

San Francisco Bay Chapter Organizational Profile



Profile of the Sierra Club, San Francisco Bay Chapter

October, 2009

The Sierra Club

More than a century ago, John Muir and a group of conservationists laid the foundation for an organization dedicated to preserving and protecting the magnificent wildlands of the Sierra Nevada. The impact of the newly formed Sierra Club was immediate and long lasting. Since its founding in 1892, the Sierra Club has been instrumental in protecting wildlife and wild places as well as the implementation of important legislation which has improved our quality of life.

Sierra Club California

In 1986, due to the numerous chapters and the large number of Sierra Club members within the state of California, the Sierra Club Board of Trustees created Sierra Club California to represent the 13 California chapters before the State legislature, Governor's office, and State agencies. Sierra Club California was created to give California members a strong effective voice in the State Capitol. As a legislative advocacy organization, Sierra Club California lobbies the State Legislature, the Administration, and state government agencies to protect California's natural resources and to improve the health and safety of Californians. Currently there is a 2-3 person lobbying team who work full-time in Sacramento on behalf of all the California Chapters as well as the Sierra Club as a whole.

The San Francisco Bay Chapter

The San Francisco Bay Chapter is one of 13 Chapters in California and an important leader in Bay Area environmental community. We are home to more than 30,000 Sierra Club members in Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, and San Francisco counties. We are comprised of eight local groups within the four counties; each group being led by volunteer members.

Established more than 80 years ago, we are one of the oldest Sierra Club Chapters and represent the grassroots backbone of the Sierra Club. We have long and successful history of volunteer activism and cutting edge environmental successes, and include local icons Ansel Adams and David Brower among our ranks.

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What We Do

The mission statement of the Sierra Club is:

1. Explore, enjoy and protect the wild places of the earth.
2. Practice and promote the responsible use of the earth's ecosystems and resources.
3. Educate and enlist humanity to protect and restore the quality of the natural and human environment.
4. Use all lawful means to carry out these objectives.

In the San Francisco Bay Chapter, we try to live up to these principles by empowering our members to appreciate the natural beauty that surrounds them while at the same time getting involved in the political process to help preserve and protect it.

The Chapter takes several approaches to achieve its conservation goals:

1. **People Power.** With approximately 32,000 members in four counties, we are the largest environmental group in the Bay Area. We have a large and active volunteer program. Thousands of members participate in our activities and conservation programs every year. Whatever we do, we do it best by involving our members and volunteers.
2. **Commitment and Involvement to the Democratic Process.** - Club members elect our leaders and as a 501(c)4 organization, we are one of the few environmental groups that can get directly involved in local, state and national elections. Many of our most important victories are a direct or indirect result of our involvement in elections.
3. **Full Service Environmental Activism.** The Chapter works on a wide range of environmental issues. Although we have a local focus, our work includes regional, state and national issues. We utilize a variety of funding sources that allows us to do conception to completion activism that includes research, education, lobbying, elections and lawsuits.
4. **Activities and Outings.** Through our "Activities Sections," volunteer leaders offer thousands of people an opportunity enjoy and explore the natural world and grow their environmental appreciation. The San Francisco Bay Chapter has several active programs that are mostly self-governing.
5. **Respected Environmental Leadership.** The Sierra Club consistently polls as the one of the most influential and respected groups in determining how people vote. When the chapter takes a local position, it is the position of the entire Sierra Club and our 700,000 members. More than any other organization, people look to the Sierra Club to establish the environmental standard.

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Decision Making in the Chapter

A distinguishing feature of the Sierra Club, as opposed to many other large environmental organizations, is that policy decisions are made by volunteers elected by the membership. “Group” Executive Committees are elected for geographic subsets of the Chapter. For example, the San Francisco Group sets policy for issues local to San Francisco. The Northern Alameda Group sets policy for issues local to Oakland, Berkeley, Alameda, Emeryville and other, nearby incorporated cities.

The Chapter Executive Committee is the regional group of elected volunteers comprised of members from each of the groups. The Chapter “Excomm” sets policy and makes funding decisions for Chapter-wide issues.

The Chapter Director and staff play an active role in consulting with the elected volunteer leadership to develop campaign plans, and then play major roles in implementing them.

Chapter Staff

The Chapter Staff are charged with actually carrying out conservation priorities identified by the volunteer leadership. Staff are the engines that keep the conservation campaigns running, with input and support from volunteer leaders engaged in each campaign.

Chapter Director

The Chapter Director, working with the Executive Committee, directs a 16-person office and \$1.25 million dollar budget¹. The Chapter Director has two essential roles:

- 1) Manage the 16 full-time and part-time staff at the office involved in conservation work and fundraising.
- 2) Work cooperatively with the elected Executive Committee to further the conservation priorities identified by the volunteer leadership (see above section).

A very successful in-house phone fundraising program currently provides a majority of the chapter funds. In order to increase fundraising success, efforts to develop other revenue sources, such as a major donor program, will be expected from a new CD.

Significant improvements to the chapters’ IT systems will also be beneficial.

2009 Survey of Membership

In fall 2009, in preparation for this Search process, the Search Committee conducted an informal survey of volunteer leaders. Two goals that scored highest in the rankings were

¹ Some of the \$1.25 million includes funds that go directly to Sierra Club California and for the insurance for each club member.

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“Maintain or increase membership level / develop new leaders” and “Increase overall fund raising capabilities.” Others mentioned working on new media, improving our chapter’s electronic communications and outreach, and diversifying the activities of the Bay Chapter to include more panels, lectures and events. In terms of skills needed to be an effective Chapter Director, “Good management skills (ability to manage people and run the office)” scored highest in our survey.

In any case, it is clear that there are challenges ahead for the Chapter, and for the incoming Director, while at the same time, enormous opportunities and a high level of interest from the membership in working to strengthen the organization.

Chapter Director Search Committee

The 2009 Chapter Director Search Committee includes the following individuals:

Kent Lewandowski, Northern Alameda County Group (Chair)

Norman Laforce, West Contra Costa County Group

John Rizzo, San Francisco Group

Arthur Feinstein, San Francisco Group

Becky Evans, San Francisco Group

Our Website

<http://sanfranciscobay.sierraclub.org> (can also be found with www.sfbsc.org)