

environmental
DEFENSE CENTER

FALL 2019 NEWSLETTER

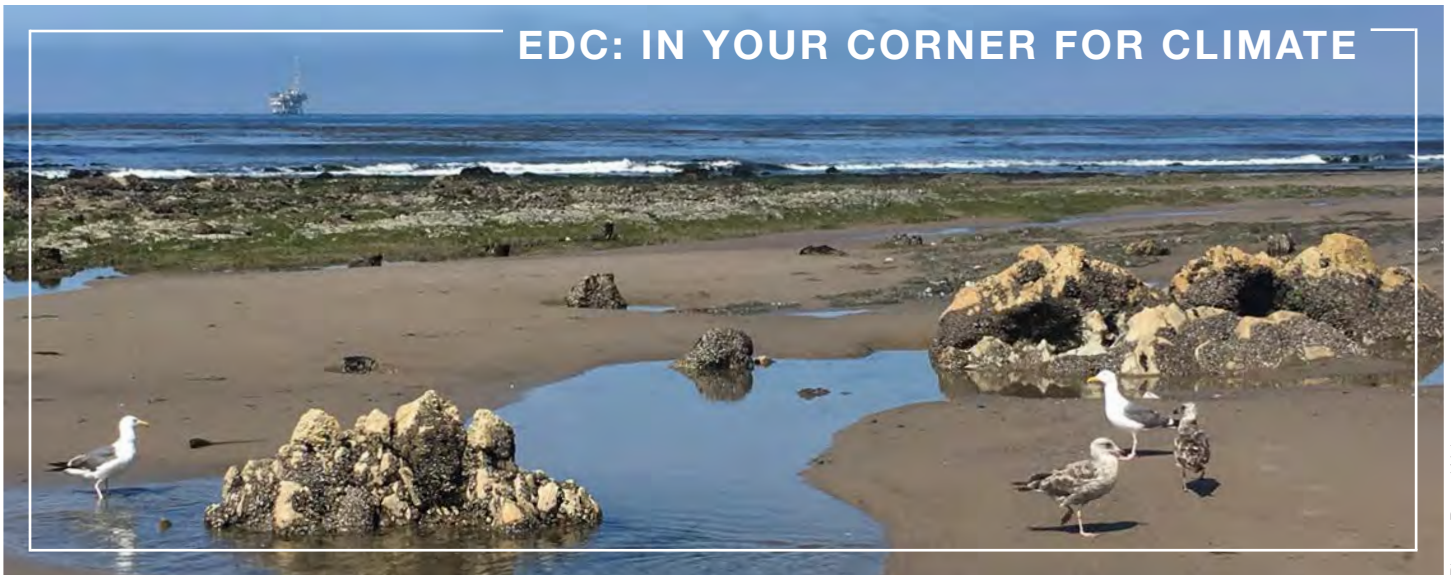


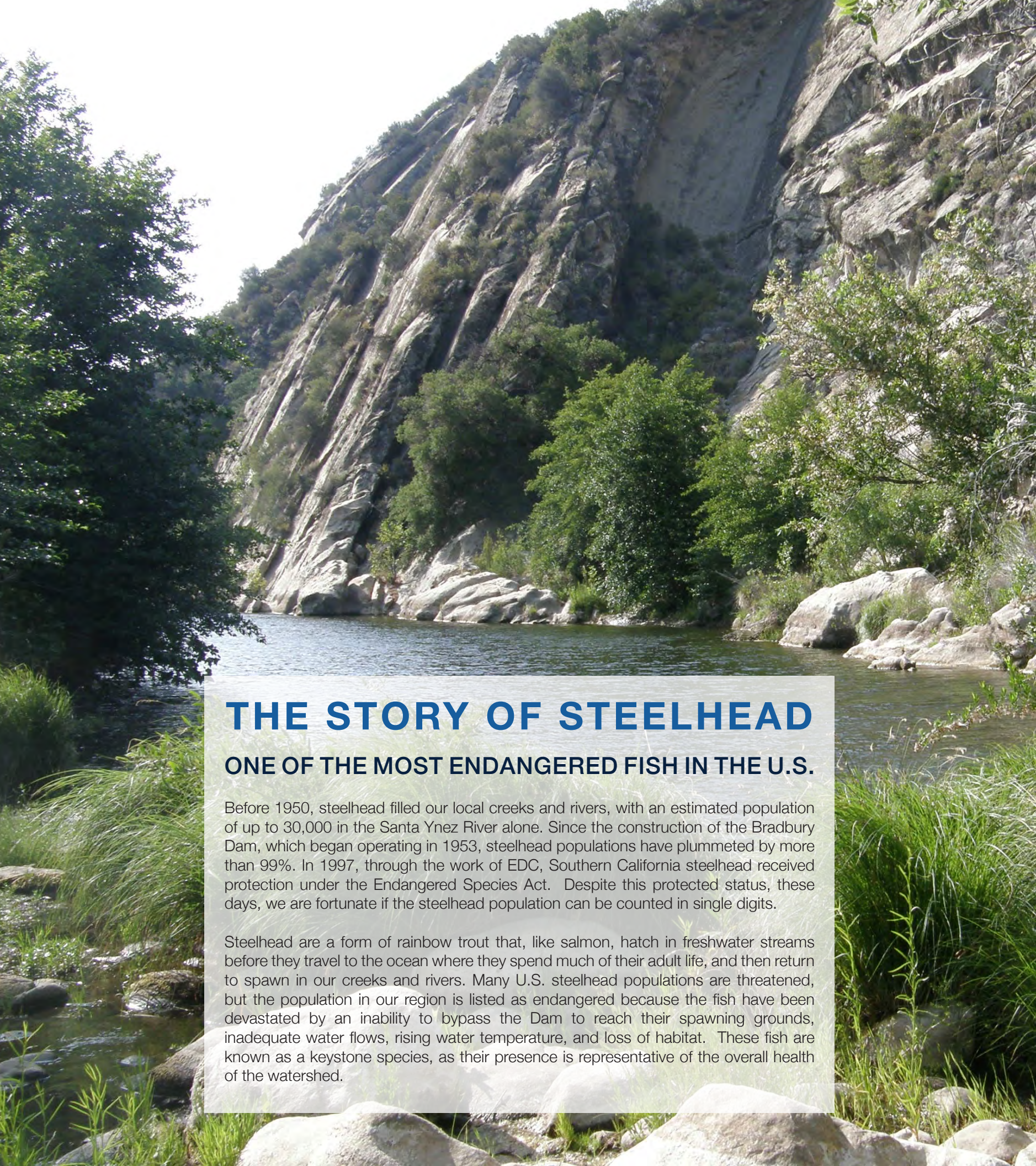
Photo: Betsy Weber

The “debate” may still be popular on cable news and in some political campaigns, but the reality of global warming is already upon us. Our small corner of the world is already impacted, facing prolonged droughts, reduced cloud cover leading to excessive heat, and a wildfire season that now stretches through most of the year. And study after study shows this is just the beginning. We have all seen the reports on sea level rise, mass extinctions, severe impacts to food production, loss of snowmelt, and ever-increasing threats to human health. To protect those most at risk, we must act now, make bold choices, and cut carbon emissions.

The Environmental Defense Center (EDC) continues to be a climate leader, representing fellow nonprofit organizations in the fight against irresponsible fossil fuel projects on land and at sea. You may have heard of EDC’s work to prevent the Trump Administration from moving forward with the first federal oil lease sales offshore California since Reagan was president, our fight against a potential tripling of onshore oil production in Santa Barbara County, and our continued legal battle against fracking and acidizing in the Santa Barbara Channel. Another climate related case that EDC is pursuing has so far received less attention. But that is going to change soon.

EDC is working to ensure the decommissioning of oil platforms off our coast! Back in 2017, EDC successfully ended a 20-year fight against Venoco’s desired oil drilling expansion from Platform Holly. This led to the company’s bankruptcy filing and permanent shutdown of the Platform, which had been operating since the 1960s. At least seven other platforms will also be decommissioned soon, including two platforms offshore Carpinteria, which were forced to stop producing after EDC and our clients fought for years to successfully terminate the associated state leases. And this is just the start. With the era of easy to access oil already behind us, the writing is on the wall for a number of other platforms in the Santa Barbara Channel, and EDC is working to help ensure their decommissioning and removal, to ensure no future oil company has the opportunity to use them as a base for fracking, acidizing, or other climate-jeopardizing oil production boosters.

