

County of Placer Community Outreach

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AWARD SHOWS SPIRIT OF COOPERATION IS STRONG IN PLACER COUNTY BY PLACER COUNTY SUPERVISOR ROBERT M. WEYGANDT

An awards banquet held by the Mother Lode Chapter of the Sierra Club May 7 was a great reminder of the spirit of cooperation that has grown up around initiatives such as the proposed Placer County Conservation Plan.

At the banquet, I was honored to receive the Outstanding Elected Official Award, and happy to see chapter Conservation Coordinator Terry Davis recognized with the Outstanding Staff Award.

A few years ago, Terry and I seldom found common ground on key environmental issues, and he frequently disagreed with the course of action taken by the Board of Supervisors.

We still do not always see eye to eye, of course, but I now have a much better understanding of his point of view. I respect the Sierra Club for its commitment to the environment and willingness to work constructively with Placer County and other stakeholders on a wide range of local issues.

One of the most rewarding experiences of my 16 years on the Board of Supervisors is seeing environmental groups, the business community, landowners, developers, the agricultural industry and other stakeholders work together on initiatives such as the proposed conservation plan and Placer Legacy Open Space and Agricultural Conservation Program.

The good working relationship between local governments and the business community is one of our county's many strengths cited by Dr. J. Robert Fountain, the keynote speaker at last year's Placer County Economic Development Summit Breakfast. Dr. Fountain, an economist and professor emeritus at Sacramento State University, said Placer County is well positioned to lead the entire Sacramento region on the path to economic recovery.

Stakeholders often come to the table with markedly different points of view, but working together reduces polarization while creating a trust and spirit of cooperation that are vital to our efforts. Often, stakeholders find common ground or at least areas of mutual interest that make progress possible.

That approach worked well when the county developed Placer Legacy. We formed three advisory bodies: a Scientific Working Group, Interagency Working Group and Citizens Advisory Committee that included representatives from the general public and environmental, building, business and agricultural interests.

That approach helped ensure everyone had a common understanding of what Placer County is trying to accomplish and had opportunities to voice their concerns.

Established in 2000, Placer Legacy won a Governor's Environmental and Economic Leadership Award in 2002. To date, Placer County has protected more than 2,700 acres through property and easement acquisitions and has helped preserve another 6,286 acres through contributions to acquisitions by other agencies.

The crown jewel of Placer Legacy is the 221-acre Hidden Falls Regional Park, which is located in the foothills northeast of Rocklin. By late next year, the county plans to expand the park to include 979 acres of county-owned land located next to Hidden Falls.

Last December, the Board of Supervisors agreed to contribute to the Placer Land Trust's acquisition of 1,773 acres now known as the Harvego Bear River Preserve. Located outside of Auburn, the preserve is a critical link in a trail system that could someday run from Hidden Falls to the Bear River.

I grew up on a foothills ranch not far from Hidden Falls in an era when small towns and farmland dominated the landscape. I would be fine if it just stayed that way, but I joined the Board of Supervisors in 1995 at a time when Placer County already was feeling the growth pressures that make it one of the state's fastest-growing counties.

Growth was inevitable, so I made a commitment to do what I can to preserve our high quality of life as our population grows. To me, that means guiding development in a way that protects natural resources and improves the environment wherever possible.

That is why the proposed conservation plan is so important to me. It seeks to balance growth and the preservation of natural resources, and its success depends on bringing all interested parties to the table.

The PCCP would be one of the most comprehensive conservation plans in the nation. It would protect both endangered species and wetlands, and coordinate conservation efforts to create a large, interconnected reserve system, rather than small, isolated properties.

At the same time, it would provide a streamlined approval process for development projects by creating a comprehensive framework for complying with federal and state environmental rules.

Earlier this year, the latest draft of the PCCP was submitted to federal and state regulatory agencies for review.

My work regarding Placer County's drive to develop a regional wastewater treatment system in partnership with the cities of Lincoln and Auburn is due partly to environmental concerns.

The regional system would allow the county to close an outdated treatment plant in North Auburn and the city of Auburn to close its existing plant. A pipeline would be built so sewage could be pumped to Lincoln's modern wastewater treatment plant.

Replacing the small, old plants would help protect water quality in streams such as Auburn Ravine, Coon Creek and Miner's Ravine by reducing the potential for accidental discharges of untreated wastes or harmful

chemicals. Wastewater would be sent by pipeline past some of South Placer's most sensitive natural habitats and treated at Lincoln's modern plant.

Balancing growth and the conservation of natural resources is a challenging task in a fast-growing county, but our efforts already are paying dividends. The real test will be what kind of communities and environment we leave for future generations.