



Association of Environmental Professionals

2017–2018 Public Policy Program

The Association of Environmental Professionals Is:

A not-for-profit association founded in 1974 by public and private sector professionals with a common interest in serving the principles underlying the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The specific and primary purposes of the association are to establish and operate a professional association of persons involved in and committed to improving the processing and implementation of environmental assessment, analysis, and reporting.

The AEP Membership

- Our membership consists of environmental professionals with expertise in environmental sciences, air quality, biology, archaeology and paleontology, land use planning, transportation, engineering, land use and environmental law, and other disciplines integral to the environmental review process.
- Our role is to represent common interests of environmental professionals, including but not limited to private consultants, public officials, and federal, state, regional, and local government staff.
- Our members are responsible for implementation of California's most important environmental protection laws, including CEQA, the California Endangered Species Act, the Global Warming Solutions Act, the Natural Communities Conservation Planning Act, the Planning and Zoning Law, and many others.

Mission of AEP

To enhance, maintain, and protect the quality of natural and human environment; encourage and carry on research and education for the benefit of the public and concerned professionals in all fields related to environmental planning and analysis; improve communication and advance the state of the art among people who deal with the environmental planning, analysis and evaluation process; and improve public awareness and involvement in the environmental planning, analysis, and review process.

Vision of the Public Policy Program

- To provide technical and policy expertise in the development of legislative proposals to maintain and enhance laws and regulations to protect the quality of the natural and man-made environments through the application of good science, careful planning, and informed decision-making.
- To lead in the design and implementation of sound environmental planning, analysis, and evaluation processes.
- To support balanced and informed decision-making through the timely and efficient implementation of CEQA's procedural requirements.

Serving AEP Membership and the Environment By:

- Improving communication among environmental planning professionals and advancing the science and art of environmental planning, analysis, and evaluation.
- Encouraging and supporting research and educational programs beneficial to the public interest in environmental management and planning.
- Enhancing, maintaining, and protecting the natural and human environments.

Enhance, Maintain, & Protect
The Natural and Human Environment



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Legislative Platform

Legislative Principles

- Serve the public and the legislative intent of CEQA by upholding public disclosure for CEQA documents.
- Foster ethical practice by environmental planners and practitioners.
- Encourage clear and implementable legislation through clarity and consistency in the statutory language.
- Ensure that thresholds and other metrics that are proposed in CEQA bills reflect the most current technology available, and that bills allow for advances in methodologies and technologies.
- Support the integration of environmental protection and planning by performing environmental analysis early in the process.
- Practice good science as essential to protecting the public interest in the built and natural environments.
- Ensure that CEQA remains a useful policy tool for elected officials and the public.
- Carefully evaluate the broader implications of project-specific bills and project-specific exemptions.

Legislative Goals

- Encourage and promote legislative proposals that enhance, maintain, and protect the quality of the natural and human environments through smart environmental planning, analysis, and assessment, and eliminate inefficiencies in the environmental planning, analysis, and evaluation process.
- Support continued collaboration with the American Planning Association and other planning and environmental organizations to promote appropriate changes to CEQA.
- Support amendments to restore the use of negative declarations in tiering.
- Support the creation of an electronic library for all CEQA documents.
- Support legislation to allow concurrent assembly of the Administrative Record during document preparation.
- Support legislation to curtail or limit abuse of the CEQA process for reasons other than environmental protection (e.g., economic, political).
- Support legislation to encourage timely submittal of comments in accordance with the public review periods mandated by CEQA.
- Support legislation that allows CEQA to address impacts on occupants of future projects that may be affected by existing environmental hazards (e.g., geotechnical, noise, air quality, on-site contamination).
- Broaden public awareness that the environmental review process is one part of an information continuum decision-makers rely on when deciding the future of land use, the environment, public health and safety, and the economic well-being of Californians. Other parts of this continuum include land use planning (general plans and specific plans), zoning, community values, and economic interests.
- Utilize the expertise of environmental professionals to assist the Legislature in improving California's environmental protection laws.



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Legislative Platform, cont.

Primary Areas of Interest

- Protect the integrity of the California Environmental Quality Act.
- Serve the public interest through sound environmental planning and design.
- Support science-based environmental regulatory programs.
- Protect natural resources through best management practices.
- Conserve and preserve sensitive environmental resources.
- Promote sustainable practices that minimize our “ecological footprint” and conserve finite resources for future generations.



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AEP on the California Environmental Quality Act

Background

CEQA establishes a process whereby state and local decision-makers in California holding discretionary authority to approve or deny actions or projects affecting the environment are informed and understand the range of environmental consequences resulting from those actions.

When used as intended, CEQA fosters innovation and adaptation in land use, environmental planning, and project design. CEQA provides decision-makers with the information necessary to balance the needs for environmental protection and public interest in a strong economy.

Core Values

- Full disclosure and accountability for all relevant information in the CEQA process are essential.
- Fair and unbiased presentation of all relevant and available information in the CEQA review process is a fundamental duty of CEQA practitioners.
- Transparency in the analysis, evaluation, and mitigation of unavoidable environmental impacts of a project subject to CEQA.
- All interested parties are entitled to fair and balanced access to the CEQA process.
- CEQA represents a process that is “part of the solution, not part of the problem.”

