

# GREEN BUILDING TO COME TO SEA RANCH?

by Martha "Dibby" Tyler

Is The Sea Ranch a "sustainable" community? How can its sustainability be improved? What the heck is sustainability anyway? Panelists discussed the answers to these questions at the Sea Ranch Forum on January 6, 2007. The panelists were three Sea Ranchers: Scott Smith, architect and principal of Sasaki Associates, an architectural and planning firm emphasizing sustainable building design; Dave Alpert, an architect who staffs the Green Building Committee at Kaiser Permanente; and Lisa Scott, operations manager of TSRA Department of Compliance and Environmental Management.

Scott Smith led off with the big picture. Until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, communities were generally well related to their environments. Modern science and engineering and abundant resources led to a disconnect. People came to believe that the environment could be shaped to their liking by brute force. The environmental destruction caused by this attitude led in the 60s and 70s to the environmental movement. The Sea Ranch was conceived during this period and was at the leading edge of environmental design. Today, the movement is more focused on global warming and depletion of resources. The terms "sustainability" and "green" have come into vogue to characterize good environmental practice.

## WHAT IS SUSTAINABLE DESIGN?

"Sustainability" is a loosely used term. Smith quoted a definition from a United Nations conference: "Sustainable design meets the needs of the present without com-

promising the ability of future generations to meet their needs." Another way of saying this is: "Sustainable design is the prevention or reversal of environmental peril through stewardship of the world's resources."

How we build matters. The U.S. construction industry comprises 8 percent of the Gross National Product—the second largest industry after health care and the largest construction industry in the world. According to Smith, "in the next 30 years, we will build or renovate the equivalent of the square footage of all the buildings in existence now." The construction industry consumes 30 to 50 percent of all the energy used in the United States. It uses 68 percent of the electricity, 12 percent of the water and is responsible for 50 percent of carbon emissions.

On the global scene, China will soon be the largest producer of carbon emissions in the world. Its construction industry has grown from \$8 billion in 2001 to \$639 billion last year. China can reduce carbon emissions by the stroke of a pen and, in fact, will stop all construction in the Beijing area prior to the 2008 Olympics to improve air quality. Green concepts are also being applied to building in China. One example is a new high-rise tower planned that will be "carbon neutral." It will actually produce more power than it uses.

## GREEN BUILDING PROJECTS GROWING THROUGHOUT U.S.

The U.S. is seeing a huge increase in green building with many projects by governments and colleges and universities. Today, 14 states and 42 cities have green building requirements and programs. Nearly 1,000 colleges and universities are



Speakers at Green Building Forum, (l. to r.) Dave Alpert, Scott Smith, Lisa Scott

looking at green building programs spurred by organized pressure from students to build responsibly.

In most cases, green building adds little extra cost. In California, a review of 32 green buildings found that green features added about 2 percent to the cost of a building and saved ten times the extra cost in 5 years through reduced energy use.

The success of green building has opened the floodgates to "green washing"—appearing green with no real environmental benefit. To counter this, the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) was formed in 1990 and launched the LEED program. LEED stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design and provides a system to measure and certify green building design based on third party analysis. LEED consists of checklists and standards for all kinds of build-

ings and building projects. USGBC is also working on standards for sustainable communities.

Smith concluded his overview with a reminder that it takes more than a few buildings or even entire cities to achieve sustainability. What is needed is a culture of sustainability. If everyone applied relatively simple sustainable practices over the next 30 years, carbon emissions could be cut in half.

Dave Alpert followed with a summary of a paper he gave at a meeting of the U.S. Green Building Council entitled, *On Common Ground, Learning from The Sea Ranch: A Green Community in Midlife*. He noted that The Sea Ranch was conceived more than 40 years ago as an environmentally sensitive community. Since then, environmental knowledge has grown and design standards have changed.

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GREEN BUILDING (from page 6)

**IS THE SEA RANCH AS ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY AS WE THOUGHT?**

Would The Sea Ranch be classed as a sustainable community today? Alpert evaluated The Sea Ranch using a draft LEED scale of sustainability for communities. The main criteria are locational efficiency; environmental preservation; compact, complete and connected neighborhoods; and resource efficiency. Out of a total of 114 points, The Sea Ranch scored 19 mostly in the category environmental preservation. Forty-six points are needed for LEED certification. The Sea Ranch is not, and is not likely to be, a sustainable community primarily because of its remote location and low-density.

