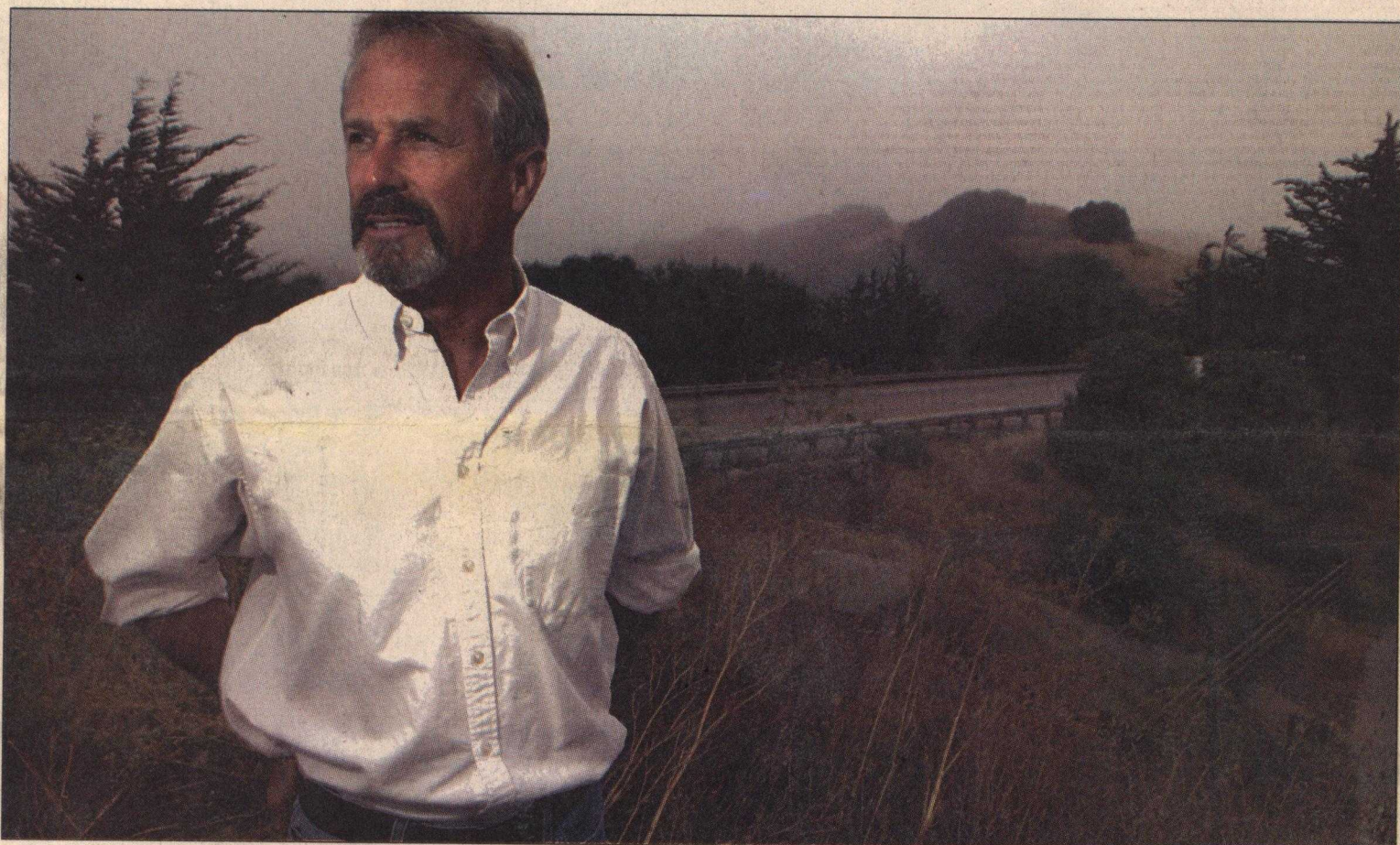


Radicals Right?



35 years later, students' environmental report seems prescient



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel photos

When Gary Griggs' group produced its environmental report 35 years ago, Wilder Ranch State Park was scheduled to host 7,000 homes.

'Virtually everything we brought up has since been cleaned up or was never approved.'