Guiding Principles

AEP *supports* proposals that:

- Enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of CEQA to achieve its original purposes.
- Limit the abuse of CEQA by deterring litigation for reasons other than protection of the natural and human environment.
- Encourage the submittal of written comments during the public review periods mandated by CEQA.
- Clarify that CEQA should address impacts on occupants of future projects who may be affected by existing environmental hazards (e.g., geotechnical, noise, air quality, on-site contamination).
- Strengthen the “tiering” relationship between CEQA documents.
- Provide for meaningful “in-fill” exemptions.

Proposals that would “streamline” the CEQA process should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, weighing the benefits of an abbreviated review and analytic process versus the public disclosure of a project’s environmental impacts.

AEP *opposes* proposals that would exempt projects from CEQA for the sake of expediency or at the expense of legitimate public interest.



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AEP on Environmental Planning and Design

Background

Environmental planning addresses the public interest in urban and non-urban open space, outdoor recreation, preservation of natural communities, habitat conservation, coastal planning, scenic values, and other attributes of our physical environment.

Environmental planning also includes assessment of and planning for threats to public health and safety caused by potential earthquakes, flooding, and wildfires.

Core Values

- California's great diversity of natural environmental attributes is inseparable from the quality of life Californians have come to expect.
- Landscape diversity is as essential to the health and well-being of all Californians as it is to the thousands of plant, animal, fish, and invertebrate species that define California's landscapes.
- Analysis and evaluation of a landscape's "natural holding capacity" must be based on best available scientific information.
- Determining the sustainability of natural communities requires the ability to identify, measure, and forecast relevant environmental change over long periods of time.

Guiding Principles

AEP *supports* proposals that:

- Further the integration of environmental planning with land use and transportation planning.
- Provide for sound environmental design and sustainability.
- Provide for the effective preservation of landscape diversity.
- Establish clear guidelines for the protection of public health and safety from environmental hazards.

AEP *opposes* proposals that would diminish the environmental planning principles underlying the California Coastal Act, the Natural Communities Conservation Planning Act, the Williamson Act, and similar laws.



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AEP on Biological Resources Conservation

Background

California is home to thousands of native plant and animal species, some found nowhere else in the world. The continued existence of many of these species in California is threatened by many factors.

The California Endangered Species Act, the Natural Communities Conservation Planning Act, and other sections of the Fish and Game Code are the principle laws guiding state policy with respect to the conservation of biological resources and special status species.

The continued existence of special status species is one measure of the health of the California environment. The loss of a special status species can start a chain reaction affecting the viability of other, more-common species and, potentially, can adversely affect habitats supporting other native and special status species.

Special status species are often best protected through an ecosystem preservation approach that relies on landscape-level conservation planning.

Core Values

- Conservation of California's native wildlife and special status species, their habitats, and unique and dwindling wetland and riparian resources is intrinsically and consistently supported by a vast majority of Californians.
- The conservation of unique biological resources, habitats, and special status species is a critical factor in sustaining broader habitat areas that support large and diverse populations of other, more-common native species.
- It is possible and desirable to strike an acceptable balance between viable economic development and effective conservation of native and special status species and their habitats.

Guiding Principles

AEP *supports* proposals that:

- Aid in the protection of special status species and their habitats.
- Promote natural species diversity.
- Support research leading to the recovery of at-risk species.
- Support the acquisition and conservation of critical habitats.
- Ensure no net loss of sensitive habitat through enforceable mitigation measures.

AEP *opposes* proposals that would:

- Lessen protections for special status species.
- Adversely affect the ability to preserve wetland/riparian resources.
- Degrade the habitats of native species.
- Limit or reduce the practicality of landscape-level conservation and protection of species and habitats.



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AEP on Climate Change and Sustainability

Background

Global warming—its causes and effects on climate change—is perhaps the most important environmental issue of our time.

California's Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006 ("AB 32") establishes a goal of returning California to 1990 levels of greenhouse gas emissions by 2020. Senate Bill 32 ("SB 32") continues the efforts started in AB 32 and establishes a goal of reducing GHG emissions in California to 40 percent below 1990 levels by 2030. By executive order, the governor has also established a goal of reducing GHG emissions to 80 percent below 1990 levels by 2050.

Reducing GHG emissions in accordance with these goals will require extraordinary effort. Among other things, projects subject to CEQA will be required to reduce their "carbon footprint" before securing the necessary permits to proceed.

With the enactment of SB 375 in 2008 and SB 743 in 2013, important links between land use, regional housing needs, and regional transportation plans are established for the purpose of meeting regional GHG emission reduction goals to be set by the state.

Core Values

- All sectors of the economy should contribute on a fair-share basis to reducing GHG emissions.
- Essential to attainment of the state's GHG emissions reduction goals is a verifiable and transparent accounting system that tracks the GHG reduction commitments of California businesses.

Guiding Principles

AEP *supports* proposals that:

- Encourage air districts and/or other agencies to adopt "significance thresholds" for GHG for the purposes of CEQA analysis that provide "substantial progress" toward the ultimate goal, but are not currently set based upon the level of reductions needed to achieve the 2050 goal.
- Use the AEP Climate Change White Papers in developing protocols for community-wide GHG emissions inventories for use in Climate Action Plans in California.
- Support efforts such as SB 32 that provide "substantial progress" toward the ultimate 2050 goal incrementally in order to allow technology and society to transition.
- Improve the California Green Building Code to reduce energy consumption and increase the use of renewable energy in California.
- Encourage infill and mixed use development near transit centers.
- Encourage development of sustainable communities that balance jobs and housing to reduce vehicle miles travelled.

Proposals that would expand CEQA streamlining processes to include projects other than qualified housing and transportation projects should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.