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**Urban Wetlands Conservationist Honored with National Wetlands Award**



*Mark Abramson conducting a fish barrier survey at the Solstice Dam. Photo credit: Los Angeles Waterkeeper.*

The Environmental Law Institute has announced that Mark Abramson, Senior Watershed Advisor for The Bay Foundation, will receive the 2014 National Wetlands Award for Conservation and Restoration. This year marks the 25th anniversary of the awards. Mark and five other award recipients will be honored at a ceremony at the U.S. Botanic Garden in Washington, DC on May 8, 2014.

Mark grew up in Southern California. He left home to attend college in New Jersey, but decided to return home to finish his degree. After returning, he visited one of his favorite childhood diving spots. What he found there shocked him. The lobsters, eel grass, kelp and other life he remembered from his childhood were all gone. "I just kind of freaked out about it," recalls

Mark, “I just wanted to do something.” Mark started looking for groups to volunteer with and found what was then a small, non-profit organization – Heal the Bay. Soon after he started volunteering, Mark says he “knew this was what [he] was going to do.”

Mark has now dedicated the last 15 years of his life to protecting and restoring wetlands and streams in Los Angeles County. In this time, he has achieved a range of accomplishments, from leading extensive field research to engaging the public in monitoring efforts to leading the implementation of large wetland restoration projects. “One rarely encounters a single individual with such a combination of passion, expertise, and sheer stubbornness that has resulted in such tangible and inspiring results for wetlands conservation,” says Jamie King, Environmental Scientist for the Department of Parks and Recreation for the State of California. “Mark is one of that rare breed.”

One of Mark’s most significant accomplishments is the 10-year effort to restore the Malibu Lagoon. The lagoon is one of the last coastal wetlands in the County, which has seen 95% of its historic wetlands destroyed. Mark was involved from the beginning, volunteering hundreds of hours of his time to ensure the project’s success. “Despite a large number of participants in this restoration,” says UCLA Professor Richard Ambrose, “no one has devoted as much time and energy to its completion as Mark, nor taken as strong a leadership role in the project.”

The project was completed in 2013 and, since that time, a diverse community of plants and animals has returned to the lagoon. “Already things are markedly better,” says Mark. “The last vegetation survey I did four months ago, we had 40 different species of plants within a 10 meter radius as opposed to the four we had before.”

In addition to this work, Mark is also involved in outreach and education activities. This includes working at the UCLA Lab School to restore the ecosystems around the Stone Canyon Creek. What began as a volunteer project morphed into a restoration project that has been integrated into the elementary school’s curriculum. “Mark worked with us numerous times to help build our own background knowledge as educators as we embarked on this year-long study with our students,” say UCLA Lab School teachers Monica Acosta and Sylvia Gentile. “The students were engaged, excited, and inspired to know more about what it means to be a creek ecologist.” Mark continues to run monthly work sessions at the creek. “Volunteers from all over Southern California – elementary school kids up to adults – come to dig, weed and plant,” say the teachers. “He inspires them to learn about and protect wetlands along stream corridors and coastlines.”

Executive director of The Bay Foundation Shelley Luce says, “What differentiates [Mark] is the breadth of his talents, including the rare combination of technical expertise with the ability to lead and inspire people and to do the in-the-mud restoration work.”

The National Wetlands Awards program is administered by the Environmental Law Institute and supported by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, NOAA Fisheries, and the Federal Highway Administration. Our federal agency supporters provide financial support, serve on the selection committee, and/or participate in the ceremony. A committee of wetland experts representing federal and state governments, academia, and nonprofit organizations selected the award winners.

For more information on the National Wetlands Awards, visit [www.nationalwetlandsawards.org](http://www.nationalwetlandsawards.org) or e-mail [wetlandsawards@eli.org](mailto:wetlandsawards@eli.org).

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#### The Bay Foundation (TBF)

*The Bay Foundation is a 501(c) 3 non-profit environmental group founded in 1990 to restore and enhance the Santa Monica Bay through actions and partnerships that improve water quality, conserve and rehabilitate natural resources, and protect the Bay's benefits and values. TBF is one of the 28 National Estuary Programs ([www.santamonicabay.org](http://www.santamonicabay.org)).*

<http://elinwa.org/sites/default/files/Mark%20Abramson%20press%20release%20%2804%2028%2014%29-FINAL.pdf>