Clear lessons of Covid-19

By Katie Davis

Lessons of Covid-19

The April issue of the Atlantic magazine with the cover story, “How to Destroy a Government,” by George Packer, landed in my mailbox just as coronavirus cases first started being reported in the United States. It was subtitled, “The president is winning his war on American institutions” going. The spread of the virus and subsequent lockdown shows how critical it is to have competent government planning and science-based decision-making. The article was about the decline of the Justice and State departments, but the same destruction applies to the Interior Department and Environmental Protection Agency (run by an oil lobbyist and coal lobbyist respectively). Also, to the White House National Security Council, which had a Global Health Security and Bio-defense team dedicated to pandemic response that was disbanded by the Trump Administration in the spring of 2018. Thus, the U.S. failed to quickly roll our widespread testing for Covid-19, prepare properly or take the threat seriously enough early enough. The lesson is clear. We need to prioritize COVID Plan accordingly. Execute effectively. Save lives.

Real Response

By Jim Hines

America’s national emergency does not apply to everyone.

On March 13th the President declared a national emergency because of the spreading coronavirus. While this national emergency applies to you and me and millions of other Americans it does not apply to the U.S. Dept. of the Interior (DOI) where it is business as usual.

DOI is still going ahead with issuing oil and gas leases on millions of acres of your national public lands in the western U.S.

And upcoming public comment periods for a number of projects which have the great potential to destroy fragile ecosystems, kill endangered wildlife and ruin sacred sites so important to native Americans will not be extended to give the American people voice to their government, says the Secretary of the Interior.

The U.S. Surgeon General announced in March that “this week it’s going to get bad.” Of course, he was talking about the coronavirus, but he could have easily been talking about environmental destruction measures which could be approved. One example is federal regulators approving an LNG project in Coos Bay, 2.1 million the objections of the state, which has (had?) the power to grant three necessary permits. “Backers of the project have been promising local jobs for 15 years. But we feel that they should comply with state and local permits, but Pembina (Pipeline Corp.) is now signaling that it intends to preempt the state;” wrote a reporter from the Oregonian. Despite the governor insisting the project wouldn’t go forward without the state’s permitting, Pembina has appealed the state’s rejection to Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross, a founder of the International Coal Group and a friend to the oil industry.

Despite the governor insisting the project wouldn’t go forward without the state’s permitting, Pembina has appealed the state’s rejection to Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross, a founder of the International Coal Group and a friend to the oil industry.

The National Park Service is now in the process of closing either partially or fully various national parks in the west to you, but not to drilling and mining companies, its work as usual for them. So if you want to spend time outdoors during this national emergency and want to visit a national park just show your drilling or mining permit and you’re in.

During these times we will do what the Sierra Club does best, heading to court as well as meeting with members of Congress and Interior stuff, all of this done remotely and safely during this time of national emergency.

We want all lease sales on federal land to cease. We want all public comment periods extended. Just two simple asks...will our requests be granted?@EAVESDROPS

Fifty years ago, our region faced an unprecedented environmental disaster, echoed today by the even larger impacts of the climate crisis.”

- Kathi King, SB Community Environmental Council who noted: “This year’s event aims to harness the energy of that first Earth Day, rallying activists of all ages...” (The April event has been postponed due to Covid-19)

The emergency here was a Sierra Club protest against new oil projects during the March 4 CalGEM hearing (see story pg. 2), but its new meaning may be extended. Email to: CalGEMRegulations@conservation.ca.gov
Clear lessons... continued from page 1

The Sierra Club drove 30,000 emails to members of Congress supporting the Covid-19 relief package, which provides leave, unemployment benefits, free coronavirus testing, and food and medical aid to people affected by the pandemic.

It also involves determining how to carry out economic stimulus in a way that doesn’t bail out oil and gas companies and sneak through regulatory and public giveaways, but that protects workers, clean energy and clean transportation jobs, and our democracy, including the important election taking place on November 3.

The Sierra Club has exactly that in mind as its campaign got underway, as we planned, which support, Exxon’s oil trucking plan and Aera’s Cantor Canyon oil project are also slated for a decision this year, which we oppose.

As we go ahead to 2021, our Congressional representative Salud Carbajal recently sent a letter asking for language prohibiting federal funds from being used to allow for any new oil and gas along the Pacific coast, Atlantic coast, Florida’s coast, and the Arctic’s in new year’s next step in our battle.

