

President's Column

February 1998

by Jim Clark

My second term of President of Redwood Region Audubon Society was not like the first. What I had expected to do, based on my first term, was different because of it. What I intend to do as Immediate Past President, will also be different. One year to learn, one to preside, and one to act. We have selected the triad presidential system to provide individuals with an easier transition and to provide RRAS with continuity of leadership experience. It will my job as Immediate-Past President to take what I have learned in the past two years and use it to help the President, President Elect, and the new officers and board members do as good a job as they can do for you, the members of RRAS.

What I have seen in the past two years is many good ideas diminished through lack of coordinated execution, and integration. Too much of our success has been due to a few dedicated individuals and small groups working on specific projects.

As in military organizations, there are only two functions that are essential to a conservation organization: Operations and Support. Our operations are the activities that protect wildlife habitat. Support is what makes that possible. Bucks for birds (and all other life forms except timber beasts) is really what it comes down to. To get bucks, we need to attract people and make them think that they are having fun when they are actually helping earn those bucks. When we get the bucks we can protect wildlife habitat.

It's time to do your part! You will have fun. You will help earn bucks for birds. You will get others to multiply your efforts. You will, at least make a hefty pledge for the upcoming Bird-a-Thon, if not actively participate.

ANY QUESTIONS?

President's Column

January 1998

by Jim Clark

It was a dark and stormy Saturday at the Arcata Marsh. The dowitchers were following the tide out and the Green-winged Teals were exhibiting early courting behavior. Suddenly a voice rang out: "Hi! I'm Jim Clark, and I'm here to lead the marsh walk this morning." It was my time to "give." Four hardy and one not-so-hardy folks showed up for the walk. It's hard to be hardy when you are four years old and it's wet, windy, and cold! The four-year-old and his parents had to turn back so the remaining three continued on. For three it was a good time to walk the marsh, and for three others it was better to return later, perhaps another day.

Like other Saturday morning marsh docents, I lead the walks three or four times a year. I'm sure I'm not the only one that gets more back than I give.

The tide, season, weather and the age of a child set rhythms to which we should pay close attention. Our lives and our happiness depend on it. The parents of the cold little kid wisely took him back to shelter so that walking in the marsh would not be a miserable experience. He'll be back.

Volunteering for Redwood Region Audubon Society can be a lot like walking in the marsh in heavy weather. If the experience is not good, there is little reason to return. Let's all try to keep the four-year-old in us happy by not stretching ourselves too thin. Those who have not volunteered for a while, please consider that now might be your time to have some fun, and help keep the four-year-old in someone else happy. And many thanks to those regular volunteers!

President's Column

More details needed on spill response and planning

December 1997

by Jim Clark

It's 9:20 a.m. on November 5, 1997, about four hours after 4570 gallons of #6 fuel oil spilled from the punctured fuel tank of a freighter at the Louisiana Pacific Dock.

I am on the northeast corner of the Samoa boat ramp parking lot, looking at the line of oil in the water at the shoreline undulating like some giant snake in the waves. It stretches west then north along the beach past the shallow cove and as far as I can see toward Fairhaven. It also continues to the south past the boat ramp.

At the top of the boat ramp there are about a dozen Coast Guard personnel in blue coveralls. They are waiting for orders. Behind them is a lowboy trailer with three large orange containers on it, presumably containing oil spill cleanup material. It is waiting to be deployed by the Coast Guard people who are waiting for orders. Meanwhile the oil continues to cover the shoreline, and what does not stick to the shore moves on to find something else to stick to. It is becoming more difficult to recover by the minute.

I was only there for 20 minutes. Although my emotions told me that the oil should be sucked up and absorbed immediately, my intellect told me that I am not an oil spill cleanup expert and that I should leave it to the experts standing by. Maybe those 20 minutes of non-action didn't make any difference; maybe it did. I don't know how long those people waited before taking actual cleanup action.

