

BAY AREA OPEN SPACE CONFERENCE

**CLOSING TALK BY JOHN GIOIA
Member, California Air Resources Board
and Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors**

**“The Importance of the Open Space and Land Conservation
Movement to the San Francisco Bay Area”**

Ford Craneway Pavilion, Richmond

May 18, 2017

Its great to be with so many Bay Area Open Space leaders!!! You're amazing. I know I'm your last speaker of the day and I'm the only thing standing between you and happy hour.

So, I promise to be as brief as I can and still, hopefully, provide a meaningful message because I don't want to be the one standing in the way of vital networking and some good wine, cheese and chocolate.

So let me start by thanking all of you for spending a day here in Richmond to advance the cause of preserving and expanding our precious open spaces here in the Bay Area.

Your efforts and the efforts of generations of open space leaders have helped make the San Francisco Bay Area one of the most magnificent places to live in the United States. We all know this; we live here.

We live in a place where we enjoy amazing culture and diversity, yet we have easy access to the most extensive amount of protected open space in any metropolitan area in the country.

Our open space areas are a part of who we are as a region. They are woven into the urban fabric of the Bay Area. But, as we know all too well, this open space didn't happen by accident.

Conservation and environmental leaders like yourselves have fought to make it a reality. The 7 million people who live here in the Bay Area benefit every day from your dedication, creativity, passion and hard work.

I get lot of energy working alongside a number of you in my various roles, whether its with the Restoration Authority, Air District or BCDC because you're really at the heart of this movement.

I like reading history. One of the books I'm reading right now is titled: "The Country in the City: The Greening of the San Francisco Bay Area." It's a good book and I recommend it.

It tells the stories of the many battles and fights to preserve our precious open space, acre by acre.

There is a particular quote in the book that is one of my favorites because it summarizes the successful strategy of the land conservation movement here in the Bay Area.

So, the quote is: "Every park, reserve and trail required money, mobilization, lobbying and electoral pressure. Every place not paved meant holding back developer and highway builders with local ordinances, regional commissions and greenbelt alliances."

One of the largest victories in the open space movement is visible right outside our window.

If we just take a moment to look outside and enjoy the marvelous view of San Francisco Bay, we can thank the tireless work of 3 East Bay women; you know their names - Kay Kerr, Sylvia McLaughlin and Esther Gulick – who back in 1962 decided to do something when they learned that the City of Berkeley wanted to fill the Bay to create a massive amount of housing.

At that time back in the '60's, cities were filling the Bay for development; and industry, garbage dumps and the military controlled 98% of the Bay shoreline with only 5 miles of the shore open to the public.

The efforts of these 3 women, which became a movement, led to the establishment of Save San Francisco Bay Association, who many credit as the first urban environmental movement,

and eventually led to the creation of the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission or BCDC.

BCDC was the first regional agency in the United States to have land use authority which was more senior to cities and counties; and as you know the Coastal Commission was modeled after BCDC. It holds the power to stop cities from filling the Bay and to require public access to the shoreline.

Your collective efforts in this room represent the same type of collaboration and teamwork that saved San Francisco Bay from being filled and paved with homes.

I've been privileged to serve on BCDC for the past 19 years and I can proudly say that we've gone here in the Bay Area from 5 miles of publicly accessible Bay shoreline since the 1960's to over 350 miles today.

That's an amazing legacy for 3 women from Berkeley and El Cerrito, and shows the power of individual and grassroots action.

I live just about a mile down the shoreline here in Richmond, along the Bay Trail. I can tell you that everyday I see people of all ages, ethnicities and races enjoying this wonderful shoreline, and I think of the efforts of these 3 women who really helped fight for that back in the '60's.

As you all know, there are numerous stories like theirs. Some of the open space fights were on the neighborhood level like the efforts of the Urban Creeks Council to preserve a local creek, or regional efforts like Save Mt. Diablo to save open space around Mt. Diablo. And many of you here today are fighting those battles.

My message today is that your work in the land conservation and open space movement remains as important as ever. That even with our past successes, the future quality of life in the Bay Area depends on your work. The health, economy and livability of our region needs a thriving open space movement for all residents, suburban and urban.

As the Bay Area economy continues to attract jobs and people at a record pace, the importance of protecting and expanding our valuable and vulnerable areas of open space becomes even greater. Open space that isn't fully protected -- and you know this all so well -- is subject to continual threats.

Just as importantly, and I really want to emphasize this point, that it's essential to create more urban open space in those areas where there is a shortage and where more growth and development will occur.

We need creek side trails and parks in urban areas like Richmond and Oakland just as much as we need protected hillsides in Walnut Creek and Marin. Bay Area residents need you on the front lines of these battles.

I want to specifically recognize the East Bay Regional Park District for its significant efforts to focus on expanding parks in urban areas and to build an environmental education center just up the road at Pt. Pinole.

There are also a lot of great non-profits doing this work. And I want to call out the work of a great local non-profit because I think their work exemplifies what we need more of. Those of us here in Richmond know of Urban Tilth and we're working with them to create a 3 acre urban agricultural park and learning center nearby in North Richmond so that families can engage with nature, build environmental stewardship, grow their own fruits and vegetables, use a commercial kitchen and come together to strengthen their community.

