



Transcript of Video Interview with Peter Douglas, recorded August 2011.

This interview is part of Earth Alert's Heroes of the Coast video archive, featuring interviews with leading California coastal activists, past and present California Coastal Commissioners and Coastal Commission staff. For more information, visit www.earthalert.org.

Janet Bridgers (JB): Peter, in 1972, the voters of California passed Proposition 20, enacting the Coastal Act and creating the Coastal Commission. Why was this legislation important?

PD: Well, that's a very profound question, because I think the Coastal Initiative was a very visionary law and embodied so many fundamental principles that changed the way that we were looking at land use, environmental stewardship and basically protecting resources for current and future generations.

So, for example, incorporating the precautionary principle, which hadn't been done before, incorporating a change in the burden of proof that basically anybody who wanted to change the status quo would have to prove that their project would not have an adverse environmental impact, as opposed the government having to show why a project shouldn't be approved. That was significant.

The fact that it was the people who spoke to protect and stepped forward to protect their precious resources—the coast—making it the People's Law, was huge. The fact that it created an independent commission whose members were appointed by a variety of appointing authorities, so that no one ideology would control the decisions to be made, and recognizing that decisions are subjective and that you could have a good law, but if you don't have good people to implement it, it doesn't really make much difference. And the fact that that came at the height of the environmental movement and changes to the way that we looked at how we deal with land especially was huge.

In California, it set the standard for the rest of the nation, and in fact, the world. So the Coastal Initiative, which came about as a result of people's alarm at what was happening along the coast...the rapid change, the deterioration of quality, the filling of wetlands, the proposed nuclear plants, the freeways proposed right along the coast, new marinas...It was all overwhelming to people who came to know the coast as kind of the geographic soul of California. And they said, "stop. We don't want this kind of change to happen here in California as it happened, for example, in Florida. And so they took the initiative to pass the initiative.

JB: What was your role, Peter, in Proposition 20?

PD: My role in Prop. 20 was...I mean I was involved in it since 1971, so I was a legislative aide, writing the Coastal Act, which we couldn't get through the legislature for two years straight. And because of that, the Coastal Alliance then turned to the initiative process and the initiative was to be written by the Coastal Alliance and they weren't doing it and we were running out of time. So I called one of the attorneys who was volunteering to work with the Coastal Alliance, and he and I got together here on a Saturday morning and the two of us wrote it. So we wrote Proposition 20. I sent it out to about 20 people for comments and got a few comments back, minor

comments, and that's how it ended up getting on the ballot and getting passed. And then my job was to help see it get implemented. But writing it was my principal role, with another attorney named Ray McDevitt.

JB: You became Deputy Director of the commission in 1977 and then executive director of the commission in 1985. Did you have any inkling at the time you would spend so much of your life involved with the commission?

PD: No, no. I didn't know what I was going to do when I grew up, and sometimes I still think I haven't grown up yet, but no, it didn't really hit me until 1996. I was 54 years old and that was when Governor Wilson tried to get rid of me and it was a bizarre event. And when they couldn't get the votes together, I remember flying back up the coast in a private plane with a friend, listening to Beethoven's Ninth Symphony and thinking, "why have I been worried about what I want to do with my life when I love what I do? This is what I'm going to do." So that's when I decided I was going to stay with environmental stewardship and stay with the commission in this capacity as long as I could. And I've been blessed to be able to be engaged in a labor of love. Not many people can say that and I'm one of the few who can.

JB: Peter, as a piece of legislation, how would you rate the Coastal Act's effectiveness?

PD: Let me put it this way: About six, seven months ago, I was visited by two consultants for the World Bank, and their job was to go around the world, meet with various coastal countries to help them put together sustainable coastal protection programs. And they were in South Korea, and they were told by the CEO of Hyundai, "you've got to go talk to the Coastal Commission in California, because they're the only ones who are really doing this." They'd never heard of us. So they came here and they spent a couple of weeks, and then they came to see me and said that they'd concluded that the California Coastal Commission is implementing the most effective, strongest coastal protection law in the world. And that just blew me away. I knew we had a strong law and I knew we were the strongest program in the country, but to be recognized as having the strongest program in the world was just mind-blowing.

And the reason that they said that was, first of all, that as a result of the Coastal Act and the way we've implemented it, we've avoided capture by the client, the people that we actually regulate, which is not what happens everywhere else. Corruption takes over and the people who are regulated end up becoming so chummy with the regulators that they basically get what they want. Second is that we have a really strong law. Third is that we have an independent commission, and that we have a commission that is appointed by split appointing authorities, so that not one ideology dictates what the commission does. And that we have an independent staff, independent from the commission. We work for the commission, but we make our own professional judgment and then the commission makes the policy call.

