

Karen Telleen-Lawton: Environment Is Alive and (Pretty) Well in Santa Barbara

Environmental Defense Center's top 10 accomplishments in 2011 represent a breadth and depth expected from a larger organization



The 1969 oil spill off Santa Barbara's coastline has spawned two generations of activism. (Karen Telleen-Lawton / Noozhawk photo)

By Karen Telleen-Lawton, Noozhawk Columnist | [Published on 01.16.2012 5:02 p.m.](#)



It's not news that Santa Barbarans are uber-involved in environmental issues given our birthright as home to the environmental movement. The legacy of the [1969 oil spill](#) has spawned two generations of activism. Nevertheless, I was surprised to realize just how much we accomplish in a single year.

Take the [Environmental Defense Center](#), for example. Its list of top 10 accomplishments in 2011 represents a breadth and depth you'd expect from a state or even national organization.

A brief encapsulation:

Demanding Truth-Telling and Cleaning Up After Oneself

The EDC convinced the county to adopt requirements for public disclosure and environmental review after fracking (hydraulic drilling) was discovered absent permits or notice in [Los Alamos](#). According to the EDC, "today's modern form of fracking ... poses new and unknown risks to environmental quality and public health, including potential drinking water contamination, groundwater depletion, air pollution, wildlife habitat destruction, and noise and light pollution." We may find that we are no worse off with modern fracking, but bringing projects into the light ensures we have a chance to study the situation.

The EDC also filed notice against [Multi-Chem](#) in April, alleging that the firm was violating its [Clean Water Act](#) requirements to monitor and report stormwater discharges. The lower Ventura River provides habitat for several endangered species and joins the Pacific just above Ventura's most popular surf spot.

Under a settlement agreement, Multi-Chem agreed to measures such as improving pollution control devices, working with the EDC on other changes and providing funding for independent water quality measures.

Free Whalie (and Oattie)

Marine mammals have a glamour factor, whether they're otter-cute or blue whale-enormous. But their value to the ocean ecosystem is unfathomable.

The [Santa Barbara Channel](#) is home to the densest population of blue whales on the planet.

The EDC improved cetacean protection on several fronts. It petitioned the [U.S. Coast Guard](#) to establish a 10-knot speed in [California Marine Sanctuaries](#), provided research to the [Coast Guard Port Access Study \(PARS\)](#) regarding moving shipping lanes, and delivered a formal notice to the [National Marine Fisheries Service](#) to demand performance under the blue whale recovery plan. It also sat on a Channel Islands Marine Sanctuary subcommittee on whale-ship strikes and engaged the community with outreach and education.

Otters' footprints are not as large, but their historical place in the Southern California ecosystem improved with EDC's support. The [U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service](#) repealed the "no otter zone" policy, legalizing the outlaw otters that have been spotted recently off our coast. The FWS predicts that the species' range will expand over the next 10 years to encompass the coastal waters of Santa Barbara and Carpinteria, and even as far south as Oxnard.

The Coast Isn't Clear

Gaviota and Oxnard are bookends for Santa Barbara's coastline. Even in poor housing markets, developers face critical pressure to build along our spectacular coast. EDC and other organizations toiled to prevent development at Naples, on the Gaviota Coast and at Ormond Beach in Oxnard. The EDC also helped protect agricultural land at Bishop Ranch in Goleta and Bailey Avenue in Lompoc.

Rounding out its top 10 were projects continuing the EDC's original legacy, protecting Santa Barbara's coastline. After more than a decade of work, the EDC was able to stop oil barging. All platform oil now travels through underwater pipeline to the coast.

And More ...

This seems like an exhaustive list of local environmental causes, but there was plenty of work for others to do. The [Community Environmental Council](#) concentrated on energy efficiency, alternative transportation and renewable energy. [Environment California's](#) work included supporting the plastic shopping bag ban, a million solar roofs, climate change and creating green jobs.

The [Land Trust for Santa Barbara County](#) continued its good work with local landowners permanently protecting acreage from development.

These organizations and others represent a legacy of good work that has benefited all of us and our descendants. Their plethora of accomplishments is dwarfed only by the endless tasks ahead.

— *Karen Telleen-Lawton's column is a mélange of observations spanning sustainability from the environment to finance, economics and justice issues. She is a fee-only financial advisor (www.DecisivePath.com) and a freelance writer (www.CanyonVoices.com).*