We need to think about open space in ways that incorporate principles of social equity and environmental justice, and I think we're making progress but we have a lot more to do in the Bay Area on that.

The work of Urban Tilth, Groundwork Richmond, East Bay Parks and many other great organizations are examples of this ethic and we will need more of these types of efforts if we're going to truly make all Bay Area neighborhoods healthier

and more livable.

We also live in transformative times; which presents some great challenges but also some great opportunities. The biggest challenge facing our planet, Climate Change, is going to dramatically impact our work to maintain the environmental and economic vitality of the Bay Area. And it is going to impact how we protect and use our open space.

As a member of the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, I'm proud to say that our Board recently passed a visionary blueprint for how our region transitions to a post-carbon economy. Its called Spare the Air: Cool the Climate – and you can find it on our Air District website.

The plan identifies opportunities for the Bay Area to develop new technologies, solutions and ideas that will help our state lead the nation and the world in addressing climate change.

Pursuing these opportunities will help us maintain our prosperity -- and I think, just as importantly, demonstrate that we can protect the environment, the economy and the climate all at the same time.

This vision sets forth a blueprint for how to achieve this post-carbon Bay Area by 2050 in a way that improves air quality, grows our economy and achieves California's goal to substantially reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Just a few points from this plan and you can read it online. It talks about how we can eliminate wood burning and the use of fossil fuels in buildings; how we can continue to locate new development near transit, and pedestrian and bicycling opportunities; how we reduce motor vehicle travel by improving public transit, promoting bicycling, walking and ride-sharing; driving zero-emission vehicles powered by renewable sources of energy, like my Nissan Leaf; switching from fossil fuels to a carbon free electricity source; achieving

100% renewable power; supporting jobs in clean energy; and many other strategies.

All of these things need to be done in a way that protects the public health of impacted communities and promotes social equity.

And you know this -- our natural and working lands will play an important role in achieving this vision.

Our natural and working lands make up about 2.8 million acres, or about two-thirds of the Bay Area's land mass.

And as experts in this, you know that when we properly manage these lands, we can do it in a way to help mitigate global warming by sequestering carbon. We also can promote more urban tree planting to absorb CO₂ and improve community aesthetics.

The California Air Resources Board, on which I serve, has also laid out a plan to achieve the State's aggressive greenhouse gas reduction goals – which is to decrease GHGs by

40% by 2030. You can go onto the website -- its called the AB32 Scoping Plan Update.

The plan lays out far-reaching strategies to shift the California economy away from dependence on fossil fuels to a thriving sustainable future with a growing economy, more jobs and substantial environmental and public health benefits. We are hoping to adopt this plan at our meeting next month.

I know many of you have already been working hard for years to achieve some of these goals. The policy support of state and regional air quality agencies will help you in this pursuit.

The Air Board is committed to drawing on your knowledge and experience, and actually, we will need your knowledge and experience, in helping our state and our region lead the world in saving our planet and improving our air quality and public health.

And I think, like many of you, I'm really optimistic that Bay Area residents will rise to the occasion and continue to support policies and actions to protect and expand open space and to address climate change. They've already shown a history of doing this.

Last June, an overwhelming 70% of Bay Area voters supported the San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority's Regional Measure AA, which is a \$12 per year parcel tax to raise \$500 million over 20 years for wetland restoration and public access to the Bay.

That \$500 million will leverage billions of dollars from foundations, federal, state and local agencies, and will allow us, in the Bay Area, to complete great marsh and wetland restoration projects which will improve water quality, improve habitat, help address sea level rise, and provide more access to the Bay.

There is no other regional measure like this in the country. And we should all thank Save San Francisco Bay Association for working hard to develop and support the legislation to form the Restoration Authority.

I can also tell you, as Vice-Chair of the San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority Board for the past 9 years, this multi-year effort was the embodiment of great regional collaboration and had active engagement from leaders in business, labor, government, the environment, environmental justice and non-profit sectors.

I think that what this historic vote tells us is that when we all come together as a region and we clearly communicate a compelling vision to the public, we can pass tax measures and bold policies that lead the nation and make major differences in improving our environment and livability.

We are going to need more Bay Area-wide efforts like Measure AA if we're going to be successful solving our challenging regional problems like addressing sea level rise, affordable housing, reducing traffic congestion, and improving air and water quality.

Conferences such as today are a great opportunity to discuss these strategies and to strengthen and build the partnerships we will need to be successful.

So let me end by saying – I think its fitting to hold this conference here in the historic Ford Building which is part of the Rosie the Riveter World War II Home Front National Historical Park.

If you haven't had a chance, you should visit the wonderful Visitor Center which tells this history. This National Park is the official place in the United States which

tells the story of how the home front, including the local Kaiser Shipyards, helped win World War II.

The work that you are all doing is vital to winning the battle of keeping the Bay Area diverse, vibrant, healthy, and a livable place to live, work and play.

All of us who benefit from this in the region thank you for your dedicated efforts on behalf of the people and the environment of the Bay Area.

So thank you for your work and for spending a day to realize this vision.