

## Presentation to Ojai City Council on February 28, 2012

Dear Mayor Clapp and Council Members, thank you for allowing the Ojai Valley Green Coalition to speak again on the single-use carryout point-of-sale bag issue before you today. In April of last year the Coalition formally submitted an ordinance request for the city's consideration. Thank you for opening that door and walking through it. Also a special thank-you to Interim City Development Director Ann McLaughlin for her tireless and sincere efforts on this issue and ordinance.

Former Carpinteria Mayor Donna Jordan, speaking on behalf of Carpinteria Beautiful during a recent Carpinteria City Council meeting, said, "Single-use bags are a disaster not waiting to happen, but happening. It's really time to break the habit. We've tried education, tried persuasion, tried setting examples for people, but it just hasn't been enough."

Mark Gold, president of the Santa Monica environmental group Heal the Bay, has said that previous [Los Angeles] County efforts to promote recycling of plastic bags at grocery stores had been a failure: "You cannot recycle your way out of the plastic bag problem. The cost of convenience can no longer be at the expense of the environment."

Single-use plastic bags grew to a staggering 115 billion in the US in 2010, and despite stepped-up efforts, still less than 5 percent of those bags are being recycled. California is the only state that monitors plastic bag and film recycling and has a retailer-funded plastic bag take-back opportunity at virtually every grocery store. Its latest report (2009) shows that just 3 percent of plastic bags generated are recycled in the state. If the reported growth rate is to be believed, the 2010 recycling rate is about 4 percent. By all measures, efforts to recycle single-use plastic grocery bags have failed.

The Californians Against Waste organization reminds us of the propaganda on plastic bag recycling being spread by the plastic industry to 'save' the single-use plastic bag through a recently released report that misrepresents and falsely inflates plastic bag recycling data to suggest an increase in that recycling.

The report suggests that from 2009 to 2010 the volume of plastic bags recycled grew by about 27 million pounds. What they fail to tell us is that during that same period, the US EPA reports that single-use plastic bags distributed grew by 220 million pounds. Bottom line: substantially more single-use plastic bags were distributed, littered, and disposed in 2010 than in 2009—we're moving in the wrong direction.

On the government intrusion argument, which we're sure you've heard or read by now; we'd like to give another viewpoint. We think you will agree that one of the roles of government is to protect and tend to the well-being of its citizens. Historically, government favors the good of the many over the good of one or a few.

Where individuals have said, "I don't care if I increase my chance of death substantially by not wearing a seatbelt or motorcycle helmet," government has stepped in to say, "We the people care."

Where individuals have said, "I don't care if when I drive intoxicated or while talking on a cell phone I take a significant risk of killing myself and others," government has stepped in to say, "We the people care."

Where corporations have said, “We don’t care if we pollute your drinking water, the air you breathe, or the food you eat,” government has stepped in—granted, not always—to say, “We the people care.”

It is time again for government to step in and say that we the people care, even when individuals say, “I don’t care if this nonessential item uses up significant amounts of finite resources, clogs waterways, substantially contributes to litter, pollutes oceans, kills and injures marine life—I want the convenience for my purchases and I want it for my trash cans and dog poop.”

I’d like to share excerpts of a story posted online by a David Todd on November 30, 2011, titled *GRAY WHALE’S DEATH A WAKEUP CALL ABOUT PLASTICS*:

“As we approached the whale on Arroyo Beach that April morning, I was filled with anticipation. This was my first gray whale stranding with the NW Marine Mammal Stranding Network. Kristin Wilkinson, NOAA’s marine mammal stranding expert, told me, “Be prepared for the media—this is the fourth dead gray in two weeks.” Why had the whale died on our Salish Sea shore? I could not ignore the gnawing feeling that somehow we had played a part. The thin whale, a male measuring 37 feet, was estimated to be 3-6 years old (a gray whale’s lifespan is 50-70 years). The massive creature needed to be towed to a remote location where biologists could perform their work.

“Cascadia’s renowned cetacean researcher John Calambokidis explored the contents of the whale’s stomach. He noted there was a significant amount of algae with little evidence of food. He reached his hand inside the whale and removed a piece of plastic. Then, a length of rope, a golf ball, a plastic bag, a piece of cloth. Another piece of plastic, more cloth. Duct tape. A towel. Electrical tape. Fishing line. More rope. Surgical glove. Plastic funnel. More plastic bags. A huge piece of fabric—it was half a pair of sweatpants. Work around us stopped and everyone gathered, stunned. Over twenty plastic bags in all were removed from the whale’s stomach. John shook his head. In 20 years examining over 200 whales, he said he had never seen anything like this.”

This planet with all of its life systems can be thought of as a tapestry—each life system a thread in that tapestry and important to the whole. If we pull on any one thread of our tapestry, our life systems begin to unravel. In our small, inland valley, we CANNOT disconnect ourselves from the whale hundreds of miles up the coast starved to death by plastic bags and other trash. We CANNOT disconnect ourselves from people in distant lands sifting through literally mountains of plastic bags to find clean reusable ones, which by the way is part of our (less than 5%) recycling statistic. We CANNOT disconnect ourselves from the sea of plastic and plastic bags that collect at the mouth of rivers everywhere, leading directly into oceans.

Plastic bags are sucking up precious water and energy resources and strangling our waterways, our oceans, and our wildlife. And for what – the convenience of not having to remember to bring our own reusable bags, and the convenience of a very expensive “free” bag to line our trashcans and pick up our dog poop—that’s the case FOR plastic bags that we continue to hear.

We would suggest that, in the final analysis, the question isn’t how much is this ordinance going to cost shoppers, stores, the city, or any other entity, but how much is it going to cost the environment and future generations if we don’t change this habit. Look, we understand reducing plastic and paper bag use in Ojai isn’t an environmental action of global proportion,

but it is significant in what it symbolizes: the fact that we are part of the tapestry of life and that we get it now; we care about the greater good, and we don't want the future generations of this world to not have gray whales. If every community everywhere stood up for this notion, then we do have something of global significance.

With this ordinance you take a step toward proactive leadership and being part of a global and local solution NOW. Or at a later date we can be reactive when a ban is mandated by a higher authority, which isn't a question of if, but when. By then how many more plastic bags will Ojai have contributed to the unraveling of our tapestry called life?

That the ordinance could use some refinement there's no question, but let's not throw the baby out with the bathwater, but rather work together to achieve a legally appropriate and equitable ordinance that begins to move us beyond "business as usual," which is CLEARLY not working for the environment or its inhabitants.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Deborah Pendrey  
Ojai Valley Green Coalition