

THE
WEST
COUNTY

GAZETTE

23,000
DISTRIBUTED
MONTHLY

FREE Compliments
of Our Advertisers

www.westcountygazette.com

WRITTEN BY READERS • SONOMA COUNTY'S COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER

Published by VESTA Publishing, LLC • Volume 6, Number 4: April 16 ~ May 14, 2009

Unreliable Water

Russian River Unreliable as Summer Water Source

By Brenda Adelman

The Sonoma County Water Agency (SCWA) came to Guerneville again last month. In February they arrived with an army of staff to inform us of their plans to divert an extra 26,000 acre feet (AF) from Lake Sonoma for their water customers. In mid-March a few key staff came to warn us about diminished water supplies and lowered flows. It seemed like a contradiction, and I reported earlier that it was, but now there are several new twists.

At the March 18th meeting in Guerneville, attended by approximately 70 people, Pam Jeane, responsible for system operations, and Dave Manning, the Agency's leading fish biologist, responded to questions for over two hours about deficiencies in the water system. It was an informative meeting, and staff seemed to answer everyone's questions sincerely. Nevertheless, many questions remained. Since then, after meeting individually with several key staff, the many complexities of our current water supply situation appear even more muddled.

Estimates of how much water will be available to Water Agency contractors this coming year, including Santa

WATER cont'd on page 7

LOVE your MOTHER



Celebrating Life on this Planet...

Earth Day...April 22nd
Mother's Day...May 10th
Every Day

Greening Your Home

With No Money Down

By Patricia Dines

On the surface, Sonoma County's new \$100 million Energy Independence Program (SCEIP) seems simple enough, offering property owners government financing to install solar equipment and improve energy and water efficiency.

Yet, hiding beneath this mild-mannered exterior, lies a powerful tool to help us solve some of our most urgent shared problems. I've been watching this program emerge for a while, so I'm delighted to finally be able to tell you about its special features.

First, because SCEIP financing isn't based on currently-compromised housing prices, it provides a much-needed alternative to home equity loans. Plus, the program brings income to green contractors and suppliers in the beleaguered construction industry, which in turn nurtures our local economy.

But most impressive of all is SCEIP's benefits to the environment. At a time when we can feel powerless to looming eco-disasters, and skeptical of green pitches of varying veracity, SCEIP provides an easy yet meaningful way for us to nurture the planet's survival.

Because trimming our energy use is one of the most important ways

GREENING cont'd on page 10

954366

PERMIT NO. 10
FORESTVILLE

PAID

US POSTAGE
PRSRT STD

CA 95436

FORESTVILLE
6490 FRONT ST.

PMB 300

West County Gazette
VESTA Publishing LLC

Hanging Out pg 12

Guerneville Challenge pg 14

WANTED: One Kidney pg 17

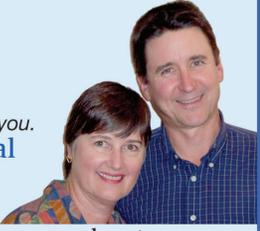
www.westcountygazette.com

Vietnam pg 18 ~ 20

Baby Birds pg 26

Garden Treasures pg 38

You are #1
 with Barbara & Tom Shula
*Whether buying or selling your home -
 work with professionals who are interested in you.*
Knowledgeable, Reliable and Local



Prudential
 California Realty 707-824-4573
 7300 Healdsburg Ave., Sebastopol tshula@comcast.net www.luxeteam.com

Z ZURVITA
 A higher way of life.
**EARN \$\$\$
 @ HOME**
**NEW COMPANY
 SETTING RECORDS**
 Business Opportunity:
 No experience necessary -
 Part-time/Full-time
RETIRE IN 2 YEARS!
 Expanding in Sonoma County
Call: 707-328-1899
 www.vickyandjeff.zurvita.biz

Z Zurvita HomeGuard	Z ZurvitaProtection
Z ZurvitaTech	Z ZurvitaHealth
Z ZurvitaCareSaver	Z ZurvitaChoice

**These products
 WORK for YOU**



**ENERGY
 INDEPENDENCE**
 A SONOMA COUNTY PROGRAM

The Energy Store
 404 Aviation Blvd.
 Santa Rosa, Ca 95403
 (Sonoma County Water Agency)
SCEIP is the first county-wide **AB 811**
 program in California. \$100 million
 financing program to fund energy and
 water efficiency property improvements.

www.sonomacountyenergy.org



**FOOD
 for thought**
 SONOMA COUNTY AIDS FOOD BANK
 Learn what they do for the community and
 what you can do to help them.

