

Oral History: Phil Isenberg

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Part 2

CHRIS AUSTIN: Everyone in California depends on the delta for something, be it drinking water, fresh produce, or livestock, goods shipped over the highways and railways that transverse it, or gas and electricity that is carried in pipes and transmissions lines that cross it. Wildlife also depends on the delta, as it provides crucial habitat for wildlife and is an important stop for migratory birds. It's home to over half a million people as well.

This relatively small region has a big job: It is the hub of California's massive water storage and delivery system, with water exports to agricultural and urban users in the Bay Area, Central California, and Southern California. Two-thirds of Californians rely on the delta for a portion of their drinking water. However, the delta is in decline by all accounts for decades. Its levee system is fragile, many of the native species are declining, invasive species have taken hold, there are water quality issues in some areas, and no governmental entity seems to be squarely in charge. For decades, Californians have argued over how to manage the delta's resources with no end in sight.

So when the Delta Plan was passed and was passed unanimously, how important was it to you that the gentleman from the delta represented on the council voted, it was a unanimous vote.

PHIL ISENBERG: Well, I... In all the stuff I've done for the last... For all my political career, my goal is to get as nearly a unanimous result as possible almost every time. Some issues, you can't do it, you don't even try. But when you do major foundational documents like a Delta Plan or the Delta Vision Report before that, or the Marine Life Protection Act, and I just did the one... I chaired the one for the Central Coast of California. If you start off with a unanimous vote, you have a better chance of moving ahead and actually implementing the plan you've adopted. And so, fortunately, for the Marine Life Protection Act, for the Delta Vision Advisory Panel, and the Delta Plan at the Delta Stewardship Council, at all three stages, we got unanimous support. That was important to me.

AUSTIN: Well, also too, when we'll get to it... After they passed the Delta Plan, you got the flurry of lawsuits, people were saying...

ISENBERG: Oh, yeah that's right. I think 27 lawsuits, or 15, or 18, or whatever. Yeah. And that's because... This is my view. That's because all those organizations, sure, they have... They're

not terrible people. I don't think there's any venality in it, but it's all me first and my interest, me and mine first. And you can't do that for everybody in the State of California. There's no way that all, however many people we've got this year, 40 million people, each get exactly what they want out of water forever. And you know, politicians, as a rule, don't like to say no to anybody. And so you find ways to say yes, and you create new governmental agencies in the hopes that they saying no might civilize the debate somewhat. That's a legitimate role for agencies to perform.

Most people think, and I believe this is correct, that the Delta Stewardship Council was told to adopt a delta policy. But the legislation did not exempt, didn't say anything about it, but it did not exempt the plan from the environmental quality laws of California, and we discovered to our somewhat astonishment that a planning document basically was now to be treated by everybody in the world as if it was a project. That a planning document with a vision, the goals you want to reach, all of a sudden becomes a recommendation for dams and culverts and tunnels and environmental projects and marshlands and upper marshlands and the whole routine. Well, the minute you do that, add at least three years to the process because it just is impossible to do the environmental work, which is very costly, and particularly if you're doing it for the first time, very costly and time-consuming. And it became very clear we could adopt the Delta Plan by a certain deadline, but we couldn't include the levee stuff because that required its own evaluation.

And one of the things the Department of Water Resources did want the council to do is set up a process where all the beneficiaries actually belly up to the bar and pay some money, because so much of the water debate is not about water; it's about cheap water, as Jay Lund and other scientists like to say. And the quest for cheap water is a lot harder than the quest for water.

AUSTIN: OK, let's go to the levees here.

ISENBERG: The levees.

AUSTIN: The levees. Let's levee. So, one of the things I know that you spend a lot of time was figuring out who was paying for work on the levees, state, federal shares, and stuff. Why is funding the levees, why is that an issue?

ISENBERG: Because for many of the levees within the delta, people usually say 1,100 miles of levees. For most of that, they protect farmland which is of relatively low dollar value. The building of levees, however, is high dollar projects. And so, people who think they need the protection but can't afford to pay for it themselves are always searching for money. And politicians, myself included when I was in the Legislature, are always trying to find some ways to have somebody else pay for a local need, but keep local control at the same time because money is good and control is bad from the state. And levees are just uniquely fundamentally about wrong place, bound to fail... Many of them are bound to fail in the relatively near future. You can't have land 25 feet or more below water level and expect the levees not to somehow break and collapse. And there'll be more of that, and that will lead to saltier water coming in through the San Francisco Bay. It'll lead to... Like Schwarzenegger. I forget which island it was. Was it Twitchell that broke when he was...?

