

2017 Open Space Conference Deb Callahan Remarks

Welcome everyone to the 2017 Open Space Conference. We're delighted to host this event.

It's so great to see all of you here today, and I think we have a terrific program with excellent speakers and presentations. Don't you love to come here to the sunny Craneway Pavillion?

Throughout the day, make sure to look at the information tables in the Exhibition Hall, enjoy the REI lounge, the Roving Ranger and One Tam Ranger. We'll have hikes and bikes at lunch and snacks, Patagonia beer and Craig Anderson's band Cahoots at the closing reception.

After lunch, we'll hear from Park Bond bill sponsor Assemblymember Eduardo Garcia and we're going to have break-out sessions after he speaks – please be sure to pay attention to which room the session you signed up for is in – it may be down the outside walkway or somewhere else in this big pavillion.

There's lots to do, so let's get started!

I want to thank all our sponsors for helping to make this conference possible.

A special thank you to our Regional level sponsor: East Bay Regional Park District,

And to our 3 Ecosystem level sponsors: Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy, Marin County Parks, and Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District for their generous support.

I also want to thank our 12 Watershed level sponsors and our 29 Park level sponsors who are listed in the program. We wouldn't be here without you.

And thank you to Kaiser Permanente and the Christensen Fund for your special support to our conference this year.

Thank you to our Board members and our Advisory Council members. We are so grateful for your service, leadership and commitment to the Council.

Thank you to all 15 Leadership Development Program participants and 15 mentors.

Thank you to our 23 Exhibitors.

I also want to extend a thank you to our 34 volunteers this year.

As you might guess, it takes a lot of work, and some days I'd say nerves of steel, to organize this conference. I want to recognize Sarah Noel Ross, our Community Engagement Manager, who has spearheaded organizing this great event. Thank you, Sarah for joining the Council team and for diving into the deep end of the pool from day one. I also want to recognize the rest of our great staff: Tom Robinson, Melanie Hogan, Clare Thompson and Angel Hertslet - it is an honor and pleasure to work with such a great team.

Our Conference theme this year is "Eyes on the Horizon, Boots on the Trail". What that means is we want to spend the day thinking about how, especially in times of change or uncertainty, the way to reach big long terms goals is to take one step at a time while keeping your big vision at the center of everything you do.

And while you might say the times we're living in are unprecedented in many ways, it isn't the first time we've had to navigate change and uncertainty.

I know that sometimes when I'm trying to figure out the present, I think about the past and what lessons I've learned during my life and career. I think about what the wise and experienced people in my life would say and do.

Russell Train was the second Administrator of the federal Environmental Protection Agency from 1973-1977 - he helped to create the EPA. He was someone that I knew and admired greatly. He was a wonderful storyteller and a dedicated, lifelong conservationist.

Russ used to say that in the late '60's and early '70's, with respect to environmental laws and rules, "if you could think it up, you could make it happen." I would hear him say that with mixed feelings of gratitude, disbelief, and not a little envy.

Can you imagine what it must have been like in the early days of the environmental movement to be a public servant engaged in pioneering and creating the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, the Endangered Species Act, the Marine Sanctuary Act, NEPA and to establish the Environmental

Protection Agency and the President's Council on Environmental Quality? All over the course of about 6 years!

Take a moment and imagine what it would be like to live and work in a time when "if you can think it up, you can make it happen."

The conventional wisdom in the country these days is more like if you can think it up ... you can think about it.

And the conventional wisdom is that here in California we live in a bubble. And in the Bay Area we live in a bubble within a bubble. And in my home county of Marin we're in a bubble within a bubble within another bubble. That's sometimes said with pride, and sometimes with irony or derision.

But I don't think we live in one or in many bubbles so much as we live in a region that believes we can make a difference for the future. And we put those ideas into action.

