

## November 2006 Election: Environment Wins Big!

*By Dennis Rosatti, Co Director*

The November Elections are now behind us, and Conservation Action found great success in our endorsements. Overall, we were 77% effective on our endorsements; we got 23/30 endorsed candidates, measures, or propositions elected or passed into law.

Perhaps our greatest success came with the Sonoma County Agricultural and Open Space District Tax Renewal. More than 75% of the electorate voted to renew the OSD, guaranteeing at least another 20 years of land purchases for public ownership and conservation easements. These funds protect farms from being subdivided, prevent the lands around cities from being developed, and provide recreation land and access to pristine areas of Sonoma County. Conservation Action was very active on this campaign, distributing literature, identifying supporters and working to Get Out The Vote on Election Day.

The SMART measure found a 70% success rate in Sonoma County, but with only 58% of Marin (a healthy majority, mind you), we ended up with only 65.4%, and we needed 66.7%. The SMART Board is taking this razor thin margin of loss as a mandate from the vast majority of the



Steve Birdleough gives a presentation at the Starlight Wine Bar Fundraiser that SCCA hosted in Sept.

public to come back to the ballot in 2008. SCCA will continue our education and advocacy towards multi-modal transportation over the next two years, and work hand in hand with our members and volunteers to steward the rail vote in '08.

SCCA ran the ground campaign for the SMART campaign, something that we

*(Continued on page 3)*

## SCCA's Amazing Volunteers and The Know Your Neighbor Project

*By Jenna Brager, KYN Coordinator*

During this past Spring's election season, Conservation Action continued the development of the Know Your Neighbor Program (KYN) that was piloted 2 years ago in Healdsburg and Petaluma. SCCA had great success in Healdsburg organizing teams of volunteers in their own neighborhoods for Debora Fudge's supervisorial campaign. Volunteers walked neighborhoods and phoned for the candidate, finding positive responses while contacting neighbors. Debora had an extremely well-run campaign, and we came closer than ever to dethroning Paul Kelley, losing by a narrow 242 votes. We eagerly look forward to Debora running again in 4 years.

In the recent November election, Conservation Action had the pleasure of running a field campaign for the first time ever - Measure R, the SMART Rail and Trail. We had more than 200 volunteers turn out to work out of our office for this measure and Measure F, the Open Space Renewal. Many volunteers directed activities into their own neighborhoods. Again, the reception from neighbor to neighbor contact was great. Measure F won with a landslide 75%, and, though the SMART Measure lost the overall vote by only 1%, we did pass it here in Sonoma County with over 70%! Thanks to all of our wonderful volunteers! We could not have done it without you.

Grassroots organizing is the way to combat big money interests in development. The most effective way to do this is to be active in our very own communities. Conservation Action has the advantage of having the largest member base of any environmental group in the county. With our Know Your Neighbor Project, we plan on organizing more neighborhood events for people to meet each other and be informed about local issues. This includes continuing work on the SMART Project, which will be on the ballot again in 2008. Now having a volunteer base of over 200 people, we want to build on that and expand our volunteer program. This

Winter will be a time of internal organizing. In the Spring, we plan to activate the program and facilitate more activities for you to plug in to. In the meantime, we'd like to know which local issues are of interest to you and what types of activities you would be inspired to participate in. Please email us your thoughts and questions: [volunteer@conservationaction.org](mailto:volunteer@conservationaction.org)

The following is a list of local community events/activities to participate in over the next several months:

1. Each Wednesday & Saturday -- Santa Rosa Original Farmer's Market runs year 'round at the Santa Rosa Veteran's Building East Parking Lot, 1351 Maple Ave., Santa Rosa - Rain or Shine! Fee: No Admission Fee. Time: 8:30 AM- 12 PM Phone Number: (707) 522-8629
2. Garden Volunteer Days: Join the Occidental Arts and Ecology Center in the garden for Volunteer Wednesdays. [www.oaec.org](http://www.oaec.org)
3. Saturday Saunters for Santa Rosa Area Every Saturday. Meets 9am, ends around 11:30. Moderate Walks. Fun way to exercise with friends. For more info call 707-539-6300.
4. Community Planting Days with Cotati Creek Critters: January 13, 28; February 10, 25; March 10, 25 for more information, go to [www.creeks.cotati.info](http://www.creeks.cotati.info)
5. Monday, Feb. 5: Is there any such thing as Wastewater? - Denise Cadman  
The Laguna Treatment Plant serves the cities of Santa Rosa, Rohnert Park, Sebastopol and Cotati, treating an average of 21 million gallons of effluent every day. Learn about the treatment process and what happens to the water after it is cleaned. For more information go to [www.creeks.cotati.info](http://www.creeks.cotati.info)
6. Spring Biodiversity Plant Sale, Occidental Arts and Ecology Center (OAEC) April 8-9, 9am-5pm each day, [www.oaec.org](http://www.oaec.org)
7. Benefit for Earth Roots Garden Project January 13th, 2007, 10 AM- 6 PM  
Local musicians, circus acts, tai chi, knitting, workshops in sustainability, organic treasure hunt, food, vendors, and more!  
Call Kyle for more information at 970-227-8040, or email him at [earthrootsfield-school@gmail.com](mailto:earthrootsfield-school@gmail.com) ◇

