



## Matthew Wickersham

Partner

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### *Related Services*

Environment, Land Use & Natural Resources ■ Litigation ■ Environmental Litigation ■ Environmental Appellate Litigation ■ Land Use ■ Oil & Gas ■ Environmental Compliance, Permitting & Transactions ■ Appellate ■ Mass Torts & Toxic Torts ■ Perfluoroalkyl & Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS) ■ Oil & Gas Litigation ■ Water Resources ■ Administrative Law

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*Matt has the experience and track record to guide clients through all types of disputes involving environmental regulation and litigation. He is a go-to resource for companies facing litigation and agency proceedings and a trusted advisor when it comes to real estate development, contamination concerns, and environmental regulatory compliance.*

Matt Wickersham has a broad environmental and energy practice involving complex litigation, regulatory counsel, and transactional matters. He has represented clients in a wide variety of federal and state environmental litigation, including toxic tort litigation and class actions, citizen lawsuits, and environmental enforcement actions. He has extensive experience resolving land-use disputes and disputes under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Matt also has substantial experience in cost-recovery litigation in state and federal courts under California's Superfund law and Hazardous Substance Account Act (HSAA) and the federal Superfund law (CERCLA). At the same time, Matt regularly helps clients devise solutions to difficult regulatory problems, represents clients in administrative proceedings, and assists clients with deals and development projects. Matt also advises clients on regulatory programs related to environmental warning labels, underground storage tanks, environmental disclosure laws, brownfield laws, water rights, and land-use regulations.

Matt is featured in *Chambers USA: America's Leading Lawyers for Business* for Environment (California).

Matt served as a clerk to the Hon. Ronald M. Gould of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. He earned his J.D. from the University of Southern California, where he served as a judicial extern to the Hon. Lourdes G. Baird of the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California and received the Law Alumni Award for highest GPA upon graduation.

### *Representative Experience*

#### ***Energy and Renewables***

- Representing energy companies challenging ordinances adopted by the City and County of Los Angeles, declaring oil operations as a nonconforming use. The City's ordinance also prohibits the drilling, redrilling, and maintenance of existing wells. The lawsuits include claims that the ordinance is preempted by state law, and that the ordinances interfere with the operator's vested rights and represent an unconstitutional taking of property without the payment of just compensation. In March 2025, the City of Los Angeles stipulated to a judgment that its original ordinance is preempted by state law, and the County of Los Angeles has proposed to rescind its ordinance in light of changing state law.

- Representing an oil company in challenging to state agency for failing to treat injection project as exempt under CEQA. The Kern County (CA) Superior Court determined in November 2024 that the state abused its discretion in refusing to issue the project approval and not treating the project as exempt. The matter is currently on appeal.
- Representing an energy company in challenging a California statute that singles out the client's operations for draconian penalties to force the abandonment of low-production wells and then all operations at a particular oil field. A lawsuit has been filed alleging various constitutional and statutory challenges against the State's implementation of this statute.
- Representing oil companies challenging a de facto moratorium on the issuance of well stimulation permits by the State of California, including claims that the State officials lack statutory authority to adopt a de facto moratorium and that the agency has implemented an underground regulation.
- Represented a renewable energy company against a challenge under CEQA to the approval of a project converting a crude oil refinery in Paramount, CA into a fully renewable fuels production refinery capable of processing 25,000 barrels per day. The case was resolved through a favorable settlement.
- Represented an energy company, royalty owner and trade association in a challenge to a county's general plan amendment that would severely restrict ongoing oil operations throughout Ventura County, CA. The action also challenges the environmental impact report adopted for the amendment as failing to consider the potentially significant environmental impacts that would result from implementation of the new policies. The parties have reached a favorable settlement.
- Represented seven oil companies (that generated about 90% of the oil production within California) as interveners defending a lawsuit brought by environmental organizations against the state oil and gas agency. The petitioners challenged DOGGR's regulation of underground injection and sought the immediate prohibition of injection activities for thousands of wells. After a trial on the merits, the court denied the petitioners' claims for a writ of mandate in their entirety. The case was affirmed in full by the court of appeal, and the Supreme Court denied review.
- Represented a large oil production company, along with impacted business partners and royalty owners, in a challenge to a countywide ballot initiative that would immediately prohibit well stimulation, the drilling of new wells, and would impose a sunset date for the injection or impoundment of produced water. The California Supreme Court held that the initiative was pre-empted by state law, and that local governments cannot contradict a state statute providing that the state agency has authority to determine the appropriate methods of oil production in each suitable case.
- Obtained a pleadings-stage dismissal of a lawsuit challenging the issuance of drilling approvals for five exploratory wells issued in violation of CEQA. The court dismissed the claim without leave to amend in response to our demurrer.
- Represented an oil production company as the real party in interest against a lawsuit challenging the issuance of a renewed conditional use permit, allowing the continued operation or drilling of 36 wells within Ventura County, CA. The trial court denied the claims in their entirety, which was affirmed by the court of appeal. The California Supreme Court denied review.
- Represented an energy company in a lawsuit challenging the submission of an aquifer exemption application for a large oil field. The trial court denied the petitioner's claims that the California Division of Oil, Gas, and Geothermal Resources (DOGGR) and the State Water Resources Control Board were required to comply with CEQA before submitting an exemption application to the U.S. EPA, in a complete victory that was not appealed.
- Represented an energy company in obtaining a preliminary injunction against the enforcement of regulations from DOGGR that would have imposed substantial daily penalties for continued injection into nonexempt aquifers that were the subject of pending agency approval.