GARY GRIGGS

'We have people who get excited about environmental issues and they don't bother to get the facts. We were providing real employment for people. We thought we were improving the forests.'

BUD MCCRARY,
BIG CREEK LUMBER

By BRIAN SEALS
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

SANTA CRUZ — The spring and summer of 1970 wasn't lacking for controversy.

President Richard Nixon ordered the U.S. invasion of Cambodia, after pledging to withdraw from Vietnam.

Four students were shot to death at Kent State in Ohio during a protest that May.

College students across the country unleashed a fury of protest. California Gov. Ronald Reagan ordered the state's campuses closed for a four-day "cooling off" period as unrest spread in the Golden State.

And here in Santa Cruz, a group of students at the five-year-old UC Santa Cruz found itself embroiled in a dispute within the community reflective of the turbulent times.

Led by a 27-year-old professor named Gary Griggs, about 30 UC Santa Cruz students had authored and distributed a scathing report titled "Santa Cruz and the Environment." Their goal: Identify pollution problems and offer solutions.

"I thought we were going to get



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel file

The first protest against a proposed convention center on Lighthouse field in May 1970.

praise heaped upon us," recalled Griggs, now director of the school's Institute of Marine Sciences.

Not hardly, although the report still resonates 35 years later.

On the Web

THE ORIGINAL 1970 REPORT MAY BE VIEWED AT:

<http://www.santacruzsentinel.com/archive/2005/July/scenvironment.html>

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Reaction from area business and political leaders was anything but positive. Furor over the glossy 27-page report lingered well into the late summer.

The Board of Supervisors held a hearing and issued its own critique of the students' work. The study was generally denounced as a piece of radicalism from the era's hippie movement.

Words like "slanted," "irresponsible" and even "libelous" were employed by critics quoted in Sentinel stories.

Then-county Supervisor Dan Forbus labeled the report "incompetent, incorrect, a terrible misuse of taxpayers' money prepared with a disregard of the facts and done with political aim."

University officials disavowed the document. Critics pointed to factual errors. For example, the student report said 30 million gallons of sewage was discharged into the Monterey Bay from various sources; county officials fired back it was actually 42 million gallons. In another instance, the report asked why city beaches were never "tested," when it meant to question why beaches with high levels of bacteria were "never posted."

Nevertheless, 35 years later, history bears witness to the community's embrace of the report's basic tenets — more recycling, no nuclear power, stricter logging rules.

"Virtually everything we brought up has since been cleaned up or was never approved," Griggs said.

Now, the establishment is centered on environmentalism. And the political battles and its landscape have evolved from fighting nukes to neighborhood squabbles over split lots, steak houses and rail trails.

The bigger picture

"Back then, we were fighting the big fights," said Geoffrey Dunn, an area historian who was a student at Soquel High School back in 1970. "Now, on some level the fights have become smaller, but people have the same energy for them. I believe in the '70s we had the bigger picture."

Environmentalism didn't come to Santa Cruz with the university, Dunn pointed out, as the area pushed for forest conservation as early as the late 19th century.

But with the arrival of the university, the alternative lifestyle movement of the 1960s began to clash with the pro-business, pro-growth visions of city and county leaders of that time.

Call it a case of what's not seen here:

■ PG&E had secured an option for 6,800 acres in Davenport, on what is known as the Coast Dairies Land, with plans to build a 1 million kilowatt nuclear power plant. That's right — a nuclear power plant in Santa Cruz County.

The 1970 report raised questions about the safety of nuclear power, not to mention one located near a seismic fault line, at time when PG&E was running advertisements espousing the process.

PG&E's plans galvanized community opposition, and when seismic studies suggested the site was faulty, the company dropped its plan and let the option expire.

There was not the wealth of watchdog groups as there are now, said Griggs, who joined community activists in the battle.

"We thought if we didn't say something nobody would," he said. "Now there are a horde of environmental groups. That's exciting. You feel like there is a groundswell now that wasn't there then."

■ What is now Wilder Ranch State Park just north of the city of Santa Cruz was once eyed for massive housing development of 9,000 to 10,000 houses. The students questioned the cost burden such additional development would place on the city's infrastructure in terms of providing water and

services.