## ***City of Santa Rosa Discharging in the River***

The City of Santa Rosa is now spending large amounts on money on its goal of implementing a direct river discharge. Scoping sessions have been held, comments have been taken, and in the next few weeks, project alternatives for the environmental impact report (EIR) will be selected. There is little doubt that designated direct discharge locations in Healdsburg, Windsor, and Forestville will be carefully studied. And next year an EIR will be released for public review.

Ironically, this project is named, "Discharge Compliance Project", as if it will allow them to *comply* with new clean water regulations. It was actively moving forward at the same moment that new pollution prevention requirements in the City's discharge permit by the Regional Board were being vociferously challenged by the City's anti-regulation team, including staff, political leaders, lobbyists, consultants, and lawyers brought to the permit hearing in order to vigorously oppose new limits in their discharge permit.

Now the City intends to challenge the new limits, watered down from staff recommendations and imposed with great care by that Board. Environmentalists viewed the new regulations as a compromise, especially in light of the need to clean up Laguna pollution resulting in an exotic plant invasion that encourages breeding of mosquito vectors possibly carrying West Nile Virus.

In a rather amazing development, the Sonoma County Water Agency (SCWA) has written a letter to the City objecting to the sites selected for study of discharge options, because of concerns about water pollution. The letter did not address large increases in winter flow occurring when the rainwater infiltrates the City's old and leaky pipes. They also failed to mention the desirability of increased conservation or increased discharge at the Geysers. All of these are options that could eliminate river discharge altogether, especially if used in conjunction with one another. SCWA merely expressed concern about their needs for new water supply system facilities.

Russian River Watershed Protection Committee (RRWPC) recently learned that SCWA is purchasing a large parcel for the purpose of future water diversion facilities

directly across from the site chosen by Santa Rosa for a Forestville direct wastewater discharge. So now we get to choose: we can have wastewater discharges immediately downstream of Steelhead Beech polluting the river directly, or water diversion facilities such as a water treatment plant or a new collector that is likely to diminish river flows. The latter may happen anyway, since, in order to meet current water allocations to the water contractors, flows at Hacienda need to run much closer to the 125 cubic feet per second [cfs] minimum, rather than past average flows of 200 cfs. During the "low flow" controversy, the Agency insisted that there was no connection between water deliveries and lowered flows in the Russian River. Now we are concerned that the river will be mostly dry and wastewater, polluted with unregulated chemicals, may replace our potable (drinkable) water supply.

The summer wastewater discharge prohibition is no longer sacrosanct. We are carefully tracking the Regional Board's definition of "incidental runoff" from irrigation areas. This is a situation when inevitable runoff from irrigation occurs. Right now such runoff is illegal, but the Regional Board is looking to change that. While nothing has happened yet, it is important to stay tuned because, according to the Executive Officer, Cat Kuhlman, it is definitely in the works.

## ***Russian River Watershed Protection Committee Hires Attorney to Fight So Co Water Agency***

Sonoma County Water Agency, operators and managers of the Russian River County Sanitation District, are seen as committing such egregious violations of California environmental law, that RRWPC has hired the well known environmental law firm of Shute, Mihaly, & Weinberger to assist in challenging their actions.

The Sonoma County Water Agency (SCWA), operators and managers of the Russian River County Sanitation District (RRCSD) have been attempting to regionalize the RRCSD Treatment Plant since they took over 11 years ago, without serious regard for extensive environmental impacts of such a project. In spite of strong public opposition to regionalization in 1996, SCWA completed an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for expand-

ing RRCSD in 1998. After 2.5 years in the making and a cost of \$600,000, it was thrown out by District Directors for being inadequate.