- Counsel for an oil and gas company in CEQA litigation brought by environmental activist groups challenging hundreds of permits to drill oil and gas wells in a large oil field in Kern County, CA. The trial court has denied the claims in their entirety, holding that issuance of the permits was a ministerial action.
- Represented three petroleum industry groups as interveners in a lawsuit initiated by environmental organizations against DOGGR that challenged DOGGR's regulation of hydraulic fracturing. The case was dismissed without leave to amend based on recent legislation regulating hydraulic fracturing in California.
- Represented an energy company in a CEQA matter related to Los Angeles County's adoption of a community standards district for a large urban oil field. The case was settled on terms favorable to the client.
- Represented a petroleum company in response to threatened claims under Proposition 65 for the discharge of listed chemicals to an underground source of drinking water. The claims were settled on favorable terms.

## ***Cost Recovery and Toxic Tort***

- Represented a water district against claims of cross-contamination based on the theory that the construction and maintenance of a drinking-water well allowed for the deeper migration of regional solvent contamination. The claim was voluntarily dismissed without prejudice shortly after discovery began.
- Represented a steel mill against claims of nuisance and cost recovery from the alleged disposal of lead-containing wastes.
- Represented a company accused of selling fire retardant foam with per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) to the U.S. Navy in a toxic tort case filed by a New York municipality seeking to recover costs associated with PFAS contamination at an airport and National Guard base.
- Represented a materials manufacturer in connection with the alleged contamination of a dairy farm from PFAS through application of sewage sludge as soil enhancers.
- Represented a real estate developer in a putative class action and individual lawsuits seeking personal injury and property damage from the alleged failure to disclose the presence of radioactive substances at a former naval shipyard that is the site of San Francisco's largest development project in a century.
- Counsel to an aerospace manufacturer in federal and state cost-recovery actions under CERCLA and the HSAA alleging groundwater contamination from TCE and perchlorate.
- Defended an aerospace company in a toxic tort lawsuit involving more than 800 plaintiffs who claimed personal injuries and property damage resulting from alleged exposure to chemicals in drinking water. These claims were settled on favorable terms after the trial court excluded the opinions of the plaintiffs' primary medical experts.
- Defended an aerospace manufacturer against claims of public and private nuisance in an action seeking damages for soil contamination, resulting in the plaintiff's voluntary dismissal on the day before the hearing on our summary judgment motion.
- Defended a waste-management company in a cost-recovery action seeking damages for contamination from a landfill under the California Superfund law and common-law causes of action, resulting in summary judgment in the client's favor and subsequent affirmation on appeal.
- Represented energy companies in responding to a State Water Resources Control Board order to investigate and sample for per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) at bulk-fuel storage terminals and refineries throughout the state.

