

California County Planning Commissioners Association
81st Annual Conference, Friday October 21, 2011

Program Highlights
by Dan Roberts

With the lovely view of a mild blue California day stretching over Sacramento, planning commissioners, staffers and guests from throughout our state convened on the sixteenth floor of the Holiday Inn. This year's conference theme was "Natural Resources – Economic Growth in California." Our intrepid and resourceful 2011 President Charlotte Hague, eager to present the fruits of her year-long endeavor, appeared at the podium to introduce the association's Board Members, express appreciation for assistance she received in preparing this conference, as well as to invite and recruit interested commissioners to serve on the association's board as District Representatives. With that, a most illuminating day of sharing and discussion with our invited speakers was underway:

Paul Wenger: President of the California Farm Bureau Federation

Mr. Wenger introduced himself as a third-generation farmer who hails from the Modesto area. He stressed that it is the diversity of areas and climates that makes California so great, and offered some 'food for thought' regarding the role of agriculture and farming. People in general seem to want agricultural land to stay in agriculture. Out of about 32 million people in California, 80,000 of them are farmers: sixty percent of the fresh vegetables in the United States come from the Salinas Valley!

An interesting recent phenomenon is what Wenger terms the "multiplier effect" of food suppliers processing and packaging foods in convenient ways (examples would be mixed salad in a bag, or packaged pre-sliced apples). These products provide additional jobs that are directly related to farming.

On environmental groups, he noted that many times an unrecognized conflict of interest may exist when a legislative agenda is pursued. It is difficult to make decisions when you don't fully understand the process. For example, a "no burning" rule for agricultural land may be intended to preserve air quality, but it means that crop waste needs to be chipped and plowed back into the land, rather than burned. The unburned waste being plowed into the soil creates a harbor for mites, necessitating pesticide spraying for mites in order to ensure a successful crop.

California's agricultural operations are still largely owned by "family" businesses, although some of them are quite large companies (E & J Gallo is a prime example). Mr. Wenger explained that he got involved in the Farm Bureau because he recognized that while over-regulation can drive you out of business, most farmers are hesitant to put their money and attention into being more politically active. Of great concern at this time is the continued availability of adequate water for agriculture within our state, as the population continues to increase.

Randy Hanvelt: Recently elected Supervisor from Tuolumne County

Mr. Hanvelt took the opportunity to thank and encourage those in attendance (as well as Planning Commissions everywhere) for the service they perform. Commissioners will study and learn, each with his own perspective. The recommendations made to a Board of Supervisors by its Planning Commission are so valuable because of the variety of perspectives.

The world has changed dramatically, and we are all a part of that. Planning Commissioners do their homework and educate themselves. His advice is to take the broad view, listen to the opposition, and realize that everyone is valuable.

Hanvelt cited two recent examples from his own experience, of the value of knowledge in detail: in one case, a commission was considering a permit for a small portable sawmill. In discussion it occurred that there was a limit on lumber production of 10,000 board feet per year. The permit was up for consideration while planners and commissioners could not define "board foot." Research revealed that this limit was so low (i.e. about one or two boards per day) that there was no possibility of creating a profitable venture for the proponent: the limit needed to be raised in order for the permit to become practical. Another example was a proposed requirement to place a 1000 foot perimeter around all mine sites. For a large mine this could have resulted in a preposterous number of acres of unusable land. It is a commissioner's job to discover what does and does not make sense about a proposal.

In conclusion he noted that those who are appointed as commissioners often tend to be a bit bashful, and playfully he added: 'a little crazy.' He ended with "That's why I appreciate what you do. Thank you."

Michael Albrecht: President and co-owner of Sierra Resource Management, Inc.

Mr. Albrecht introduced himself as a logger: he has been a logger for many years. "Logging," however, is apparently not a modern or politically correct term. Over time this field of endeavor has been labeled 'vegetation management', then 'forest thinning,' and most recently 'timber harvesting.'

There are 740 million acres of forest in the United States: 38 million of those are in California. With this resource we should be a leading exporter of lumber to the world, but instead we are the world's leading importer.