AUSTIN: Jones.

ISENBERG: Jones Tract.

AUSTIN: Jones Tract.

ISENBERG: Jones Tract. San Joaquin County, right?

AUSTIN: Right, right. South...

ISENBERG: It broke... On a clear day, it broke, it flooded 10,000 acres, whatever it was, and Arnold gets on a helicopter, flies down there, and says, "We will rebuild this levee." And the water guys are looking. They said, "Oh, Christ! What is he saying that for? This guy..." And the land developers liked it because a good slug of that land was housing that can afford to pay for levees. But as long as Arnold's going to have us restoring the levees, that's good. And all politicians get trapped by that. All politicians... They ought to ban politicians taking helicopter flights during emergencies.

AUSTIN: So, the Delta Reform Act tasked the council with coming up with some type of prioritization for state spending on delta levees...

ISENBERG: Right.

AUSTIN: The Delta Levee Investment Strategy. How difficult of a process was that?

ISENBERG: It was awful. It was awful. Because it's a road that's been traveled for 80 years; the players are well known. There's a famous book on levees and flooding in the delta called "Battling the Inland Sea." And in that book are the van Loben Sels, a family in the delta. And guess what? There are van Loben Sels today on the same land going through the same issues, arguing the same points. And so it's a... I was going to say it's a sterile issue; that isn't quite right. It's an issue that is so narrow in focus, to largely agricultural levees in the delta, that it's hard to break through the traditional positions of families that have been there for a long time and get any motion at all. And so it's... The political gravity always results in, "Let's throw some money at the local levee districts," and so you give them \$400 million for projects and it dribbles out, and it hasn't substantially changed the situation. Sure, it's gotten a little stronger levees, but we grade it by saying, "If you raise it an inch or two, that'll get us another 20 years." And maybe that's OK, maybe that's all you can expect.

AUSTIN: So, one of the outcomes of the Delta Levee Investment Strategy was this decision tool. What was that decision tool? How did that work?

ISENBERG: Well, you understand, I left in the early stages of that. It's a way of evaluating requests for funding. It's a way of protecting the Department of Water Resources, which usually has the funding responsibility, to protect them from political pressures that just want to satisfy the home team. And that's a legitimate goal for this activity. Now, does it work? Well, sort of, until the next legislative bill package where you get a bond issue and interested politicians want their cut of the action for their constituents. So it doesn't work perfectly. It helps.

AUSTIN: Yes. So, the Delta Reform Act contained provisions that the Bay Delta Conservation Plan, which was the forerunner to the California WaterFix today...

ISENBERG: The tunnels.

AUSTIN: The tunnels. That it would be automatically integrated into the Delta Plan.

ISENBERG: If conditions were met.

AUSTIN: And what conditions were those?

ISENBERG: Well, there were many conditions. But first, it had to be approved by appropriate state and federal agencies. Secondly, they had to get NCC... I'm sorry, federal environmental clearance for the project, and state equivalent, state environmental clearance. And then they had to do a bunch of other lesser stuff. So it was... It shaped the administration's tunnels idea into a much more expansive and developed plan that I thought, frankly, better dealt with the notion of co-equal goals than WaterFix, the Jerry Brown version that followed. And that's because they actually went out of their way to try to at least initially talk about major environmental commitments. And so at one point in time, what is called the Bay Delta Conservation Plan envisaged restoring about roughly 15 to 20 percent of all the land in the delta to protected status of some kind.

Well, God, that's amazing, because we probably now've got protected status for 3 to 6 percent of the land, and that would have been a major expansion, about 150,000 acres of the statutory delta. That didn't last the political process. That was one of the real concerns. And the delta people, there are delta environmentalists and there are delta people who were opposed to the project, but not for environmental reasons. And so, they kind of ganged up on everyone, and the notion of taking 150,000 acres of land, even though much of it is owned by government agencies, offended the people who were renting land and grazing and doing whatever they were doing. But anyway, it was a very complicated process, and from the beginning, it was pretty clear that the Department of Water Resources wasn't quite sure how serious we were going to be. Now, they knew I was a pain in the ass, but they weren't sure the rest of the council would go along. And I think a bit to their surprise, the Delta Plan that got adopted in 2013 was a unanimous vote, including a very prominent Sacramento County supervisor who has been, who is opposed to tunnels. But the process worked out, the involvement of science was very important because the scientific guys tended to haul everybody who wanted to just speak in polemic terms back to grounds of issues and actions and all that. So it worked out better than I thought it would do.

