

**STAFF REPORT
INFORMATIONAL
87**

A	Statewide	11/29/17
S	Statewide	S. Pemberton

**INFORMATIONAL UPDATE ON THE COMMISSION'S ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE
POLICY PUBLIC OUTREACH AND DEVELOPMENT**

The purpose of this staff report is to update the Commission and the public about efforts to update the Commission's Environmental Justice Policy, and to elicit feedback from the environmental justice community and others about the policy revision and its implementation. This staff report expands on the October 19 update ([Item 96, October 19, 2017](#)).

Staff created a dedicated website page on the Commission's website with information about the Commission's environmental justice policy update process and the initial draft revision. The page, which staff will update throughout the revision process, may be accessed at the following link: <http://www.slc.ca.gov/Info/EnviroJustice.html>. Staff also established a dedicated email account for public comment at the following address: environmentaljustice@slc.ca.gov.

A key objective of this staff report is to ensure that environmental justice communities and advocates can communicate their perspectives directly to the Commission. This is a critical step to developing the Commission's revised environmental justice policy and implementation plan.

In November 2017, staff participated in several outreach sessions with environmental justice communities in Fresno, California. On November 2, 2017, staff presented information about the Commission and its environmental justice policy revision to the Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability. Based in the San Joaquin and Eastern Coachella Valleys, the Leadership Counsel works alongside impacted communities to advocate for sound policy, eradicate injustice, and secure equal access to opportunity regardless of wealth, race, income, and place. The Leadership Counsel takes a holistic approach to environmental justice, pointing out that environmental justice involves everything that affects the physical environment. This includes access to public transportation, access to clean water, pesticide use, air quality, illegal dumping, and many other social equity issues. A central feature of the Leadership Counsel's advocacy is to educate both decision makers and environmental justice communities, including trying to change the perception that government cannot be trusted and that peoples' voices are not heard.

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On November 14, 2017, staff attended the Fresno Environmental Reporting Network meeting and convened an outreach session with environmental justice advocates and the public. At all three meetings in November, attendees shared concerns about the lack of public access to the San Joaquin River, and indicated that they would like to stay informed about projects related to the San Joaquin River. They indicated that in Fresno County, particularly in southern Fresno, email and the Internet is not accessible to many people. In-person meetings, radio advertisements, ethnic news media, and television advertisements are the best ways to connect with community members. Participants were also interested in learning whether land in the middle of the riverbed is privately owned, how mineral extraction is overseen, and about the applicability of the Public Trust Doctrine to groundwater management and regulation.

Environmental justice advocates often focus on the interconnectedness of issues and the importance of affordability and accessibility. For example, while public access to the water and public land is a priority for the Commission, it requires consideration of other holistic factors: whether public transportation is available, how large any nearby parking areas may be, and whether there is a cost to park or to otherwise access the water for recreational purposes. Meeting representatives noted that many disadvantaged communities in Fresno cannot readily access public lands under the Commission's jurisdiction because the city lacks public transportation to these areas and because parking and use fees are unaffordable for many individuals in disadvantaged communities. Participants explained that these factors have perpetuated the notion that rivers, lakes, the ocean, and the coast are only available to those who are wealthy. One example in Fresno is that the San Joaquin River is difficult to access because homes traverse the length of the river, making it difficult for the public to locate an access point without trespassing on private property. Often people do not know whether access points even exist.

Meeting participants expressed that environmental justice communities are often unfamiliar with the Commission and encouraged further outreach sessions in the communities to educate the public. Participants requested that the Commission's website and other information, including documents associated with leases and Environmental Impact Reports, be written more simply, in an understandable, nontechnical way, and with less acronyms. They suggest creating a fact sheet or one-page document in English and Spanish that summarizes key aspects of environmental documents, because they believe this would help the public, and environmental justice communities in particular, participate in government and express their perspective on proposed projects. Other suggestions include creating geographic staff contacts on the Commission's website to more easily identify staff assigned to specific regions, creating tailored listserves, and making maps available on the Commission's website that depict its jurisdiction throughout the State. Participants also requested that the Commission include information on its website about how the public can report problems occurring on lands under the Commission's jurisdiction, and establish a main point of contact for

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receiving reports about issues or problems involving lands and resources under the Commission's jurisdiction.

The participants noted that environmental justice communities care about the Commission's work and want to be involved and understood, and are similarly interested in being involved and heard by other state and local governments. They note that the Commission has an opportunity to make its environmental justice policy and implementation plan a model for other government agencies, and they encouraged staff to set the bar high. They also emphasized that public access to public lands is paramount, and encouraged the Commission to make guaranteeing public access core to its mission and vision. Another key suggestion is to improve language access on the Commission's website and meeting agendas, including making the information available in Spanish.

Commission staff, together with Coastal Commission staff, have also worked with New America Media to explore ways that government agencies can use ethnic media to improve communication with disadvantaged communities. New America Media is an ethnic, community, and cross-cultural media organization devoted to expanding environmental justice opportunities in the media. In early November, however, New America Media announced that it was shutting down operations after nearly fifty years.

Ethnic media enables government agencies to reach an audience that their staff may not traditionally interact with, and be a helpful resource for the Commission as it strives to update its environmental justice policy and incorporate environmental justice principles into its work. Many people use ethnic media platforms, such as newspaper, radio, or television, to stay updated about current events and issues. Staff believes it is important to become more connected with ethnic media, because it is a likely pathway to achieving more meaningful engagement with environmental justice communities.

Staff will continue to keep the Commission updated about its progress.