I think those were the key elements that they felt made this the strongest program and it's been sustained, year after year. Every time there's been an attack on it, the public has risen up to protect it and it's essentially remained as strong as when it was enacted in 1976. The initiative was a strong law in and of itself, but that was a temporary law. And it

went out of existence in 1976 when the Coastal Act was passed and the fact that it has passed the test of time and our record is outstanding in terms of achievement and you have to recognize that most of the things that have been achieved under the Coastal Act are the things you don't see. It's the access that hasn't been lost, the wetlands that haven't been filled, the views that haven't been destroyed, the second home subdivisions that haven't been allowed, the agricultural lands that haven't been destroyed. So it's things that you don't see that are the major accomplishments.

Also, other things you don't see are attitudinal changes by elected officials who have come to recognize that coastal protection is a priority. Empowerment of citizen activists... another one of those things that you can't measure, but clearly can be traced to the Coastal Commission, because of its stress on public participation and transparency of process. Those are all incredibly important elements of what I would call our measures of the success of this law.

JB: The act called for five-year reviews? Has that happened?

PD: Well, we've done four or five of them, but... yeah, the act calls for it, but there's no consequence to doing them or not doing them. It's one of the big weaknesses in the law. We had to compromise out at the last minute the provision that said that you do the five-year review and if the local government doesn't make the changes that the commission recommends, then the commission could impose sanctions.

Those sanctions were removed—sanctions and incentives—were removed, and now all we can do if we do a review, and the local government refuses to make the changes, all we can do is write a letter to the legislature. Meaningless! So, we just haven't had the staff resources and have found that it's just not worth it. So that's why we haven't done them.

JB: There are some places near the Coastal Zone that are not included in the Coastal Zone. I've heard that at the time it was enacted, people hoped that the Coastal Act could be amended to include those areas, but it hasn't happened so far. Are those areas forever lost the protection afforded by the Coastal Act?

PD: Yes, there are elements that we couldn't get into the Coastal Act that clearly make it less strong that it should be or could have been. And the Coastal Zone boundary is one of those examples. It's a political boundary.

And it was... I remember in 1976, when we couldn't get the Coastal Act out of the Senate—the Coastal Bill—we took a bill that had already passed the Senate carried by Senator Smith, Jerry Smith, that dealt with CalTrans. And we asked him, “do you mind if we gut your bill and put in a bill that saves the California coast?” And he said, “are you kidding? Of course.”

So we did that and that was during the interim of the 1976 legislative session and in July, the chairman of the committee that I was a consultant to said, “we're going to have a hearing on this bill, and I want the Coastal Zone boundary mapped. And I want one line and I want those maps done for the hearing and I want them put on the wall around the room where we're going to have the hearing. And that was at Loyola University. The chair of the committee was Charles Warren at the time.

I said, “why are we doing that, Charlie? We’ve got multiple zones here.”

“Don’t argue with me, just do it.”

I said “why?”

And he said, “you’ll see.”

So what happened was we put the maps up, had the hearing, and all these lawyers and big property owners, and they were all looking at the map, and they were all looking at their property, and at the end of the day, we ended up changing the lines in a whole bunch of places because of the politics of the people in the room. And we walked away from the hearing, and I turned to Charlie and I said, “nobody really paid any attention to the policies. That’s the essence of the act. They were all focused on the map and the lines.”

He said, “see?”

That’s how we got the strong policies in the Coastal Act, because he diverted everybody’s attention to the lines on the map. So that’s how we got this jagged political Coastal Zone boundary. It doesn’t make a lot of sense, but the trade-off was the strongest land use policies in the country. It was worth it. It was smart. I learned a big lesson.

In terms of ...I mean there were subsequent amendments to the Coastal Zone boundary, but they both strengthened and weakened. Like in the Monterey Cannery Row area, the boundary was contracted, unfortunately. In other areas, it was expanded in a good way, but we’re not going to get...those changes are history. Everybody agreed, “let’s stay away with messing with the boundary.”

But there were weaknesses in the act that I don’t see us changing. The biggest weakness that we were able to change was that we had virtually no enforcement capability. And when Pete Wilson was elected governor, and he saw...I had an opportunity during the campaign to sit down with him and show him the abuses of land owners and developers and the impunity with which they could do these things, because we had no enforcement capability.

So it just so happened that there was a state senator named Ed Davis, former sheriff, L.A. County sheriff, conservative Republican. But he was a conservationist and he abhorred scofflaws and when I talked to him about this, he said, “you know, the Santa Monica mountains, it’s terrible what’s happening up there.”