Climate change is the most important issue of our time and EDC will continue to lead the fight to reduce carbon emissions and to help make the way for the essential transition to safe, clean energy.



THE STORY OF STEELHEAD

ONE OF THE MOST ENDANGERED FISH IN THE U.S.

Before 1950, steelhead filled our local creeks and rivers, with an estimated population of up to 30,000 in the Santa Ynez River alone. Since the construction of the Bradbury Dam, which began operating in 1953, steelhead populations have plummeted by more than 99%. In 1997, through the work of EDC, Southern California steelhead received protection under the Endangered Species Act. Despite this protected status, these days, we are fortunate if the steelhead population can be counted in single digits.

Steelhead are a form of rainbow trout that, like salmon, hatch in freshwater streams before they travel to the ocean where they spend much of their adult life, and then return to spawn in our creeks and rivers. Many U.S. steelhead populations are threatened, but the population in our region is listed as endangered because the fish have been devastated by an inability to bypass the Dam to reach their spawning grounds, inadequate water flows, rising water temperature, and loss of habitat. These fish are known as a keystone species, as their presence is representative of the overall health of the watershed.

VICTORY FOR STEELHEAD

This September, EDC and our client, California Trout, celebrated an important victory for the critically imperiled Southern California steelhead trout in the Santa Ynez River. For almost 20 years, EDC has been working before the State Water Resources Control Board to improve water management on the Santa Ynez River to benefit the endangered steelhead. At its Sacramento hearing, the Board adopted a significant Order requiring improved water flows and critical studies to benefit steelhead, such as the potential for fish passage over the Dam and other improvements to habitat.

This victory is very important for steelhead, but it is also worth noting that what we have been seeking will not affect local water supplies. Increased water releases will only be required in wet or above normal rainfall years. The releases will also be modified to mirror the natural life cycle of the fish, migrating from the ocean to the River. And of course, water released is never wasted. Regardless of when it is released, it will travel downstream, benefitting communities and agriculture, and ultimately recharging groundwater. A healthier river will support other wildlife, recreation, and ecological viability.



Photo: Mark Capelli, NOAA



Photo: Mauricio Gomez



“The Santa Ynez River steelhead population – once the largest in southern California – was nearly wiped out by the [Bradbury Dam] and only 1% of the population remains. The Order charts a path forward to a future in which steelhead can thrive and we can have an ample water supply for future generations.”

—Brian Trautwein, EDC



Photo: Brian Trautwein

OIL PROPOSALS THREATEN OUR CLEAN ENERGY FUTURE

Right now, Santa Barbara County faces a tripling of onshore oil production. Three oil companies propose over 700 new wells in Cat Canyon, posing dangerous threats to clean air, clean water, public safety, and our climate. What's more, these oil companies are not proposing conventional oil drilling, which is risky enough, but rather they are seeking permits for an enhanced oil extraction method known as steam injection which is far riskier and more energy intensive. This technique uses enormous quantities of water and toxic chemicals, and threatens wildlife and our communities. Additionally, these projects will require the destruction of native habitats, the removal of hundreds of mature oak trees, and will bring hundreds of oil tanker trucks through local roads every day. While these projects have faced some delays in the permitting process, they will be moving forward again this year.

To make matters worse, the oil companies seek to dispose of their toxic waste into underground aquifers, threatening water supplies that are critical for drinking and agriculture. EDC is taking the lead in urging the State of California to protect our waters by refusing to grant the companies an exemption under the Safe Drinking Water Act. At a minimum, the State should wait for completion of a pending U.S. Geological Survey study of Cat Canyon Oil Field and the impacts on water in the area. If necessary, EDC will take our fight to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. EDC is representing Sierra Club, SBCAN, and our own members in these cases.



CLEANING UP GOLETA WATERSHED

This summer, EDC has been leading a series of cleanups with heroic teams of volunteers venturing into Goleta's urban creeks in an effort to remove the large amount of accumulated trash before winter rains wash it into the ocean. To date, almost 40 volunteers have removed more than 4,251 pounds of trash out of Devereux, Glen Annie, San Pedro, San Jose, and Maria Ygnacio Creeks. We also identified pollution sources and collaborated with the City of Goleta to address stormwater violations and illegal dumping. We have one more cleanup in October to wrap up this series. This work is important to protecting water quality and wildlife in the Goleta Valley, the Goleta Slough, and the Pacific Ocean, and we thank the many volunteers who have joined us in this effort.



