

TRAILBLAZERS

ENERGY & ENVIRONMENTAL

THOMAS M. BERLINER

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PIONEER SPIRIT Tom Berliner was working in the San Francisco city attorney's office and wanted to become involved in water-related issues. "San Francisco gets its water from the Sierra Nevada. As a kid, I spent a lot of time camping and hiking there." In 1987, he moved away from litigation to focus on environmental and water issues. Berliner began making frequent trips to Washington, D.C., since the Department of the Interior oversaw the San Francisco water system. When California created a water board, he sat through more than 50 days of hearings. "It was a baptism by fire."

TRAILS BLAZED Dianne Feinstein was the mayor of San Francisco when the federal government considered tearing down the Hetch Hetchy Dam, which provided water to the city and Silicon Valley. "I was mostly in Washington, D.C., convincing people this was the stupidest idea of all time." The plan never really got traction. Berliner also represented urban, environmental, farm and other interests in the Bay-Delta Accord and was involved in the Central Valley Project Improvement Act. Currently, he is working on the California Water Fix, which addresses the risks that major earthquakes pose to the water supply. "It's very contentious. There are huge water supply issues."

FUTURE EXPLORATIONS Direct potable reuse could have a major impact on urban water issues. "It's possible to desalinate wastewater and mix it with clean water for perfectly potable water. If we could capture and treat that, we'd have enough water for two or three million families." There will also be far more intensive management of California's water. "We need to use water smarter."

