



REPUBLICAN ENVIRONMENTALISTS: THERE ARE MORE THAN CAN FIT IN A VIKING REFRIGERATOR

Watch out, polluting outlaws, habitat stranglers, and sprawl spreaders. There is a new posse in town—daring, caring and committed.

Their minions have been in our midst for decades, unrecognized by conventional wisdom, lurking in the cryptic regions of political polling data.

When Republicans for Environmental Protection (REP America) holds its annual meeting in San Diego from September 12-14, a phantom force will find organized voice in a region known for conservatism and conservation.

Despite the widespread presumption that being green means being Democrat, there really are more Republican environmentalists planning to make the weekend conference than can fit in a Viking refrigerator.

In fact, over a hundred organizers, policy analysts and public officials who dare go where no other has gone since Richard Nixon established the Environmental Protection Agency, hope to produce winning strategies to paint the gray elephant green, again.

San Diegans of all political lime-like stripes should bless this communion. Tree loving Democrats, a distant minority in Congress, need all the help they can get to stop a deregulatory stampede galloping toward our National Parks, oceans and open space networks.

REP could not have picked a better place to establish a new beach head.

This is the place where Republican President Theodore Roosevelt created the great Cleveland National Forest in 1908. He returned seven years later to wave his big stick in a roaring speech during the Panama Exposition in landscape architect J.C. Olmsted's new Balboa Park.

San Diego is also the scene of a classic planning conundrum about how to balance the housing needs of a million or so new residents over the next twenty years and protect the home of more endangered species than live anywhere else in the country.

Pollsters have long recognized that even among those San Diego Republicans who consider themselves conservative on issues like gun control, choice and gay marriage, environmental protection is a high priority.

And, coastal Republicans most often describe themselves as free marketeers, liberal on social issues, and strongly in favor of air pollution laws, preservation of open space, and protection of wetlands. Government regulation is welcomed if it protects everyone's great backyard.

The ongoing and so far successful efforts to create the San Dieguito River Valley Park, a 55-mile trail system stretching from the ocean to Julian, in the midst of the most heavily concentrated numbers of registered Republican areas in California is testament to that zeitgeist.

Phil Pryde, long time chair of the River Valley's Citizens Advisory Council, is one of the REP policy wizards who have been reconciling free market economics with environmental protection goals.

It is in this environment that former Republican Mayor Susan Golding and her aide Karen Scarborough, currently a Carmel Valley resident, sat warring groups of environmentalists, builders and property owners around a huge table a decade ago to craft a national model for habitat preservation.

At the same time, the County developed their own plan under the watchful eye of Supervisors Pam Slater and Diane Jacobs. Slater, along with current San Diego Mayor Dick Murphy, will be honored during the conference for her ongoing environmental efforts.

The idea, bureaucratically called the Multiple Species Habitat Plan, was to offer builders and property owners relief from Federal permitting hoops that took years and millions of dollars to navigate if they agreed to contribute their most environmentally sensitive lands to a county wide contiguous habitat preserve system.

Thousands of acres on Carmel Mountain and Del Mar Mesa just south of SR56 are creatures of the MSCP process. And, although some pig-headed property owners are still agitating to push their commercial projects into the preserves, most builders have bought into the plan and are now its most effective advocates.

REP America is not just about talk and policy. The group is also about raising campaign funds for environment friendly Republican candidates like New York's Rep. Sherwood Boehlert (R) NY who is the conference keynote speaker.

Boehlert, the green conscience of the Republican Party, was named as an "Environmental Champion" in 2002 by the League of Conservation Voters because of his support for clean air, clean water, land conservation, and efficient energy use. He is also endorsed by the Sierra Club.

And so, next time you find yourself at a public meeting sticking up for some beloved piece of open space, look to your left, look to your right, and you just might find yourself in between a few Republicans. Tell them about REP America.