The nature of timber harvesting has evolved. New (and very expensive) equipment cuts trees, removes the limbs, and loads logs for hauling with minimal disturbance to the forest floor. Slash is chipped rather than burned. New thinning practices allow for "clumping" of growth areas to provide better habitat while still removing enough vegetation to mitigate fire concerns. Leaving dead trees (snags) is also beneficial. Part of the product is what is left behind: a healthy, fire-resistant forest. Due to the nature of these newer practices, sawmills are re-tooling to accommodate smaller logs.

It is also of interest that since 1983 a 25 megawatt wood-fired power plant has been operating in Tuolumne County, using wood chips and waste from timber harvesting operations. An electrostatic precipitator collects the particulates, and the remaining flu gas is relatively clean.

Increased timber harvesting could help our economy, as California is currently growing 9 billion board feet of timber per year but only accessing 2 billion of that. A key could be to better connect with, and educate the members of environmental groups in the industry's role in responsible resource management: for example, the Sierra Club surveyed their membership of 750 million regarding their attitude toward timber harvesting. Only 70,000 members voted, and out of those 39,000 responded "no timber." Based on surveys such as these which may be skewed or faulty, the Sierra Club and other such organizations become opponents of timber harvest operations which could actually make positive contributions to people and the environment.

Kristin Olsen: California State Assembly, 25th District

Ms. Olsen greeted the planning community present by stating that being a planning commissioner was her favorite role, but she had sought to help influence policy and moved on to elective office. Her successful bid for the assembly seat she now holds was based on job creation, local control, and reform.

With an unemployment rate between sixteen and twenty percent in parts of the Central Valley, job creation is of great importance. She also stresses education, and participation in our world economy: Her desire is to move governmental regulation and control, from the state to the local level. State regulations can be cumbersome and time-consuming, and in need of reform. An example of reform which she supports is AB890 which would provide for a streamlined CEQA process when roadway safety is at issue. This bill has a narrow focus but can be seen as a step in the right direction.

Water storage and conveyance is a big issue at the state level, with our population increase and concern regarding climate change. Water projects would also create jobs..

Although Olsen is a Republican, she laments the lack of cooperation and acceptance of ideas based on partisanship. Good ideas are not liberal or conservative, democratic or republican. Good ideas need to be considered on their merits. Ms. Olsen strives to build relationships with people outside of party affiliations by holding and attending coffees and lunches with people of both parties to discuss issues and ideas.

We need a holistic approach regarding environmental regulation: the goal should be a balance, and we need economic analyses of regulations. A separation of powers and restoration of local control for counties and cities, with fewer requirements imposed at the state level, is most appropriate in her view.

Jason Larabee: from the office of Congressman Jeff Dunham

Mr. Larabee outlined some of the bills and issues that Congressman Dunham is currently working on:

- **HR1604, NEPA Reform:**
Under this bill, CEQA could be used to satisfy NEPA requirements. It applies only to Bureau of Reclamation projects, but would expedite money and time.
- **Raising of the Exchequer Dam:**
The project to raise Lake McClure by ten feet is privately funded, but currently there is a dispute over the Merced River as a “wild and scenic” resource. Mr. Dunham feels that this project is acceptable because it impacts only 1800 feet of a 125 mile long wild river.
- **HR1734:**
This bill seeks to allow the Federal Government to sell surplus or underutilized properties and buildings, returning them to local tax rolls. An example is the Post Office Building in Washington DC, which could be offered for redevelopment and perhaps converted into a facility such as a hotel. It is currently costing the Federal Government six million dollars annually to keep the building empty.
- **FEMA Reform:**
How does this agency interact with state and local governments? Please send our office your ideas on this.
- **HR2904, IPAWS:**

This is the Integrated Public Alert and Warning System. This bill is to streamline public alerts and emergency response and is up for debate. Once again your ideas are invited.

- HR1581, Release of Wilderness Study Areas:
Lands which were placed under study for potential wilderness designation are being held in an indeterminate state. These public lands need to be released back to their respective agencies for administration.
- HR1582
This bill addresses ozone levels in the Central Valley.
- HR1837, San Joaquin Water Reliability Act:
This act concerns the Delta pumps, would repeal a 2009 settlement over water in the San Joaquin: It is controversial and should be made more farmer-friendly.
- HR2018
Clarifies clean water requirements, and the role of the Army Corps of Engineers.