OPEN Tues ~ Sat. 10am ~ 5pm
 6550 Railroad Ave., Forestville • 887-1647

**Accept Credit Cards
 at Your Business!**



**FREE
 Terminal
 Offer**

★ **No Hidden Charges!**
 ★ **Fixed Rate Guarantee!**
 ★ **Low Processing Rates!**

Total Merchant Savings
Call Julie Today and Save!
707-548-3086
www.totalmerchantsavings.com

United Bank Card  **Inc. 500**

10 - www.westcountygazette.com - 4/16/09

GREENING cont'd from page 1

that we can impact a wide variety of key environmental problems, including global climate change, habitat destruction, species extinction, ecosystem collapse, and the economic, health, and social crises they create.

So, SCEIP, a mild-mannered program? Indeed not!

No Increase in Monthly Expenses Required

With money so tight now, green actions can seem perhaps optional. However, even in these times, home improvement via SCEIP can be both fiscally-wise and essential.

First, you can choose to do improvements that offer savings in energy costs that equal your loan payments. Thus, your ongoing budget stays the same and you're just swapping an expense for an investment. Plus, your modifications will likely increase your building's resale value and comfort—all without an initial capital outlay.

Making a Real Difference

But, given the scale of change that's needed in the world, is improving one's home really a significant contribution? Absolutely yes!

In fact, the U.S. Department of Energy calls retrofitting existing homes with energy-efficient features "the single largest source of potential energy savings."

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency estimates that residential and commercial buildings are responsible for over one-third of the nation's total energy use, 68% of electricity, and 12% of water. They generate 38% of CO₂ emissions.

So if you install, for instance, insulation and weather sealing, you could lower your energy costs up to 10%; a tankless water heater could reduce your greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions up to 30%; a solar water heater could lower CO₂ emissions by 20%; and a 3 kW solar photovoltaic system could, over its 25-year lifetime, trim CO₂ emissions by 80 tons — the equivalent of driving 7,800 fewer miles a year.

SCEIP can also help you reduce your water use, which is vital now both because of low reservoir levels and threatened salmon survival. Many water-saving improvements qualify for funding.

Getting Started

To participate in SCEIP, look at the program requirements (see the box plus the SCEIP website shown there). Then determine what improvements you want to make.

A home audit, while optional for residences, can identify potential upgrades, costs, and savings. From this, you can prioritize improvements that bring you the best results for your buck. The SCEIP website offers links to audits and other assessment tools; click on "Evaluations." Your audit cost can be rolled into your financing.

It's also recommended that you improve building efficiency before installing solar, so that you don't buy more system than you need. Any licensed contractor can perform work under this program.

One caution: Pay attention to cash flow. The program helps you reduce your monthly PG&E bill but the loan is repaid through your bi-annual property tax bill. To avoid an

GREENING cont'd on page 11

SCEIP Basics for Property Owners

- Financing is available for improvements to existing buildings, not new construction or mobile homes.
- Funds can be used for a wide variety of projects to improve energy efficiency, conserve water, and generate renewable energy. This includes insulation, on-demand water heaters, low-flow showerheads and toilets, more efficient windows and heating systems, irrigation controllers, and solar equipment. Items must be permanently attached to the property, so appliances such as dishwashers don't qualify. The minimum loan amount is \$2,500.
- Owners don't pay up-front capital costs and have fewer credit restrictions than with standard loans. The financing (technically considered an assessment) isn't based on property value but is secured by its position second to property tax. You need to be current on all property taxes to qualify. Repayment is made through your property tax bill over time.
- The loan stays with the property, not the person, so when you sell, the new owner takes over payments.
- For more about SCEIP, see (www.sonomacountyenergy.org) or call 521-6200.
- For more about other rebates and incentives, including federal investment tax credits and the California Solar Initiative, see (www.gosolar-california.org).

GREENING cont'd from page 10

unsettling tax bill surprise, consider setting aside monthly what you're saving in utilities.

Also, in case you're curious, PG&E is supportive of SCEIP, because their compensation structure rewards them for encouraging energy efficiency. How wonderful!

Meeting GHG Reduction Targets

Sonoma County is one of the nation's pioneers in setting bold goals for reducing greenhouse gases (GHG), including our target of lowering county emissions to 25% below 1990 levels by 2015.

SCEIP (enabled by California's recent AB811) is intended to help the county achieve these objectives.

