



environmental
DEFENSE CENTER

FALL 2018 NEWSLETTER

THE BLOWOUT THAT STARTED THE MOVEMENT AND CREATED EDC



Photo: Bob Sollen

In January we will commemorate the 50th anniversary of the disaster that jumpstarted the modern environmental movement.

It all began on the morning of January 28, 1969. While the Union Oil crew on Platform A was retrieving pipe from the bottom of a well drilled five miles off Santa Barbara, something went terribly wrong: the well blew out. As oil began seeping up from the bottom of the ocean floor, so began one of the largest environmental disasters in U.S. history.

Oil saturated the Santa Barbara Channel and washed ashore for eleven days before the well at Platform A was capped—yet even after that, oil continued to seep up steadily through fractures in the ocean floor for several years. In the end, over three million gallons of oil were released, fouling miles of coastline, killing as many as 15,000 seabirds, and poisoning dolphins, seals, and sea lions. Santa Barbara's tourist-dependent local economy, businesses, property owners, and the local fishing industry all suffered extensive economic loss in the wake of the spill.

In the months and years that followed, this disaster led to

the bi-partisan enactment of some of the nation's most bedrock and enduring environmental laws, including the National Environmental Policy Act, Clean Water Act, Endangered Species Act, and the creation of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Here in California a citizens' initiative called Proposition 20 was passed in 1972, which led to the passage of the Coastal Act, one of the nation's strongest environmental laws. And as a response to the creation of the new discipline of environmental law, the Environmental Defense Center (EDC) was founded in 1977, when our prescient founders decided we needed an organization in place locally to utilize these new tools to better protect our environment.

Nearly fifty years later, the greatest irony is that while we look back at the devastation brought about by corporate greed, dangerous technology, and lack of oversight, the Trump Administration is trying to force California and the nation to greatly expand offshore oil drilling. Fortunately, EDC remains strong in our fight to protect our coast.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE CENTRAL COAST

In 2018, California released its fourth assessment of how climate change will continue to impact the Golden State. This comprehensive tool drew from dozens of new peer-reviewed studies and presents a sobering view of the future. The assessment clearly demonstrates that we must reduce our use of fossil fuels. The continued rise in greenhouse gasses will bring growing and severe consequences for drought, fire, threats to agriculture, loss of public beaches and coastal infrastructure, and escalating impacts on human health.

Human caused carbon emissions have already warmed California 1 to 2 degrees since the beginning of the 20th century. The assessment shows that this could rise to between 5.6 and 8.8 degrees by 2100, depending on our success in curtailing our dependence on fossil fuels. Below are some specific threats to our state and region, as well as a look at how EDC is working here at home to protect our climate.

AGRICULTURE

- 129 million California trees died due to climate change exacerbated droughts between 2012 and 2016.
- By the end of the century, we can expect a 10% reduction of wine grapes across the state.
- Warmer conditions are expected to increase exposure to various pests, impacting quantity and quality of crops.

HUMAN HEALTH

- Rising temperatures could cause up to 11,300 more annual heat-related deaths in California, costing the state up to \$50 billion a year by 2050.
- Health damage from higher temperatures could be worse in coastal areas with historically milder climates where residents are less acclimated to extreme heat and enjoy less access to air conditioning.
- Mosquitoes are adapting to warmer temperatures and bringing diseases like West Nile and Zika.

SEA LEVEL RISE

- California is now facing the extreme possibility that sea level rise could exceed 9 feet.
- Even in conservative scenarios, more than 250,000 residents, \$38 billion in property, and 1,400 miles of roads along the coast are at risk of flooding during a severe storm in southern California.
- Southern California beach cliffs could crumble at more than double the historical rate—an estimated 62 to 135 feet of recession.
- We could see 67% of our beaches lost by 2100.

WATER

- CA snowmelt will be reduced by as much as 80% by 2100. That would mean less water flowing into reservoirs in summer when the need is greatest.
- By 2050, drinking water supplied by mountain ice pack is anticipated to decrease by two-thirds.

FIRE

- We have already seen significant increases in the duration of fire season. The number of large fires in California will likely increase by 50% by 2100, and the amount of land that burns will go up 77% per year.
- A measurable decrease in summertime cloud cover across southern California has already created prime conditions for wildfires.

EDC'S CLIMATE ACTION

EDC is committed to ensuring that our region minimizes the catastrophic impacts of our changing climate. EDC's staff are at the forefront of the effort to prevent massive expansions of oil drilling, fracking, acidizing, cyclic steam injection, steam flooding, and other dangerous and climate-harming oil extraction both on and offshore. EDC was formed as a response to the 1969 Santa Barbara Oil Spill, and as we approach the 50th anniversary of this disaster, here is a quick look at some of what EDC is doing to make a difference for our climate and future.

FIGHTING TRUMP'S OFFSHORE OIL LEASE EXPANSION

EDC sponsored and worked tirelessly to successfully pass important legislation in Sacramento to prevent the state of California from allowing new oil from coming to our shores. EDC also represents the Sierra Club Los Padres Chapter and Get Oil Out! in fighting Trump's plan for more oil leases. We submitted comprehensive comments on the Draft Proposed Program this spring and will be leading the effort to continue this fight in the next round for as long as it takes.

FIGHTING A MASSIVE ONSHORE OIL EXPANSION

EDC represents the Sierra Club Los Padres Chapter in the effort to deny Aera, ERG, and PetroRock permits to use dangerous techniques of cyclic steam injection and steam flooding for their three projects, totaling 750 new wells, which would more than triple current oil production in Santa Barbara County.