AUSTIN: In 1982, you were co-chair of the Central Valley No on the Peripheral Canal campaign. But it sounds like you've sort of changed your mind a bit on that.

ISENBERG: Well, you know. It was too much fun not to be able to blast the great monolith, the octopus, of Southern California. It's too much fun to beat them up. And that was fun in 1982. I just started at the Legislature and had finished up as Mayor of Sacramento. And if you do anything in Sacramento on water, you condemn Southern California, because like you, you're an

evil Southern California water-user, and we keep our eye on you when you come to Sacramento. Anyway. So yes, I think...

AUSTIN: I get up every morning and say, "How can I drain the delta?"

ISENBERG: Yes, right. It's... Yeah, politics is just weird, and the regional politics in California on water has been around for 150 years, and it'll be in bits and pieces around forever.

AUSTIN: So what about the 1982 project now? How did you... Why did you change your mind in there? Were you convinced, somehow became convinced, that..

ISENBERG: Well, because... I mean, first of all, it was 2006, not 1982. But secondly, the water supply in California is becoming more constricted. Not that there's less water particularly, but it's not always available to everybody who wants it any time they want it at a cheap price. And so, water is just tightening up. The issues are tightening up. The water supply you can get in the future is going to be more costly. And that leads to inevitable tensions, but it also means you don't just toss out something. And I don't know how you would replace water in metropolitan Southern California, although I told Jeff Kightlinger, the head of the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, I said, "Jeff, why don't you just announce you'll get off the State Water Project, you won't take any more." They only get... What is it? A million and a half, 2 million acre-feet of water, "and ask for \$60 million, billion in return?" I mean, a kind of a revolutionary concept, but of course, the danger of that for us up north, if we don't have them to blame, who are we going to blame?

Now, maybe it's the Central Valley farmers, but... I don't know, it's interesting. So, all of this stuff, the good government stuff, is you take a messy issue and you try to make sense out of it. Another guy I like is the... is a researcher at the University California, Berkeley, in Disaster Management. And he says that water is a mess and you just have to learn with it, and a policy-maker's goal is to avoid a catastrophe, not to create perfection. And I kind of like that. That appeals to me.

AUSTIN: So, when you drive through the delta or you drive through Sacramento, there's a lot of lawn signs out: "Restore the delta"...

ISENBERG: There are some, there are some. Yeah.

AUSTIN: "Save the tunnels." Why do you think people are putting out signs and getting involved in this one? It's an issue that's not even on the ballot.

ISENBERG: Because they don't like the concept of sending their water somewhere else. I mean, the fact it's not their water is irrelevant to many of them. They think...

AUSTIN: Well, whose water is it?

ISENBERG: Well, it's actually all of our water, everywhere in the state. Goes back to the Justinian Code. The air and the water is available, and a water right is a statutorily recognized

privilege. It is not a God-given declaration of entitlement. So. So I don't think... If you drive through the delta now, what you see is pretty much a continuation of what's been going on. The urban development, particularly from San Joaquin County but also Sacramento, is encroaching more and more on the statutory delta, the prime environmental habitat area, and we're going to be hard-pressed to protect that. If we don't protect it and then it collapses, you can expect terrific decades of litigation on all of that.

AUSTIN: More than that, I'm sure.

ISENBERG: Yeah.

AUSTIN: So, going back to that July 2012 statement by Governor Brown and Interior Secretary Salazar, there is another important piece of that announcement.

ISENBERG: Shrinking the size of the tunnels.

AUSTIN: Yes. That's... The going from 15,000 CFS down to 9,000 CFS, and five intakes down to three intakes. Why was that so significant?

ISENBERG: Well, you know, people say size doesn't matter, but guys think it does.

