

Opinion Editorial: Coastal Cleanup Volunteers Demonstrate California's Commitment to Vital Resources

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Last Saturday, my family and I joined the thousands of Californians who fanned out across beaches, bays, rivers, creeks and wetlands to pick up cigarette butts, discarded food containers and other trash as part of the 25th Annual California Coastal Cleanup Day sponsored by the California Coastal Commission and part of the Ocean Conservancy's International Coastal Cleanup.

Nearly 70,000 Californians around the state devoted part of their weekend to the yucky, but necessary, task of gathering an estimated one million pounds of trash and recyclables to protect our beaches, oceans and watersheds.

In their hats and gloves, carrying buckets and bags, this army of volunteers provided a visible demonstration of Californians' love for the coast and their commitment to preserving our state's natural resources. Californians have shown this same commitment at the polls for nearly a decade as they voted overwhelmingly time and time again, to protect the state's open space, parks, and water by approving \$15.5 billion in investments in conservation bonds.

As a surfer and mother of two small children, I spend a lot of time at the beach. I am thankful that support from California voters means our state leads the nation in investments in beach water quality improvements. The Clean Beaches Program alone has invested in dozens of projects to clean up coastal waters and help ensure swimmers' safety by reducing stormwater and urban runoff, sewage spills and other causes of ocean pollution around the state.

With less than 2 percent of California's budget dedicated to conservation and the recession placing ever greater constraints on funding, the voters' approval of these essential investments in land, water and parks is making it possible for the state to continue to improve ocean water quality, protect the coastline, and preserve open space.

These investments are vital to the future of our state. Not only are they good for the environment, they are also critical for restoring the California economy -- tourism is a major economic engine for our state, protecting our natural infrastructure helps create jobs, and maintaining quality of life helps attract and retain businesses.

Throughout California, the benefits of public conservation investments have been enormous. But the task is not finished. California's natural resources and way of life face mounting challenges and threats from population growth, toxic pollution and climate change. With 20 million new California residents expected by 2050, pressures on our natural resources will continue to grow.

To confront future challenges and threats, the Ocean Conservancy has joined other environmental leaders in an educational program called Conserving California. Together, these groups are increasing awareness about the benefits and value of investing in the water, land and parks that make the Golden State the unique place we all treasure.

Last weekend, nearly 70,000 volunteers demonstrated their commitment to California's vital resources by picking up trash. Our challenge now is to get all Californians to join in that commitment. Working together to conserve our natural resources, we can ensure that the Golden State has a golden future.