

October 28, 2008

Society for Conservation Biology, Davis student chapter
2nd meeting of the year

Burritos for dinner!

Next meeting on Dec 2nd, last week of classes

Jim Thorne wants volunteers for Connectivity conference Nov 17th-18th, if you want to volunteer, email jnthorpe@ucdavis.edu

BACBS is happening on January 31st

Project updates:

Volunteering (Marit talking)- groups still organizing for the planting season, Audubon has some definite ideas, most volunteer work will begin in December at the earliest, Marit will send out a spreadsheet in late November about potential work days for people to sign up

WIDSI (Patrick Grof-Tisza)- 10-15 people interested, informational session coming soon

Website (Iara Lacher)- for website submissions, please send them to Iara in website appropriate format, i.e. don't make Iara change it for you. She's a woman with limited time

Ballot discussion highlights:

Thanks to everyone who came to the SCB meeting yesterday! Thanks especially to Ben, Bjorn, Marguerite, and Sara for bringing us the details on Props 1A, 2, 7 and 10. The discussion was really informative, and I think I have a lot more information on which to base my vote. I hope you feel the same!

For everyone who couldn't make it, I've attempted to summarize the highlights of our discussion, as I felt that our group had some really great insights and points to make. We didn't want to keep everyone there all night, so we didn't have time to come to any solid conclusions about any of these propositions. If you would like more information on any of these, our prop researchers found the ballotpedia website very helpful

(http://ballotpedia.org/wiki/index.php/California_2008_ballot_measures).

If you find anything I've written here to be factually incorrect, or just want to add a comment, please send me an email (let's say by noon Friday) rather than replying to the whole group. To avoid an inbox-filling email discussion, I'll compile any comments and send them out to everyone at once on Friday.

Thanks again, and don't forget to vote!

~Kristen

Prop 1A: A proposal to fund the initial segment of a high-speed rail system in California, which

could make travel from SF to LA in about 2.5 hours possible. The major benefits cited are environmental (increasing infrastructure for rapid mass transit, reducing greenhouse gases, and potentially reducing the need to expand roads and highways) and economic (job growth). Of course the major costs are also environmental (building railways through parks and wilderness areas, most notably Henry Coe State Park) and economic (it will cost a LOT, and some of the opponents of the proposition doubt it will ever even be built). Our group wasn't clear on how set the proposed path of the rail lines were, whether they would still be open to negotiation, or if passage of this proposition would be the equivalent of a green light for whatever plans that are in place (like going through the state park). Our hunch was that there would still need to be environmental impact statements, possibly public comments, before the exact path would be set. Another concern was increased development along the rail line through the central valley, but some thought that a railway with few stops would tend to concentrate development at those stops while a freeway would encourage development along its entire length.

Prop 2: A proposal to require chickens confined in cages to have enough space to stretch their limbs and turn around comfortably, with fines for non-compliance. (The proposition also applies to pregnant pigs and veal calves, though they are apparently a much smaller industry and the major effects of this proposition would be on the large egg producers in California.) The major benefits cited are the health and welfare of the animals, possibly reduced salmonella from having chickens more spread out, and it may tend to allow smaller chicken farmers (many of whom are already doing this anyway) to compete with the larger egg producers. The major costs are the large amounts of money it would take for egg producers to change their equipment and operations to meet these rules, costs which would be passed on in the price of eggs, which could be out-competed by cheaper out-of-state eggs, whose producers don't have to meet these rules. CA egg producers may lose money and possibly go out of business. On the other hand, some pointed out that the idea may catch on and spread to other states. Similar rules go into effect in Europe in 2012. One point of discussion was whether being able to stretch their limbs would really benefit the chickens very much. Apparently no known research on this. One of the cheapest ways for egg producers to comply would be to switch to free range, which they argue may actually increase incidence of salmonella, since eggs are laid on the ground. Note: this proposition is supported by Spiderman (Tobey Maguire).

Prop 7: A proposal to increase the existing targets for the percentage of alternative energy sources in our energy supply. The major benefits cited are the usual benefits of alternative energy: reduced dependence on foreign oil, reduced greenhouse gas emissions, etc. The major cost cited is that the new rules proposed here would not count smaller sources of energy (like solar panels on your house) as contributing to the target percentage, which would reduce the incentives energy companies currently have to provide subsidies for people to install solar panels, give out compact fluorescent lightbulbs, and the like. One of the largest sources of alternative energy comes from the desert (solar panels?), and there may be increased pressure to expand this source, add power lines, etc., with a whole host of associated environmental problems. Another thing to note: it seems like everyone is against this proposition (environmental organizations, energy companies, democrats, and republicans) except the guy who wrote it (the guy who founded the University of Phoenix?). The main reason cited (besides the reasons above) is that, despite having some good ideas, it's poorly written.

Prop 10: A bond proposal to fund a variety of alternative energy projects, but which would primarily provide subsidies to people buying or leasing alternative-fuel vehicles. The major benefits are again the usual benefits of alternative energy cited above. The major cost cited is primarily just the large amount of money which might be better spent in other ways. The largest share of the subsidies seem to primarily benefit large for-profit companies replacing large diesel trucks, as well as the company that is the primary source of large natural gas trucks, which is owned by the guy who wrote this proposition. It's not necessarily a bad thing that a guy selling natural gas trucks should make a lot of money, but can these companies afford to replace the trucks on their own, and could the state find other ways (besides tax-payer-funded subsidies) to give them an incentive to do so? Will it really take the old diesel trucks off the street, or just add more trucks? Another point of discussion was whether this would result in an increased pressure to develop sources of natural gas. Note: several major environmental organizations oppose this proposition.