



The Environment and Energy

One of the major themes in California history since at least the progressive era has been controversy over the use and preservation of the state's natural resources. The controversy intensified in the decades following the observance of Earth Day, a nationwide demonstration in 1970 to dramatize environmental concerns. New groups joined forces with older conservation organizations such as the Sierra Club to lobby for the protection of California's land, air, and water. The environmental protection movement scored a series of impressive victories, both in the state legislature and through the initiative process. The opponents of the environmentalist however, argued that environmental legislation retarded economic development by harming the state's business climate. A fierce struggle between the forces of economic development and environmental protection was waged on many fronts.

By the early 2000s it had become apparent that environmental protection and economic growth were not mutually exclusive. Indeed, a clean environment and strong economy were both essential and compatible. "In the twenty-first century observed one veteran environmental strategist, "we have to think of a smarter and more sophisticated way to address the stale debate about the environment versus the economy." Likewise, the research office of the California senate, in a report titled *The Myth of Jobs vs. Resources*, concluded that on all economic measures "states with stronger environmental policies out-perform states with weaker policies."

Regional Protection

The first important victory for the environmental protection movement came in 1965 with the establishment by the state legislature of the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC). Uncontrolled filling of the bay during the previous century reduced its size by 40 percent, and conservationists warned that without effective controls the bay would eventually become little more than a river. The new BCDC regulated all developments in a 100-foot-wide bar around the bay shoreline and provided a useful model for the creation of other



Members of the Costanoan-Rumsen Carmel tribe dance to celebrate the restoration of wetlands at former Crissy Field on San Francisco Bay, November 9, 1999. (Photo by Liz Hafalia. Courtesy of the San Francisco Chronicle.)

regional agencies in the state. During its first 40 years of operation, the commission achieved a net gain of 14 square miles of surface water for the bay. The breaching of dikes around the bay's periphery restored hundreds of acres of wetlands drained more than a century earlier.

The BCDC was unable, however, to solve all of the bay's problems. Upstream diversions continued to diminish the flow of freshwater into the bay, and wastewater from irrigated lands in the interior carried huge loads of fertilizers, pesticides, and other toxic substances into the bay each year. As a result, the bay wildlife population continued to suffer a precipitous decline. The state Water Resources Control Board in 1995 found high levels of cancer-causing pollutants in the bay's resident harbor seal population and in several species of fish. The survival of native plants and animals also was threatened by the invasion of exotic species introduced into the bay by the flushing of contaminated ballast water from visiting ships. A federal report labeled San Francisco Bay "the most invaded aquatic ecosystem in North America."

More emotional fuel was added to the environmental movement early in 1969 when an offshore well of the Union Oil Company sprang a leak in the Santa Barbara Channel and smeared hundreds of square miles of ocean and 30 miles of beaches with oil. Dozens of species of shorebirds, marine mammals, and fish were adversely affected. In 1970 the state legislature, acting partly in response to the Santa Barbara oil spill, passed the California Endangered Species Act (CESA) to protect animal and plant species facing extinction, and the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The CEQA