



Fall 2008 Newsletter

WELCOME TO BARBARA HOLZMAN!

Please give a warm welcome to Professor Barbara Holzman who starting this semester is on assignment to the ENVS Program from her home department of Geography. Barbara is no newcomer to the ENVS Program; she and three of her Geography students were founding members of the student-faculty committee that urged its creation and put in the years of hard but rewarding work that made it happen. In the early years when ENVS had no faculty of its own, Barbara served as ENVS director, and has long been the concentration advisor for NRMC. It's the "synergy between disciplines" that attracted Barbara to ENVS from the very beginning. We are delighted to have her, not only because of her subject-area expertise and "ground-floor" knowledge of the ENVS Program, but also because of her enthusiasm and rapport with students. Last but not least, she's fun.

With her interdisciplinary specialization in biogeography, it is not surprising that Barbara has long been an advocate of interdisciplinary ENVS, which operates "at the intersection of science and social science." She's a passionate advocate of the cross-fertilization of knowledge that occurs when people move outside their disciplinary boxes, talk with each other, and explore each others' research. "Each discipline," she says, "has so much to learn from the others. More holistic views of problems can generate more holistic (and better) solutions." She's inspired by ENVS students who are getting an education so that they can make change: interdisciplinary education *for action*.

Barbara's research focuses on disturbances to and the responses of plant communities. She models and predicts the geographic occurrence of plants (by assessing soil characteristics, water, terrain, plant associations, and other factors, such as disturbance), and has done long-term research in Bay Area locations such as Point Reyes, where she's been working since 1995. (She has Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Geography and a Ph.D. from UC Berkeley in Wildland Resource Science.) Barbara is "on" the recent fire on San Bruno Mountain over the summer and will be one of the researchers observing how the mountain's unique plant communities recover and/or change after the fire.

The biological communities that most fascinate Barbara, though, are tropical forests (she jokes that this was perhaps pre-ordained, because Holzman means "woodsman" in German.) After completing her undergraduate work at Berkeley, she worked for three months in the forests of Papua New Guinea, which cemented her interest in both tropical rainforests and tropical seasonal forests. Barbara's book *Tropical Forest Biomes* (one of a series of volumes called *Biomes of the World*) was just published this past summer by Greenwood Publishing. To write it, she has visited tropical forests in much of the world, which was both work and pleasure, because she's an indefatigable traveler who has visited every continent except for Asia and Antarctica, and still has her sights on those.

We hope to have Barbara talk about her research at one of the ENVS evening events that we're planning for this academic year (we'll keep you posted through the ENVS list-serve.) Welcome, Barbara!

THE 2008 ELECTIONS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

By Glenn Fieldman, ENVS Faculty

It's hard to overstate the importance of the upcoming elections for the future of *all* living things on our planet. Careful voting may be the most important thing we do this year: buying organic and taking the bus are valuable personal contributions to a sustainable future, but whether organic food is easily available and affordable and whether the bus service works well depends on the rules and budgetary policies made by elected officials. For business, too, this election is enormously important. "Green" businesses are springing up all over the place, but whether they succeed or fail can depend, for example, on whether their competitors can sell for lower prices because they're still allowed to pollute, or because they receive a subsidy. It's government that makes the rules about pollution and doles out subsidies—so whether organic farmers or solar-panel manufacturers stay in business is influenced by what government does.

The Presidential campaign has captured public attention—with good reason – because of the extraordinary powers a president has: proposing legislation and the federal budget, the power to sign or veto laws passed by Congress, and in his/her position at the "bully pulpit." Presidents make appointments: they choose the heads of agencies like the EPA that help to determine how legislation passed by Congress is actually carried out. The agencies translate the laws into regulatory requirements, and then monitor and enforce those regulations. Both proponents and opponents of how the agencies do their jobs can take the agencies to court over regulations—many environmental organizations invest a lot of their resources in this type of lawsuit. Because the President of the U.S. appoints Federal judges and Supreme Court justices, whoever ends up in the White House will have enormous, although indirect, influence over the final interpretation of existing laws like the Endangered Species Act and (future) climate legislation. Even if Congress passes meaningful legislation on climate or any other environmental problem, "the devil is in the (regulatory) details," so the President and his or her appointees have enormous potential to do environmental good or harm.

Finally, it is the President who sends representatives to negotiate on behalf of the U.S. at international meetings. At the end of 2009, delegates from all over the world will meet in Copenhagen to adopt a successor to the Kyoto agreement on climate, which expires in 2012. Developing countries (and much of the rest of the world) expect the U.S. to step up to the plate, to take responsibility for reducing its emissions drastically, *and* to help poor developing countries finance "clean" economic development. Whether we get an adequate international agreement on climate will depend greatly on the President's position on these issues.

