



PLANNING AND CONSERVATION LEAGUE



PCL INSIDER: NEWS FROM THE CAPITAL

Highlights from the 2020 California Environmental Assembly

The Planning and Conservation League's 2020 California Environmental Assembly delved deep into the multi-faceted battle against climate change. Panelists and speakers discussed the various channels for environmental protections and how California is seeing big wins in the fight.

The morning started with opening remarks and speaker Wade Crowfoot, California's Secretary of Natural Resources, informed attendees of how the Newsom administration is tackling the climate change issues ahead. In outlining the specific goals and initiatives for the future, Wade communicated the plans the governor has for ensuring California is prepared to address greenhouse gas reductions, water shortages, and increasing wildfires.

The morning panels focused on how we can achieve sustainability through better land use and water management, and by reducing our fossil fuel reliance. The audience in all of the panels listened intently and asked tricky questions on how we can achieve our climate goals. In the Litigation Panel, panelists communicated a general optimism when discussing ongoing litigation against the Trump administration's rollbacks, citing a less than 10% success rate. Panelists felt that despite a large number of judicial appointees by Trump, the courts remain a backstop for non-politicized enforcement of the law.

During the lunch session, John Tarrant, author, teacher, and director at the Pacific Zen Institute shared his views on how to remain hopeful and optimistic while battling climate change. Having grown up in Australia, he also shared his unique perspective regarding the recent wildfires and how to ensure we care for ourselves while in times of uncertainty.

Switching gears, the afternoon speakers outlined adaptation and mitigation measures for climate change regarding agriculture and the foreseen water scarcity in the years ahead. The biodiversity session outlined the numerous ways California is proactively building resiliency through actions such as the Biodiversity Initiative, including "A Charter to Secure the Future of California's Native Biodiversity," currently backed by 500 California biodiversity scientists. The health and environmental justice panel was in heavy attendance, with speakers from the American Lung Association, Kaiser Permanente, and the California Environmental Justice Alliance. The panel moved away from a macro-level analysis of environmental issues and into individualized accounts of the personal effects of climate change on vulnerable groups, including people of color. One perspective carried through; the anxiety we feel regarding climate change must fuel our progress against it, and lead to policy reform. As this year marks the 50th anniversary of CEQA, the act is one which many have on their minds. Perfectly timed, the CEQA 2.0 panel

welcomed a discussion on the strengths and critiques of the original legislation. Working since 2018, PCL and its stakeholder advisory groups have proposed amendments to the CEQA process to update the statute for the 21st century. The legislative amendments will run as one bill in 2020 with Senator Jackson as the author. Attendees learned about the specifics of the legislation and how it will address challenges that developed in the half-decade since its inception.

The final speaker session included several fellows from CivicSpark who are addressing climate change challenges by building capacity in local government sectors. Fellows shared what drives them and keeps them going and how to accomplish the cultural shift needed to combat climate change. Speakers voiced how personally seeing the impact they make drives them to keep doing the important work ahead. PCL is honored to have distributed scholarships to over 50 students for the assembly and hopes to continue collaborations with young voices across the state.

The battle against the impending challenges due to climate change is hard-fought. Although, given the many dedicated and influential panelists, speakers, and attendees, an air of optimism is shared in creating a healthy environment for us all.

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