Here in the Bay Area, there's a great history and legacy of visionary leadership for conservation. There were, and still are, Rebels with a Cause -- citizens and public officials working to protect and conserve parks, open space and agricultural lands in priority areas of the Bay Area. People working to ensure our quality of life, to create more trails and more recreational opportunities for all Bay Area residents and visitors -- in every community and from every walk of life. People whose life's work is to protect wildlife, watersheds, agricultural lands, open spaces and special places.

Here in the Bay Area, we still "think it up, and make it happen."

I don't mean to gloss over the fact that we are living in strange and challenging times that require new approaches, vigilance and rethinking business as usual.

I don't mean to minimize the fact that the chaos in Washington DC is creating unprecedented uncertainty that threatens many environmental advancements of the last half century.

Some of those challenges threaten things we thought were permanent or secure.

For instance, 27 National Monuments around the country have just been designated for review by the Interior Department for determination of a possible change in their protective status. Of those, 6 Monuments are in California and one of our region's newest national monuments, Berryessa

Snow National Monument, is on the list. At this time, **Cotoni** Coast Dairies National Monument is not, but there is language in the monuments order that leaves the door open for additional units to be added to the review list.

Another challenge we face is the growing population in the Bay Area. Today we are the nation's 4th largest metropolitan region with 7.6 million people living in our 9 counties. By 2040, our region is projected to add 2.1 million people and grow by 30%. Those additional residents will bring increased diversity to the Bay Area. For example, 1/3 of future new residents are projected to be immigrants. These new residents will bring new challenges and new opportunities – new viewpoints and new experiences.

Given the current pressure on immigrants in our country today, it's more important than ever to roll out the Green Carpet to our parks and open spaces to those folks who are new to those resources and to help them feel welcome and safe.

And, of course climate change is one of the great challenges of our time. Science clearly tells us that with climate change comes severe impacts such as drought and flooding, rising sea level and ecosystem stress, disruption and displacement. Yet right now there is a debate whether our country should withdraw from the Paris Climate Accord – an international agreement crafted by 195 nations that we helped to lead.

These are just a few of the significant challenges facing the Bay Area and our nation, the land conservation community and society today, and there are many more.

There are also opportunities.

One example is the effort to put a statewide Park Bond on the ballot in 2018. After lunch today, we'll hear from the sponsor and lead author of the Assembly's Park Bond Bill, Assemblymember Eduardo Garcia.

Many you here in the room have worked with us at the Open Space Council to lobby the Assembly and Senate on the Park Bond, to ensure that the Bay Area gets our fair share of funding that supports land conservation priorities. The Senate bill is currently working its way to the floor, and may be voted on next week. It's been a long and winding road, but we are hopeful our efforts will be rewarded. Thanks to all of you who are working on this important effort.

Another sign of progress is that protecting wildlife corridors is an issue that is gaining increased traction with policymakers.

And Plan Bay Area which establishes a blueprint for our region's transportation, housing and greenbelt has benefitted greatly from input by conservationists and planners who champion sustainability and protection of our region's conserved and working lands.

At today's conference, you'll hear colleagues and experts share their wisdom and ideas about how we engage land management and conservation in service of reaching the goal of protecting and stewarding 2 million acres of priority lands. We'll celebrate some of the successes in land conservation that you have accomplished over the last year – sometimes having pursued a long shot and persisting until the job was done. It's something we in the Bay Area know how to do, and do well.

We think things up, and then we make them happen.

I like to say, in our community scientists are our super heroes, outdoor educators are our rock stars and land managers are creative innovators.

At today's Conference, we'll hear from business leaders and political leaders. We'll hear about economics, communications, recreation, science, partnerships, climate change, mental health, solutions and more.

And perhaps most important, at today's Conference, we're going to celebrate risks taken and successes achieved. And at Open Space Conferences to come, we'll continue to do that, because I'm guessing each of you, just like me, wants to hear about what's going on, what's new, and what did one of our colleagues just think up and make happen.

So, let's get things started, and thanks again for coming.

#