To date, the federal government has *no* real policy in place to reduce greenhouse emissions. Both Presidential candidates have indicated they will change that and support emissions reduction, but there are significant differences between them. It is Congress that must write the policy and figure out how to pay for it. As a benchmark for evaluating climate policies, keep in mind that scientists and environmental advocates argue that a meaningful climate policy should reduce *global* greenhouse emissions 80% or more by 2050; much of the rest of the world expects the U.S. to reduce *more* than that by 2050 because of the large U.S. responsibility for the problem.

Members of the House of Representatives are elected in every general election (neither of California's Senators is up for re-election this year), so candidates are running active campaigns. You will not only be able to vote, but may have a chance to meet the candidates at campaign meetings with the public, and ask questions or express opinions about what issues and legislative approaches are important to you. You should be able to find out when these appearances take place by looking at candidates' websites. It's very important to speak up publicly whenever you have a chance to do so. Who knows—perhaps your informed question to a candidate about his/her position on climate policy, farm subsidies,

adequate funding for regulatory agencies like EPA, or environmental justice issues will encourage others at the event to ask follow-up questions.

State and local elections often get too little public and media attention, but the state legislature, boards of supervisors and city councils make dozens of environmentally important decisions—from funding and managing parks to zoning and development. So far, states and localities have carried the climate policy ball, and have put in place a range of energy saving and emissions-reduction measures. The California state climate law (AB32) is on the “cutting edge” of climate policy in the U.S.—but whether it fulfills its promise of significant emissions cuts will depend in part on things like adequate funding for public transit and various city-level policies. Candidates for state and local office are often much more accessible than candidates for federal office, so don’t pass up the chance not only to vote in these elections, but to appear at their campaign events and let them know you’re paying attention.

Last but not least, there are several environmentally-relevant propositions on the California ballot this year: Prop 1A (high-speed rail bond); Prop 7 (renewable energy generation); and Prop 10 (alternative fuel vehicles and renewable energy bonds). Another, Prop 2, (standards for confining farm animals) is likely to interest many environmentalists. Propositions can be tricky to vote on—see below for a bit more about this.

TIPS ON HOW TO BE AN INFORMED VOTER

Registered voters get an information pamphlet and sample ballot several weeks before the election. It will show what offices are contested, who the candidates are, and the propositions. The pamphlet will contain candidate statements and a summary of pro and con arguments for each proposition, as well as information about groups opposing, supporting, and funding them. This information can be quite helpful, but it’s really not enough, so you’ll need to seek out information elsewhere. The non-partisan League of Conservation Voters scores Congressional representatives and Senators on environmental issues according to the votes they have cast in the legislature, so if a candidate is an incumbent, you can find out what he/she’s been up to while in office. Naturally, you can take a look at candidates’ websites and speeches. Many media outlets are featuring comparisons of candidates’ positions on specific issues. For example, KQED radio recently aired a special called “Feeling the Heat: The Global Politics of Climate Change” (America Abroad Media, at <http://www.americaabroadmedia.org/programs/view/id/85>) that contrasted the Presidential candidates’ positions.

While you’re making up your mind, it’s a good idea to look at candidates’ positions on issues that aren’t specifically environmental: a candidate’s general position on taxes and spending, international affairs and trade (for Congressional/Presidential candidates), regulation, and social inequality offer important context when you’re trying to figure out what a candidate will actually *do* if elected. The organizations and businesses support candidates is also an important part of that “context.”

Most major newspapers endorse candidates (federal, state and some local) and take positions on propositions, and they defend their choices on their editorial pages. Although newspapers are shrinking (they don’t cover the news to the extent they used to) reading a newspaper regularly well *before* the election can really help—you’ll become familiar with issues, bills, campaign positions and so forth more thoroughly than you can simply by reading the ballot and the pamphlet the night before the election. Some papers, like the *San Francisco Chronicle*, run regular analyses of Presidential campaign ads and accusations, and these analyses can also be helpful. For more help in “sorting out fact from fiction,” the *Chronicle* recommends www.Factcheck.org, www.PolitiFact.com, and www.Snopes.com.