After major incidents involving multiple agencies, there is a post incident review among the participating agencies. The purpose of that review is to critique the actions taken in order to improve future responses. Although agency representatives are customarily frank about their errors, it is still an in-house exercise. An incident of the magnitude of the Humboldt Bay oil spill should require a detailed public report. We need to examine more than "incident response." We need to take a close look at oil spill response planning. Capable people waiting for orders to act, and oil booms that can't function properly in Humboldt Bay's tidal currents, are not acceptable.

President's Column

Plan? Why bother?

October 1997

by Jim Clark

The Redwood Region Audubon Society's primary concern is the preservation and conservation of wildlife habitat. We recognize that if this is done correctly, environmental and quality of life benefits are more likely to follow. We also recognize that we live in a complex world in which most issues are interrelated. Poverty and homelessness have a negative effect on the environment throughout the world, yet the National Audubon Society focuses mainly on habitat, rather than poverty. Likewise, I am going to focus on environmental planning in Humboldt County, while recognizing that poverty and other human conditions also need to be dealt with at their source.

Most of our membership is probably glad to see the illegal residential use of the South Spit of Humboldt Bay coming to an end. The County Health Officer has declared it a health emergency due to unsanitary and substandard conditions. The controversy and angst caused by the decision to correct this coastal plan violation on the South Spit, though, appears to have overshadowed the real problem, of which the South Spit situation is but a symptom.

Why did the South Spit situation develop in the first place? Who or what is responsible for the regulation of the use of private property in Humboldt County? The answer to that rhetorical question is; "the Planning Department," of course.

The root cause of the development of the rural ghetto on the South Spit was the refusal of the Humboldt Planning Department to enforce its own plan with regard to the allowable uses of private coastal land. As with so many other cases, inappropriate land use resulted in a secondary problem that becomes a bigger problem to be handed off to another agency. One of the excuses offered for non-action was that the landowner, Pacific Lumber Company, could not cope with the situation without county assistance.

A similar, but smaller situation on private property adjacent to Clam Beach was remedied quickly by civil action. This property owner was an individual and the illegal campers were in the public eye rather than out of sight and out of the loop.

What will it take to make our county Planning Department more than plan compliance and development permit facilitation agency? Our constant vigilance and activism!

It will take a lot of work to make the enforcement of planning regulations pro-active and even handed, instead of politically motivated and reactionary.

President's Column

Reducing Recycling

September 1997

by Jim Clark

In the last issue of the Sandpiper, I discussed how solid waste reduction priorities could be reversed. Recycling has become the catchall word for all methods of waste reduction, while reduction of waste at the consumer level has taken a back seat. I also said that next time I would write on reducing recycling.

Is this heresy? Guess we'd better define our terms! Reducing recycling in this column means reducing the relative quantity of recycled material, compared to that which is avoided by reduction, and reduced by reusing.

So, if reducing and reusing are higher priorities than recycling, why haven't we significantly cut waste in packaging at the consumer level? In my opinion, it is because our economy is still based on the raw extraction and disposal principles of the nineteenth century. Both the extraction (including 'renewable' resources) and disposal industries are very big, and businesses between them are resistant to change. Combine this with a generally uninterested public, and we have trouble in 'Waste Reduction City,' my friends.

Think about how much less pulp would be needed if we eliminated half of all paper market bag use. It would happen in a month if shoppers were forced to buy their bags at the checkout stand as in Europe. Unfortunately, most shoppers forget that they are paying for those bags. More and more grocery stores are refunding the cost of bags if you bring your own. Patronize them if you can.

Audubon members can help reduce waste at the source in other ways too. Try not to buy over packaged products, look for recycled content packaging, and try to reuse what you can. Buy quality that lasts.

President's Column

Solid waste reduction: who wants what?

May 1997

by Jim Clark

I have represented Redwood Region Audubon Society (RRAS) on the Humboldt County Integrated Solid Waste Task Force for 5 years. Other than the process of selecting suitable areas for additional landfill capacity, very little of the task force's activity has been directly related to what most of our members consider CONSERVATION. My primary motive for participating in the task force was not to protect the environment from those big dirty landfills (although I carefully watched the landfill site selection process), but to help coordinate National Audubon Society's prioritized solid waste policy with the State's, as implemented in Humboldt County. How fortunate that the priorities were identical! "Reduce, Reuse, Recycle," the fourth and unmentioned priority is "Return" as in return to the earth via landfill, which ties back to "Reduce," as in reduce what goes to landfill.