Photo: Ronald William & Lighthawk

VICTORY FOR VENTURA

Congratulations to our partners CFROG, Los Padres ForestWatch, and others for their recent victory in the fight for proper oversight of Ventura County's oil and gas production. In September, the Board of Supervisors agreed that all new oil and gas projects should come under proper environmental review. The vast majority of the oil and gas operations in the County have been operating under antiquated conditional use permits, some that were issued more than a half century ago and before the California Environmental Quality Act. Years ago, EDC undertook some of the initial work on this issue, arguing to the Board that modern fracking must be subject to strict environmental review and that permits offered decades ago were insufficient for new applications. This victory will go a long way to ensuring clean water, safe communities, and environmental justice for all, and we appreciate our partners' determination in seeing this through to a win!



WHAT WILL BE YOUR LEGACY?

Earlier this year, EDC held our third annual Legacy Society appreciation reception, recognizing those amazing individuals who have chosen to include our organization in their estate planning. These generous commitments to EDC help secure the future of environmental protection throughout our tri-county region. EDC's Legacy Society members make pledges in any number of ways, many of which provide significant tax benefits, and all of which help preserve their legacy of a healthy environment.

For more information on our Legacy Society, please visit our website or contact Owen Bailey at obailey@EnvironmentalDefenseCenter.org.



EXXONMOBIL SEEKS TO RESTART OIL PLATFORMS AND TRUCK OIL ON LOCAL ROADS

ExxonMobil continues to push forward with its proposal to restart drilling from three offshore platforms that have been shut down since the devastating 2015 Refugio Oil Spill that dumped more than 140,000 gallons of heavy crude from the Plains All American Pipeline onto the Gaviota Coast and into the Santa Barbara Channel. The oil giant seeks permits from Santa Barbara County for 70 round-trip tanker truck transits, moving up to 470,000 gallons of crude oil on our local roads and Highway 101, every day for up to seven years. EDC and our clients, Get Oil Out! and SBCAN, are strongly opposed. We await the final Environmental Impact Report which should be released in the next few months.



FRACKING OIL COMPANIES

EDC continues to lead the fight against oil companies fracking and acidizing from platforms in the Santa Barbara Channel. On behalf of Santa Barbara Channelkeeper (SBCK) and our members, EDC secured a big victory last November, prohibiting the federal government from further permitting these dangerous techniques until the Fish and Wildlife Service fully reviews these practices for potential impacts to threatened and endangered species, including the Southern sea otter and the blue whale. The judge also ruled that these dangerous practices cannot occur offshore California until the Coastal Commission analyzes potential harm to our State's coastal zone. Of course, the Trump Administration and some oil companies filed to appeal the ruling soon after. EDC and SBCK have now filed our own appeal to fend off this effort and to ensure full review so that appropriate measures can be put in place to protect marine life, our coast, our economy, and our communities.

STAFF CHANGES AT EDC

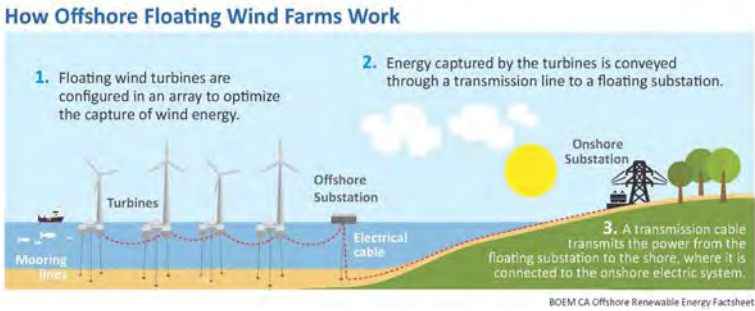
EDC recently welcomed three new staff members to our excellent team – Elizabeth Fisher, Daniel Elkin, and Jessica Dias, and at the same time promoted long-time Communications Director, Betsy Weber, to be EDC's new Assistant Director. Elizabeth joined as our newest Staff Attorney, bringing extensive experience with environmental law and in overseeing a diverse caseload with the Kern County Superior Court and Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals, as well as serving as the Assistant Solicitor General for the State of North Carolina. Daniel Elkin has taken over as EDC's Office Manager & Event Coordinator. Daniel is a recent graduate of UCSB's Bren School of Environmental Science & Management, and before that

