

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE POLICY

Rivers and Mountains Conservancy

INTRODUCTION

Mission Statement of the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy

The San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy (RMC) was created by the California legislature in 1999. We're one of ten conservancies within the California Resources Agency. Our mission is to preserve open space and habitat in order to provide for low-impact recreation and educational uses, wildlife habitat restoration and protection, and watershed improvements within our jurisdiction.

Our territory covers eastern Los Angeles County and western Orange County. This vast and varied area includes mountains, valleys, rivers, coastal plain, and coastline.

Environmental Justice Definition

California law defines Environmental Justice as “the fair treatment of people of all races, cultures and income with respect to the development, adoption, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies” (Government Code Section 65040.12 and Public Resources Code Section 72000).

Background

The concept of Environmental Justice is designed to give people of all races and incomes equal access to open space and a healthier quality of life. Environmental justice communities where environmental justice principles are commonly identified are those where residents are predominantly minorities and low-income; and where residents are at a disadvantage because they are exposed to negative environmental influences that are barriers to their public health well-being and, in some instances, have been excluded from the decision making process in relation to their built environment. This environmental justice policy aims at addressing the environmental inequities and lack of access in the communities the RMC covers.

Specifically, the key environmental justice principles are 1) community driven empowerment/organizing campaigns, 2) identification of incompatible land uses, and 3) recognize opportunities to create green infrastructure such as community open space and alternative transportation modes (bicycling and walking).

Policy

It is the policy of the RMC that the fair treatment of people of all races, cultures and income shall be fully considered during the planning, decision-making, development and implementation of all RMC programs, policies, and activities. The intent of this policy is to ensure that the public within the RMC catchment area including minority and low-income populations are not discriminated against; treated unfairly, or caused to experience disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects from environmental and land-use decisions, and that kids and families have access to safe open space and healthy neighborhoods.

Conservancy Actions

It shall be the RMC's action to:

1. Make environmental justice considerations a standard in the way we do business. We will keep an environmental justice perspective in our programs, activities, and training, as we set priorities, identify program gaps, and assess the benefits and adverse impacts our programs have on communities in our catchment area.
2. Work with local elected officials, staff of cities, and community groups, to address concerns about lack of access to safe open space, especially in low-income and minority communities.
3. Review and evaluate RMC programs and activities to ensure that the environmental justice perspective through its programs does not contain any substantive gaps.
4. Develop and incorporate an environmental justice program element into our employee-training curriculum.
5. Annually provide a staff briefing to the Board at a public meeting regarding ongoing and planned activities. Issue a written annual status report identifying action items accomplished and a proposed work plan outlining the action items for the next year. The work plan shall include quantitative goals for working in disadvantaged communities and populations adversely impacted by industrial and transportation proximities.
6. Strengthen our public outreach, education, and organizing efforts in all communities, especially low-income communities and where we see a need for the implementation.
7. Identify partners within land-use and transportation agencies that are responsible for the environmental benefits or adverse impacts in our neighborhoods and address potential mitigation activities.

8. Work with cities, County of Los Angeles, and community groups in identifying relevant populations living in close proximity to industrial and transportation locations that may benefit from RMC programs and activities.
9. Taking a proactive role in working with cities in adopting and/or updating their General Plans to implement environmental justice policies.
10. Work in conjunction with other federal, state, regional, and local agencies to ensure consideration of disproportionate impacts on relevant populations and create action oriented mitigation plans.
11. Fostering broad access to existing and proposed data sets and technology to better identify, analyze, and respond to environmental justice issues (database bank).

CONCLUSION

The RMC is committed to integrating environmental justice principles into its programs and plans. We will continue to improve our outreach efforts in all communities of our catchment area, ensuring that everyone has an opportunity to participate fully in the development and implementation of our programs. As an oversight agency we will work closely with local cities and County of Los Angeles, and other stakeholders to jointly develop environmental justice awareness so that it is in line with our funding grant programs for project design and development. Our commitment is to take consideration of neighborhoods where people encounter environmental pressures given their close proximity to industrial and transportation zones, as well as incompatible land uses. We are taking steps today to restore, create, and preserve free open space for all, and reduce health risks in communities. Our goal is to ensure that the populations in our area especially children and families are empowered to play a role in creating a healthful environment.