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## UCSC grad students help block Chevron natural gas plant

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SANTA CRUZ — Shaye Wolf and her husband Doug Bevington don't want to take all of the credit for causing Chevron to abandon its plans to build a \$650 million liquefied natural gas terminal off the coast of Tijuana.

But they'll take some of it.

Even though Wolf, a biologist, and Bevington, a sociologist who studies environmental organizations, are still graduate students at UC Santa Cruz, the pair's one-two punch of scientific study and political advocacy has led to the kind of international conservation success story that would make Sierra Club jealous, their faculty advisers said.

"It's very unusual for graduate students to be responsible for stopping a multinational corporation," said Don Croll, a UCSC professor of ecology and evolutionary biology.

As part of her master's degree research in ocean sciences, Wolf documented the large and diverse populations of seabirds that nest on the Coronado Islands, a trio of small Mexican islands visible from downtown San Diego.

While she was doing her research there, she learned of Chevron's plans to build an LNG terminal on one of the islands where supercooled, liquefied gas delivered by tankers would be heated, vaporized and fed into a pipeline.

Wolf's findings offered clear proof of the damages that such a plant could cause by highlighting the importance of those islands, which serve as breeding colonies for six threatened or endangered bird species, including the largest known colony of the rare Xantus's murrelet.

"These nocturnal seabirds are very sensitive to artificial light," she said. "I knew from my research that even a single light bulb would attract birds — they circle lights like moths, they fly into lighted structures, and lights make them more vulnerable to predators. The tremendous amount of lighting from the terminals and tankers would be devastating"

Mexican environmentalists, including Greenpeace Mexico, feared the project would harm delicate plant and sea mammal habitats, as well. They opposed the validity of the three key Mexican permits required to develop the project.

But their four-year effort was unsuccessful, and by 2005, the groups had exhausted their legal options in the Mexican courts.

At that point, Bevington entered the picture. With the help of a lawyer friend, Bevington and Wolf built a coalition of U.S. and Mexican groups including the Center for Biological Diversity, Los Angeles Audubon and WildCoast, among others.

In 2005, they took their complaint to the Commission for Environmental Cooperation, an agency created by the North American Free Trade Agreement to study environmental issues.

"The agency was set up so industry can't cross borders to evade environmental laws," Wolf said.

In January, the commission recommended an investigation into whether Mexico had violated its own environmental laws in approving Chevron's proposal.

One month later, Chevron announced that the company was abandoning its plans to build the facility.

Despite ongoing opposition to the LNG terminal since it was proposed in 2003, company spokeswoman Margaret Cooper said, "the decision was based on our business needs," and was not due to pressure from environmental campaigners or the NAFTA agency.

Chevron decided to send natural gas supplies from the Greater Gorgon gas fields off northwest Australia to Japan instead of to the Coronado Islands, she said.

Wolf learned about Chevron's withdrawal from a news story.

"I was elated," she said. "Knowing the importance of island, it was impossible for me to accept that they would ever build there"

She insists that she was just one person in a large group of people and organizations that contributed to the effort.

Hundreds of people were involved, from people marching in the cities of Baja California, to demonstrators at a Chevron stockholders meeting in California, said Alfonso Aguirre, who directs the Mexican offshoot of the Island Conservation and Ecology Group, which is based at UCSC's **Center** for Ocean Health.

"The case showed that the only way to defend localities from tremendous energy 'maquiladora' type projects in the time of globalization is acting globally," Aguirre said by phone from Mexico. "The vaccine to manipulative globalization has to be global as well"

The controversy over building natural gas terminals was in the forefront last week in California as two state agencies rejected plans by Australia energy and mining company BHP Billiton to build an \$800 million plant about 20 miles off Malibu. The California Coastal Commission on Friday unanimously decided that the project failed to meet rigorous coastal protection standards, citing risks to migratory whales, marine birds and other sea life. The company, which said the facility would provide a reliable source of low-polluting energy, has spent nearly four years and tens of millions of dollars on studies and lobbying to build its plant.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

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