

**California Lawyers for the Arts**  
**Arts and Environmental Dialogue**  
**Sierra Health Foundation**  
**Sacramento**

**January 17, 2013**

*One thing that will become clear in this search for solutions to the environmental crisis is that many of the solutions will be found outside the environmental sector in alliance with communities of concern that are not in the first instance, environmental... Given the tendency of environmentalists and almost all other communities of interest to work mainly with ourselves, when one does goes trapped, there are few friends to help out.*

From *The Bridge at the Edge of the World*,  
James Gustave Speth, Yale University

**Summary of Events**

On January 17, California Lawyers for the Arts presented its third Arts and Environmental Dialogue at the Sierra Health Foundation in Sacramento, selecting “Water” as this year's theme. Representatives from the artistic, scientific, educational, environmental, legal, and governmental communities explored how art could raise awareness of environmental issues, including climate change, recycling, and conservation. The initiative gave special attention to the history, as well as the challenges and opportunities presented by the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta ecosystem. Hosts from CLA’s mediation panel led group discussions and facilitated the conceptualization of new projects. This report summarizes the highlights of the day, and describes several projects that are now under construction.

Major funding for this initiative was provided by the National Endowment for the Arts and the California Arts Council, with support from the Sacramento Metropolitan Arts Commission, the County of Sacramento, and the Sierra Health Foundation. Sponsors included Remy, Moose, Manley, LLP; Randy Sater of Stonebridge Properties; Christopher Neudeck of Kjeldsen, Sinnock & Neudeck, LLP; Grace Bergen, Esq., and Therapists for Social Responsibility.

The day began with opening remarks by **Ellen Taylor**, Director of Sacramento Programs for California Lawyers for the Arts, discussing the serious environmental issues that we are currently facing, and the need to bring awareness to our leaders and the public about these issues.

Next, **Alma Robinson**, Executive Director of California Lawyers for the Arts introduced CLA, and discussed how creating alliances between professional communities could help confront these challenges.

**Shelly Willis**, Interim Director of the Sacramento Metropolitan Arts Commission, expressed hope that the event would lead to environmentally conscious public art projects in our communities.

**Devorah Major**, the event's facilitator and 3<sup>rd</sup> Poet Laureate of San Francisco, outlined the day's agenda and goals. She expressed her hope that the three working sessions planned for the afternoon would lead to the development of tangible projects. To set the stage for the day's dialogue, Devorah introduced three film clips:

- ^ *Waste Land*, which shows the transformation of a garbage dump in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, into a recycling center. "What I really want to do is change the lives of a group of people with the same materials" said filmmaker-artist Vic Muniz
- ^ *Chasing Ice*, the product of 25 cameras placed for 3 years in Antarctica, showing changes in the glaciers and fissures in the ice over that time
- ^ *Landfillharmonics*, featuring music made by Venezuelan children using instruments made out of recycled materials. "The world sends us garbage, we send back music," said one of the children, "my life would be worthless without music"

Following the film clips, **Jeff Knorr**, Poet Laureate of Sacramento, presented several pieces of poetry. This set the stage for a discussion by **David Sandino**, Senior Staff Counsel for California Department of Water Resources and professor of Water Law and Environmental Law at various universities, and **Barbara Benish**, Director of ArtMill and research fellow at the Center for Sustainable Creativity at UC Santa Cruz.

David Sandino discussed the importance of the delta to California's ecosystem and culture. His discussion began with a survey of the various perceptions held of the delta, and what interests they represent:

- ^ Native Americans, having ancestral attachment to the land, who live and fish in the delta
- ^ Historians, studying the 19<sup>th</sup> century dredging operations that changed the delta from a natural ecosystem into a farming region
- ^ Chinese-Americans, having been brought into California to build railroads, who provided the labor to construct the delta's levees
- ^ Delta Farming Communities, growing crops in the delta region, who view it as "home sweet home"
- ^ River Cities, like Locke, Courtland, and Walnut Grove, which were founded as rest stops on the steamboat trip between San Francisco and Sacramento
- ^ Recreational Enthusiasts, enjoying the delta as a natural playground for fishing, bird watching, and hunting
- ^ Commercial Fishing Interests, concerned about the migratory salmon that pass through the delta and the impact this has on fish populations in the Pacific
- ^ Agricultural Interests, knowing that the soil in the delta region is very productive, yet fragile, and so something to be cherished and protected
- ^ Wine Tourism, benefiting from the fact that wine enthusiasts do not have to drive to Napa anymore
- ^ Transportation and commercial Interests, using the delta as a primary hub for moving agricultural produce out of the area