Alpert was quick to say that LEED criteria are best applied to urban environments. High density is favored because it can reduce auto usage and cut infrastructure needs. However, if density at TSR were increased, it would likely add to, rather than reduce, the number of cars on the road.

What elements of TSR contribute to its sustainability? According to Alpert, the most sustainable feature of The Sea Ranch is the commons—huge areas of forest and meadow protected from building. The trail system allowing pedestrian movement within the community is also a great asset, but a drawback is the lack of walkways to Gualala. The clustering of houses, as in Unit 29A, is a plus because it allows more land to stay in commons and simplifies service delivery.

Alpert was impressed by TSR's preservation of the night sky, reliance on natural drainage systems, limits on grading, passive solar architecture, and local, drought-resistant landscaping. And, the recent

addition of sheep grazing to manage the meadows drew a nod. Other successes include the Halperin workshops and other efforts to foster a sense of community and instill green thinking, Posh Squash and restoration of the Barn.

On the minus side, Alpert sees The Sea Ranch's isolated location and sprawling tracts of homes as the biggest barriers to sustainability. Other minuses are the golf course with its high water and fertilizer use, restrictions on the use of green building materials and the lack of a town center forcing residents and visitors to drive to Gualala for services. Sea Ranchers are not a very diverse group and housing here is increasingly unaffordable.

**HOW CAN WE IMPROVE SUSTAINABILITY?**

What can be done to improve sustainability at the community level? Alpert offered several suggestions including developing a town center, providing more affordable housing and attracting more telecommuters. However, one of the best opportunities to improve overall sustainability is to require green features in new homes and remodeling projects. Although individual home design is closely controlled, there is now a huge range in the level of sustainability.

**LOVE OF PLACE... IS THE FOUNDATION OF STEWARDSHIP**

Alpert concluded that The Sea Ranch may not be a very sustainable community by some criteria, but it is still a great place to live. Aesthetics count, contributing to a love of place that is the foundation of stewardship. And stewardship is essential to achieving and maintaining a sustainable community.

**A SEA RANCH GREEN BUILDING PROGRAM?**

Lisa Scott spoke to sustainable concepts in the Design Manual and design review practices. Under current procedures, TSRA requires environmentally sensitive site design and construction practices. The Design Committee encourages submittals with green features and promotes solar design and use of alternative energy systems.

The Design Committee is considering a LEED program for TSRA. Using a layman's version of a LEED checklist, proposed houses and remodeling projects would be evaluated and awarded points for green features. A house receiving 50 points or more would be certified as "green." Cotati and Sebastopol have mandatory green building programs. Santa Rosa, Windsor and Rohnert Park have voluntary programs. Lisa expects that the Design Committee will start with a voluntary program and see how it goes. TSRA is also assessing its own facilities and operations.

**AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION**

After a short break, a lively discussion ensued spurred by questions from the audience. Some ideas were:

**Transportation:** What about a jitney service on TSR? The response was that TSR's population is too small for any form of public transportation. The community must rely on carpooling and volunteer drivers. Increasing density might help and could be achieved by allowing full kitchens in guesthouses.

**Solar and Wind Energy:** Tax subsidies have served to jump-start a solar industry that is now growing rapidly with big conglomerates get-

ting into the business. Walmart has decided to use solar power for all its stores. This has greatly increased the demand for systems causing price increases. As production capacity catches up, prices should come down. Lower prices coupled with the rising cost of electricity from conventional sources will make solar a sound economic choice with or without subsidies.

**Wind power** could be a natural option on our windy coast. New wind towers are better designed to protect birds, but they are also getting taller. Scott Smith said the issue with wind power is more aesthetic than economic.

**Other Energy Sources:** Scott Smith mentioned that TSRA's fire management program is clearing tons of underbrush that is burned. It could be used as biomass for power generation. Methane capture is another possibility for power. Smith noted that 9 cows produce enough methane to fuel a house.

