



PCL INSIDER: News from the Capitol

PCL's Annual Environmental Symposium a Watershed Event!

More than 200 Attendees Gather to Explore Solutions to CA's Historic Drought

Against the backdrop of the Governor's recent [drought](#) declaration, an overflow crowd of more than 200 of the top thinkers, doers and decision-makers on water policy joined together on Saturday, February 1 at UC Davis School of Law for the Planning and Conservation League's [2014 Environmental Symposium](#). This year's event, entitled Water for Life, focused on moving California towards a more equitable and sustainable water future.

The [program](#) kicked-off with plenary panel exploring varying visions for water planning for California, with a lively debate over the need to prioritize where we invest our resources versus more of an 'all of the above' approach (that meet certain criteria) to water planning; despite some significant disagreements among the speakers, there was consensus reached around breaking down barriers between sectors and working collaboratively wherever we're able to solve California's water crisis. Next up was an equally compelling plenary discussion about prospects for a 2014 water bond spearheaded by the authors of two bond proposals, Senator Lois Wolk and Assembly Member Anthony Rendon, as well as a presentation of public opinion polling on the bond. While data shows an increasing appetite for approval of a major water bond for California, there will need to be a unified front and massive outreach to ensure passage of such a measure. Participants were largely supportive of the Wolk and Rendon bonds (and agree either is superior to what is currently on the ballot), but some important differences between the two raise significant concerns still must be solved to move a green bond forward.

Following the morning plenary sessions, guests were treated to an [awards luncheon](#) where some of the most profound accomplishments in the water world were recognized, including California American Water for their [San Clemente Dam Removal and Carmel River Reroute project](#); former Assemblyman Mike Eng for his historic [Human Right to Water](#) bill; and Assembly Majority Leader Toni Atkins and Assembly Member Mark Stone for their coastal protection efforts this past session. A short clip of "Thirsty for Justice: the struggle for the human right to water" was previewed for attendees, before they went on to choose from a wide array of water-related breakout sessions that ranged from water pricing and the water-energy nexus to what's next for coastal protection efforts and the public trust doctrine. Participants then reconvened for a final discussion debating differing approaches for restoring the Bay-Delta, including the current administration [BDCCP](#) proposal, an alternative [portfolio approach](#) that focuses on more regional water solutions to water, to the consensus [near-term projects](#) approach being spearheaded by PCL and others that seek to achieve immediate

benefits for restoring critical ecosystems and safeguarding communities. The event was bookended by a pre-Symposium reception for sponsors and speakers on Friday evening, as well as a post-event wine-and cheese soiree that provided guests a chance to unwind and build the relationships that will be needed to promote more sustainable and equitable water solutions for California.

PCL's 2014 Symposium was one of our most successful ever, and it would not have been possible without our many [sponsors](#), the top-flight presenters who joined us, an amazing crew of volunteers, and, of course, the entire PCL family and the engaged attendees who made the day's dialogue so engaging.

PCL will be uploading all the presentations from the Symposium and putting together a short report on the day's deliberations, so check our [website](#) in the next couple weeks for that. In the meantime, enjoy some of the sessions that were [videotaped](#) courtesy of Daniel Barth.

Drought Continues to Seize California

Will it Spur Needed Long-Term Action or Prompt Continued Band-Aid Approaches?

The welcome rains over the past week did nothing to alleviate the stranglehold the 3rd year of drought has on California. With climate scientists [now saying](#) that California droughts have lasted over 200 years and that the 20th century was an abnormally wet one, the state must prepare to deal with the fact that we may be entering a new, and parched, normal.

Governor Jerry Brown responded on January 17 with an emergency [drought declaration](#), which provides primarily for more collaboration by agencies and making more funding available. It also calls for voluntary 20% reductions of water use throughout the state, which PCL Executive Director Bruce Reznik [writes](#) is both too inexact and too weak a weapon. Visit PCL's [new Drought Webpage](#) to read our [decoding](#) of the Drought Declaration, including what the CEQA suspensions mean.

Others are looking at this drought as the impetus to adopt needed water forms that have been long overlooked in order to significantly increase water conservation, reuse and recycling. In addition to dueling water bonds, Senate President Pro tem Darrell Steinberg plans to author a [\\$644 million drought relief bill](#) to deal with immediate solutions. Other legislators are getting into the act as well; some other measures that have either been introduced or are being discussed around the Capitol include improvements to groundwater management, reforming Proposition 218 taxing requirements to make it easier to increase water rates for stormwater capture and water recycling, increasing water metering to promote more conservation, and expanding the use of recycled water throughout the state.