- ⤴ Environmental Interests, understanding that the delta is California's most important ecosystem, which supports an incredible amount of wildlife
- ⤴ Politicians, viewing the delta as a political hot spot. Every California governor faces issues associated with the delta. In this way, it influences state water policy and water law
- ⤴ Water Engineers, working to alter the delta. Large pumping plants take water from the delta and ship it to the Bay Area, the San Joaquin Valley and Southern California
- ⤴ Export Water Users, including Los Angeles and San Diego counties, who oppose anything that threatens the delta's dependability and sustainability
- ⤴ Artists, appreciating the delta as a source of inspiration

David Sandino also considered the problem of land subsidence, which is a critical issue in the delta. Some of the 60 delta islands, particularly those in the interior delta, function more like doughnut holes: they are no longer at river level or sea level, they have subsided. Some of them have subsided 20 feet, leaving a tremendous hole as nature reclaims them and fills them with water. Such reclamation has a negative impact on fish populations and water supply. This is caused by farming of the volatile soil on the islands, which results in soil erosion and loss. In 2004, the Jones Tract in the central delta flooded and in a matter of days turned into an inland sea. It took years and \$100 million to pump out the water.

Finally, David Sandino presented the question of the delta smelt, which may be among the most urgent. Fisheries are experiencing limited water supply, and as a result the fish population is suffering. More water allocated to fisheries means less water available for the San Joaquin Valley and the cities in the South. This causes the controversy of water for people versus water for fish.

Globally recognized artist **Barbara Benish** identified the real challenge as the promotion of environmental awareness through the creation of new images to reach and educate the public. She noted that all rivers flow to the sea, and that local harm eventually becomes global harm. Avoiding this will require changing our culture to one that develops and preserves water resources.

She introduced a project that has been proposed by UCSC's Social Practice Arts Research Center: the SS Palo Alto Art Park. The SS Palo Alto is a concrete tanker ship that was grounded offshore of Aptos in the 1920s. A wharf was built connecting it to the shore, in the hope that it would serve as an amusement destination. As it was never able to serve this purpose, SPARC proposes to turn the now-wrecked ship (which provides an artificial reef for the area's marine life) into an art park. It would feature sculptures and other art, but it would be more than an outdoor gallery. It would be a living lab for scientists and artists alike. Benish suggested that this would foster public awareness of the issues concerning the health of the ocean.

She also introduced the 5 Gyres Institute. This organization builds rafts out of discarded plastic bottles, and sails them from California to Hawaii. The goal of the organization is to raise awareness about plastic pollution in the world's oceans.

David Sandino and Barbara Benish then conducted a Q&A session regarding their presentations. They agreed that film and digital media have the greatest impact on political dialogue, while large scale art projects inspire awe and bring attention to environmental projects. The Spiral Jetty, an earthwork sculpture created from the salt of a dry lake bed, was a noted example of this.

Sacramento City Councilmember **Steve Cohn** followed with a discussion of how "in California, whiskey is for drinking and water is for fighting," centering on water issues that arise in the Sacramento area. He introduced the Sacramento Area Flood Control Agency, which was formed after a severe flood in 1987. One of the agency's most substantial projects has been to upgrade Folsom Dam, allowing it to operate more efficiently, as

more water can be released in anticipation of a big storm.

Another of the agency's significant projects has been to upgrade the levees throughout the region. While some of this work had been done during the 1990s in Natomas, the recent disaster of Hurricane Katrina has shown us that those improvements might not be enough. Since then SAFCA has worked to build broader, not just taller, levees.

Steve Cohn also spoke about the Sacramento Sanitation District and its work toward maintaining clean water in the Sacramento River. He expressed that this is an issue of importance not only to the Sacramento region, but to Southern California as well. His hope is that California is moving from a utilitarian view of water to a view that celebrates it. He expects that solutions to these problems will come from a collaboration of all sectors of society, from state government to local artists.



“The Delta” by Greg Kondos



“Delta Water” by Wayne Thiebaud

Following these presentations, dialogue attendees participated in a “World Café” workshop. The goal of this workshop was to identify the most urgent threats to the ecosystem of the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta and to develop ways for artists to become more involved in creating public awareness of those threats.

