

## **David Bernhardt's Trail of Corporate Influence Peddling**

David Bernhardt has spent his career in the revolving door between government and the private sector and now has the opportunity to return to government so he can further his client's interests in despoiling the environment and making millions. He has worked on so many issues relevant to the Department of the Interior (DOI) that it is hard to see how he can act impartially as the Deputy Secretary of the Interior without conflicts of interest.

### **Westlands Water District**

The Westland Water District is the largest agricultural water district in the US, and provides water to farms in an area of approximately 600,000 acres (2,400 km<sup>2</sup>) in [Fresno County](#) and [Kings County](#) in the [San Joaquin Valley](#) of central [California](#). Its headquarters are in [Fresno](#).

Mr. Bernhardt was a lobbyist for the Westlands Water district from 2011 – 2016. Westlands has paid Brownstein Hyatt Farber Schreck, Mr. Bernhardt firm, \$1.4 million since 2011.

While working at Brownstein Hyatt Farber Schreck, Mr. Bernhardt and Westlands were deeply involved in writing language that was included in Water Infrastructure Improvements Act of 2016 through a [midnight rider](#). The rider directed water managers to pump maximum amounts of water from California's rivers to meet agricultural needs. It says that such pumping should remain within the confines of the Endangered Species Act, but its specific directions override the scientific opinions that govern pumping to protect the rivers' delicate ecosystems.

Mr. Bernhardt and Westland helped write H.R. 23 (Valadao), which would repeal or undermine salmon related provisions in the Central Valley Project Improvement Act, the Endangered Species Act and more. It would also undermine the authority of the State of California to protect salmon and state natural resources under state law.

Mr. Bernhardt and Westlands help write H.R. 1769 (Valadao) that proposed drainage settlement between the Westlands Water District and the Department of the Interior. This settlement would forgive a debt of over \$375 million that Westland owes taxpayers and give them a permanent water contract.

### **Cadiz**

Mr. Bernhardt ran the Natural Resources Department at the law firm, Brownstein Hyatt Farber Schreck. There, he played the principal leadership role for the firm for the client Cadiz Inc. where he represented their interests as a lobbyist for about six years. At Brownstein, Bernhardt's department co-chair is Scott Slater. Mr. Slater is the CEO of Cadiz, Inc., Cadiz is planning to tap into an aquifer "[the size of Rhode Island](#)" underneath the Mohave Desert to pipe drinking water to Southern California. This project has been on the books for decades without much movement but appears to be moving now as the Trump Administration, in one of its first decisions related to water policy, [endorsed the Cadiz water project](#). With Trump and DOI's endorsement Bernhardt and Brownstein have already seen a windfall. His lobbying firm owns 200,000 shares of Cadiz

stock, the price of which has more than doubled in price since President Trump won the election. If Interior moves forward and Cadiz completes the project, Bernhardt's firm will earn another [200,000 shares](#) of stock in the company, worth nearly \$3 million today. If Cadiz stock returns to its all-time high of \$375, the lobbying firm's total stake would be worth around \$150 million.

### **National Environmental Strategies (NES)**

David Bernhardt's time at Interior was tainted by ethical challenges as well. As Solicitor, he sided with a political appointee, Julie MacDonald, who doctored reports from government scientists and passed sensitive internal documents on to industry lawyers.

MacDonald was the [subject of a scathing internal report](#) that revealed how she bullied scientists with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Bernhardt, instead of stopping MacDonald's abuse, was part of a committee that gave her a cash bonus of [nearly \\$10,000](#), but without any documentation justifying the award.

Julie MacDonald then went to work for National Environmental Strategies (NES). NES is the firm that J. Steven Griles worked for prior to becoming Deputy Secretary of the DOI. FOE uncovered that not only was Griles receiving over \$1 million from NES while he was employed by DOI but that he was continued to meet with NES clients despite his recusal agreements. NES/MacDonald received almost \$350 K from Westlands from between 2012 and 2014.