Tunnels are big, but the old peripheral canal that was defeated by the voters in 1982 had a capacity of 21,000 cubic feet per second. The Schwarzenegger kind of... It started off as a canal, and then it morphed into the tunnels underneath, but that went down to 15,000 cubic feet per second. And Jerry brought it down to 12,000. But they're still immense projects. And the critics, environmentalists, and the delta interests said, "Well, wait a minute. If that were run day and night, you could drain the entire delta." Well, yeah, sure, but it won't run day or night, can't run day or night, but what will happen to it? And there was even a moment during the... I can't remember whether it was the... I think it was the Delta Plan, when Planning and Conservation League, primary opponent of the tunnels, said they could live with a 3,000 cubic feet per second single tunnel. And they were instantly dismissed by the water guys because it wasn't big enough. But of course, the flip side of that coin is they'd said they could live with something. And the art in politics is to take that occasion and try to do something with it. We tried to do that, I tried to do that, without result, it was too early.

ISENBERG: Now it might actually work. Now is 3,000 something they liked? No, they'd want it all to go away, but they could live at 3,000, they might live at 5,000. And that process is probably part of our future for the next couple of years while we see whether anything is going to happen. I mean, that tunnel idea could simply implode of its own disinterest.

AUSTIN: Off the record, yeah, Governor Newsom says one tunnel, but he's given us very few details. Maybe it's one 9,000 CFS tunnel.

ISENBERG: But understand -- it's kind of like Jerry. The more details you give, the less flexibility you have. And policymakers, particularly the big guys, the governors of the state, the presidents, the smart ones want to have... They want to have as fleshed out a deal as possible to

evaluate; they don't want to get in too early and try to do all the details themselves. Chief executives are not great on detail. Jimmy Carter, notwithstanding.

AUSTIN: Well, the Planning and Conservation League and the NRDC, which put forth that one-tunnel proposal; what they said specifically was that they weren't necessarily supportive but they would want to see that study because maybe they might...

ISENBERG: Oh, well. Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

AUSTIN: OK.

ISENBERG: Every... Sure. And studies are the death knell of action. I know all that. But you know, basically we've got a water supply for human beings throughout California that runs through the delta, a threatened area. It's inconceivable to me that we won't have some water coming from the delta to satisfy human needs 50, 100, 150, 200 years in the future. The issue is, how much, under what conditions, what other sources do you have? It's not as if the delta water is endlessly available. My point about us up north are using more water than all the people down south, well, that's, that's heresy. If I said that when I was an elected politician from the Sacramento region, that probably would have been a recall petition, but it's true. And this whole process is kind of American government lurching forward with eyes closed, hoping that things get better, knowing it may not for a while, but we muddle through. And we'll muddle through here, I think.

AUSTIN: So, let's talk about science because you've always been very involved with science. And science began in the Delta Vision process.

ISENBERG: Oh, long before that.

AUSTIN: Long before that.

ISENBERG: The CALFED Bay Delta had a science team, a good slug of them came over to the Delta Vision Process. It's a... They're a remarkably talented group of physical scientists who have developed around Northern California primarily who provide terrific information on the delta.

AUSTIN: Now, in July of 2012, there was an announcement. Governor Brown...

ISENBERG: Governor Brown, the secretary of the Department of Interior from the federal government, and somebody's standing in for FEMA, I think. They had a press conference... That's where Jerry uttered his famous statement, "I want to do shit," or "build shit," or whatever he said.

AUSTIN: "Get shit done." Yeah.

ISENBERG: Yeah. And in that, but not Jerry's comments but the press release that was issued, they had a little thing that science will guide policy, environment and water in the delta. And that's revolutionary.

AUSTIN: So it hadn't up into that point?

ISENBERG: No, you have to have enough scientists around of some sort or the other to satisfy the Environmental Quality Act in California or the federal equivalent. But nobody... The word "guide" suggests that they do more than simply give talks with PowerPoints to be ignored once the meeting is over. And it's the effort to give scientists my... This is my personal opinion, is to... I want to suck the scientist into the decision-making process. And they are deeply fearful of that.

AUSTIN: Yes, you gave scientists a hard time.

ISENBERG: Of course ,I give scientists a hard time. I've gone through a succession of people I give hard times to: lawyers, doctors, judges, and scientists, because I like them a lot, I read their work, I admire what they do, and like all of us, we should all be better than we currently are.

AUSTIN: But trying to bring science into the policy process has been a challenge.

ISENBERG: Well, it's been a challenge, but it's one where the water developer community, which is local water agencies and land developers and all of that, have come to the realization that, "Gee, we can't just go hire our hand-developed specialist and expect his 500 pages to match independent science evaluations." And there's a little window where, in fact, if the scientific opinions could be made actionable, the water developers and environmentalists would like it, sort of. And actionable means you can rely on a declaration at this point in time that adequate science has been used, or what we call commonly in statute, best available science. And that is a really powerful and interesting thing. It's also led to an expansion of the number of scientists making more complicated the work, but the agencies, federal agency, water agencies, state water agencies, and the locals, they'll stand still for science being involved, but they don't want to be controlled by scientists. They don't want to have scientific findings that force them to act. Although more and more, the environmental laws passed nationally or in California have that effect.