### **World Café Session 1: What are the Water Issues Facing the Sacramento region?**

*Divided into tables of 6-7 participants, attendees created a list of issues threatening water supply and environment. Some common issues emerged as each table reported its list. The issues selected for consideration in session 2 were:*

- ⤴ Water conservation and supply
- ⤴ Climate change
- ⤴ Floods & flooding
- ⤴ Pollution
- ⤴ Common ground between public and private spheres
- ⤴ Fish and endangered species
- ⤴ Reaching youth and communities with a limited voice
- ⤴ Allocation and supply (between humans and nature)
- ⤴ Drought, scarcity
- ⤴ Workable responses to crises
- ⤴ Water awareness

## **World Café Session 2: Promoting Awareness of Issues & Conflict Resolution**

*Each of these issues was assigned to a table and attendees were asked to move to the table that most interested them. Each table considered projects to address its issue, giving special consideration to the question: “How can we promote awareness and resolve conflict?” The tables envisioned the following projects:*

### Table 2: Climate Change

- ^ Podcasts showing current conditions along the Capitol Corridor rail line
- ^ Photo & video documentation of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta levee on a regular basis

### Table 3: Floods & Flooding

- ^ Public safety campaign to communicate potential flood levels in the event of levee failure
- ^ An artistic campaign to publicize potential flood locations through compelling design

### Table 4: Pollution: Groundwater & Fracking

- ^ The collaboration of art and science as vehicle and rationale for anti-pollution message
- ^ Social media infographics
- ^ A campaign to involve ranchers, farmers, and 4H organizations
- ^ The creation of recycling centers for unused pharmaceuticals
- ^ A partnership with PTAs to hold poster contests in schools

### Table 5: Endangered Species & Fishes

- ^ A “Fish Out of Water” sculpture project: the installation of a giant fish sculpture near the river as a receptacle for trash removed from it
- ^ Geo-caching treasure hunts along the river
- ^ A website that distributes stickers demonstrating a pledge not to pollute the river
- ^ A publicity campaign for the delta smelt- the biggest little fish in California

### Table 6: Common Use of Water vs. Privatization

- ^ Finding commonality between scientific and artistic vocabulary
- ^ Dissemination of memes (viral images) creating awareness of water use issues
- ^ Holistic management of water use based on ecologic design science

### Table 7: Reaching Youth & Communities with Unheard Voices

- ^ Addition of water awareness to the academic curriculum
- ^ Pairing of artists-in-residency with government agencies
- ^ Creation of interactive displays for education in public spaces
- ^ Resolution by public agencies that artists should create community awareness
- ^ Messaging on water bottles, milk cartons, paper bags, etc.

### Table 8: Allocation and Supply

- ^ Using art as a means to create common understanding
- ^ Unification of 100 water agencies in the state to share meaning through the arts

### Table 9: Policy Statewide

- ^ Increased connection of artists with policy makers
- ^ Increased connection of artists with voters
- ^ Pairing of artists-in-residency with government agencies

### Table 10: Creating Water Awareness

- ^ Inauguration of a water awareness-themed festival
- ^ Engaging the youth through school-supported design and essay contests

### **World Café Session 3: Breakout by Idea, Project, Interest, or Partnership**

*Tables were then asked to select their most promising projects, and consider the steps necessary to make these projects happen. The following six projects were decided upon:*

#### Table 1: California River Race and Festival

- ⤴ Organize a race or walk to converge on Discovery Park
- ⤴ Create stations for presentations and activities demonstrating people's impact on water
- ⤴ Incorporate a cleanup component to the race
- ⤴ Feature the “Fish Out of Water” sculpture
- ⤴ Provide performances for the convergence at Discovery Park

#### Table 2: Use of Social Media on Commuter Rail Lines

- ⤴ Engage tourism bureaus to develop opportunities for commuters to learn about water environments through art on trains and podcasts

#### Table 3: Connecting Artists with Agencies

- ⤴ Forge partnerships between county water and multi-service agencies and arts councils
- ⤴ Encourage the artistic community to attend public agencies' meetings
- ⤴ Lobby agencies to dedicate a percentage of their education budget to focused art projects
- ⤴ Partner with arts agencies, libraries, museums, water agencies, industry, and waste management

#### Table 4: Fish Out of Water

- ⤴ Call for local artists to become more involved in SMAC's Art in Public Places program
- ⤴ Install a sculpture filled with trash from the river
- ⤴ Involve the community in collecting trash from the river and filling the sculptures with it
- ⤴ Develop a website to publicize the installment, featuring webisodes of its progress
- ⤴ Create a social networking slogan, meme, or hashtag
- ⤴ Film the progress for compilation into a documentary

#### Table 5: Memes: Local Forums for Discussing Ideas

- ⤴ Reach out to local artists
- ⤴ Identify the best forums for communication (music, photography, internet, radio, public events)
- ⤴ Develop web based water-awareness memes

#### Table 6: Flood Elevation Markers

- ⤴ Support SAFCA efforts to reduce flood insurance costs by enlisting public involvement
- ⤴ Connect agency mandates with artistic vision and passion
- ⤴ Develop recognizable icons, branding, and interactive markers