**DESIGN GUIDELINES TO ENCOURAGE ALTERNATIVES?**

**Design Guideline Changes:** If TSRA allowed metal roofs, owners could capture rainfall, reducing water usage. TSRA could allow clotheslines to reduce use of clothes dryers. And, of course, there is the issue of wood siding. One member felt the Association should do more to encourage alternatives. Another thought TSRA should just accept reality and allow members to paint wood siding. Paint is an available and inexpensive way to increase wood's longevity.



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# DISASTER PREP FOCUS OF MIDWINTER MEETING

By Rob Elder

Even before they walked through the doors of the Knipp-Stengel Barn, Sea Ranchers attending the Feb. 17 Midwinter Meeting got a glimpse of what disaster preparedness is all about.

On their left was parked The Sea Ranch's emergency communications trailer, from which a bright yellow boom reached for the sky, holding aloft an antenna for radio repeaters designed to send messages not only in short wave radio's usual line-of-sight trajectories, but also over and around the ranch's various hills and dales.

On their right was parked the Disaster Operations Group's brand new Red Cross trailer, jam-packed with everything from folding cots to cardboard boxes labeled "Shelter Manager Start Up Kit" and "Adult and Child Diapers." The trailer also carries pillows, comfort kits and clean-up kits to meet the needs of 75 people, plus 150 blankets, medical supplies and some emergency food. It is based at the Sea Ranch north fire station, and it is one of four new Red Cross trailers in Sonoma and Mendocino counties. The others are stationed in Ukiah, Fort Bragg and Sonoma.

photo by Rob Diefenbach



The entire north end of the Knipp Stengel Barn was filled with displays educating members about disaster response.



Red Cross trailer holding cots, blankets and supplies to meet the needs of 75 people.



Dave Westwater and Lin Plescia discuss radio communications.

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**DISASTER PREP** (from page 8)

Inside the barn, most of the Mid-winter Meeting was devoted to disaster preparedness. In a scene that looked as busy and as interesting as a high school science fair, Sea Ranchers milled around tables filling the north end of the barn, each table displaying a particular aspect of the program.

For example, Larry Pike was sitting at a table where Sea Ranchers could look at a map and learn which disaster planning division they live in. There are 20 divisions, and they are different from TSRA's unit-block-lot identification system. Even numbered divisions are on the west side of Highway One, and odd numbered divisions on the east side.

Pike, the leader for Division 19, was encouraging people to get to know their division leaders and the volunteers who will work as damage assessors. The damage assessors, after a major disaster, will comb their assigned areas of The Sea Ranch, looking for injured people and damaged property that presents an immediate hazard. They will report their findings by two-way radio to the program's staging areas. The staging areas, each of which will serve several divisions, will be at The Sea Ranch Lodge, Ohlson Recreation Center, and Del Mar Center.

Pike was handing out leaflets that urged residents to "contact your division leader to provide vital information about you and your property that will facilitate a fast response to an emergency." It is particularly important for the emergency volunteers to know the location of people who, even if not injured, would need help to evacuate their homes, Pike explained.

At the next table, Gene Rosholt was signing people up for amateur radio classes. Nearby, Website Committee chair Anne Long was



Louise DeWilder shows family emergency supply kit to Brad Clayton



Randy Burke demonstrates chart listing Sea Ranch resources.

showing off a laptop computer screen listing emergency contacts. Just beyond her, TSRA Works Manager Randy Burke was standing behind what looked like a giant Monopoly board; actually, it listed all the Sea Ranch vehicles and equipment that might be pressed into emergency duty.

On the other side of the room, Mi-

chele Staples, who teaches Community Emergency Response Team classes, was signing people up for CERT training, and Sea Ranch Security Director Lin Plescia was demonstrating hand-held two-way radios for veteran Sea Rancher Roy Austin. Austin seemed intrigued. "I should get one of those for myself," he said.



Emergency communications trailer with a solar powered radio repeater antenna.

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**DISASTER PREP** (from page 9)

Louise DeWilder, the Sea Rancher in charge of overall planning for the Disaster Operations Group, said the purpose of the displays was to enable “people to actually see what we’re talking about.”

DeWilder said the program is a group effort including 150 volunteers. “Any natural or man-made disaster such as an earthquake, a series of severe storms, a tsunami, a hazardous materials spill – anything you can think of, we’re planning for,” she said.