So he carried a bill to give us the authority to issue restraining orders... enforcement... ave us enforcement mechanisms with the support of Governor Wilson that we would never have gotten if Ed Davis hadn’t been the author. He was conservative, former sheriff, Republican. And with Pete Wilson, we got that changed just at the right time, too, because the guy who was in his office, his right hand, who was his conscience, a fellow named Otto Boss, was a great friend of the coast. And Pete really listened to him carefully. And he helped us with that bill. And then one

day, he was coaching his daughter's soccer team and had a heart attack and died. And he was young. And when he died, the attitude in Wilson's office changed 180 degrees, from cooperation, supportive, friendly, to open hostility. So we had that window of opportunity.

It's like so many other things with the Coastal Act. It was a window of opportunity that if you didn't get through that during that moment, it wasn't going to happen again, just like passing the Coastal Initiative. I don't think that's possible today and there are lots of reasons for that.

But to get back some of the things, or strengthen the Coastal Act, it's virtually impossible these days. We had a bill now several times that would give the Coastal Commission the authority that virtually every other regulatory agency has to administer, or to impose administrative fines for violations and with safeguards, checks and balances...can't get it through, because the Coastal Commission has...because we've been so effective, we've made a lot of enemies. And it's just...you just mention the Coastal Commission and a lot of people's...the red flags go up and it's kind of...all these horror stories that people have told—lies, but nevertheless, they take hold, as is the way of our political landscape that make it virtually impossible to strengthen.

I think our biggest ... our challenge really today and tomorrow is to implement a visionary law in a politically myopic climate. And I don't see that changing. So the best we can do is hold the line, fight to retain the integrity of the law. And that's what we're concentrating on.

There have been efforts to try to weaken the Coastal Act. Very few have succeeded. Ironically, the one that succeeded that...kind of interesting how the circle turns. It dealt with affordable housing. And we put affordable housing in the '76 Coastal Act, because it was a form of public access, to be able to live near the coast. Well, we made it work. Every new subdivision, 25 percent had to be affordable housing, controlled affordable housing, so that it continued to be affordable. Well, we were making it work so well that local government and the realtors and developers went to the legislature and said, "you can't...you've got to get rid of this because it's stifling economic development."

And, of course, Prop. 13, which came along in 1978, made it more difficult for local governments to raise money, so they were really pushing to get rid of the affordable housing policies in the Coastal Act. And I objected to that...opposed it, but I couldn't overcome the support of the governor, Jerry Brown, at the time, and some of the strongest supporters of the Coastal Act. So we lost the affordable housing provisions in the Coastal Act because we were making it work.

And now, people are wringing their hands saying, "we need affordable housing." People who work in the coastal zone can't afford to live there. They commute great distances. "Well, what happened to the affordable housing? Why aren't you, the Coastal Commission, requiring it?" It was taken out of our hand, because we were making it work.

So that to me was the most significant weakening amendment to the Coastal Act. Other attempts to weaken the wetland protection policies, to cut back on our enforcement ability, or the scope of our permit jurisdiction...all of those have failed. So our ability to prevent erosion of the integrity

of the Coastal Act is much greater than our ability to enact strengthening amendments and improvements to the law.

JB: Do you think it would be possible to pass an initiative revising the Coastal Act?

PD: I don't think so. So many things have changed since 1972. First of all, the amount of money that can be put into campaigns now. There's no way that the environmental community can compete with the corporations and the monied interests that have a stake in coastal development. So that's one thing.

The fact that it's so expensive. The Coastal Initiative was, I think, the last initiative that qualified with all volunteer signature gatherers. It's so expensive to run a campaign. And there isn't a cohesive group out there, like the Coastal Alliance was, to run such a campaign. And there isn't something...In order for that to happen, there has to be some horrific event that kind of galvanizes people to make a change, and I don't see that happening. I mean, when you look at what happened in the Gulf last year, you thought that that might have an impact on offshore drilling. Didn't! It as a flash in the pan because of the cleverness and the money the oil companies can put in to counter, counter measures.

And there are other things that have changed. The Fairness Doctrine, for example. The Fairness Doctrine in 1972, for the first time, we were able to make it, and that's what Lew Reid, this legislative counsel for the Coastal Alliance was able to do during the campaign, get the FCC, Federal Communications Commission, to require that the Fairness Doctrine be applied to initiative campaigns, which means that you give the proponents of a measure the same amount of time on the air as the opponents, even if they don't have the money. You have to give them free time. We had free time in 1972. They put us on at 2:00 in the morning, but we got Charlton Heston. We got Jack Lemmon. We got Eddie Albert and Lloyd Bridges and got a lot of Hollywood types to do spots for radio and television. And as soon as Reagan became president, one of the first things he did was eliminate that Fairness Doctrine. So that's gone, and that was huge in terms of just getting the message out. So, we don't have that anymore.

