

PALMER HILTON

OF COUNSEL

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OFFICE:
Sacramento

LANGUAGES:
English



Palmer Hilton is a seasoned strategic advisor guiding clients through complex governance, decision-making, and public-facing development projects.

His expertise spans land use, environmental compliance, public contracts, and public agency law challenges affecting cities and special districts. He also advises clients on prelitigation positioning for controversial decisions. A key asset of his practice is his California and Western water law/water rights expertise, working on major delivery and management systems that underpin communities across California.

Palmer is currently General Counsel to Bear Valley Community Services District, and advises the cities of Rancho Cordova, Antioch, and Salinas on public works and long-term community/economic development. This includes logistics projects and sports-anchored entertainment complexes requiring strategic planning, land use, and environmental considerations under CEQA. He has also represented a state government in a water rights interstate compact dispute brought before the U.S. Supreme Court.

Clients know Palmer for his relentless work ethic, commitment to solving their most complex challenges, and natural ability to integrate as a trusted member of their leadership teams.

During law school, Palmer served on the Executive Board of the University of North Carolina (UNC) Environmental Law Project and participated in pro bono work for the Southern Environmental Law Center. He was a staff member for the UNC Community Development Law Clinic, where he provided corporate and transactional legal assistance to non-profit organizations.

Prior, he interned for the Nevada Attorney General's Office/Colorado River Commission in Las Vegas and conducted research in environmental, water, and land use law—reflecting the long arc of his commitment to the unique challenges at this intersection of law.

EDUCATION

University of North Carolina School of Law, JD, 2018

Bucknell University, BA, Political Science & History, 2014

ADMISSIONS

California, 2019 – Bar No. 324846

U.S. District Court, Eastern District of California

PRACTICE AREAS

Land Use & Environmental

CEQA/NEPA

Climate Change & Sustainability

Land Entitlements

Wildlife & Natural Resources

PROFESSIONAL & COMMUNITY AFFILIATIONS

- The State Bar of California, Member
- Sacramento County Bar Association, Member

PRESENTATIONS & PUBLICATIONS

- Co-author, "California Land Use Practice, Chapters 1, 2, 7, 8, 9, 10, 14, 15, 16, and 20"
– *Continuing Education of the Bar (CEB)* (2026)
- Contributing author, *Legal Tides*
- Contributing author, *Coast Watch*
- Contributing author, *North Carolina's Blue Economy*
- Staff Member, *North Carolina Journal of Law & Technology*

REPRESENTATIVE EXPERIENCE

- **City of Rancho Cordova.** Palmer has served as lead counsel for the Planning Commission of Rancho Cordova since January 2024, advising the city on public works issues and long-term community and economic development. His work includes complex logistics projects and sports anchored entertainment complexes involving land use, public financing and economic development, environmental permitting, and CEQA compliance, as well as securing permits for thousands of acres of subdivisions encompassing tens of thousands of homes, and hundreds of thousands of square feet of mixed-use and commercial space.
- **Bear Valley Community Services District.** Palmer currently serves as General Counsel to the Bear Valley Community Services District and was interim General Counsel to the District from April 2023 to July 2025. During the course of his guidance, Palmer assisted a first time General Manager in adjusting to the role of a public sector executive, assisted the District in achieving multiple rate increases under Proposition 218, navigated complex first amendment issues, and the District completed two separate union negotiations.
- **City of Salinas.** Palmer provides advice including legal advice on various complex land use and fiscal issues, and litigation, including a housing element update, rent stabilization advice, tax issues, land use transactional advice regarding specific plan mixed use and warehouse development, and public infrastructure litigation.
- Represented the state of Texas in the United States Supreme Court regarding water rights issues. (*Original No. 141 Texas v. New Mexico and Colorado.*)
- Represented a California water district in litigation regarding an irrigation canal

easement and other land use issues. (*Greenhouse Ranch v. Stevinson Water District* (Merced County Superior Court Case No. 18CV-02624))

- Represented a Sacramento County in proceedings before the California State Water Resources Control Board.
- Represented an Klamath Water Users Association in an Endangered Species Act matter.