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## The Diseños Project: A Geospatial Visualization of the Environmental History of California, 1769-1892

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# *THE DISEÑOS PROJECT*

## *A Geospatial Visualization of the Environmental History of California, 1769–1892*

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The Diseños Project represents the culmination of some 40 years of research by noted California historical geographer and Professor Dr. David Hornbeck, Jr., Professor Emeritus of the California State University, Northridge. In an effort to facilitate the transfer of Dr. Hornbeck's vast collections to their new home in the Tanimura & Antle Family Memorial Library of the California State University, Monterey Bay, I was recruited by land and water rights attorney Patrick J. Maloney to see through the transfer and dissemination of these invaluable collections. To date, this effort has been underwritten in large part by the law firm of Maloney, and has produced thousands of scanned documents from the collections of Hornbeck and other archival collections throughout the country. Law clerk Miriam Infinger and Information Technologist Dennis Coady have in turn worked to identify, categorize, and digitize those documents collected as of this writing.

In an effort to raise awareness of the significance of the Hornbeck Collection, Ms. Jennifer Lucido and I recently submitted the first of a series of grant proposals intended to generate funding needed to facilitate the dissemination and public education dimensions of the project now underway. As a first step towards these initiatives, we applied for the 2014 National Endowment for the Humanities Digital Humanities Start-up Grants. Our initial foray constitutes an effort to address the growing water crisis in California by way of generating an Internet-based geospatial collection and *Google Earth* mapping of the Monterey Bay.

The proposed project seeks to deploy a digital humanities approach to sustainability. Historic maps, documents, and other resources of the Spanish, Mexican, and early American periods provide critical environmental data, and thereby, environmental histories of resource abundance and scarcity for the affected regions upon which millions of Americans depend. Hornbeck's pioneering historical geography and geospatial studies have produced a formidable archive of primary sources and Mexican land grant maps or *diseños* and constitute the centerpiece of this project. The proposed



Figure 1. Map of Public Surveys in California to Accompany Report of Surveyor General, 1859. Source: National Archives. Courtesy of Diseños Project, Patrick Maloney, esq., Miriam Infinger, and Rubén G. Mendoza, 2014.

grant seeks to assemble a team of geospatial technicians, anthropologists, social historians, historical geographers, and environmental scientists for the expressed purpose of formulating a digital humanities approach to addressing California's current environmental crisis and the broader question of sustainability.

By remapping the changing landscapes of early California, both legislators and environmental scientists will be able to make informed decisions for future planning and conservation. Given that folk cartographies and plat maps have been given short shrift in recent efforts to address climate change and its consequences, the proposed project will develop a *web GIS* and geospatial visualization of the Monterey Bay that introduces primary sources as a formidable resource for humanistic and scientific inquiry. Once the Monterey Bay portion of the online archive has been completed and deployed, the prototype will serve as a demonstration project for soliciting further public, private, and corporate funding needed to sustain and expand the online resource to encompass heritage resources from throughout the state of California.