AUSTIN: Well, when you were at the Delta Stewardship Council, one of the things that you were a big proponent of was having the development of the Delta Science Plan. Why did we need a Delta Science Plan?

ISENBERG: Well, my theory is that there's now such a large body of science opinion speculating in and around the delta that you need somewhere an independent sounding board, something to put boundaries on the discussion, and ultimately some place to have people say "Yes, as of today, this is the best available science," the measure, the test, for proceeding with a project, whether it's a water project or an environmental project. And scientists don't like that. Not all scientists. There's a guy, Dr. John Wiens, who's now a retired prominent scientist, he worked at the Point Reyes Bird Observatory; terrific writer, by the way. And he gave a speech I listened to at the... one of the Bay Delta conferences, and he says, "When is the best available science the best available science? How do you know?" And he says, "You know, it doesn't have to be perfect; it just has to be good enough." And for policy-makers and for bureaucrats, the good enough is the question they want. Can we rely on this being adequate enough science so that

nobody wants to shoot us, or does shoot us, for proceeding based on this assumption? And I was constantly trying to draw the scientific community into some kind of acknowledgment that that is part of their role. And that's where... So we've had analyst discussions. I wrote articles on the subject and had a lot of fun with them because they're really smart. They're really smart. They're generally more humorous than you would think they would be, and they're very influential.

AUSTIN: "Best available science" sounds kind of squishy, hard to identify. How do you know?

ISENBERG: As opposed to what? Putting in statute the measure of certain elements, this percent of water is pollution and this percent of something else? I mean, you think about it, science is constantly changing because research is constantly going on and the opinions get modified. That's what you'd want to have happen. And so it's an endless cycle of re-juggling, and something you think 10 years ago would have worked, turns out it doesn't work. Or something that you didn't think would work actually had some merit. And so that's what scientists do. And so, they live in a... They live in an environment where politicians demand of them certainty. "Tell me when it's going to rain. Tell me when it's not going to rain. Tell me when it will flood. Tell me when..." And that's what politicians want to know so they can go do something. Scientists can't do that, but they can be more deeply involved. But where does it stop from crossing the boundary between scientific evaluation and opinion and advocacy? And it's very difficult, but it's one of the more interesting parts of the job.

AUSTIN: Do you think we're any further ahead with integrating science into our policy decisions?

ISENBERG: Yeah, I do. I think, for example, on the Coordinating Committee, the Federal State Coordinating Committee, that kind of coordinates the federal and state dams and canals and all that. Yeah, I think... Personally, I think selected scientists should have votes on the policy. The feds and the state water guys hate that.

AUSTIN: Well, the Delta Reform Act specified that there would be an inter-agency implementing committee, which turned out to be the Delta Plan Inter-agency Implementation Committee or the DPIIC.

ISENBERG: Right.

AUSTIN: How effective do you think that inter-agency committee has been in implementing the Delta Plan, its regulations and recommendations?

ISENBERG: I was a skeptic. My colleague, the vice-chair of the Delta Council, a guy named Randy Fiorini, who I think you have talked to, Randy likes the idea because he just thinks if you get guys together and talk enough, you can solve all these problems. I think you can solve some problems, but yet, there always has to be a club or a giant piano suspended in air, hanging over the head of the negotiating parties, as a threat to get them to do anything. But the feds collectively have been skeptical of California's ability to suck the federal government into paying for things in the delta. And that goes... That runs the range. The core of engineers did not want to come in here and do the Central Valley Project or the bypasses around this region, but Congress

passed laws to force them to do it. And they do a pretty good job. I think those agencies need a place where they can talk to each other. But my... And particularly now with the new administration in Washington, there's a real rupture between California and Washington, DC, views of water policy. But periodically, it doesn't change.

George Bush, when he was president, wanted the State of California to buy out the Federal Central Valley Project of dams and reservoirs and all that, of course, for peanuts, but he wanted them to buy out that. And, you know, they'll do what they do either because they're pressured. There are a lot of people who just want to do it because it's right, but they don't have the money to do it. And so, we made recommendations on money, but we can't do a regulation ordering them to spend the money.