I think it would take a real catastrophe to galvanize people into action. Then it might be possible, but under the current political regime we live in, which I call a corporate kakistocracy, a kakistocracy being government by the worst men there are, not women, but men, and in this case it's a corporate. I mean corporations run this country. And so they're going to be able to run over the environmental community on positive initiatives. They didn't succeed with, for example, the recent measure to try to eliminate these distributed energy facilities, which PG&E was trying to eliminate, and the public saw through that and did the right thing in rejecting that, but getting a positive initiative through is a whole different matter. So I don't see that as being likely, not unless there's a tectonic shift in our political landscape.

JB: Have any of the local coastal plans been updated?

PD: Yes, many of them have, many of them are being updated right now. It's a slow process. They're being updated mainly because of local pressures, changed circumstances. We would like to see more of them updated, especially in areas that weren't addressed at the time the initial

measures were approved, but we can't force it. So we have to wait for the local government to take the initiative to come forward. And we've been working with them, but we haven't been able to work with them as closely as we would like, because we've had so many staff cuts that we don't have the staff resources to get in early with the local governments to identify issues we have with the evolving changes. So, for example, we worked for almost seven years with Santa Barbara County to update their local coastal program. And we worked it out, and it gets to the Board of Supervisors, and they reject it, for political reasons. So all that work, down the drain. The same thing just happened in Del Norte County, almost 10 years on that one, where we worked really hard to work with the local government to update the plan, and then, because they didn't like certain elements of what we were recommending, they just rejected the whole thing.

And there are lots of changed circumstances that require updates to the plans—climate change, sea level rise, the fact that we know so much more about ecology and sensitivity of species that we did when these plans were approved, and water quality, storm water runoff, public access issues—lots of important changed circumstances that need to be addressed in updated local coastal programs and that hasn't happened to the extent that it should. And we used to give grants for these updates. All that money is gone.

Our staff cuts make it impossible for us to be working with local governments in a timely fashion, so the local governments also have a disincentive then. “Why should we work on this when you guys can't help us and then if we do it, you just come in at the last minute and make changes we can't live with, so why should we even do this?” So it's been a real rough road, to make these updates, but many local governments are proceeding in any event. Marin County is well along the way to updating theirs. So are many other local governments.

JB: Peter, you've been on the playing field of coastal activism for a long time. How would you rate the current level of activism?

PD: In the 70s, it was “what can we do to save the coast?” And when we couldn't get the legislation through, and went to the initiative, the focus was on the initiative, and it was a campaign. And it was exciting. People really galvanized around that campaign. And once it passed, people thought, “okay, we've saved the coast and now on to the next thing.” And they didn't realize we had to pass the Coastal Act in '76. So we had to regitalize people to focus on getting support to pass the Coastal Act in '76. When that bill passed, people thought, “okay, we've saved the coast again. On to the next thing.”

Well, and then they started to realize that it's really important to be involved with the commission to implement the law, because it may be a good law, but if they make wrong decisions, what difference does it make? We still lose the resource. So the nature of the public participation changed tremendously, and it became, over time, very expensive to be involved in the commission's work. The issues got complex. It required quite a bit of expertise to even understand what was at stake. And then the commission meets in different locations, and so to follow the commission and be engaged in those issues that the group thinks is important is expensive, both in terms of time and the money it takes to travel to the meetings and to do the kind of work—research—that needs to be done to build a case.

So public participation has changed a lot. It's still, as far as I'm concerned, one of the hallmarks of California's program that the public has been so involved, and it's a key in the Coastal Act. Public participation is to be maximized, so we do what we can to facilitate that. And I think without public support, the Coastal Act would have been gutted a long time ago.

So, it's changed, but it's still there, and it's actually there in a more intense way than it was before, because we've lost so much natural ground in this state that the coast is, in many places, the only place left for people to go to for rest and recreation and relief. So it's much more jealously guarded than it was then. And I think that's really important. So from my perspective, the fact that there are so many people out there who care about the coast, and who are very vigilant about what decisions are made says to me that it's changed, but it's still there and it's still absolutely essential. Without that, the Coastal Act really would fade away.

And the organizations that are now involved in a way...we've lost some statewide organizations that used to be present at all of our meetings, like the Sierra Club, the League for Coastal Protection. But we have a group called ORCA. I can't remember what that acronym stands for, but it's a great way for environmental activists in various locations along the coast to get together once a month to talk about issues of concern to them, and then they get people in the areas of the commissioners to meet with the commissioners to raise those concerns. And then they have representatives of ORCA at the commission meeting, people who live in the area where the meeting takes place who can then raise the issues. That's a big change, but it's important to have that kind of a presence. The Sierra Club used to have a person at every meeting. Unfortunately the funding for that was cut off, and that's big loss.