Inevitably a spill

On March 21 an oil tanker overturned on Highway 166 and dumped 6,000 gallons of crude oil into the Cuyama River. From there, the oil could be blown downstream toward the Twitchell Dam. That road is windy with steep embankments, a particularly dangerous route.

The Twitchell reservoir is designed to recharge the groundwater basin that provides drinking water for north Santa Barbara County. In this case, the trailer came unattached and rolled down the embankment.

This comes just two months after an oil tanker shut down Highway 41 the week of January 21 near Kern County. That also involved a tank trailer that went over the side of an embankment, spilling 1,000 gallons of oil.

Statistically, trucking is the safest way to transport oil. But roads would see hundreds of additional oil tanker trips every day if pending oil projects in Santa Barbara are approved. Sierra Club, other groups and the public will continue the fight against transporting oil by trucks.

Rightwing Rags

A mysterious group recently purchased the Santa Maria Towers Lompoc Record and Santa Ynez Valley News, along with other inland CA newspapers, including the Bakersfield Californian.

Documents filled with the state list Melanie Walsh as chief executive officer. She is the daughter and business associate of rightwing fraudster, David Radler, who helped media baron Conrad Black build a global newspaper empire starting in 1990. Radler was once described as managing to “collect a string of reactionary Republican papers—and make them even more conservative.”

In 2007 Radler and Black were both convicted of white-collar crimes. Radler served less than a year of his 29-month sentence for fraud and Black was pardoned by Trump, with whom he partnered in the now-defunct Black published the flaying biography of Trump entitled, “A President Like No Other.” He also describes Canadian carbon sand companies as “heroic” and “ecologically impeccable.”

Based on this history, but be wary of the Santa Maria Times under their new ownership.

Send an action email

By Jon Ullman

Sierra Club and its allies turned out scores of residents in Santa Maria on March 4 to ask a state agency to protect people, water and land from the kind of oil drilling that we are urging to submit their own comments before an April 10 deadline, even though it may be extended.

The oil drilling regulation agency called CalGEM (California Geologic 

Management Division, formerly DOGGR), planned to hold 10 workshops statewide to gather comments on a proposed new rule that set back oil drilling from homes and institutions and ban certain kinds of seismic oil drilling. A new law introduced by our Assembly member Monique Limón. A few workshops, including one in Oxnard, were later cancelled due to coronavirus.

Environmental and social justice groups and residents gave impassioned speeches asking for a 2,500-foot setbacks and a ban on new oil drilling statewide. They also asked that California not grant an aquifer exemption to allow a tripling of oil drilling in Cut Canyon because of its threat to Santa Maria’s water supply, a city of 100,000 master residents.

While Gov. Newsom’s administration is considering new loopholes, they could be less than what environmentalists are asking for and check full of loopholes that would allow increases in high-pressure steam and acid drilling across our Ventura and Santa Barbara counties.

Opponents of new protections were out in force: Western States Petroleum Association, big oil firms, oil lobby groups and unions. There may be one more meeting on line before a new drilling season.

All Sierra Club members are urged to submit comments via email soon to CalGEMregulations@conservation.ca.gov.

Here are ideas for comments:

- 2,500 feet buffer between oil/gas operations and homes, workplaces and schools. The health hazards are proven. This includes agriculture.

- No drilling near protected areas. The new rule required by the state has found instances where drinking and agricultural sources have been compromised, such as in Oxnard, and is likely to find more.

- No drilling near homes, businesses and public places that prohibit flaring and venting except for safety purposes.

- Natural gas (methane) is a byproduct of oil drilling. Methane is leaking, it emits greenhouse gases and other air pollutants like benzene. It should be captured and used.

- No drilling in fire hazard zones. Wildfire risk is increasingly costly, deadly and hazardous to health and safety due to climate change. Our region has already experienced devastating fires.

Get power from sun

Sierra Club is partnering with SunPower to make it easy for anyone (member or not) to go solar and save money with a proven company backed by the club.

This is especially critical in the Ventura area which has joined the Climate Power Alliance, an advantage for lower prices. Santa Barbara County residents can also save money by going solar. Solar will boost the value of your home and it qualifies for a tax credit, as long as you live on the link below for a free estimate.

You’ll receive a $1,000 mail-in rebate while our Los Padres Chapter gets $1,000 to support its work for clean energy.
By Nina Danza

A new 5-mile non-motorized route along the Santa Clara River between Oxnard and Ventura may become the latest asset to fight climate change when the Ventura County Board of Supervisors approved submitting a grant application to construct the coast-rage trail.

