



Geoffrey K. Willis

Partner

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PRACTICE AREAS

- Real Estate
- Land Use and Natural Resources
- Environmental

OVERVIEW

Geoffrey K. Willis is a partner in the Real Estate, Land Use and Natural Resources and Environmental Practice Group in the firm's Orange County Office.

Areas of Practice

Mr. Willis concentrates his practice on matters involving the California Environmental Quality Act; the National Environmental Policy Act; water rights and quality; the Endangered Species Act; wetlands regulation; the Clean Air Act; CERCLA investigation, remediation and litigation; the California Subdivision Map Act; and local zoning and land use requirements, environmental due diligence and audits.

Additionally, Geoffrey handles matters involving the use or reuse of real property -- from the development of shopping centers, large conjunctive use projects, houses, golf courses, industrial parks and manufacturing complexes to regulatory compliance of ongoing businesses involving air, endangered species, water and wetlands permitting. Geoffrey has represented his clients' interests before all of the counties in Southern California, many of the cities in California, the State Water Resources Control Board, the Regional Water Quality Control Boards, the Army Corps of Engineers, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, the South Coast Air Quality Management District, the High Desert Air Pollution Control District, the California Department of Fish and Game, the California Coastal Commission, the California EPA, EPA Region IX, and a number of additional state and local governing bodies.

EDUCATION

- J.D., University of California, Hastings College of the Law, 1986
- B.A., Government, Pomona College, 1983

ADMISSIONS

- California

EXPERIENCE

Representative Matters

Transactional / Regulatory Matters

- Developed a compliance strategy for a major food manufacturer that allowed the client to avoid both plant shut-down and the payment of a substantial fine. In another matter, he successfully entitled an award-winning golf course/residential housing project that faced significant opposition from environmental groups.
- Gained approval for a commercial office complex using a unique "condominium" approach, which allowed the sale of individual buildings that otherwise would have been required to remain in common ownership. He has also successfully negotiated a land swap that allowed the development of a community church that would otherwise have been built in the flight path of an airport. The land swap allowed continued use and expansion of the airport and allowed the church to develop beyond what would have been allowed on its original site.
- Represents a Fortune 50 retailer assisting them in obtaining all permits and approvals necessary for new store development. He assists the client with compliance and permitting involving CEQA, the Subdivision Map Act, wetlands, air quality and the Endangered Species Act.
- Provided environmental review for mergers, acquisitions or financings involving one of the largest construction companies in the world, one of the world's leading manufacturers of fishing equipment, Indian casinos and hotels, energy companies, hospitals and sports complexes, among others

Litigation Matters

- Negotiated the dispute resolution between a major network broadcaster and environmental groups, that sought to prevent the telecast of a sporting event because of perceived harm to endangered big horn sheep. The broadcaster made minor changes to the broadcast coverage, which satisfied the concerns of the environmental groups.
- Set precedent in *Kola v. United States*, 882 F.2d 361 (1989), an action that changed the procedure by which the United States processes special use permits. In another matter, he was the lead litigator in an action brought on behalf of the City of Orange to compel the County of Orange to comply with the requirements of CEQA in its operation and planning of the Orange County jail system.
- Successfully represents land owners and public agencies in eminent domain matters throughout California involving the right to take, valuation, relocation expenses and related issues. In one matter, he brought a regulatory takings claim regarding the application of the Endangered Species Act, which resulted in a multimillion-dollar payment from the government for a temporary taking
- Brought a successful NEPA challenge against the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission concerning the Commission's failure to adequately study the impacts of the diversion of the city's major source of drinking water. He also litigated a water rights claim delineating surface and ground water rights.

HONORS

- Winner, California Young Lawyer's Association Award of Achievement For Distinguished Service to the Profession and the Public

MEMBERSHIPS

- Member, Environmental Section, State Bar of California
- Member, Orange County Bar Association
- Member, American Bar Association
- Member, Riverside County Bar Association
- Former president, Riverside County Barristers

ARTICLES

- Effective Urban Fringe Planning: A Case Study of the 2007 San Diego Wild Fires, *San Diego Daily Transcript*, August 22, 2008
- Sheppard Mullin Expands Its Land-Use Team, *Los Angeles Daily Journal*, February 4, 2008

SPEECHES

- "Drought Management in California - Much to Do with Nothing," CLE International (November 20, 2008)
- "Disaster Management and Preparedness," ABA Conference on Environmental Law, Keystone, CO (March 2008)
- "Real Estate From Beginning to End in California," Lorman Education Services, San Diego, Calif. (December 2007)
- "Updates, Trends & Analyses," First Annual Central California Land Use and Planning Law Conference, Lex and the City, Avila Beach, CA (March 2007)
- Speaker and moderator, "California Subdivision Law," Lorman Education Services (2006-2007)
- Speaker, "California Environmental Quality Act," CLE International (1998-2002)
- Chair and moderator, "Endangered Species Act Symposium," University of California Extension (1995-1998)
- Instructor, "Air Quality Law," University of California Riverside Extension (1990-1999)
- Instructor, "Survey of Water Law," University of California Riverside Extension (1990-1992)