I think the environmental community has to rethink how they can reactivate or reinvigorate that kind of presence and involvement, but it takes money. And it's hard to gather funds for that kind of work. And you've probably talked to Mark Massara and seen how difficult it was for him to sustain his participation, but it was invaluable. We don't have that anymore.

So I know the environmental community is trying to figure out a way to raise funds to reactivate that kind of presence, but they're not there yet.

JB: Do you see sufficient young people being involved?

PD: Not as many...I mean, there's no end to the number of protectors of the environment that we need. And so, to me, there are never enough. But there are young people who have stepped forward, who've become involved, again not as many as I'd like to see, but every time I see a new young face—activist—out there, I just really am encouraged.

It's one of the big challenges. How do you get young people involved in these kinds of issues, take them away from their electronic devices and get them to focus on the real world around them. I think one of the organizations that has done that the best is Surfrider. It's a natural for it. And various other groups, like Heal the Bay. But the answer is, "yes, I've seen new young faces, but not as many as we need, or as should be there, or as could be there. And to me, our environmental future really turns on education and engagement by young people. So I encourage that wherever I can, getting young people involved...mentoring, and doing things that expose

kids to the ocean and coastal issues, watershed issues, get your hands on and get your hands involved. That's the only way I think that we can continue to fight to protect this fragile, limited resource.

JB: You already kind of answered this, but does the price of real estate affect the potential for people to become activists?

PD: Well, it does make it difficult, but there are quite a few young people who find a way to, you know, rent, get together, rent a house. I still find a lot of people, activists, who are involved in the work of the Coastal Commission who do live on the coast. They may not own the place they live in. They may not live in a place by themselves, but they're able to somehow manage.

But then there are also a lot of activists who are inland, who recognize the importance of the coast. And you don't have to live in the coastal zone to be an active protector of the coast. But you're right. It's become a very exclusive real estate domain, very exclusive in terms of who can live there.

JB: We've seen some major changes in the makeup of the Coastal Commission in this past year. How do you rate the current commission?

PD: You know, since I'm still working for the commission, it's kind of awkward to be real candid about what I see in terms of the makeup of the commission—strengths and weaknesses. But I've seen them all over the years since 1972. And I think we have one of the better commissions that we've had in years right now. The fact that we have fixed terms for eight of the twelve members makes a big difference. So I think that's been good. I think that, like very commission, you have strong commissioners, and you have less strong commissioners. What I look for is integrity, conscientiousness, support for the law and obviously, as I say, integrity, so that the experiences we've had in the past with corruption, the few times and we've had literally hundreds of commissioners and only one had been prosecuted for corruption and sent to prison. A couple more should have, but they...the circle came around for them in other context. But we haven't had that in years, where I could say, "that commissioner is corrupt, or that commissioner is out to sabotage the Coastal Act." That we haven't had, thank goodness.

In terms of strength, you know when you have a commissioner who knows the law better than most of the staff, who has an incredible background of expertise, institutional memory, and then they don't get reappointed, it makes a huge difference in terms of continuity, or loss of continuity. And that's part of our job is to train and help new commissioners understand why we do what we do. Some of the concepts underlying decisions that we make are very complex. So we have to constantly be educating new commissioners. And the quality of commissioners depends on a lot of factors, but as long as they do their homework, they have integrity and they believe in the law and want to do the right thing by the law, that's all I ask.

So I think the commission right now is a strong, good commission. Have we had stronger commissions? Yes, but I would say that most of the commissions we have had have probably been weaker in the sense of kind of the majority support for coastal protection decisions. But that's a complex issue to measure, so I don't really think about that much. It's hard to answer.

JB: Do Governor Brown's appointees indicate that he supports the commission?

PD: Oh, I think so. I think so. I think he's made good appointments to the commission. Of course, two of them are carry-overs from Schwarzenegger and mixed...you know, one could argue we could have stronger commissioners, but I would say that given my experience that they're good commissioners. And Governor Brown has been supportive of the Coastal Commission. I mean he's had his issues with us over the years, but it was enacted on his watch and he's the one that signed the Coastal Act into law in 1976. He was the one that helped us keep it on the ballot in 1972 when he was the Secretary of State and there were efforts to try to throw Proposition 20 off the ballot. And he endorsed it. So he has a big stake in this. It's his legacy, as much as it is anyone else's, probably more so because of his key role.

JB: The Coastal Act speaks to the authority of the commission to address indirect impacts that come from outside the Coastal Zone, but the commission doesn't act on these impacts very often. Do you foresee a change in the current policy?

