

Responding to a Historic Red Tide

Aundi Mevoli had been a Baykeeper field investigator for less than a month when tipsters started flooding our pollution hotline with reports of murky red water in the Oakland estuary.

She had never experienced anything like this during her two years as a Baykeeper volunteer, but she knew her way around the hotline. Aundi was soon fielding

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reports from Berkeley, Richmond, San Leandro, the South Bay, Sausalito, and other parts of the Bay.

Aundi investigated the discolored

water and scooped samples over the side of the Baykeeper boat to help local agencies confirm the source and extent of the problem. It turned out the red tide was caused by a naturally occurring microorganism, a species of algae that was toxic to fish. She recalls reviewing aerial footage of the algae bloom taken by our partners at LightHawk Conservation Flying: “I could see how widely the bloom had spread, and had an awful feeling that things were about to get much worse.”

Sure enough, she started to get hotline reports of dead sharks and sturgeon washing up near San Mateo—all killed by the algae. Then around the Bay, we started seeing rafts of dead sea life massing along the shoreline. A fish die-off was underway, the likes of which the Bay had never seen before.

Nothing makes a person ready for the scale of such an event,

and the uncountable numbers of fish dying so suddenly, but Aundi’s work in health care prior to joining Baykeeper gave her some perspective. “Once the bloom took off, it had to run its course—and



Pictured: Aundi taking water samples from the Bay during the algae bloom.

it was heart wrenching to watch the results play out,” she observed. “The only way to stop a hazardous algae bloom is to prevent it from happening in the first place.”

Numerous factors worked together to cause this summer’s algal

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Too Close to Home

My daughter and I took a trip to Chicago this summer to celebrate the Fourth of July with friends. We were staying only ten minutes from Highland Park, where a gunman opened fire on the holiday parade, killing seven bystanders and wounding 48.

The entire community went on lock-down and prayed for the police to catch the shooter. The tragedy struck too close to home. And I was horrified to recall that the US Supreme Court had just dismantled century-old gun safety laws.

Then the highest court in the land gutted women's rights. Now my daughter—and the girlfriends she was giggling with during our trip—are going to grow up in a nation that no longer recognizes their right to control their own bodies.

And the state of our world has only made me more outraged since.

The Supreme Court undermined EPA's authority to regulate carbon pollution from power plants in *West Virginia v US Environmental Protection Agency*. This wide-ranging rule may have sealed our climate-fueled fate.

The court's conservative justices defied the language of the Clean Air Act that empowered EPA to "protect and enhance" the quality of the air we breathe. They didn't care that power plant pollution is killing people, or that climate change is the greatest threat facing our planet today.

And sadly, the Supreme Court is about to hit close to home again. This October, the Court is hearing a case that could dramatically limit the types of waters protected by the Clean Water Act.

This ruling could remove protections for wetlands and seasonal streams around the Bay. If the court does as lobbyists have asked in *Sackett v. EPA*, there's no guarantee that we'll have the tools we need to protect our watershed in the future—at least not at the federal level.

That's why Baykeeper's attorneys filed an amicus brief supporting EPA in the *Sackett* case. We're also advocating to make local laws stronger, so when the federal protections fail us, California laws will still protect our air and water.

We're even supporting causes that defend our right to vote because it's clear that a stronger democracy matters now more than ever. And our team remains

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Let's turn our collective anger into action, and keep fighting for this beautiful place we call home.”

dedicated to turning our collective anger into action to keep fighting for this beautiful place we call home.



Sejal Choksi-Chugh,
Executive Director



Photo: Chloe Aftei

Singing the Delta Blues


While the red tide in the Bay was grabbing international headlines, an even more toxic bloom of cyanobacteria (also known as "blue-green algae") was spreading across the Delta.

Cyanobacteria blooms can be more dangerous because they produce a potent neurotoxin that's harmful to people and potentially fatal to small animals.

Restoring the flow of Bay and Delta tributaries, like the San Joaquin River, can reduce these toxic blooms. A flowing river disperses cyanobacteria before a bloom can form, but at times up to 90 percent of the San Joaquin River's flow is

diverted.

Harmful blooms in the Bay and the Delta share a common thread. Whether it's excessive wastewater pollution or dried up tributaries, regulatory decision makers have failed to address the root causes. Poor policies have resulted in conditions that help harmful microorganisms thrive.

That's why Baykeeper will continue to advocate for government agencies to do more to protect the health of the entire watershed. 

Go to baykeeper.org/action to find out how you can urge local agencies to prevent harmful algal blooms.


Pictured: Downtown Stockton in the midst of a cyanobacteria bloom.



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bloom, but the main culprit was the high level of phosphorus and nitrogen in the Bay's waters. These nutrients fuel algal blooms, and the Bay has some of the highest levels of these pollutants of any estuary in the world. Their primary source is the wastewater discharged into the Bay by the 40 sewage treatment plants along its shore.

There are regulatory fixes that would reduce nutrient pollution in the Bay, and Baykeeper's scientists have long advocated for stronger permits and improving wastewater treatment technology. There are also habitat-based solutions, like creating treatment wetlands along the shoreline. With a graduate degree in natural resource management from Virginia Tech, that happens to be Aundi's specialty. She's excited to be part of the solution to prevent future algal blooms in the Bay. 

Pictured: A dead sturgeon in San Mateo County in the wake of the red tide (photo: Baykeeper)

Help us protect San Francisco Bay from toxic threats—now and for the future



Make a gift to Baykeeper today!

Or sign up for monthly gifts to make your support go even further.

Use the attached envelope or visit

baykeeper.org/donate

Photo: Robb Most

FALL/WINTER 2022 BAYKEEPER NEWS



This year we launched an exciting collaboration with Hip Hop for Change and GRAMMY-nominated artist RyanNicole Austin to connect local frontline communities with Baykeeper's special brand of legal and scientific activism.

Pictured: Photos from the Environmental Justice Summit in San Francisco, where RyanNicole debuted her Baykeeper-inspired song, "Small but Mighty." Clockwise from left: Ellen Kabori of Baykeeper's advisory board, Hip Hop for Change Executive Director Khafre Jay, and Baykeeper Executive Director Sejal Choksi-Chugh; RyanNicole performing at the event; DJ Lady Ryan; Ellen, Sejal, and the Destiny Arts dance group perform as back-up dancers for RyanNicole.



Photos by Sarah Arnold for Hip Hop for Change

