a cord across the lagoon would be impossible. The device runs through batteries in three days, according to Churchman. A bill passed eight years ago set aside large areas for rock fish conservation, which has dramatically improved the stock of the fishery. Further limits on rock fish seem unnecessary, he said.

“If you protect an area the fish grow big,” said Churchman. “Great. The fish die of old age. That’s great too. But I kind of think our community would like to have some local fisherman.”

Other commercial fisherman echoed similar complaints.

Sure, we’re part of the process, said a commercial fisherman stakeholder who chose to remain anonymous, but every time the fishermen submit a proposal, “it comes back with all the guts torn out.”

“It’s very frustrating, especially when you make your living doing this,” the fisherman said. “They have absolutely no clue what is at stake here.”

This gentleman has been fishing since he was a teenager and put himself through college fishing salmon from a small boat called a double-ender. He is very skeptical of the way Fish & Game has been managing the fishery.

“I’m a commercial fisherman all my life, college educated. I hope I don’t have my head in the sand, but for years I’ve been listening to what they tell us and that’s not what I see in the ocean,” he said. “I just don’t know how they come

up with some of this stuff.”

“If they really want to manage the fishery, then buy the whole lot of us and shut us all out,” said the man, referring to the environmental groups who are pushing for maximum conservation, “because that’s what they’re doing. They’re starving us all out.”

Not all environmental groups are as despised by fishermen as it sometimes seems. Some have actively worked to include fishermen in the process. Karen Garrison, co-director of the Natural Resources Defense Council’s Ocean Program, took a road trip down the California coast to discuss the project after she was appointed as a stakeholder. She met with the harbor master and the mayor in Point Arena, divers in Gualala and entertained ideas at a restaurant in Anchor Bay. In Marshall, she spoke with John Finger, co-owner of the Hog Island Oyster Company. No oyster growers are on the stakeholder team and Garrison wanted to make sure Finger knew what proposals might affect his business.

“I was alarmed in the beginning because there were things being proposed that would impact us,” said Finger.

Finger, who said he initially passed up the opportunity to be a stakeholder but later regretted the decision, was concerned that the MLPA might preclude Tomales oyster growers as a whole from using more than 300 unused acres they have access to by putting a moratorium on new acreage.

Francesca Koe is a stakeholder as well as an abalone diver and a scuba instructor who runs great white shark cage dives off the Farallones. She has perspective from both fishermen and conservationist, and explained why many fishermen have such heated opinions.

These small fishermen have no other platform to address their issues, explained Koe, so their problems come to the table at MLPA stakeholder meetings.

“They’re already in a bad mood and

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they're already in the process of losing economic stability," she said, "and here comes this legislation which really is visionary. But it's hard to see that when you're already backed into a corner."

History

There are several marine sanctuaries along the north central California coast, including Cordell Bank and the Gulf of the Farallones. These were put in place to protect against the extraction of oil and gas offshore, explained Richard Charter, who helped pass the legislation that created the sanctuaries. Charter is currently a stakeholder on the north coast MLPA. He belongs to the group Defenders of Wildlife.

"In the early 1980s, when we began creating these sanctuaries, no one, including myself, could have envisioned the steep crash in certain fisheries that came later," said Charter.

During the 1980s, populations such as rock fish, which include commercially fished species, like cowcod and bocaccio, crashed.

Traditional fisheries management has been based on single species, explained John Ugoretz, a DFG marine biologist and advisor in the MLPA process. Policies address issues such as size limits, daily take limits, total catch limits and seasonal closures. In a traditionally managed fishery, some fishing is allowed, and often the larger, older individuals are fished. But in a protected area, there is no fishing, which means no members of a species need worry about being fished. "The benefits of that," said Ugoretz, "are that you actually get much more reproduction. Hopefully the fish produced inside the MPA move outside and replenish those areas."

The idea of the MLPA is that small pockets of no-take will provide fish for much larger areas of ocean. The MLPA has been pioneered in the Australian Great Barrier Reef and Florida, but until the central coast project, never on such a large scale in the U.S.

The project's staff are satisfied that the MLPA is sound policy, but not all fishermen are so sure.