PD: Well, it's wrong. We do act on those impacts. We've dealt with a lot of impacts through federal consistency, that is that we are the only state agency that has authority to look at any activity or project that's carried on by a federal agency, or that's approved by a federal agency through permits, or grants that could affect coastal resources. So that enables the commission to look at impacts resulting from development activities outside the Coastal Zone. We've done that in many, many...dozens and dozens of cases. So the commission does look at activities outside the Coastal Zone that impact resources inside the Coastal Zone. So I don't know where that notion came from, but the fact is we do it. In fact, that's one of the strong elements of the Coastal Act is this federal authority to look at federal activities, no matter where they occur.

So, for example, back in the 70s, late 70s, early 80s, the Navy was proposing to scuttle obsolete nuclear submarines 350 miles off the Northern California coast. We asserted jurisdiction over that and wrote them a long dissertation why this would not be consistent with the Coastal Act. They dropped the project.

EPA was going to incinerate toxic materials several hundred miles off the Golden Gate. We asserted jurisdiction over that, because we said that would come onto into the Coastal Zone and have impacts in the Coastal Zone. The project was dropped.

We deal with military activities that occur outside the Coastal Zone but could impact resources in the Coastal Zone, whether it's Navy sonar projects or Air Force training missions over Big Sur.

No, we do reach beyond...the issue of the Coastal Act and coastal permits, being able to address impacts that originate outside the Coastal Zone, that's different. But when you have a federal activity involved, then we do have a handle.

JB: Peter, do you feel that the citizenry and elected officials of California are prepared for the effects of global warming to the coastline?

PD: Absolutely not. Absolutely not. We, as I say, live in a very politically myopic culture. People are concerned about the immediate, whether it's immediate entertainment, whether it's immediate concerns about security, fiscal and personal security. They're thinking about the now. We have a collective disorder, an inability to look ahead and we don't want to see it. It's inconsistent with what we want to see of the world. I call it cognitive dissonance. We only look at and interpret things in a way that's consistent with how we want to see things. And the notion that we're destroying the Earth, that the environment that our children and grandchildren will live in will be so much more challenged, and it will be much more difficult, and often ugly and the scarcity of resources, the destruction of resources, we don't want to think about that. So we've done a collective "stick your head in the sand."

And then on top of that, you've got these, again, these corporate dissemblers who are doing everything they can to distort people's perception of what the climate change means. So all these industrial- or corporate-supported think tanks that purport to spew out academic documents which question climate change, I mean those are all intended to promote profits. None of them have any sense of community responsibility or community welfare and as a result you have... And then you have Fox Noise that's out there that's propagandizing for the corporate oligarchy that runs this country. And they're always knocking and tearing down climatologists who... And there's consensus among scientists. There's no question what's happening.

I mean, I was on an airplane the other day, sitting next to a guy. We were talking about some of the more severe weather events that are happening now, more and more. I said, "you know, I had a briefing from the Union of Concerned Scientists about 30 years ago and I've had briefings when I was on the NOAA Science Advisory Board 20 years ago. I mean this was all predicted. There was no question that these things were going to happen. Nobody paid any attention to it. They didn't want to, and because the corporations don't want us to pay attention to it, because it means a loss in profits and it means changing the way we do things, like the chemical industry, like the oil industry, getting off of oil, getting away from the carbon emission industry and technology that we live in. They don't want that to happen because it means less profits, irrespective of the tremendous cost in terms of human suffering and environmental degradation. People just don't want to accept it. So this guy on the airplane and I said, "I know where it's coming from. It's climate change."

He said, "well, it's not clear that climate change..."

No, it is clear. There is no doubt. The people who believe the Earth is still flat. They may not believe it, but anybody who is capable and willing to read a scientific article will understand there is consensus. This is a real dynamic that's happening to the planet, and we're past, probably past the tipping point and we can't continue to ignore it.

We've tried to get... slowly making progress... to get local governments to be thinking about sea level rise. We did this up in Crescent City not too long ago with a condominium project that we had. We imposed conditions that would anticipate a certain level of sea level rise. The City went ballistic. They didn't want to approve the project after the commission approved it with conditions that required a certain height, so that you didn't have permanent residences down at

the area where we thought inundation levels would occur. And then finally the developer convinced them to approve it.

But one of the reasons that the county up there rejected the amendments, the updates to their local coastal plan with the modifications we recommended, because they didn't want to implement the sea level rise protections that we had built in.