SCWA has continuously attempted to enlarge RRCSD without appropriate environmental impacts analyses and project description. Environmental laws require project proponents to reveal all potential impacts publicly while also providing mitigations to address significant impacts. The public is given opportunities to comment after full disclosure has been made.

After the 1998 EIR was eliminated, District Directors (Supervisors) decided to use the grossly outdated 1976 EIR in order to construct part of the Treatment Plant expansion. RRWPC legally challenged its use. At that time, as now, citizens were pressing for a comprehensive document that would fully reveal intentions of the District Directors and fully address all environmental, social, financial, recreational, and other impacts. Unfortunately, our case was overuled, and the \$4.5 million dollar expansion was completed last year.

Currently, SCWA is moving forward, we believe illegally, on FOUR separate EIR's for regionalization of RRCSD. Last April they began an EIR process for a new equalization storage basin. Most recently they began a separate EIR process for an outrageously oversized irrigation pipeline, focusing on a 15-18 mile pipeline to irrigate vineyards in the Green Valley area, and not considering an affordable, local Guerneville project irrigating redwood trees. At the same time, SCWA has made Camp Meeker Recreation and Park District lead agency for a pipeline project to hook Camp Meeker and Occidental to the RRCSD. In addition, an EIR is imminent for a new disinfection system, as the current one causes RRCSD to violate its permit almost every winter, and is an essential component of this expansion.

SCCA and RRWPC feel strongly that a comprehensive EIR covering ALL anticipated project areas must be developed in one document. We are also concerned that Monte Rio and properties now on septic may also need to be added to the expanded system, and should also be considered. EIR law states, "*The lead agency must consider the whole of an action, not simply its constituent parts, when determining whether it will have a significant effect.*" It's time to add some sensibility to this process.

## Percy Schmeiser Visits SCCA for Luncheon



GE FREE Activist Talks About International Awareness and Grassroots Actions

Percy Schmeiser, the Canadian Farmer whose canola fields were contaminated with GMO seed, and in turn was sued by Monsanto, recently finished a November speaking tour with his wife, Louise, in northern California. Among their stops from Santa Cruz to Pt. Arena/Manchester, Percy and Louise visited SCCA's office in Santa Rosa for lunch. We had about 25 people present, enjoying local organic food, generously donated by Laguna Farm and other local sources.

Percy spoke about his ongoing struggle with Monsanto and current court appeal. He addressed the United

Nations recent decision to continue the global moratorium on Terminator technologies. This is a huge victory. Terminator seeds are genetically engineered to make the offspring of a plant unable to reproduce, making it so that farmers cannot produce from seeds saved from their own harvest.



The SCCA Bunch with the Schmeisers

Percy stressed the importance of protecting California's agriculture from GMO's so that we do not ruin our market for product uniqueness and export. We were very happy to receive this visit from Percy and Louise, and look forward to having more informative luncheons at SCCA's office.

For updates on local GE FREE activities, go to [www.gefreesonoma.org](http://www.gefreesonoma.org)

To learn more about upcoming SCCA events and lunches, see our website at [conservationaction.org](http://conservationaction.org) for regular updates. ◇

## Phone Canvass Report

By Joshua Stithem, Canvass Phone Manager

This election season saw Sonoma County Conservation Action's phone canvass come into its own. Our team was essential in identifying environmental voters all over the county, getting registration forms out to non-voters, and making sure everyone got out to vote at the correct polling locations. The phoning paid off as 70% of Sonoma County turned out to vote this year!

In 2007, the phone canvass will be one of our primary areas of focus. We will be expanding the department and using it to make Conservation Action more effective at informing and organizing the grassroots of the county. The phone team will be making sure that all of our members get a chance to renew their membership, whether the field canvass gets to them or not. We will also be following up on conversations that we have had in the field and keep in contact with people who have worked on progressive campaigns in the past. ◇



*Continued from Page 1*

have never done before! We found great success here in Sonoma County, distributing 1000's of lawn signs and facilitating more than 200 volunteers for the effort. We know that the task ahead is in Marin, and we are taking steps to solidify our support to the South.

