

Ecosystems

In California, passage of water bills signals the start of a new era

In a year of budget cuts and partisan wrangling, nobody thought it could be done. But shortly before dawn on November 4, 2009, the California Legislature completed a monumental effort to overhaul the state's ailing water system. The New York Times called it the "most comprehensive" water package since the 1960s.

At drought-stricken farms and in meetings with the governor, his staff and other key players, EDF made sure the environment had a seat at the table.

Our challenge was how to provide for California's farms and growing population while leaving enough water in rivers for wildlife. Until now, despite three years of drought, regulations had failed to encourage the necessary conservation. Tensions were rising.

The problems all converged around the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta, the hub of California's water infrastructure. With the 1,300-square-mile Delta suffering from pollution and wetlands loss, we worked closely with other conservation groups, legislative leaders and water users to save the West Coast's largest estuary.

Decades of leadership by the late Tom Graff, our longtime California director, had won EDF the respect of major water users, allowing us to build consensus at a key moment. With our partners, we achieved a comprehensive package of reforms that for the first time make conservation a cornerstone of future water management.

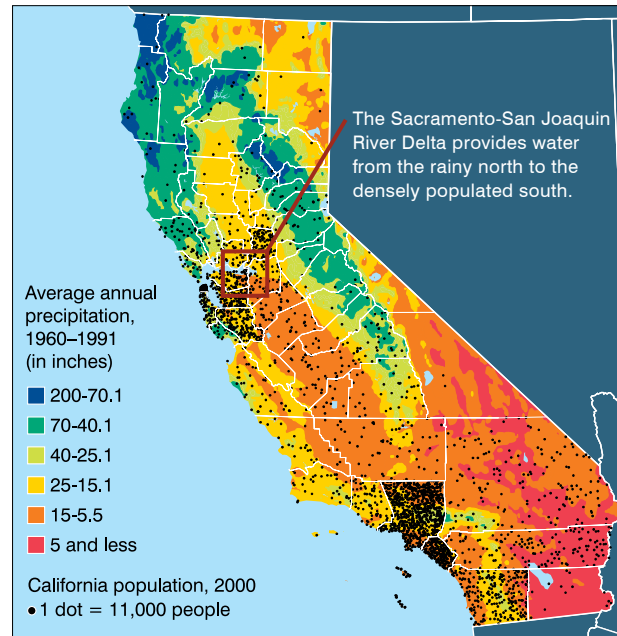
"A transformation has begun," says our regional director Laura Harnish. "We're moving from a model based on

conflict to one of collaboration and conservation. There's enough water for everyone—if it's managed rationally."

Among the reforms we achieved are: reduced reliance on water from the Delta, the assurance of enough water in streams for salmon and other wildlife and more resources to curb illegal water diversions.

The hard-fought bipartisan legislation also requires a 20% reduction of water consumption by 2020. That sets the stage for California's emergence as a wellspring of innovation in efficient water use. It could be the beginning of the end of the state's water wars.

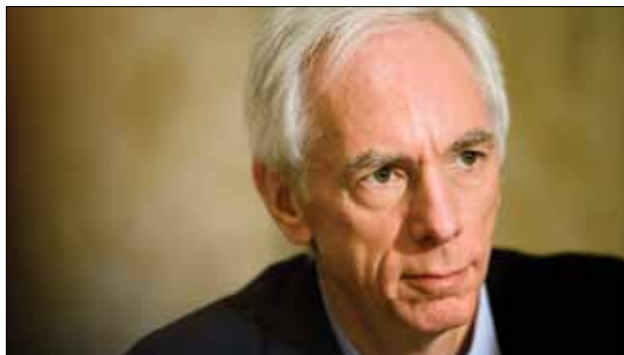
Meeting California's water needs



“EDF was among the big players in meetings with the governor’s staff and key legislators on solving California’s water supply problems.”

PHILLIP L. ISENBERG

CHAIR, GOVERNOR’S DELTA VISION BLUE RIBBON TASK FORCE



Farmers to the rescue

Fertilizer running off farms is a major contributor to the huge dead zone in the Chesapeake Bay, home to some 300 species of fish and birds. As a result, the Chesapeake’s oyster population has fallen to just 2% of historical abundance.

Now farmers are EDF’s partners in novel efforts to restore water quality. We’ve been offering farmers in key areas more accurate information on how much fertilizer their crops need, so they can reduce polluted runoff—and save money.

So far, farmers have enrolled more than a quarter-million acres around the Chesapeake Bay, Lake Erie and North Carolina’s Pamlico Sound, reducing fertilizer use on average by 20%. With many U.S. watersheds suffering harm from agricultural runoff, we’re working to incorporate our approach into federal guidelines.

Extending a welcome mat to wildlife

The red-legged frog, celebrated by Mark Twain, and myriad other species will benefit from a new plan protecting 28,000 acres of California habitat. This Safe Harbor agreement, based on an EDF concept, enables private landowners to help endangered species without fear of new federal restrictions. More than four million acres are now enrolled, protecting species like the San Joaquin kit fox and the northern spotted owl.

▶ **VIDEO:** See a landowner’s story at edf.org/houstontoad

46 states are predicted to face serious water shortages during drought conditions



LEVERAGING AN OPPORTUNITY

Protecting an endangered coastline

Before levees were built to control floods, the Mississippi River would deliver rich silt to replenish Louisiana’s coastline. Now the silt flows into the Gulf of Mexico, starving the wetlands of nutrients. Critical habitat is disappearing, and New Orleans is losing a life-saving buffer from hurricanes and floods.

Leverage point: In 2009, EDF joined with the State of Louisiana to help restore natural flows of freshwater and sediment to the wetlands. We’ve brought together diverse partners and helped direct \$100 million in state funding toward coastal restoration.

Allies: Government officials, Conoco Phillips

A donor’s perspective:

“We have an opportunity to protect coastal communities, change wetlands policy and create a model for large-scale restoration of freshwater ecosystems.”

R. KING MILLING

CHAIRMAN, AMERICA’S WETLAND FOUNDATION