We've tried to get interest in, and this was a pretty profound effort, around Eureka, Humboldt Bay. So we wrote a letter to Senator Feinstein, Senator Boxer, Congressman (God, how can I forget his name), at any rate, the congressman from the area, to try to get support for a collective planning effort to get us to start planning for and thinking about what do we do about sea level rise around Humboldt Bay. The amount of infrastructure alone that is affected... Just look at Highway 101 between Arcada and Eureka. I mean it's at sea level and every now and then, it gets overwashed anyway. What are we going to do? Put that up, make it a viaduct? Are we going to move it inland? Are we going to abandon it? What are we going to do with the utilities? All of the development that's within the area of inundation which is clearly projected. Never got a response. It was, to me, just inconceivable that even progressive legislators didn't want to touch it. So now, with the University of California Sea Grant and some academic institutions, we're actually... some work is being done, but it's not at the level that it should be. So we're doing a lot of work at the Coastal Commission with other agencies to try to get initiatives started to deal with sea level rise. Schwarzenegger (sp?) actually issued a directive that all local coastal programs should be updated to incorporate sea level rise, but whether that's going to happen... I mean, we're going to be working on it, but the answer to the question is "no, there's no preparation and there's no willingness to really address it."

JB: Rising sea levels versus expensive homes on the beach. What's going to happen when all the homeowners request sea walls?

PD: Well, unfortunately, the Coastal Act mandates approval of sea walls, so I can't see that changing, but what's happening in some areas is that, irrespective of that mandate, the cost of installing sea walls is prohibitive. So you've got apartment buildings in Pacifica falling into the ocean. They just can't afford to build the protective works. So there are going to be places that existing development is just going to be abandoned or removed.

In other places, we're going to see more and more armoring. It's too expensive. We've tried to look at the issue of planned retreat, you know, buy out properties along the shoreline and allow natural erosion to take place. No interest in that, and people are saying, "why should we pay for that?" So there's no money for it. There's no interest in it. So I see that as a huge train wreck that's already lost and we basically don't have much choice but to approve new shoreline protective works, which both change the shoreline, takes away public recreational resources, starves the beaches. It's tremendous public cost, but I don't see an alternative at this point, not a viable one.

JB: Wetlands migration is another issue? What are we going to do when the wetlands all begin to migrate inward and bump up against roads and buildings?

PD: Well, again, I see a lot of bulwarks being built to keep the water back, but I also see efforts...the Coastal Conservancy is trying. We're trying, working with CalTrans, down in San Diego, for example. The I-5 widening project goes through five lagoons. We've told them that we want them to look at buying land around the periphery of the wetlands to allow for migration of the wetlands inland as sea level rises. Whether or not that's going to go anywhere, I don't know. But that's a big concern and there are...we're looking at it. The Coastal Conservancy is trying to find ways to allow for these expansions by buying lands, but as you know, most of these areas have been built up pretty close to the edge of the wetlands, so yeah, that's another real challenge. How do we adapt to that issue? And I don't know the answer to it. I mean, it would take a lot of resources, but CalTrans has the money, and it's certainly to me appropriate mitigation. It would be, I think, very appropriate to be buying some of the adjacent properties. But, you know, in a lot of areas, the only way they can do that is use condemnation, and condemnation is not politically popular and they don't want to use it. So it's a real dilemma.

JB: The Sacramento River Delta is not part of your jurisdiction, the commission's jurisdiction, but the predictions about what might happen when the dikes break, in case of a super storm, or an earthquake, are something to worry about for the whole country. Do you care to comment?

PD: The Sacramento River? No, we've been asked to get involved in that, but as you know, our jurisdiction ends at the Golden Gate Bridge, so we're not involved in that, even though that federal consistency could allow us to reach inland, we've decided not to do that. We have reached inland to tell the folks on the Klamath River, for example, for the dams there, that that's something that we do intend to assert jurisdiction over at the right time in removal of the dams on the Klamath River, which are way inland of the Coastal Zone, but clearly impact salmon and so many important coastal resources. But no, on the Sacramento Delta, I mean that's another one of those tangled webs that kind of defy solution. We need to address it and my good friend, Jerry Merrill, is now charged with that responsibility. I wish him a lot of luck.

But, you know, it's like you look at where have we stepped forward to impose strong protections of land use and place and the only places that that's happened is where you identify with a particular unique piece of geography—San Francisco Bay, the coast of California, Lake Tahoe. There are a couple of other places where conservancies were established—Santa Monica Mountains—but not regulatory, and efforts to try to do that in places that should have had those kinds of protections, but the window of opportunity was missed, are places like the Delta and the Sierras, but you can't do it now. Too many people live there, too many people who vigorously oppose government interference, involvement, so we're going to keep muddling along and losing the resources bit by bit. I don't know what the answer is for the Delta. We need one. I hope they find one.

JB: Energy on the beach. The Regional Water Quality Control Board is now disallowing once-through cooling for generating stations on the beach. What effects do you see coming from that?