served as the Outreach Coordinator at the Aquarium of the Bay in San Francisco. As our new Development Coordinator, Jessica brings experience in personal relations, database management, and event planning having worked in the banking industry, as an Executive Assistant for our friends at Allen Construction, and for a nonprofit land trust foundation in South Carolina. Finally, Betsy is EDC's first Assistant Director. She will continue to manage EDC's communications work, but in addition, this new position will better utilize Betsy's extensive experience as a leader, managing staff, and empowering her to reorganize internal operations to ensure maximum organizational efficiency. Each of these four staff members will make a significant difference in supporting EDC's work for this community.



BLOWING TOWARD A CLEAN ENERGY FUTURE

As the Central Coast grapples with the realities of climate change, EDC is helping lead the way toward clean energy alternatives. While fighting efforts to expand offshore oil and gas development, we are simultaneously supporting clean energy alternatives, which may include offshore wind. Since 2016, EDC has been participating in conversations about the thoughtful introduction of renewable energy production off California's Central Coast. While many offshore wind projects have been developed globally, the environmental impacts to the marine environment along our coastline will be unique, and technology will need to be developed to work in our deep waters. Instead of wind turbines that are anchored to the seafloor, developers will have to employ floating wind technology. To ensure robust analysis of impacts without unnecessarily delaying our shift to renewable energy, EDC has joined several national nonprofits and industry representatives to identify environmental issues that should be addressed early in the planning process. This includes identifying data gaps, research needs, and other information to ensure proper siting and development of offshore renewable energy projects.



GREEN & BLUE: WE COULDN'T DO IT WITHOUT YOU!

We had a lovely afternoon on June 2nd with more than 500 guests joining us for Green & Blue, our annual fundraiser in the gardens at the Stow House. Guests enjoyed delicious food and drinks, exciting silent and live auctions, and the presentation of our 2019 Environmental Hero Award to long-time community leader, Abe Powell. We are extending a huge thank you to our generous sponsors who helped make this event possible!

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Lee Heller
The Ojai Vineyard
Santa Ynez Vacation Rentals
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Paula & Richard Whited

Spark Creative Events
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The Tent Merchant
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Gail and David Teton-Landis
Jeremy Tittle
Trinity Episcopal Church
Ventura Citizens for Hillside Preservation
Cean & Mike Weber
Michelle Weinman
Janet and Harvey Wolf



Photos: Laurie Bailey



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DEFENSE CENTER

EDC STAFF

Owen Bailey, Executive Director
Jessica Dias, Development Coordinator
Daniel Elkin, Officer Manager & Event Coordinator
Elizabeth Fisher, Staff Attorney
Maggie Hall, Staff Attorney
Kristen Hislop, Marine Conservation Program Director
Linda Krop, Chief Counsel
Pearl Lee, Accounting Manager
Tara Messing, Staff Attorney
Brian Trautwein, Environmental Analyst & Watershed Program Director
Betsy Weber, Assistant Director

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EDC LAW CLERKS, INTERNS & VOLUNTEERS

Samantha Bertrand, Intern
Chelsey Ballot, Law Clerk
Natalie Doran, Intern
Alexandra Eisinger, Intern
Casey Powell, Law Clerk

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.

EDC is excited to announce three new additions to our board of directors: Lee Heller, Sabrina Venskus, and Naomi Kovacs. Lee rejoins the board after several years' absence and brings enormous experience with environmental and animal welfare charities. She was recognized for longtime commitments to our communities as a 2016 Cox Conserves Hero and one of Santa Barbara Independent's Local Heroes. Sabrina is the founder and principle attorney of Venskus & Association APC, a public interest law firm with offices in Los Angeles and Ventura Counties which specializes in environmental and natural resources, land use and zoning, housing rights, historic and archaeological resources preservation, energy regulation, and open government law. Naomi brings a wealth of experience from the nonprofit sector, having spent more than a dozen years working with community organizations in various capacities, and having spent several years in Santa Barbara County government working for County Supervisor Janet Wolf. All three bring invaluable leadership, environmental, and advocacy experience to EDC's leadership.