

Northern Exposure: Chico State students work to divest school from oil industry

Published: Sunday, May. 4, 2014 - 12:00 am

Students target energy firms

CHICO That 16-by-20-foot sheet of black plastic spilling out of Chico State's administration building and across campus is education on the march.

Students in Geography 440 paraded the plastic, "the Kendall Hall oil spill," as part of a campuswide campaign to divest the school's University Foundation from the fossil fuels industry. They also dropped banners from a seven-story classroom building reading "D.I.V.E.S.T."

"This generation gets the connection between fossil fuels and [climate change](#)," said Kevin Killion, a Chico State senior taking Environmental Thought and Action.

The class is designed to link classroom topics with the real world, said Mark Stemen, who has been teaching it for more than 10 years. Students select an issue and develop the legal language required for a ballot measure.

After they collect enough signatures to place their issue before the student body, they "campaign like hell" using tools from social media to direct action, he said.

Divest Chico State is part of an international movement by universities, cities and churches to rid their investments of companies profiting from fossil fuels, which often leak into the environment. "If you own the stock, you own the spill," Killion said.

Stemen's goal is not divestment. He aims to teach students the skills they need to organize and win campaigns.

He gets a midterm A: The students' ballot measure garnered 80 percent approval. The final grade for the class depends on the University Foundation's decision on the advisory vote, expected later this spring.

Drought even hits Humboldt

HUMBOLDT COUNTY California's North Coast is normally so wet even the leprechauns carry umbrellas. This year it shares status with the rest of the state: officially suffering from drought.

Last year, the rains stopped in January and never really resumed. Since October, the area that normally gets up to 50 inches of rain has had just 21 inches, said Katie Delbar, who directs the county's Farm Service Agency.

She and other county officials are scrambling to help ranchers find ways to feed the cattle that usually graze on rain-soaked fields. It's expensive to haul hay to remote Humboldt County, but one rancher drove to Utah in search of food for his herd, Delbar said.

Now eligible for federal disaster assistance, more than 120 local ranchers have applied for \$750,000 under a program that will pay up to 70 percent of the costs of improving water sources. Some hope to develop springs, others to increase their storage capacity with troughs or tanks.

Meanwhile, ranchers are seeing calves that are below normal weight and weaning earlier. Some are selling cows to reduce their herds. A few are considering getting out of ranching altogether.

Even cutting back on herd sizes has an effect on the entire county, where the \$58-million-a-year ranching industry is second only to timber, said Jeff Dolf, Humboldt County's agricultural commissioner.

"When it doesn't rain, we get concerned about it – even around here," he said.

Giddy-up radio gets urbane

SURPRISE VALLEY KDUP, the world's only radio station broadcasting out of a meat locker, has an urbane new partner: National Public Radio.

Giddy-up Radio, whose logo alternates between a hell-bent horseback rider and a sage-green Chevy pickup, now shares the air over eastern Modoc County with KVYA, transmitting national and international news to a place that makes Lake Wobegon look cosmopolitan.

“Both stations are proudly broadcasting to 200 people and 20,000 cows,” said Jeff Cotton, station co-owner.

Cotton chose the new NPR affiliate’s call letters for Vya, 22 miles across the playa in Nevada. The signal is not strong enough to reach Vya, “but no one lives there anyway,” he said.

Cotton also co-owns KLAP, broadcasting out of Gerlach, Nev., at the edge of the Black Rock Desert. The programming is similar to KDUP, a mix of big band, singer-songwriter and country that complements Gerlach’s motto, “Where the pavement ends and the West begins.”

KVYA will feature a rhythm-and-news format through Jefferson Public Radio in Ashland, Ore.

Cotton launched the valley’s first community radio station in 2008 in the Modoc Meats building, positioning his recording equipment behind the butcher case and beneath the rails originally used to roll sides of beef into a walk-in refrigerator. The station shares space with two restaurateurs who serve espresso and seasonal farm-to-table food.

Surprise Valley is the last corner of California to get NPR. But don’t hold your breath for Frank Deford’s color commentary of Surprise Valley High School Hornets games.

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