PD: Well, that's big and the Coastal Commission has long supported the elimination of once-through cooling, using ocean waters for cooling of power plants, because of the tremendous impacts, the mortality impacts of the entrainment that results from all these living organisms being sucked through the system. So phasing out the once-through cooling system...we strongly

support that. And it's now being required, although they just gave the Department of Water and Power a pass, not forever, but a delay. So that's a good thing that they're doing.

So what they're doing is getting away from that and they're going to other cooling systems. We support that.

JB: San Onofre. Is it safe in case of an earthquake?

PD: Well, that's a question that's been asked many times. I don't know the answer to it. I do know that our geologist has looked at it, especially after the Fukushima, the earthquake and tsunami in Japan, and the features, the tectonic features and fault features around San Onofre are very different and his conclusion and the conclusion of virtually all the geologists that have looked at it is that they just see it as highly highly unlikely that a similar rupture could occur there, because of the nature of the faults. But you never...I mean Mother Nature bats last, and you never know what she's going to visit on us. So it could happen and all these promises that were made about, "oh, this can't happen here, and this is safe, and that's safe." I don't believe it, but I think that they're clearly under the microscope, as they are at Diablo Canyon and doing what they can to assuage public concern that they've taken public safety into consideration and done everything they can. There's no answer to that question. If there's a rupture, well, look at what's happening in Japan. I think it could be catastrophic, but I think it's very unlikely.

To me, the biggest concern with San Onofre and Diablo and Humboldt is that we have all this nuclear waste stored onsite and we're adding to it all the time and it's going to stay there. Those are not good depositories for nuclear waste, but we don't know, we have no way of getting rid of them. To me, that's the bigger concern. What if that waste...what happens if somehow that waste gets out into the environment, through whatever even, whether it's terrorism or a natural act. So that's the issue I would really like to see addressed. How do we get rid of that waste?

JB: Peter, what are your opinions about the potential for offshore wind and/or wave technologies to be implemented?

PD: I think there's a future there. I think it's...wave energy...there have been a lot of technologies that have been piloted. We had a lot of projects that were being proposed on the North Coast that never went anywhere because once they got into engineering and site-specific kinds of considerations found it to be prohibitive. The environment is so dynamic and rough that to put something out there that is going to be able to be maintained is a real challenge. But I see it as a big part of our future, because...I mean if you deal with wave energy in the right way, in the right location, that's a perpetual generator. But it's very expensive. The technology is just evolving, but I see that part of our future.

Wind technology, I see that, too. There are now different...with new cable technology, and I think the notion that you can actually put these things on floating platforms, as opposed to fixed bottom structures. Again, it's going to be very expensive and so it's the economics that are probably going to drive it as much as anything else, and from our perspective, the concern would be mainly impacts on birds, visual impacts, of course, but I think we have to learn to accept some of those impacts as the price of renewable energy.

So I see those two as being part of our energy future and there have been various proposals floated out there, but nothing that's viable yet in terms of wind technology, offshore anyway.

JB: Peter, this is your opportunity to say something to your supporters and detractors.

PD: I've never looked at my job and what I do in a personal way, so when somebody says, "your supporters or your detractors," I always deflect that to think about supporters of coastal protection versus detractors of coastal protection. It's not about me and even though the challenges to my position over the years have been met with a great deal of public support for me to stay in the position, it wasn't about me, it was about the way that I looked at the implementation of the law and the integrity of the program, and maintaining that integrity. So it's not about personality. It's about the laws and the principles and those have to endure and supersede and extend beyond the individual players at a particular time in the program. So we've had a lot of really good commissioners come and go. The important thing was the continuity that the staff brought to it, that the law brought to it, and that's what has to be continued in the future.

The greatest threats to the coast, to most environments, I think, are public ignorance and apathy and you answer ignorance through education and apathy through activism.

And as I have always said, "precious geography like the coast is never finally saved. It's always being saved. So we need constant vigilance. We need people to understand you never save a place, it's always being saved, whether it's a national park, or a reserve, or a marine protected area. They require constant vigilance in order to maintain that protection, and that's part of our ongoing responsibility as citizens of the world. So, to me, the biggest message is that it's our responsibility and the responsibility of future generations to be engaged in the protection of their world, and the environment, which means you can't just stand as an innocent bystander or an idle bystander on the sidelines. You have to be involved. And I know it. People are preoccupied with self-indulgence and entertainment and a lot of people are preoccupied with just survival. Totally understandable. But they can't ignore the environment in which they live and that they have a responsibility for the protection of that environment. It's their role and their responsibility as responsible citizens.

So my message is be informed, be involved and never give up.

[end of interview]