Sadly, though, there are those who are taking this crisis affecting all of California and turning it into an opportunity to pit farmers and environmentalists against each other. California House Republicans and Speaker John Boehner are [blaming environmentalists](#) for the drought (as though we conducted some 'green magic' that controlled the weather) and pushing a bill that would allow Central Valley farms to pump even more water from the already overextended Delta. The White House has [threatened to veto](#) this bill if it does make it that far. While the lack of rain and snow is the actual cause of the drought, bill author Rep. Devin Nunes (R-Tulare) doesn't completely miss the mark in calling this a "man-made crisis," in that

California's failure to engage in long-term, responsible water planning is exacerbating our thirst.

Please visit [PCL's Drought Webpage](#) regularly for more information and updates.

Ballona decisions to be taken up by California Supreme Court

PCL is not planning to move forward with bills to fix the line of cases culminating in [Ballona Wetlands Land Trust v. City of Los Angeles](#) (aka the "Ballona fix" bills) this legislative session. PCL pursued legislation last session that would have clarified that environmental review must look at existing and likely hazards where projects are sited in order to safeguard communities; the bills died under fierce opposition (and a misinformation campaign) by the California Chamber of Commerce and the California Building Industry Association. Although a fix to this problematic limitation of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) is still necessary, the issue will be addressed this year by the California Supreme Court in the appeal of [California Building Industry Association v. Bay Area Air Quality Management District](#). PCL wants to see how the court resolves this critical issue before pursuing more legislative action. To stay updated on the case, visit [the case page](#) on the Supreme Court's website.

Next Round of Comments on CEQA Guidelines Updates Due Feb 14

The CEQA Guidelines provide guidance, binding on California agencies, on how to implement and interpret CEQA. The Governor's Office of Planning and Research began their [CEQA Guidelines update](#) this past summer, and are looking to make it the most comprehensive revisions in two decades. Updates mandated by SB 743 (Steinberg) replacing Level of Service and parking with other metrics aimed at promoting more infill and reducing GHG emissions, must be completed by July 1; OPR hopes to have the other Guideline Updates done at the same time or shortly thereafter. A [preliminary report](#) on traffic metrics has already been released. OPR is considering a vast array of procedural and substantive changes to CEQA, and they want input from the public and organizations that deal with the law on the ground. Particularly helpful would be comments giving specific suggestions for how to deal with problems, such as how to address the issue of displacement that accompanies infill. You can view PCL's first round comments [here](#). **The next round of comments is due on February 14, 2014.**

Majority Leader Toni Atkins Named Next Assembly Speaker

Assembly Majority Leader Toni Atkins has been [named the next Speaker](#) of the Assembly, replacing current Speaker John Pérez later this session. Assembly Member Atkins has been a longtime environmental champion, boasting a lifetime 99% grade on [CLCV's Environmental Scorecard](#). PCL has had a strong relationship with the next Speaker as well, having sponsored the [coastal commission bill](#) (AB 976) that she authored last year, which earned her recognition as co-Legislator of the Year at our just-completed annual Symposium. It looks like Assembly Member Atkins's counterpart in the Senate will be Senator Kevin de León, who Senate President Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg has indicated will be the [next leader of the state Senate](#). With Senator de León, also a past recipient of PCL's Legislator of the Year award for his groundbreaking work on [SB 535](#), and Majority Leader Atkins taking the helms of their respective bodies, California's environment should be in good hands in the Legislature as both should build upon the past successes of Pro Tem Steinberg and Speaker Pérez.

PCL Legislative Director Abigail Okrent Moving On

PCL's Legislative Director, [Abigail Okrent](#), left PCL at the beginning of February to embark on a great American road trip. While only at PCL for a year-and-a-half, Abigail had a tremendous influence on the organization and statewide environmental policy. A strong advocate for community empowerment as well as environmental protection, she led PCL's amazing [work on CEQA](#) over the past year, including helping stave off egregious attacks on the law in the Capitol, developing a proactive CEQA-strengthening legislative agenda, organizing community CEQA workshops, and building strong coalitions around the law. Among her many other accomplishments, Abigail was instrumental in fighting off clandestine attacks on the California Public Records Act, which is vital for providing communities access to critical information to safeguard their environment and health. Abigail will be greatly missed at PCL, but we wish her well on her road trip and all her future endeavors. If you need to speak to someone at PCL about policy or legislative issues, please contact Water Campaign Manager Rebecca Crebbin-Coates at Rebecca@pcl.org.



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