AUSTIN: What do you see is the likely future for the delta?

ISENBERG: It's going to shrink. It's going to shrink in the sense that unless you could control urban development, you can't easily protect even farming in the delta. That's been the San Joaquin County experience. I don't see anything that's going to change that. Well... I'm sorry. The threat of flooding in the delta has been a real impediment to growth, and the threat of sea level rise, even though it will have minimal impact in the delta, just is on top of that. So that will continue to have a big problem. When the state backed away from their 150,000 acre-feet of... 150,000 acres of protected lands, you just get back to the little pocket stuff. It needs a big concept. Gavin Newsom could reinstitute a version of that and it would be a legitimate co-equal goal to a project, even a reduced one-tunnel project.

AUSTIN: Well, the EcoRestore program has been under way for a number of years trying to restore acreage in the Delta.

ISENBERG: Yeah, but most of it's done as a result of the federal biological opinions that are occasionally issued and they're mandates from the goddamned federal government. And then California and the local water agencies and the land developers resist the compliance with federal standards, and after they've exhausted everything and even the Supreme Court has kicked them out, U.S. Supreme Court, they finally start claiming wonderful credit for all the things they were ordered to do that they resisted doing for 10 years. I mean, give me a break. That is not a coherent strategy. And so, a lot of the stuff that is environmental projects within EcoRestore, the companion to the tunnels, are things that were ordered in 2008. And don't you have to do more than that? Doesn't co-equal mean... We said it in our first comment letter to BDCP. We said the environmental side should be comparable in scope, done concurrently, and have guaranteed funding. And if you don't have that, then all you've got are paper, unenforceable promises of government agencies to do wonderful things in the future. That won't work much longer.

AUSTIN: Well, in the Bay Area, they have actually been successful in restoring tens of thousands of acres of tidal wetlands and marshes and et cetera, but it's been much harder to get those projects in in the delta, even though they're needed there as much.

ISENBERG: Well, it's because it's an agricultural area, low population, which makes it an attractive environmental area, and you don't have the environmental movement as actively

involved as residents here. And so you get Sacramento County, Solano County, San Joaquin County in particular, a little bit Contra Costa. The developments are extensive, the urban developments are extensive in and around the delta. People like to be around water except when it floods, and then they want somebody to stop that.

AUSTIN: So, out of the Delta Vision and the Delta Stewardship Council process, what has surprised you the most?

ISENBERG: I don't think a lot surprised me. This is government by exhaustion. It's a process that, by its very nature, is contentious, complicated, and only insiders pay attention to it on a regular basis. And I look at myself and I say, "You know, I had a terrific run in the Legislature, but I spent 10 years on water issues." After I left doing government work, 10 years, 14, 16... No, 14 years. 14 years. And somebody else, you, are going to get drafted into it 30 years from now to come back and do the then-current version of the same thing. And I would rather have, of course, like Donald Trump in this, I'd like to be able to give an order and have it followed and so I can go home and read science fiction books, but that isn't the way it works. And so it's a constant slog forward, hopefully forward. Obama's optimism was very appealing to me. I like... He's about as optimistic as I can get.

AUSTIN: What out of these processes are you most satisfied with?

ISENBERG: We completed them relatively on time, we had unanimous votes for the final projects, and particularly with the skilled work of John Kirlin, executive director in the first two, and the staff of the Delta Stewardship Council, they did a terrific job with not much help from the administration, but a lot of petty carping. I feel good about that. And I feel good about all the scientists I love to rag about. And so, there you are.

AUSTIN: OK. So, last question that I have on the list. So, do you look at the delta differently these days than you did in the past?

ISENBERG: Well, as development pops up in and around the delta, and even the farming operations are adding new processing plants and so on, the delta is receding and it's just being... It's being consumed by human desires. And that's infinitely sad to me because the delta is... It's kind of like those... Not Santa Catalina, but some of the offshore islands. You go out there and you can say, "Boy, this is what California looked like about 100 years ago, and I'm glad it's still around for me to look at it and say, 'People before me a couple of generations saw the same thing.'" That's important to me. And that's disappearing. And it pisses me off.

AUSTIN: The delta as an evolving place.

ISENBERG: Well, whatever. And it is evolving. The scientists tell us it's no longer a nature area as was established historically, whatever, 10,000 years ago. It hasn't been that since human beings started to come around. It's an artificially constructed and altered environment.