The burgeoning environmental community that fought the nuclear plant also battled against developing Wilder Ranch. In the early 1970s, the state allocated \$6 million for the land. It opened as a state park in the 1980s.

■ By all accounts, the Monterey Bay was little more than a toilet. Sewage discharged into the bay was raising bacteria levels at alarming rates. A meat-packing plant in the city's Westside industrial district discharged bloody byproducts into the sea. Students called for "secondary treatment" of sewage, rather than "primary treatment," which was common at the time. The more extensive treatment was eventually put in place.

■ The report called for tougher grading rules in mountain areas, as well as tougher logging rules in the county's forests. That is an issue that resonates today. In 1999, Santa Cruz County supervisors passed logging regulations more strict than those enforced by the state.

The rules were challenged by Big Creek Lumber Co. and the case now sits before the state Supreme Court.

■ Davenport was covered in dust, and a makeshift dump lay on the beach there. Of course, in a post-Coastal Act era, dumps are inconceivable on the beach.

Scrubbers at the cement plant were eventually improved to reduce emissions.

County leaders fired back at the report's authors, in some cases pointing out the inaccuracies, and in others, such as water treatment, saying it was something of which they were working toward.

The McCrary family, owners of Big Creek Lumber Co., demanded a retraction after being labeled a "major polluter" along with Pacific Cement and Aggregates, which operated the Davenport cement plant at the time, Kaiser Aluminum and PG&E's Moss Landing Plant.

Bud McCrary of Big Creek Lumber said the company had decommissioned a wood burner that was cited in this report. Decades later, he says the 1970 report is similar in tone to viewpoints today on many environmental topics — more emotion than fact.

"We have people who get excited about environmental issues and they don't bother to get the facts," McCrary said last week.

He said the report could have fatally damaged the lumber company.

"We were providing real employment for people," said McCrary, who until recently led Sierra Club nature hikes. "We thought we were improving the forests."

Ahead of their time?

While shaking the political establishment, students say they stood behind their work — then and now.

Some of them still say the overall message was right on.

"I think we were very much ahead of our time," recalled Gregg Wheatland, who worked on the study as a student and later served 12 years as a city councilman in Orinda. "The whole idea of protecting the environment and taking care of the earth was just emerging."

The first Earth Day celebration was held just weeks before the report was released.

That whole generation set a tone in California where environmental laws are among the more progressive in the country, Wheatland believes.

"I think that is why California is the most popular state in the United States," said Wheatland, who eventually went on from

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UCSC to graduate from UC Davis Law School and now works as an attorney.

On the other hand, historians like Dunn believe that the environmental movement has lost its focus, too often devolving into NIMBY-ism ("not in my backyard").

"There are still environmental issues out there, but people don't want to look at them," he said.

Dunn points to the water-quality issue. The 1970 report criticized how sewage was treated, and the process has long since been updated, but beach closures still aren't uncommon. Dunn believes equal effort should be focused on that problem.

There will always be battles in Santa Cruz, but the tone was set in the 1970s, said Assemblyman John Laird, who had just completed his sophomore year at UCSC when the student report came out.

The battles of that decade have set the stage for any politician wanting to get elected.

"It is my view that it (the environment) has been the third rail of Santa Cruz politics since the 1970s," said Laird, who served on the Santa Cruz City Council. "By the end of the decade, it was the driving force."

During the 1970s, environmentalists would win an epic showdown in preserving Light-house Field, which was eyed for a convention center. By the end of the decade county voters would approve growth control measures and city of Santa Cruz residents would pass the town's greenbelt ordinance.

And, of course, there is always a fresh ecobattle brewing, no matter what one thinks of the issue's scope.

Earlier this summer, the Board of Supervisors implemented a three-year moratorium on spraying vegetation along roads the county maintains, following months of complaints. The board is also assembling a team to look at the potential of genetically modified crops.

City activists headed off a controversial parking garage and convention center at the Santa Cruz West Coast Hotel this year. On its heels another battle brews over building a small convention center and upscale hotel at the La Bahia near the Boardwalk.

Important battles to be sure, but maybe not the same as fighting nuclear power or bloody cow parts getting discharged into the ocean.

"The bar is higher," said Griggs. "We're sort of tweaking a high-quality environment."

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