Alan Strachan, a local developer and GHG reduction advocate, makes a persuasive case that succeeding with this will require that we seriously step up the scale of our activities.

For instance, he challenges us to "do the math" and calculate what it'll take to reach California's goal of equaling 1990 CO₂ emission levels by 2020, which was set in the state's Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006 (AB32).

According to Strachan, buildings statewide generate about 35% of our GHG, and we can probably cost-effectively remove about 30-40% of each building's GHG. Thus, he concludes that meeting AB32's targets will require us to retrofit *all* state and county buildings over the next ten years. For Sonoma County's 180,000 buildings, that means upgrading 50 units a day, which will surely keep our construction workers employed.

The good news, he emphasizes, is that we can afford it, the construction industry is available, and it can be profitable. Plus the energy demand already exists; retrofits are simply a different way to meet it. However, we can only achieve this by sustained action starting now. A last-minute all-nighter just won't do!

Strachan argues that, of the many challenges in today's world, climate change stands out because "this one you don't recover from. If you blow this, it doesn't matter what you do with the rest."

A Higher-Quality Green

One aspect of SCEIP's approach that I find particularly eco-friendly is its focus on improving existing buildings, rather than building new ones.

In their book, *Natural Remodeling for the Not-So-Green House*, eco-architects Carol Venolia and Kelly Lerner argue that remodeling a current building is nearly always greener than building a new "green" one. That's because it takes fewer resources than starting from scratch, doesn't plow under new land, and capitalizes on resources already extracted and infrastructure already created. It also usually saves money through targeting of expenses.

"In short, ecological remodeling is not the poor cousin of the shiny new eco-home," they say. "It stands on its own as a wise, resource-conserving, community-building, accessible, enjoyable way to improve life."

Action Ignited

As the first California county to embark on this innovative approach, Sonoma County is showing leadership in achieving climate change goals. They're now in the process of signing folks up, with the goal of covering program costs and becoming self-sustaining.

County Controller Rod Dole, who oversees the program, says that interest in it has been "phenomenal." In just two weeks, they've already received \$750,000 in applications. Local companies are quickly recognizing that SCEIP makes their offerings more attractive to customers. This, of course, encourages more folks to go green! A friend told me that a Friedman's salesperson actually mentioned SCEIP financing in recommending an energy-efficient window to them. Over 300 people came out for an April 9 Economic Development Board SCEIP workshop for contractors.

And, so, the SCEIP retrofitting begins!

Patricia Dines is a freelance writer specializing in environmental topics. She's written books, newsletters, reports, and articles for a wide variety of periodicals. For more information, see (www.patriciadines.info). © Copyright Patricia Dines, 2009. All rights reserved.



TOM TRENT BUILDERS
SINCE 1977
(707) 865-1250
Building GREEN for more than 15 Years
www.tomtrentbuilders.com

There are many ways we can use the financing of the Energy Independence Program...
Let me show you how to GREEN your home



LineDry.com
Solar Dryer Specialists
Custom Clotheslines & Supplies

"Hang it low, hang it high
Hang it in the sun to dry."

Laundry Art & Inspiration
Free consultation 707 823-5421 M-F 9-5



IT'S A GREAT TIME TO GO SOLAR!

SAVE immediately on your electric bills.

Going solar is one of the smartest financial decisions you can make right now. SunRun and SPG Solar are partnering to make it easy for you.

- A SMART OPTION that allows you to LOCK IN A LOW RATE for solar electricity rather than purchase equipment
- FREE system maintenance, repairs, insurance... along with a PERFORMANCE GUARANTEE.

Don't waste another dollar on rising utility costs.
PUT THE SUN TO WORK FOR YOU!

SPG SOLAR
Building Energy Everyday™

SUN RUN
Innovation. Integrity. Experience

Call 707.836.7317 or go to www.sunrunhome.com/spgsolar

Who Benefits from Sonoma County's EIP?



Property Owners



Residential and business property owners receive financing to install solar equipment and improve energy and water efficiency. Funding isn't tied to property value and requires no initial capital outlay. Loan repayments are offset by reduced energy costs.

Green Contractors



Green contractors and suppliers can provide their offerings with "no money down," thus attracting more business, which in turn helps stimulate the local economy.

Our Shared Environment



Our environment's well-being is improved because trimming our energy demand helps solve a variety of key eco-problems, including global climate change, pollution, and habitat destruction. Retrofitting most or all of our current buildings is vital to reaching our GHG reduction targets. Also, upgrading existing buildings is "greener" than building new ones.