On the City Council side of things, we had smashing success! Thirteen of our sixteen candidates earned seats on City Councils. We won 2 seats in Santa Rosa, perhaps the most important of all the cities, with all the appointments they get to make! Susan Gorin and Veronica Jacobi will need to hold down the fort in Santa Rosa, as we need two more seats in 2008 to gain a majority on the council.

Pam Torliatt won the Mayor's race in Petaluma, and Teresa Barrett won a council seat. Sam Salmon and Robin Goble helped us retain an environmental majority in Windsor, and Steve Barbose and Ken Brown won in Sonoma.

Pam Stafford won a seat in Rohnert Park, ousting Armando Flores and giving us a progressive majority for the first time in the history of Rohnert Park city politics! Now its time to put the gavel to the grind, so to speak, and enact sound environmental policy in "The Friendly City."

Of the three candidates who won in Cloverdale, Bob Jehn was the only person endorsed by SCCA, but all three committed to supporting an Urban Growth Boundary.

In Cotati, only Pat Gilardi won from our list, in a very tight race. SCCA is eager to work with John Guardino, who was endorsed by the Sierra Club, and is a newcomer to Cotati City politics.

On the school board side of things, neither of our candidates won the SRJC School Board seats. A well funded developer supported opposition was able to out-mail and gain more votes than these fine candidates.

On the bright side, Kellie Noe was top vote getter in the contested West County High School District race, earning more

than 13,000 votes! Kellie ran a grassroots campaign, knocking on over 5,000 doors by the time election day rolled around.

At the state level we are doing very well! All 4 of SCCA's state candidates won their elections. Pat Wiggins is back in politics as our State Senator, Noreen Evans is still serving us well as Assemblymember for the 7th District, and Patty Berg is scoring points in the 1st Assembly District. Jared Huffman, of Marin county water district and National Resources Defence Council fame, is the Assemblymember for the 6th District. The environment will be in good hands in Sacramento!

Lynn Woolsey is back in Washington as our 6th District Representative in the House of Representatives. Lynn will continue to speak sensibilities in Washington, and keep those oil rigs off our coastline!

In short, the local environment was well served during the Fall 2006 Election. SCCA will continue to educate the public about the issues that matter to us most: clean air and water, open space protection, and alternatives to automobiles. Thank you for your support!



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**Campaign Finance Reform  
By Assemblymember Noreen Evans**

In a city council campaign, the beliefs and goals of candidates should be more important than their fundraising capabilities. Santa Rosa voters clearly stated their intent when they adopted a public financing initiative in 2004. Yet, the council majority now threatens to thwart the public will.

In 1994, the most spent by a candidate for city council was \$38,544. But these numbers grew exponentially thereafter – up to \$95,000 in 2002. This made it all but impossible for an ordinary citizen to even contemplate an effective run for local office.

After massive spending in the 2002 elections, the Charter Review Committee - composed of citizens throughout Santa Rosa - recommended that the city council adopt public financing of local campaigns. The council agreed and placed Measure O on the ballot. It amended the city charter to require public financing for city council campaigns. In its ballot argument in favor of the measure, the council told voters that any candidate accepting public funds would do so in return for accepting voluntary spending limits.

In 2004, 62.8 percent of voters approved Measure O, thus leveling the political playing field. Its goal was simple: reduce the influence of money in our council elections.

Measure O worked as planned. In the last election, all ten candidates accepted spending limits and only one violated the law. Despite such a successful track re-



Noreen Evans, 7th AD

cord, at least three council members want to repeal this ordinance.

The argument in favor of repeal is the concern that candidates accepting spending caps cannot respond to last minute negative campaigning from unregulated independent groups. But one does not flow from the other.

The United States Supreme Court has held that campaign money is political speech and is protected by the First Amendment from government regulation. Any regulation of independent expenditure campaigns must be voluntary, just as spending caps are voluntary for candidates.

Furthermore, responses to last minute hit pieces pose financial challenges to any candidate. By the end of a campaign, most candidates have spent their money, especially those with limited resources. Consequently, if the council's goal is to reduce the impact of independent groups on elections, abolishing voluntary spending caps will have no effect.

Eliminating voluntary spending limits will make public funding available to candidates, no matter how much money they raise and spend, thus giving candidates with a lot of money even more at public expense. This is clearly contrary to the public intent and should be rejected. Anything else displays nothing short of contempt for the will of the voters. ◊

*Assemblymember Noreen Evans served on the Santa Rosa City Council for 8 years prior to running successfully for the State Legislature. She currently resides in Santa Rosa.*

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