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WATER & DROUGHT

Jonas Minton, California environmentalist and water-policy expert, dies at 73

BY DALE KASLER

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Jonas Minton was the senior water policy advisor at the nonprofit Planning and Conservation League. He died on June 22, 2022 at age 73. *Planning and Conservation League*



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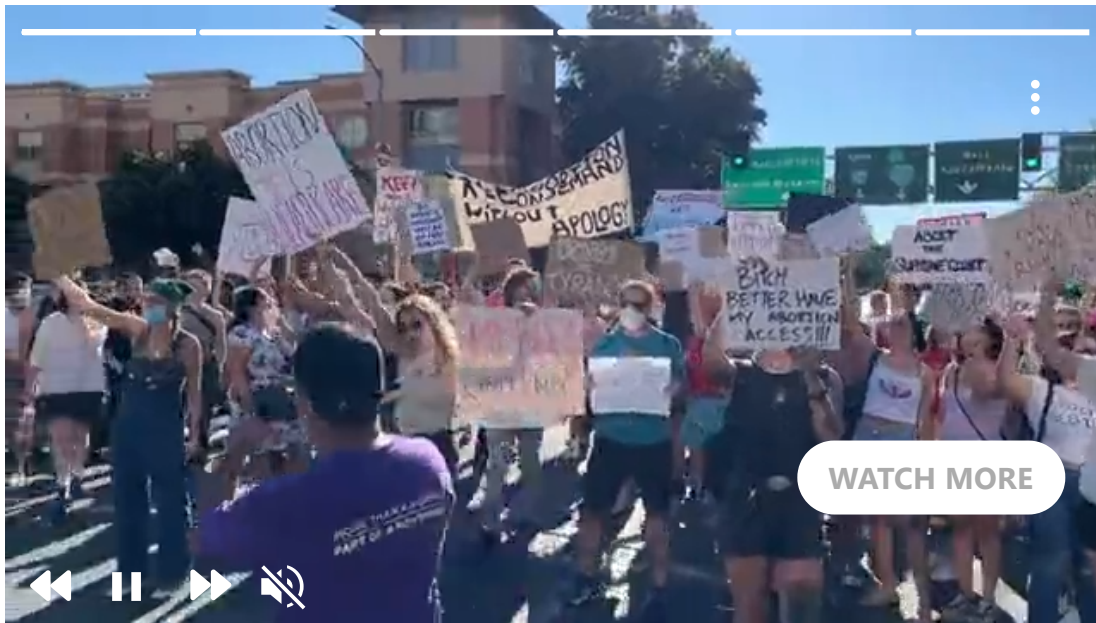
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Jonas Minton, a California water policy expert and environmentalist who maintained a high profile around the Capitol for decades, has died.

Minton, 73, the [senior water policy advisor](#) at the nonprofit Planning and Conservation League, died Wednesday due to a heart condition.

As a former deputy director of the California Department of Water Resources, he was instrumental in securing protection for 1,200 miles of California rivers under federal law in 1981. He was the former executive director of the [Sacramento Water Forum](#), a group that brokered a wide-ranging deal in the early 2000s between environmental groups and area water agencies to share the waters of the American River.

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With the Planning and Conservation League, he was an outspoken advocate on environmental issues, [demanding in a Sacramento Bee opinion piece](#) that Gov. Gavin Newsom do a better job than his predecessor Jerry Brown on protecting the state's rivers.

In his spare time, he worked on the successful campaign to force SMUD to [close the troubled Rancho Seco nuclear plant](#) in the late 1980s.

“Jonas got a lot done,” said Gerald Meral, who hired Minton at the Department of Water Resources in the late 1970s.

Howard Penn, the executive director of the Planning and Conservation League, said Minton's "passion for our watersheds and our water quality is unsurmounted, and his care for the people and the earth around him matched that." x

So sad to learn of Jonas Minton's passing. Jonas was a creative beacon within the California water community. Passionate about protecting the environment and collaborating for good. Positive & always gracious, with a twinkle in his eye. Rest in peace Jonas. You will be missed.

<https://t.co/4X4ksHHJzp>

— Wade Crowfoot (@WadeCrowfoot) [June 23, 2022](#)

"He was one of the premier water policy experts in the state."

Wade Crowfoot, secretary of the California National Resources Agency, called him "a creative beacon within the California water community."

A native of Kenosha, Wisconsin, Minton and his family moved to the Sacramento area when he was a pre-teen. He attended Sacramento High School, Sacramento City College and Sacramento State, said his wife Julie Carrasco-Minton.

"Jonas was a rafter, a kayaker, was just interested in water," she said.

Jonas Minton of Sacramento, a kayaker for 25 years, sticks out his tongue while completing a difficult maneuver in his kayak at the San Juan Rapids along the lower American River below the Sunrise Bridge in August 2001.

CHRIS CREWELL *Sacramento Bee* file

With the Department of Water Resources, Minton helped win a crucial victory for environmentalists in the waning days of President Jimmy Carter's administration, in January 1981.

In an effort to win political support for his controversial "peripheral canal" project, Brown in late 1980 asked the Carter administration to designate 1,200 miles of California rivers — including the Lower American, Eel, Trinity and Klamath — as protected under the federal [Wild and Scenic Rivers Act](#).

With Carter losing the 1980 election to Ronald Reagan, state officials fretted that the new administration would reject Brown’s request, Meral said. Minton was part of a team at the Department of Water Resources to pull together the required environmental impact statement before Carter left office.

The team worked practically around the clock. “We had very little time,” Meral said.

Carter’s Interior secretary, Cecil Andrus, signed the order the morning of Reagan’s inauguration. Brown’s peripheral canal project died but the rivers gained additional protections, Meral said.

In the late 1980s, Minton volunteered to work on ballot initiatives aimed at forcing the Sacramento Municipal Utility District to mothball Rancho Seco.

His wife said Minton “used an old dot-matrix printer” to create banners that were put up around the region.

Voters narrowly defeated a ballot measure to close the plant in 1988. But a second measure, in June 1989, passed by around 13,000 votes, and SMUD began decommissioning the plant soon after.

“He was pretty proud of that,” Julie Minton said.

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Dale Kasler covers climate change, the environment, economics and the convoluted world of California water. He

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