## ***Land Use and Property Development***

- Represented multiple landowners in connection with negotiating access agreements for the investigation and remediation of hazardous materials.
- Represented an owner of a refinery in obtaining approval from the local air district for the transfer of entitlements after an acquisition.
- Represented a trucking company in successfully negotiating for the amendment of a local ordinance that would restrict trucking operations.
- Advised various companies in response to investigative orders issued by the California Regional Water Quality Control Board requiring the investigation and sampling of PFAS releases and contamination.
- Representing a property owner in an investigation by U.S. EPA of a former mercury mine.
- Advised manufacturers in terms of meeting compliance with PFAS disclosure requirements under Proposition 65.
- Representing multiple operators in defending against federal lawsuits under the Clean Water Act alleging violations of the Industrial General Permit regulating industrial storm water discharges and authorized non-storm water discharges from industrial facilities in California.
- Represented a retail water agency in central Orange County, CA in a challenge to assessments and surcharges adopted by Orange County Water District (OCWD) that penalized the water agency's investment in developing a recycled water system and its ability to provide water to customers that reside within its service area but outside of the OCWD district.
- Represented a multinational package delivery and supply chain management company against legal challenges by a union under CEQA and the Brown Act seeking to halt construction of a critically needed regional distribution center. The judge denied the plaintiffs' request for a temporary restraining order and preliminary injunction suspending construction of the facility. The case was subsequently resolved on very favorable terms.
- Represented a real estate development company in an attack against the environmental impact report (EIR) and related entitlements to implement a large redevelopment of existing residential housing in San Francisco. After previously dismissing the petitioners' due process claims, the trial court held a three-day bench trial on the remaining claims and ruled against the petitioners' claims in their entirety, which was subsequently affirmed on appeal.
- Represented a real estate developer in the acquisition and development of a former gas station.
- Represented a landowner named in an imminent and substantial endangerment order by the California Department of Toxic Substances Control involving contamination from an adjacent plating facility.
- Represented a water district in a challenge to the 2019 Addendum to the Coordinated Operation Agreement between the California Department of Water Resources and U.S. Bureau of Reclamation for water exports from the Sacramento Delta.
- Represented a synagogue and preschool in negotiating construction and operating conditions for the adjacent development of a multistory hotel and condominium, and to resolve concerns about security, air quality, construction noise, and traffic circulation.
- Represented a real estate development company in an attack against the environmental impact report (EIR) and related entitlements to implement a large redevelopment of existing residential housing in San Francisco. After previously dismissing the petitioners' due process claims, the trial court held a three-day bench trial on the remaining claims and ruled against the petitioners' claims in their entirety, which was subsequently affirmed on appeal.

## ***Publications & Presentations***

### ***Publications***

- “Deadline Extension Highlights PFAS Reporting Complexities,” *Law360*, October 11, 2024.
- “Legal Defenses for Employers in COVID-19 Litigation in California,” *The Recorder*, June 30, 2020.
- “Climate Change Science and the Daubert Standard,” *William & Mary Environmental Law and Policy Review*, May 12, 2020.
- “INSIGHT: Agency Regulation of PFAS Must Balance Costs, Benefits,” *Bloomberg Environment*, April 24, 2019.
- “Environmental Litigation and Toxic Torts Chapter: Year-in-Review 2018,” American Bar Association, Section of Environment, Energy & Resources, April 23, 2019.
- “Calif. Regulators Should Account for PFAS Uncertainty,” *Law360*, April 3, 2019.
- “Gold King Mine Spill Points to EPA Institutional Failure,” *Law360*, September 9, 2015.

## ***Presentations***

- “Environmental Regulation: What’s Next,” National Association of Real Estate Investment Managers, Architecture & Engineering Meeting, Chicago, IL, September 19 – 21, 2023.
- PFAS Contamination and Regulation in California, Law Seminars International, webinar, February 11-12, 2021.

## ***Professional & Community Engagement***

Los Angeles County Bar Association (LACBA), Environmental Law Section, Executive Committee; assistant secretary (2024–2025); Spring Symposium planning committee, chair (2023); Spring Symposium planning committee, co-chair (2021); Fall Symposium planning committee, co-chair (2021)

American Bar Association (ABA) Section of Environment, Energy, and Resources (SEER), Environmental Litigation and Toxic Torts Committee, Year-in-Review vice chair (2008)

California Independent Petroleum Association (CIPA)

Western States Petroleum Association (WSPA)

Council for Watershed Health, board of directors

Los Angeles County Business Federation (BizFed), Energy & Environment Committee co-chair (2019); Land Use Committee (2020), Land Use and CEQA Committee (2021)

## ***Education***

- University of Southern California (J.D., 2005)
- Georgetown University (B.S., 2000)

## ***Admitted to Practice***

- California