

Close to Home: Time to act in response to climate change: Yes on AA

The Bible's first couple of pages describe the creation. The sun and the moon, the land and sea, the seeds and cattle of the field, the fowl on wing and whales of the deep. And, of course, man and woman. For the first time since these pages were written, the way of life of man and woman is changing the totality of this creation. The effect of the sun's rays on the Earth and the tides of the moon, the temperature and currents of the ocean, the habitat range for thousands of species, the inundation of dry land — all are in a state of change scientists tell us is caused by a gaseous layer we have caused to envelop the Earth.

Those who predict dire consequences for the planet may be wrong. If Douglas fir trees can no longer survive in warmer, dryer elevations, they will reseed to cooler, wetter ones. When they can move no further to survive they will become extinct. And other species will take their place.

If ocean temperatures cease to support nutrients for particular species of fish, they will become extinct and be replaced by adaptable ones. Polar bears may already be close to extinction, other species may not be affected for decades. Climate change will leave no more or less water on the Earth, but it will distribute what is here differently. In short, Mother Nature is nothing if she isn't adaptable.

How people will adapt and what we will do about this is an entirely different question. Does this mean we should stand by and do nothing while the effects of what we have already done unfold?

In this regard, the state Legislature has given the state Coastal Conservancy two important tasks. One is to join those who actively seek to reverse climate change. The other is to find ways to adapt to it. Since the conservancy's main job is to protect the coast and its environs and

provide access for millions of people, we require those who seek funds to analyze how climate change will impact their proposed projects. We apply the science of climate change to the practical choices of what is likely to survive and what is not.

By funding the creation of new wetlands, Measure AA on Tuesday's ballot is an important way that we voters can help decide what will survive.

Wetlands are the fragile areas of relatively shallow water that are home to thousands of species. Wetlands provide the nutrients, nesting areas and shelter for millions of familiar shorebirds.

While wetlands are environmentally most valuable, paradoxically they are the most vulnerable. They are the front line between land that is already inundated and land that is dry.

As sea level rises, land that is wetlands today will be more deeply submerged and lose their critical wildlife value. This will require movement and relocation of many species. The conservancy has already funded a science-based plan to create 100,000 acres of new wetlands. This will help wetland-dependent species survive by providing a bridge between the relatively fast inundation or their current habitat and the relatively slow natural creation of new wetlands.

The 1,500-acre Cullinan Ranch project along Highway 37, the new home for thousands of wetland inhabitants, is a great example of the type of habitat Measure AA would help create. Measure AA demands little of each of us, yet gives all an opportunity to help the creatures we know and love adapt to the change our way of life has caused in theirs.

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