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Equity groups encouraged by State Lands Commission's new Environmental Justice Policy

San Diego, CA—Yesterday, the State Lands Commission voted unanimously to adopt a new [Environmental Justice Policy](#) designed to support more fair and inclusive management of California's public lands. The revised policy incorporates many of the [recommendations](#) released in June by the Environmental Justice Working Group, a coalition of organizations representing environmental justice and Tribal communities throughout the state. The Working Group called the new policy a step in the right direction to honor the relationship of Indigenous Peoples to state lands, accelerate a just transition to clean energy, and reduce the impact of transportation and commercial activities on low-income communities and people of color.

"The concerns of disadvantaged communities have often been ignored while new energy or infrastructure projects impacting their lives and livelihoods are given the greenlight. We welcome the State Lands Commission's commitment to engaging historically marginalized groups in future decisions to ensure that our public lands are managed in a way that benefits all Californians," said Lupe Martinez, assistant director, Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment.

A three-member panel composed of California's Lieutenant Governor, Controller, and Director of Finance, the State Lands Commission manages more than four million acres of state-owned public lands. Through leasing and oversight, the Commission exercises authority over a range of key issues such as energy development, ports and transportation, public access to coastal and inland waterways, and prevention of marine pollution.

At the public meeting in San Diego, the State Lands Commission approved an updated Environmental Justice Policy that includes the following objectives recommended by the Working Group:

- Honor the importance of Native Californians' ancestral homelands
- Increase equitable public access to state lands and resources
- Practice inclusion of environmental justice communities in decision making
- Prevent pollution from oil and gas as well as ports and transportation
- Analyze benefits and burdens; distribute them more equitably

“With our coast being a prime recreation destination and a major target for new development, it is essential for agencies like State Lands to consider the needs of people as well as the environment. The debates over desalination in Orange County show how easy it is for land use decisions to overlook the needs of working-class communities,” said Marce Gutiérrez-Graudiņš, founder and director of Azul, who co-authored a series of [case studies](#) on environmental justice issues can come before the State Lands Commission. “This policy represents an important step towards more equitable coastal management.”

As part of the new policy, the State Lands Commission has laid out an implementation plan that includes reaching out to communities impacted by a proposed project, seeking input from California Native American Tribes, educating staff, hiring an environmental justice liaison, conducting an environmental justice analysis for future projects that impact vulnerable communities, and establishing an environmental justice advisory committee.

The State Lands Commission’s [recent request](#) to join litigation to stop the flow of toxic waste down the Tijuana River shows how the agency can support vulnerable communities by helping to reduce pollution and protect access to public lands and waters.

Environmental Justice Working Group members will continue to monitor the State Lands Commission’s implementation of the policy to ensure it is carried out effectively.

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Guided by the Principles of Environmental Justice and a recognition that indigenous peoples inhabited these lands before California was established, the Environmental Justice Working Group was convened in early 2018 to develop recommendations for the California State Lands Commission update of its Environmental Justice Policy. The EJWG is comprised of the following organizations working with EJ communities throughout California: Azul, Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment, Central Coast Alliance United for a Sustainable Economy, Communities for a Better Environment, East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice, Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability, Sacred Places Institute, Environmental Law Clinic at UC Berkeley, and WILD COAST.

[Azul](#) (Marce Gutiérrez-Graudiņš info@azul.org) is a San Francisco-based statewide organization working with Latinxs to conserve coasts and oceans. Campaigns include reducing plastic pollution, getting more Latinxs in marine advocacy, and protecting and enhancing beach access whenever possible--from advocating for low-cost, family-friendly beach accommodations to ensuring environmental justice is adequately considered within regulatory decisions.

[The Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment](#) (Lupe Martinez lmartinez@crpe-ej.org) is a San Joaquin Valley-rooted national environmental justice organization providing legal, organizing, and technical assistance to grassroots groups in low-income communities and communities of color. Campaigns include sustainable agriculture to combat the negative effects

of industrial agriculture, climate justice to address the disproportionate impact of climate change on low-income communities and communities of color, community investment and infrastructure for basic public services, and toxic free communities from waste dumps.

[Central Coast Alliance United for a Sustainable Economy](#) (Lucas Zucker lucas@causenow.org) builds grassroots power to realize social, economic and environmental justice for the people of the California Central Coast Region (the Counties of Ventura, Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo, Santa Cruz, Monterey and San Benito) through policy research, leadership development, organizing, and advocacy. Campaigns for environmental justice and health equity include fighting for clean air in Oxnard against power plants, stopping a hazardous metal scrapyards, protecting and restoring the Santa Clara River, and organizing for the Westside Community Park in Ventura.

[Communities for a Better Environment](#) (Bahram Fazeli bfazeli@cbeval.org) builds people's power in California's communities of color and low-income communities to achieve environmental health and justice by preventing and reducing pollution and building green, healthy and sustainable communities and environments. Campaigns include various projects in ending our reliance on fossil fuels and a Just Transition towards a clean green equitable economy, ending neighborhood oil drilling, watch-dogging refinery operations, enhancing access to clean mobility options in low income communities of color, promoting decentralized equitable clean renewable energy production, facilitating revitalization through community visioning and engagement towards promoting green zone and healthy land use practices, and working with various communities in Northern and Southern California in their struggle to reduce the health impacts from various industrial operations in their neighborhoods.

[East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice](#) (Taylor Thomas tbthomas@eycej.org) is an environmental health and justice organization working towards a safe and healthy environment for communities that are disproportionately suffering the negative impacts of industrial pollution in the local communities of Southeast Los Angeles and Long Beach. Campaigns include Green Zones land use policy development, I-710 corridor improvement project that safely plans for the region's goods movement growth, and the BNSF Southern California International Gateway (SCIG) railyard that threatens local communities and workers.

[Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability](#) is based in the San Joaquin and Eastern Coachella Valleys and works alongside the most impacted communities to advocate for sound policy and eradicate injustice to secure equal access to opportunity regardless of wealth, race, income, and place. Campaigns include healthy land use planning to address community-identified priorities such as increased park space and protection from industrial pollution; access to reliable wastewater and drinking water service; and climate resilience (includes both mitigation and adaptation).

[Sacred Places Institute for Indigenous Peoples](#) (Angela Mooney D'Arcy a.mooneydarcy@gmail.com) is an Indigenous-led, community-based organization that builds

the capacity of Native Nations and Indigenous Peoples to protect sacred lands, waters, and cultures. Campaigns include the Sacred Ecologies Program to respond to threats to sacred places and environmentally sensitive habitats, and the Indigenous Waters Program to protect fresh and salt waters and coastal resources.

[UC Berkeley's Environmental Law Clinic](#) (Roger Lin rlin@clinical.law.berkeley.edu) undertakes environmental and environmental justice projects local to global in scale, with a focus on critical needs, windows for political opportunity for progress, or both. Current cases and campaigns center on providing access to affordable energy in the San Joaquin Valley, advocating for greater public and worker health and safety protections in and around biomethane production facilities, and ensuring adequate and equitable access to nature.

[WILD Coast](#) (Paloma Aguirre paloma@wildcoast.net) conserves coastal and marine ecosystems and wildlife. WILD Coast's Border Program works to conserve over 18,000 acres of coastal ecosystems in the San Diego-Tijuana border region by addressing transboundary sewage, solid waste, and sediment that disproportionately affect south San Diego's low income and minority communities. Campaigns also include protecting mangroves in Mexico and Cuba; managing marine protected areas in California and Blue Carbon initiatives that help mitigate the effects of climate change.