WORKING AGAINST FRACKING AND ACIDIZING IN THE SANTA BARBARA CHANNEL

EDC represents Santa Barbara Channelkeeper and ourselves in a first-in-the-nation lawsuit against the federal government for inadequate permitting of dangerous oil extraction techniques which put our climate, marine life, and clean air and water at risk.

RECENT VICTORIES:

EDC played a lead role in the successful effort to stop mile-long oil trains from passing through Ventura, Santa Barbara, and San Luis Obispo Counties; we helped make enormous strides against the Puente Gas Power Plant on Oxnard's coast; we helped bring about the anticipated decommissioning of Platform Holly; and recently celebrated the end of the threat of the Paredon oil drilling project on and off the coast of Carpinteria.

OIL & WATER

In July, EDC and co-counsel Lozeau Drury filed a lawsuit in federal court against the Pacific Coast Energy Company (PCEC) for violations of the Clean Water Act. The lawsuit regards polluted runoff from PCEC’s Orcutt Hill oil field which has been flowing into nearby Orcutt Creek and San Antonio Creek and ultimately into the Santa Maria River and the Pacific Ocean. PCEC was in the news back in 2016 when the company applied to expand its oil operations from this very field with more than 100 documented oil spills. EDC helped convince the County to deny that project, and this lawsuit demonstrates that PCEC’s operation is still a long way from clean.



TRUMP ATTACKS

The Trump Administration’s environmental policies represent a direct assault on our climate, clean air and healthy ecosystems, and our values. Over the less than two years the president has been in office, we have seen unrelenting challenges to our climate, giveaways to polluting industries, and attacks on potentially life-saving regulations. EDC continues to stand up with our environmental and community partners on many

fronts. Obviously, EDC has taken a leadership role on climate by fighting new offshore oil leases, but we have also been fighting back against Trump’s threats to the Endangered Species Act, Marine Mammal Protection Act, Coastal Zone Management Act, and the National Environmental Policy Act, to name a few. The threats are everywhere, but EDC, our clients, and our partners will not back down.

EDC’S LEADERSHIP EXPANSION

We are thrilled to welcome Leanne Schlinger Diebolt as the most recent addition to EDC’s board of directors, bringing extensive business, nonprofit, and environmental experience to the organization’s leadership. Leanne has led Santa Ynez Vacation Rentals since she founded it in 2006. A recent “40 under 40” award recipient from the Pacific Coast Business Times, Leanne graduated cum laude from UCSB with a degree in Law and Society. Beyond EDC, Leanne serves on the board of the MOXI, the Granada Theater, and the President’s Council for the Community Environmental Council.



“We made the decision to join the Environmental Defense Center’s Legacy Society because it has never been more clear that we need strong defenders of our current laws (and strong supporters of additional laws where needed) if we are going to win the fights for our climate, our clean water, and our precious coastline. By leaving something in our estate plan for EDC, we know we are helping to ensure that future generations will still be able to enjoy the pristine trails, beaches, and views that make our home so special.”

-Gloria & John McManus



Photo: Christina McGinnis

GAVIOTA COAST PLAN—GETTING CLOSER

EDC has been a strong voice throughout Santa Barbara County’s process to establish a Gaviota Coast Plan that will determine the future preservation and development of this iconic coastline. In a positive step forward, we helped urge the California Coastal Commission to make modifications to the County’s Plan, including enhanced protections for environmentally sensitive habitats, agriculture, public access, views, and cultural

resources. These changes are necessary to bring the Plan into compliance with the Coastal Act, but ultimately must be approved by the County (This could happen at a meeting taking place while this newsletter is being delivered to your mailbox). The Gaviota Coast is the largest remaining rural coastland in Southern California —home to 1,400 species and their habitats, working ranches, and farms.



STAFFING UP OUR LEGAL TEAM

We are pleased to announce Kathy Hunt joined the EDC team last month as our Legal Assistant and will be assisting our attorneys with legal and administrative support, research, and case investigation. Kathy moved to Santa Barbara recently from Massachusetts, drawn to the beauty and recreational opportunities our region has to offer. Most recently, she interned for the International Fund for Animal Welfare, and before that she practiced law in Michigan. Kathy is an avid cyclist, and her favorite ride is up Gibraltar.

THANK YOU

TO OUR GENEROUS SPONSORS OF THIS YEAR’S GREEN & BLUE: A COASTAL CELEBRATION

Every year it just keeps getting better, and we could not do it without your support!

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Photos: Laurie Bailey



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MISSION STATEMENT

The Environmental Defense Center protects and enhances the local environment through education, advocacy, and legal action.

FOCUS

Since 1977, we have empowered community-based organizations to advance environmental protection. Our program areas include protecting coast and ocean resources, open spaces and wildlife, and human and environmental health. We primarily work within Santa Barbara, Ventura, and San Luis Obispo counties.



UNDERWATER PARKS

EDC is the co-chair of the Santa Barbara Channel Marine Protected Area (MPA) Collaborative, a group tasked with supporting our local network of underwater parks. In this region, 17 MPAs provide critical habitat and protected areas for thousands of marine plants and animals, as well as diverse recreational opportunities for swimming, diving, boating, and limited fishing. Over the last 40 years, we have seen a decline in biodiversity that creates vulnerability to threats, such as invasive species. Fortunately, studies show MPAs are proving successful in protecting against these threats and the degradation of ocean resources. Most recently, EDC and our partners have produced educational materials (available on our website) to help inform boaters and divers about invasive species and how to prevent their spread.