Fernando Jara, Founder and Executive Director of Rock Hill Farms:

Mr. Jara's personal story is an amazing one: he was a second-generation gang member in Bakersfield at a very young age. After spending time in institutions of the California Youth Authority, he was granted parole at the age of 17. He humbly describes his subsequent life journey in which he earned a GED and went on to earn an Associate, then a Bachelor's degree. He had applied to Princeton and Harvard, but then his inner calling prompted him to begin a program which would help others wrench free from the world of gangs and crime.

Rock Hill Farm was instituted by Jara in order to offer others released from incarceration an alternative, so they would not return to gang activities and crime. The farm was brought into production by the labors of the participants. Outside donations of tools and materials were accepted, but little monetary support was sought. The farm is intended to be self-sustaining. Crops are planted, tended and harvested by the residents who also present their products for sale at Farmers' Markets.

Jara is currently in his second year at the Claremont School of Theology and was recently appointed co-director of the White House Inter-Faith Community Service Initiative. Rock Hill Farms is poised to serve as a model for realignment programs. The prison system is changing as the Supreme Court has ordered that many non-violent, non-sexual offenders be released to alleviate prison overcrowding. Programs such as Rock Hill Farms may provide individuals released from punitive institutions with opportunities to enter more productive and satisfying lives,

Craig McNamara, President and owner of Sierra Orchards.

Out of 81,700 farms in California, 2330 are certified organic. Sierra Orchards grows primarily organic walnuts. Making the orchards sustainable is imperative: but, there are lots of definitions of "sustainability." McNamara addresses three areas of sustainability (three P's):

- People
- Planet
- Profitability

Some examples of what was involved in the three-year conversion process to become a certified organic farm included the installation of sediment traps and the promotion of native bees, with the planting of hedgerows as habitat for pollinators. Moths are controlled as pests through timed pheromone sprays which attract males, confusing them and inhibiting reproduction to acceptable levels.

Because we need new people in the future of agriculture, Mr McNamara founded the Center for Land-Based Learning, to train the next generation of environmental leaders. Students from participating California schools are invited to visit the Center in an effort to reconnect young people with the land, and their food system. A recent project at the Center has been the restoration of Puta Creek, near Lake Berryessa. Students typically express excitement and enjoyment in leaving the classroom environment and learning to work with the land. The center also operates the California Farm Academy, a six-week course offered during evenings and weekends, covering the essentials of farm operations.

Mr. McNamara urges citizens to investigate the California Agricultural Vision 2030 (available on the internet). Twelve principles were developed by this team of many partners working together with honest brokerage.

William E. Motzer, PhD,PG,CHG, Senior Geochemist

Bill Motzer expressed his honor in having served as 2011 chair of the Society of Mining, Metallurgy and Exploration (SME), a national organization.

California's non-fuel minerals are at about four billion dollars per year among some 900 active mines, the biggest part of that being Construction Grade Aggregate. This is California's biggest mineral product at 1.94 billion, followed by other leaders such as Boron: 700 million; Gold: 104 million; and Rare Earths. Do not forget that water is also a mineral!

Aggregate is produced in every county in California except for San Francisco. It takes about 229 tons of aggregate to an 'average' house. There are some interesting aggregate operations going on such as on the old Yuba gold dredge fields. One gold dredge is still in operation there. The dredge was built in 1918, refurbished in 1934, then its operations were halted during World War II. Gold operations were again revived in 2006 and continue to the present. Reclamation and restoration of riparian environment is underway in conjunction with the operations and the area will ultimately become a park.

Another point of interest is the Sutter Gold Mine, which may soon be re-opened. The site, which is currently open to tourists, operated from 1852 to 1952 producing about eight million ounces from eight mines. They are having a bit of a PR problem locally because the tours will stop when mining resumes. The Empire and Idaho-Maryland mines in Nevada County are also to be re-opened.

Boron, California is the home of the nation's largest pit, and the only borax resource in the U.S.

Rare Earths demand is increasing steadily, with strategic elements and such things as motors and LCD screens. The only source is the Mountain Pass Mine.

Again, a reminder that water is a mineral commodity.