“Completion of the Santa Paula railroad bike trail between Santa Paula and Ventura has been a dream of bicyclists, runners and trail users for decades,” stated Supervisor Steve Bennett. The trail is an excellent candidate for funding under the state Active Transportation Program when the Board of Supervisors re-applies.

The entire trail corridor from Ventura to Piru is owned by the county expressly to produce a long-range non-motorized route. The current proposed segment is less complicated than other areas of the rail, as it is fully within county jurisdiction and it is willing to own and operate the trail. In addition, all preparatory studies have been completed including environmental analysis and public comment for a full build-out of a Santa Paula Branch Line trail.

Over past years, the trail has been stymied only by a few farms. Farmer objections include worries of trespassing onto farm property, contamination or theft of produce, of trespassing onto farm property, and safety of residents. We are very safety of residents. We are very concerned when an operator who doesn’t follow the rules is drilling on the shallow tar sands near our aquifer,” the group said in a statement.

By Peak Oil remarks

“Climate First: Replacing Oil & Gas (CFROG) applauds the proactive work by the county to identify the multiple problems at the project threatens our public health and local environment. EDC staff attorneys will walk through the county owned and enhanced public health.

The rail-to-trail proposal is a straight shot from Ventura to Santa Paula. Please support it.

Join the SB Environmental Defense Center for a webinar on Wednesday, April 8th at noon, to learn about Aera Energy’s dangerous oil and gas project proposed in the Cat Canyon Oil Field near Santa Maria.

The first of three large projects moving through Santa Barbara County’s permit process, Aera’s dramatic proposal threatens our public health and local environment.

EDC staff attorneys will walk through the county owned and enhanced public health.

The public is welcome to our programs and meetings.

Our North County Group will keep you informed on our Facebook page:

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Teens tell adults you’re exhausting

By John Hankins

When Amelia Beving was seven, the traffic outside her dad’s office began to anger her.

“Cars would be idling in front of the building,” she said. “They would come in, turn their engine on, and sit there.”

At the time, Beving was doing research on idling and its impact, and she was determined to make a change. She reached out to California lawmakers and won a scholarship to attend the Capitol Hill Torch Program, a training program for youth activists who want to make a difference in their communities.

Beving has spent the past few months working with the Kids Fighting Idling group to encourage adults to turn off their engines when they are not in their cars. She has handed out flyers at her school, done research and spoken to lawmakers about the issue.

“I want to make sure that people understand the impact of idling and how it affects our environment,” Beving said.

The Kids Fighting Idling group, which is made up of students from all over California, has raised awareness about the issue and worked to get California lawmakers to pass a bill to limit idling.

“We are tired of adults saying, ‘I am driving this car because I work around the area,’” Beving said. “But if you are turning your engine on for longer than 10 minutes, you are helping to make the world a dirtier place.”

The group is working to get lawmakers to pass a bill that would limit idling and create a ban on idling for longer than 10 minutes.

“Right now, there is no law that says you can’t idle your car for longer than 10 minutes,” Beving said. “But if we pass a law, it will make a difference.”

The group has also worked to create awareness about the issue on social media.

“Social media is a huge part of this,” Beving said. “We are using it to reach people and get them involved.”

The group has created a website, www.idlingproject.com, where people can learn more about the issue and sign a pledge to turn off their engines when they are not in their cars.

“I want people to understand that idling is really bad for our environment,” Beving said. “We need to make a change.”

The Kids Fighting Idling group has received a lot of support from the community.

“We have gotten a lot of support from people who want to make a change,” Beving said. “They are all in.”
By John Hankins
You may notice instantly that there’s fewer-than-normal sightings from Mid-Spring onward, due to many scheduled events that were cancelled due to the Covid-19 virus safety advice. But the Sierra Club does not lie; it just canceled most of its internet meetings, action posts and lobbying by email. No way will we stop our effective actions to Explore, Enjoy and Protect the planet—only it’s six-feet apart for the time being.

Please join us; see Group News box on page 3 for contacts and links where you can get involved. While we are not now conducting our free outings, we encourage all to go outside on your own. If you do, like to donate (it helps a lot and the money stays here at home), do not pass go, but go directly to www.sierrabc.org/donate/1000.

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It’s seal pup season
By Robert Bernstein

We had 21 people for our Carpinteria Seals and Salt Marsh Sierra Club hike on March 15. To minimize risk, we suggested that people not carpool for the first time ever. And we suggested that people practice “social distancing” as much as possible during the hike.