"It has become apparent in the last decade that traditional fishery management measures instituted by Fish & Game and the Pacific Fishery Management Council (which looks after fish in federal waters) were not succeeding in stemming the decline of species of concern," said Charter. "To bring back the health of ecosystem you must include some geospatial limit."

Upwelling

California's coastal waters are bountiful because of a cold plume that rises from the deep. This upwelling spans from Baja to British Columbia and is driven by

prevailing winds. Air rotates clockwise around high pressure in the middle of the north Pacific, leading to a northwesterly fetch. Wind passing over water pushes it away. "You would be emptying the ocean along the coast if you carried on doing this," said Dr. John Largier, a Bodega Lab oceanographer.

Instead, new water rises to replace it. This gurgle captures nutrients in the form of dead organisms making their tedious twirl to the seafloor. Surface water lacks nutrients such as phosphorous and nitrogen because a varied group of tiny free-floating algae called phytoplankton use it all. Phytoplankton are eaten by krill which are eaten by whales or by shrimp and squid, which are eaten by fish, which are eaten by sea birds, seals and sea lions, which are eaten by killer whales and sharks. Without phytoplankton, the marine life on the California coast could exist, and without phosphorus, nitrogen and sunshine, phytoplankton couldn't exist. But, phytoplankton consumes food quickly. The only way to fill them is with a continuous flow of nutrients, such as happens off the north central coast of California. When they thrive, krill can thrive, and the seabird, the squid and the whale.

"I tend to think of all that phytoplankton as a nice big field of grass," said Largier, "that everyone can graze in and get fat."

The upwelling off the west coast of North America is called the California Current System. Prevailing winds along the north central coast of California are most persistent, making this part of the California Current the most productive. There are only four spots on earth where massive upwellings occur, explained Largier. They are the Humboldt Current, off Peru, the Benguela Current, near Namibia, the Canary Current, past Portugal, and the California Current.

"It's a very special area," said Largier.

A public workshop to discuss the MPA proposals for the north central coast MLPA will be held at the Sheraton Sonoma County, in Petaluma (745 Baywood Drive) on Monday February 4.

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for supporting each candidate. Obama supporters resoundingly saw in his candidacy a message of hope and change. "He's the only one," said a Point Reyes man, "who we have any hope of change with." An Inverness man said he thinks Obama "is a complex thinker, and that's what we need right now." Other Obama supporters simply did not want to see Clinton take office. "I am completely sick of the Clintons," said one man from Bolinas.

The majority of Clinton's supporters chose her because of their desire to see women in the White House. And Edwards' backers mainly agreed with his anti-corporate and progressive rhetoric.

The poll also broke down each candidate's support along gender. Respondents for Obama were split equally between women and men, while the majority of Clinton's support came from women. Mainly men, conversely, supported Edwards.

A large chunk of the poll's respondents, 30 percent, were still undecided. While 10 percent of democrats polled had no idea who they plan to vote for, the majority where trying to decide between Clinton and Obama. On the lower end of the radar, Congressman Denis Kucinich polled 4 percent followed by Senator John McCain and Governor Mitt Romney, both with 2 percent. At the bottom of the poll, Ralph Nader

and Congressman Ron Paul each received 1 percent.

The total number of registered voters in West Marin, according to the county, is 7,031.

The *Light* polled 100 people, all residents of Bolinas, Point Reyes Station, Inverness, Tomales, Marahal, Olema, Forest Knolls, Woodacre or San Geronimo. Among these, 30 were undecided. Of these, three men and one woman said they were leaning toward Edwards and Obama; two men and ten women said they were leaning toward Clinton and Obama; one man said he was leaning toward Clinton and Edwards; one woman said she was leaning toward Huckabee and Romney; two men said they were leaning toward a republican in general; and two men and nine women said they were not yet leaning in any direction.

Eighteen people – four men and 14 women – said they will vote for Clinton. When asked what their reasons were, six of these said simply to have a woman in the White House. Two cited Clinton's experience; two her proximity to Bill; one her stance on health care; and one her "viability."

Thirty-two people polled said they will vote for Obama. Fifteen were men, 17 were women. Nine said they thought he represents hope and a new direction; three said he represented truth and integrity; one noted that he was against the war; and one said he was not a Clinton.

Of the twelve people who said they will vote for Edwards, eight were men. Four cited his progressive, anti-corporate eco-

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