In closing Dr. Motzer noted that it takes five to ten years to permit a mine in California. Changes in times and marketplace are occurring more rapidly than that: California is not a mining-friendly state. He recommended the following resources:

SMCRA
Mining Board
Abandoned Mines Program
...or email bmotzer@toddengineers.com

Rick Miller, Southwest Region Permitting Manager, enXco

With his educational background in Natural Resources Planning at Humboldt State University, Mr. Miller oversees permit processes for the energy company enXco. The company has traditionally used wind technology but is now branching out into solar.

Miller builds long-term relationships with leases from landowners in order to site wind turbine facilities. EnXco is known as “EDF” in other countries. Their projects throughout the U.S. Are producing 1196 Megawatts.

Solar installations are all PV, there are no thermal solar installations. Mostly fixed and tilt technologies have been used up until now, but trackers are being introduced.

Key areas in the permitting process can be:

- obtaining tax credits/tax grants
- minimizing impacts
- and some cases come down to avian and bat protection.

Of course the CEQA process is lengthy, MET towers are installed to collect on-site data. Habitat loss is to be evaluated. Measures can be taken to reduce hazards to flying creatures. But he notes that these risks must be put in perspective: “For every 10,000 birds killed by humans and their cats, one of them is killed by a turbine.”

End of Friday Session

A certificate of appreciation plaque had been presented to each speaker after his or her presentation. The conference session was closed with a reminder of the events to follow in the evening and on the following day.

Crocker Art Museum

Later on Friday evening, bus transportation was provided to the Crocker Art Museum, where an elegant hors'douvres party with no-host bar and a private viewing of the gallery was sponsored by enXco. Planners and commissioners shared the time with networking and exchange of ideas and trends from their home counties.

Saturday Activities

Education continued for those in attendance on Saturday: first, a tour was offered of the State Capitol Building courtesy of Kristin Olsen. Many of the first floor offices within the capitol are utilized for the preservation of history. These rooms have been returned to their original appearance as they were in the late 1800's, according to the oldest photographs available. Original furniture, equipment and documents have been restored and the group was allowed to enter the rooms and examine these fascinating artifacts first-hand. Also along the tour were the rotunda, hallways containing portrait galleries of former governors, and the State Assembly chambers.

Sacramento's “Old Town” was the next destination, beginning with a delicious luncheon at the historic Fat City restaurant.. After lunch the association's annual general meeting was held, including the election of Karimah Karah as our next president, and a full slate of new officers for the year 2012.

Did you know that after experiencing a set of devastating floods along the Sacramento River in 1850 and 1861, and an ensuing epidemic of cholera, that levees were constructed and an entire section of the

city was raised to a new elevation? Each building was jacked up an entire story from its foundation by hand, only a few inches per day, using teams of hundreds of workers. The resulting underground basement and sidewalk areas are still accessible, and a tour of these spaces reveals artifacts of their habitation by repressed Chinese immigrants as well as prostitutes in the latter half of the century.

The next stop was the California Railroad Museum, highlighting California's role in train transportation. A number of beautifully restored steam engines and rail cars are on display here, and another highlight is the golden spike, a replica of the one that was ceremonially driven at the site of the completion of the transcontinental rail line in Promontory, Utah. The story told is that the original jeweler who created the spike made a duplicate and stored it in safe deposit. The duplicate gold spike was unknown to the public until it was donated to the Museum in 2005.

Finally, conference participants returned downtown to gather once again at the Holiday Inn for the final event, a gala Banquet and Awards ceremony where Tuolumne County's Community Resources Agency Director, Bev Shane, gave a most informative keynote address outlining the history of planning as a public process. Commissioners and Planners were honored for their service, and all look forward to our 82nd annual conference next year.

Thanks are due to Charlotte Hague for her meticulous preparation and execution of this event, all of the board members' contributions, Renee' Lederer for her organizational and administrative skills, John Elliott for photography, Karimah Karah for collecting contact information from each participant, the Holiday Inn restaurant staff for providing delicious repast in the conference and banquet rooms, our sponsors enXco and E & J Gallo, and finally to all of the participants for the polite attention and lively question-and-answer sessions with discussion and comparison of perspectives.