A special note on propositions, which are proposed laws placed directly before the public, not the state legislature, to decide upon: Envisioned as a form of direct democracy, propositions in California have

become a festival for special interests, as you can see by taking a quick look at the millions of dollars such interests contribute to support or oppose them. If passed, they can have lots of unintended consequences, because it's often not clear to voters just what they will do or how they will work, even if they look good on paper. Sometimes propositions will have much different consequences than their titles suggest; occasionally a proposition is put on the ballot with the hope that *better* or *more effective* law and policy will be trumped by the passage of the proposition. Some propositions passed in California have ended up in court, questioned for their constitutionality. On the other hand, sometimes a proposition submitted to the voters can result in lasting positive change (for example, the California toxic chemical disclosure law was passed by the voters). All of this is simply to say that voting on propositions requires special care and research on the part of the voter. Newspaper endorsements can help you decide, and so can environmental organizations you trust. KQED TV's show *This Week in Northern California* included some very informative reporting on the two energy-related propositions on Friday, Sept. 19, in the last 10 minutes of the show (you can access these shows online at KQED's website). "Forum," a radio series also broadcast on KQED, will begin a series of shows on the ballot propositions beginning the week of September 29.

VOTING 2008: THE HOW-TO GUIDE

By Courtney Rump, ENVS Office Coordinator

Election Day is fast approaching! If you have questions about how and where to vote, please find the heading below that most applies to you and read on.

I am a registered voter at my school year address.

If you are already registered at the address where you live during the school year, you should have received voter information at your home. If not, you can find out your polling place in most California counties at this website: http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/elections_ppl.htm.

I am an unregistered voter and would like to register.

You can download and print a registration form at <http://www.sos.ca.gov/nvrc/fedform/Default.aspx>. We will also have some paper forms for San Francisco County on hand in the Environmental Studies office, HSS 336. There are instructions for filling out the form at the above website. These instructions can help you determine what to fill in for each box. When the form is completed and signed, mail it to the address provided on the form. The county Registrar of Voters must receive this form **no later than October 20th, 2008** for you to be eligible to vote on November 4th.

I am registered in a different county and would like to change my registration.

To change your voter registration to a new address, please download and print a form at <http://www.sos.ca.gov/nvrc/fedform/Default.aspx> or pick up the form for San Francisco County in the Environmental Studies office. There are instructions for the form at this website which will help you determine what to fill in for each box. Also make sure you complete the section that asks for the address at which you were previously registered. When the form is completed and signed, mail it to the address provided on the form. The county Registrar of Voters must receive this form **no later than October 20th, 2008** for you to be eligible to vote on November 4th.

I am registered, but would like to change my name or political party.

To change either your name or political party on your voter registration, you will need to download and print a new registration form at <http://www.sos.ca.gov/nvrc/fedform/Default.aspx> and mail it in to the address provided. This form must be received by your county's Registrar of Voters **no later than October 20th, 2008** for this information to be effective on November 4th.

I am registered in a different county and would like to vote absentee/by mail.

They no longer call it 'absentee' voting. The new terminology is 'vote-by-mail.' This applies to anyone who is (a) temporarily living in a different location than their permanent address, and (b) their permanent address is where they are currently registered to vote. To download an application for vote-by-mail, visit http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/elections_m.htm. Be sure to put the address where you live during the school year as the mailing address. On that website there is also a link to a list of County Elections Offices; find the address for the county where you are registered and mail the application there. After processing, your ballot will be mailed to you. Fill out your ballot and mail it back in the envelope provided. Your ballot must be received **no later than 7 days before election day** (October 27th) for your vote to be counted.

For information on the different political parties

Please visit http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/elections_parties.htm. Note: California Law allows voters who "decline to state" an affiliation with a qualified political party or who affiliate with a nonqualified political party to vote in the primary election of any qualified political party that files a notice with the Secretary of State allowing them to do so. See <http://www.sos.ca.gov> for more info.

For other general information

California Secretary of State <http://www.sos.ca.gov> 1-800-345-VOTE

California Voter Information http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/elections_bp.htm

Rock the Vote <http://www.rockthevote.com>

ENVS SCHORLARSHIPS

Each fall the ENVS Program awards two scholarships:

The George Feliz Memorial Scholarship in Environmental Studies is awarded each fall to an Environmental Studies major. George Feliz was SFSU's first dean of graduate studies, and was instrumental in helping San Francisco State evolve from a teacher's college to a university. Professor Feliz donated an endowment fund to support a scholarship for Environmental Studies majors with financial need.

The Yvette Michaud Student Leadership Award is given each fall to an Environmental Studies major who demonstrates leadership in environmental causes that actively engage the campus and/or the wider community. Yvette Michaud graduated summa cum laude from the ENVS program in 2007 and was a leader in ECO-Students. She worked with Student Center staff to phase in composting as part of their waste management practices. The Leadership Award was created by an anonymous donor to encourage student environmental activism and leadership and to honor Yvette's leadership.

Each comes with a \$400 award, and getting a scholarship looks great on your resume. More information application forms information can be found at the following two webpages

<http://bss.sfsu.edu/envstudies/michaudinfo.html>

<http://bss.sfsu.edu/envstudies/felizinfo.html>

Applications are due October 10th.