We were very fortunate with the weather as the forecast called for on and off showers, but it didn’t rain until after the hike was finished. We were also fortunate to see quite a few newly born seal pups, and to have a volunteer docent on duty to explain what we were seeing.

The docent explained that these harbor seals are very different than the elephant seals in their mating habits. These seals mate whenever they feel like it. The males do not have to fight each other for a female which can mate with whoever they feel like and they do not pair up.

Most interesting is that the females can delay the gestation of the fertilized eggs! The females synchronize this gestation so that they all give birth around the same time. No doubt this offers some safety in numbers when it comes to predation by sharks.

The mothers nurse their young for about six weeks and then the seal pups are on their own, eating fish and crustaceans like the adults. We did not see any pups nursing, but we did see quite a few pups alongside their mothers on the shore and swimming in the water. The pups grow quickly, so they were almost as long as their mothers.

After we got a good view of the seals some of the group signed out to do their own thing. But most of us continued another mile and a half to the Carpinteria Salt Marsh. Thanks to Anthony for showing us the best route.

And thanks to Ana for sending me some of her photos which were excellent.

Here are my many photos, with Ana’s photos tagged at on the bottom:

https://www.sierraclub.org/carpinteria-2020-0315

A group of seals on land is called a colony, and a group of seals in the water is called a raft but to further confuse us all, they are also sometimes referred to as a pod or bob, also harem and herd. Okay, about just a bunch of seals shown here which use this haul-out space every year, just east of the Carpinteria Pier and Carpinteria State Park. (Photo by Robert Bernstein)
By Jim Hines

Trouble is coming to a national park near you, thanks to the Trump Administration’s proposed 2020-2021 federal budget which, among other cuts, contains a 17 percent reduction in the U.S. Dept. of the Interior, the federal agency which manages your national public lands, this is on top of already major cuts to the agency.

Planning an upcoming trip to one of YOUR national parks, national wildlife refuges, national monuments or national conservation areas? Well you had better hurry if these cuts go through.

But have no fear if you want to drill for oil and gas, destroy rivers and stream with fracking fluids, cut timber, mine for underground resources at little or no cost. This would be a budget you will like.

Cut the on the ground ranger staffs at national parks — which the heck, who needs park managers protecting YOUR most spectacular lands. Want to hoot ancient native American historic sites? Have at it: the budget will cut back on enforcement. Need backcountry medical assistance in Canyonslands National Park? No worries just use your cell phone to call your friends back home and ask them to come and help you.

Pay a massive increase in national park entrance fees while no fee livestream grazing is allowed on national public lands ... so you can visit for free if you have a herd of cattle, everyone else pays at the park entrance.

I can go on and on but today’s discussion with Interior staffs was not a discourse of a positive future for YOUR national lands; they were instead a vicious discussion, a threat the Trump Administration has for America’s national public lands which is something out of the movie ‘Apocalypse Now’.

Oh by the way, if you are a foreign owned company you get priority for use of America’s national public lands: lithium mining by an Australian firm, coal mining by a Chinese firm, uranium mining by a Canadian firm on the North Rim of the Grand Canyon. Discussions will officially begin soon on the proposed budget and whether or not Congress should adopt such a destructive plan to destroy YOUR national parks, national monuments, national wildlife refuges and national conservation areas.

Until I keep you updated on discussions move along with more specific information on individual national parks and other national public lands units proposed for massive cuts.

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THE PATHS YOU TAKE IN LIFE, MAKE SURE A FEW OF THEM ARE DIRT.

—John Muir

Know thy adversary

So many people ask me why — when I go to Washington DC to advocate for America’s national public lands — I spend so much time meeting with my adversaries on national public lands issues.

Well, our adversaries control two thirds of the U.S. Government, they control the U.S. Senate and the White House and are major players in distanzing America’s national public land units across the west.

Meeting with them gains me much insight on what they are up to, gains me valuable information and I build rapport with various staffers who actually happen to be on our side.

Here at home where I live in SoCal, I belong to several pro land development organizations where I gain very useful info to help me in my anti-pub land development campaigns.

To win battles, you must know what your adversaries are doing.

—For the planet, Jim Hines

Huge thanks to our donors

Members should have received our annual March Appeal letter that started out: “2020 marks the 50th anniversary of Earth Day, which took place in the wake of the first massive oil spill in Santa Barbara (and continues at the highest decade on record).”

