



Peter Douglas

[The Sacramento Bee reports today](#) that Peter Douglas, the long-time executive director of the [California Coastal Commission](#), has taken a medical leave of absence and will retire in November. Douglas definitely deserves his retirement, but it's a real loss for the environmental community.

Douglas helped draft the original Coastal Act as legislative director for former state Senator Alan Sieroty; he became the Commission's initial deputy director, and then assumed the head reins in 1985. His tenure has seen the Commission become one of the most effective — and beleaguered — environmental enforcers in the nation, and perhaps the United States' most powerful land use agency. It has final say over virtually all of the state's coastline (up to within 1000 feet of the mean high tide line), some of the most environmentally significant — and most economically valuable — property in the entire world.

The Coastal Commission has been a leading reason why the California coast has not turned into 1,100 miles of schlock, and thus it has been a target for developers for more than 30 years. Governor George Deukmejian tried to destroy it during his term, from 1983 to 1991, and Republicans have attempted to defund it on an almost annual basis. Meanwhile, some environmentalists complain that it is too sympathetic to developers.

Through it all, Douglas has maintained the Commission's political viability and ecological integrity, proving to the doubters that the state government can create and manage an effective program to preserve the state's natural resources for all of its citizens. He had help, of course: from the state's powerful environmental constituency, a dedicated and talented staff, and (surprisingly) from Republicans such as former Governor Pete Wilson, who is justly-lambasted for his cynical nativism but actually had a decent environmental record.

Douglas deserves a rest and a return to good health. We should all wish his permanent successor has half as successful a tenure as he did.