I believe that most Audubon members define "Reduce" in the context of solid waste as reduced packaging which leads to reduced use of natural resources which helps preserve wildlife habitat. A nifty side benefit is reduced cost of disposal and fewer landfills.

I credit the staff of the county and city agencies with doing a great job of diverting over 50% of the waste stream from our land fill, establishing a household hazardous waste collection facility, and greatly increasing public awareness of the solid waste situation. Some of this reduction has been through reclassification of waste and some of the new awareness has come about through higher fees, but on the whole, the effort has been successful.

True to State and Audubon priorities, the highest emphasis has been on reduction of solid waste. Unfortunately, much of that reduction has been accomplished by post-consumer "diversion" to solid waste that is now called something else and can be recycled. This is how the first priority becomes the last, and the last becomes the first; a type of recycling in itself.

On May 10, the fifth annual Waste Reduction Awards will be given to those who have made a significant contribution to Reducing, Reusing and Recycling what was once thought to be solid waste. These individuals and groups are providing practical, transferable solutions to solid waste by keeping their priorities straight.

Next time: Reducing Recycling. Be sure to bring a reusable cup or mug to the next meeting!

President's Column

April 1997

by Jim Clark

A board member called me before the last board meeting and expressed concern regarding the possibility that our chapter might be seen as an organization that says "no" to too many things, too often. That is a valid concern. What can we do about it?

The pragmatic approach to environmentalism, using law and science to achieve the goals of preserving wildlife habitat and a good quality of life for all life is not always the easy path. I have been blasted with both barrels from opposite sides of environmental issues. Our chapter has been accused of both being environmental wimps in cahoots with big business and at the same time a being bunch of bird watching environmental radicals. Fortunately, these jabs come infrequently and from the more extreme activists on either side of some issues. Most people recognize that our chapter and National Audubon Society have earned respect not only for what we do, but how we do it.

Typically, we come out against the way something is being done--or is proposed to be done--rather than the project itself. And more often than not, it is the noncompliance with environmental law by omission of information that we protest. This is the Audubon way.

You can do something about our chapter being perceived as "opposed to everything" by being familiar with local, regional and national issues and not being afraid to take a stand when challenged by an offhand remark. By listening and being reasonable you can often convince an opponent that our position has a basis in reason--even if you can't change their mind. By pointing out the benefits of a project done in environmental compliance you may get an opponent to stop and think. That's the first step.

President's Column

March 1997

by Jim Clark

As I start the middle year of my second three year presidential cycle I am amazed by what has changed in Redwood Region Audubon Society -- and what has not. I am also happy to see that most of the changes -- and things that have not changed -- are good.

The most important part of RRAS is our members. Without you, we would be nothing. Like a healthy environment, we are a diverse group, and we thrive on that diversity. We share the common general goal of preserving wildlife habitat and maintaining a healthy environment, using science and law as our tools. It is to this combination of diversity in membership and unity in goals that we owe our success. I have often had the pleasure of "spirited" discussion with my Audubon allies on environmental issues, and most times learned more about the issue as a result. By all means take advantage of our field trips and programs to learn about nature and environmental issues, but if you want to go to the next level of knowledge and have even more fun, get involved with a specific issue or project.

So, what's new? I think that since my last term as president, international involvement has been the single most significant addition to our chapter activities. I am sure our Immediate Past President, Rob Hewitt will continue to do a great job of getting the Chapter involved with the breeding bird atlas project. This is a classic "Think Globally, Act Locally" project. The data gathered locally will be of great value to preserving bird habit in other areas of the world. When we protect migratory bird habitat, we also protect other wildlife, water, soil, and the economies that depend on them. We are also learning that it is not enough to protect only a few links in the chain. If we want birds - instead of problems -- to come home to roost (and nest), we need to keep the big picture in view.

If you are reading this column, you already have a special interest. I challenge you to become involved in a chapter activity of any type, enjoy our chapter's diversity, help biodiversity, and make a real difference in the world.