

## Jennifer Kalt: The Baykeeper

PHOTO BY SHAUN WALKER

### 'An individual can make a difference'

BY WILL HOUSTON

For Humboldt Baykeeper Director Jennifer Kalt, the importance of taking action when seeing something unjust occur was a quality that was instilled in her at a young age by her parents.

Kalt chose to follow her passion for nature and the environment to study botany at Humboldt State University in 1991, but that quality has not left her.

Since graduating, she has been working as an environmental advocate and watchdog over issues ranging from the effects of logging operations new and old to monitoring bacteria contamination in local waters to name a few.

"Industries come and go," Kalt, 52, said. "But the bay and rivers, if we destroy them, they're gone forever. We can't just fill the pothole and bring the river back."

Before joining Humboldt Baykeeper in 2005 as a con-

tractor for the nonprofit's water quality monitoring program, Kalt began her environmental advocacy work writing comment letters about timber harvesting plans for the Native Plant Society.

"I think that experience made me feel like one of the beauties of our system of government is an individual can make a difference," she said.

But working in environmental advocacy came with varied reactions. While working a stint as a rare plant surveyor for a Eureka consulting firm, Kalt said Simpson Timber Company would not allow her on their land due to her previous comment letters.

Kalt would have later run-ins with Simpson Timber Co. while working for Humboldt Baykeeper, which often landed them in court over issues such as contamination cleanups.

After leaving the consulting field, Kalt began working for the California Indian Basketweavers Association where she said she gained a greater understanding about human influence on the natural world.

"A lot of environmentalists want to protect nature by drawing a line and keeping all human influence out," she said. "But when you study plants, and rare plants in particular, a lot of them need some kind of disturbance whether it's soil disturbance, fire, grazing.

"I understood that not all logging is bad, not all grazing is bad," she continued. "It's a matter of how you manage it that can actually be beneficial for the plants that evolved with that type of disturbance."

Kalt became policy director for Humboldt Baykeeper in 2011 and eventually director in 2013 when the organization came under the umbrella of the Northcoast Environmental Center. While Kalt said that nonprofits may not be seen as an entity bringing money into the local economy, she stated that nonprofits are large employers and often bring in benefits through grants. One recent grant that Kalt said Humboldt Baykeeper secured has allowed Humboldt County's public health laboratory to begin analyzing bacteria in a

way that will allow it to identify where the bacteria came from. This will not only aid Humboldt Baykeeper's water monitoring projects, but for anyone else who wants to identify and eliminate bacteria sources, Kalt said.

Kalt says that the lack of enforcement of many environmental laws in Humboldt County is "severe" and criticized decision makers who she said have "enabled" businesses to operate outside of those laws.

"I think that's an injustice to the people who believe in running their business in ways that follow the laws and protect the environment and community," she said.

While she says sexism exists in every segment of society and in every generation, Kalt said women are well-represented both in botany and in the nonprofit realm.

"Of course we all encounter sexist attitudes at times – perhaps the most frustrating is when people assume women are less knowledgeable or experienced until we prove ourselves," she said.