

Social Equity and Environmental Justice

Shoreline flooding from climate change and rising sea level will affect communities differently depending on their location and resources. Disadvantaged communities located in low-lying areas are often disproportionately affected and less able to bounce back from flooding. Minority and low-income communities have more difficulty finding temporary or permanent replacement housing in our high-cost region. Such communities are also often at greater risk of exposure to hazards or toxic substances mobilized by flooding given their proximity to brownfields and industrial areas.



What is Environmental Justice?

Environmental justice is defined by California state law as, “the fair treatment of people of all races, cultures, and incomes with respect to the development, adoption, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.” (CA Gov’t Code Section 65040.12(3)).

Policy Issues

- Flooding often affects low-income and minority communities disproportionately, including:
 - Loss of access to already limited open spaces and recreation along the shoreline;
 - Potential risk of exposure to pollutants mobilized by flood waters from nearby contaminated and industrial sites; and
 - Challenges in attracting funding to protect neighborhoods.
- The Commission's policies cannot address disproportionate impacts, even when they are identified.
- The Commission's laws or policies do not address environmental justice directly.
- Planning and project design does not provide early and transparent opportunities for disadvantaged communities to participate.

Policy Options

- Prevent loss of public access and open spaces and improve shoreline protection in disadvantaged communities.
- Initiate a Bay Plan amendment process to include findings and policies on social equity and environmental justice, specifically for public access, mitigation, shoreline protection, and climate change.
- Determine if changes to the McAteer-Petris Act are necessary to adequately address environmental justice.
- Initiate a regional adaptation plan that addresses the concerns of disadvantaged communities.

Pros / Cons

- An equity analysis may identify quality of life issues that otherwise would not be assessed.
- Accounting for the needs of diverse communities may result in increased access to the shoreline, however costs to applicants may increase.
- Addressing impacts on communities will require increased staff resources, training and new approaches to public engagement and participation.

Discussion Questions

1. Is there anything about how this issue is framed that concerns you?
2. Considering this topic only, what do you envision would be a positive outcome for the region?
3. Would you identify this issue as your top priority to address in the short-term?