The original training session for the Disaster Operations Group took place in May 2006. Since then there have been other training meetings, and the program has acquired a database which shows which Sea Ranch lots have houses on them, and which houses are in rental programs. The program also has acquired two-way radios and trained volunteers in how to use them.

DeWilder, the program’s planning director, repeatedly emphasizes that success in dealing with a disaster ultimately depends on preparedness by individual households. She has explained that this means having extra food and water stored, plus warm clothes and blankets in case homes have no heat because of power failures or gas line breaks. People who depend on medications should also have extra supplies of these on hand. “We invite you to get involved, support your neighborhood division leaders, and maintain your own self-preparedness,” she says.

DeWilder’s credentials to head the

planning for the disaster program come from her military background. She is a colonel in the U.S. Air Force Reserve, and has worked at the Headquarters Air Force Materiel Command, and as Battle Staff Director in a number of Air Force exercises.

Sea Ranchers who crowded around the various displays at the Midwinter Meeting seemed eager to learn about the Disaster Operations program, and impressed by what they saw. Most of the tables were surrounded by people asking questions, examining the displays, taking handouts and signing up for special training.

Asked for her reaction, Janet Snook, who has lived at The Sea Ranch for 17 years, said it seemed clear to her that “lots of people have been working on this, behind the scenes.” Asked whether she thinks the program will actually work, she replied without hesitation, “It’s got to. This is not the kind of place where people just sit around waiting for someone to come help them.”

Co-leaders of the Disaster Operations Group are Sea Ranch Community Manager John Fox and Dan Levin, chief of the Sea Ranch Volunteer Fire Department. The Disaster Operations program is a joint effort of the volunteer fire department, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, and The Sea Ranch Association.

Sea Ranchers not yet in touch with the Disaster Operations program can learn how to contact their division leaders by calling Louise DeWilder on her cell phone, 707 367-2547.



Jeannie Holmes explains Division Map to Mel and Janet Gerst



Display of Disaster Operations Division Maps

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Facilities and Resources workers Elliot Madole, (l) and Ted Huenemeyer (r) proudly show off their handiwork on the newly refurbished One-Eyed Jacks cabin.

# ONE-EYED JACK'S CABIN RESTORED

By Randy Burke

One-Eyed Jack, had he ever existed, would be pleased with the rejuvenation of the shed at One Eyed Jack's picnic grounds.

Requested by the Planning Committee, relative to their goal of preserving significant historical structures, the project was spearheaded by the Facilities and Resources Department of the Sea Ranch Association.

Bob Madole led the crew and hand split the roofing shingles (old growth materials found in TSR Commons), Ted Huenemeyer, and Elliot Madole went into action to reinforce the structure of existing wooden members, and replace the floor. Mike Moore, a member of the F&R crew, cut and milled, and provided the old growth siding that needed replacement.

Following the remodel, the sheep fence was resurrected; a gate was installed with deer horn accouterments. The shed will be used to store picnic items for the annual Volunteer Fire Department picnics. Randy H. Burke, Director of Facilities and Resources invites members to drop by and view this improved amenity.



OneEyed Jack's Cabin sits handily at the edge of the picnic and playground named One-Eyed Jacks.

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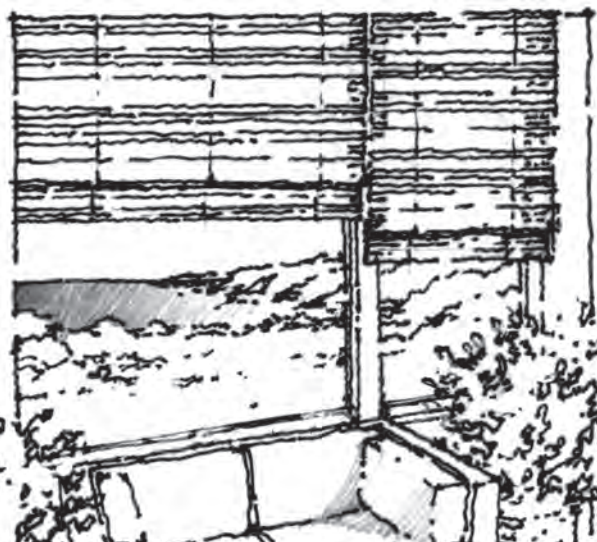
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