We hope you can show your support with a one-time gift, a legacy pledge or by becoming a member of our Sustaining Member Circle today, which entails only a monthly donation of at least $20. If you lost your letter, you could always donate anywhere here.

www.SierraClub.org/donate/1000

Contributors to the Sustaining Member Circle is best as it allows us to plan our actions over the year. You will receive advance notice of events, regular updates on local environmental advocacy, a subscription to Condon Call, an invitation to an exclusive annual outing, and a gift.

By joining our Sustaining Member Circle, you are directly supporting the local work our chapter is doing on the ground in Santa Barbara and Ventura counties. The steady flow of funds we receive from the chapter’s focus on this advocacy, outreach and growth because we know our monthly expenses will be covered.

Every dollar you donate stays here in our Los Padres Chapter region to help us transition away from fossil fuels and to protect rivers, forests, and wildlife that depend on us. Please feel free to contact Emily with any questions: emilyaengel@gmail.com

Your steady commitment makes it possible for the Los Padres Chapter to be nimble and respond where we are needed, when we are needed — national advocacy for renewables like the Straus Wind Project to advocating nationally for the Central Coast Heritage Protection Act.

Special thanks go to our initial Sustaining Members, which so far includes:

Valerie Bentz  Alex Greenlee
Irving Beiman  ‘Condon’ John Hankins
Connie Ford  Laura Lindsay
Patricia Pagaling

We have also received many one-time gifts from donors and we also thank them heartily. They are:

Camarillo
Susan Newby, Jdy Longshaw
J. Lynn Fonkulsker
Thomas Day Harrison
Charles J. and Janice C. McEachog
Rose-Lise Otzet

Carlsbad
LaVere Charmey and Keven Cornish
Michelle Ellison
Mr. and Mrs. J. Roger Essick
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Sespe trails work continues

The trails across the Ventura backcountry have been neglected over the past decade probably more than anywhere else across the Los Padres, according to the Los Padres Forest Association, which is launching a fundraiser for Beartrap Camp, a campaign for the community to help out.

“There is enough is enough, it’s time for that to change,” LPAF stated. In 2019 the LPAF was awarded a grant from REI to lead a series of volunteer projects across the Sespe Wilderness. It started in January 2020 working the Sespe River Trail from Piedra Blanca to Willet and followed that with a February 2020 project working the Red Reef Trail up from Sespe Creek.

The next scheduled project is a week-long Working Vacation in April 2020 on the Gene Marshall - Piedra Blanca (GMPB) Trail with regular updates to Beartrap Camp, which has not been cancelled as of press time.

“Due to all the work we’ve done so far has been incredible, with great volunteer turnout and everyone we’ve met along the trail has been so supportive and happy to see these trails getting worked once again. The response has been so positive that we want to keep the momentum going and continue our progress working trails in the Sespe,” said Bryan Conant LPAF director.

With that in mind, the LPAF is launching a fundraiser for the Sespe trails with the hopes of raising $15,000 to fund future trail projects in the Sespe.

Many of the Sespe trails are some of the best maintained trails across the Los Padres, but they are in bad shape now. LPAF hopes the trail community can help by raising some funds for the Sespe trails. For more information and a short video about the proposal, go to: https://funds.sierraclub.org/sespe-wilderness-campaign/
COVID QUOTES

You got to laugh, cry, hibernate, commiserate, procrastinate, facetime, downtime or get outdoors during the Covid-19 quarantine. Here’s a compilation of what folks are saying and doing. 

“Flattening the curve, fattening my curves.” A submission to comedian Jimmy Fallon.

“People feel overwhelmed, sadness abounds, hope is hanging in the balance and we as a nation face an unknown future. My garden is my place of sanctuary, a place of calm peace and renewal and self-connection.” Jim Hines, Los Padres Chapter conservation director and vice-chair.

“They’re trying to scare everybody, from meetings, cancel the meetings, close the schools – you know, destroy the country. And that’s okay, as long as we can win the election.” Mr. Trump speaking at his Mar-a-Lago resort in mid-March.

“I would have got to your email yesterday; had I not been working in our garden all day!” Mike Stubblefield, chapter air quality chair.

“I just got off the phone with my parents … I interrupted their card game with their friends. I literally yelled at my mom: you are not supposed to mix households!!!! They’re like … oh … the fake media is blowing this out of proportion.” Lori Lee on Facebook.

“Art Time: mostly just putting stickers on the dog.” Part of a new Pandemic Bingo home-schooling game by Kimberly Harrington.

“Hiking trails were filled Friday with cabin fever sufferers who stayed the requisite six feet apart and smiled a lot more than normal, grateful to be anywhere but home.” LA Times article on “State Residents Navigate the Shutdown with Ease, Day 1”.

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