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WILDLIFE CONSERVATION BOARD Conservation Summit Recap

On September 26, 2016, The Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) held the WCB Conservation Summit. The public was invited to attend and all were welcome to speak. Board Members Chuck Bonham, Eric Sklar and Karen Finn were in attendance. The office of Assemblymember Richard Gordon was represented by Matt Cremins. Also present were WCB Executive Director John Donnelly, WCB staff, and members of the public.

Director Donnelly welcomed everyone to the first-ever Conservation Summit and introduced the Board members.

Chair Bonham said he was looking forward to hearing the conversation that was to take place. He noted that this meeting fulfills the commitment outlined in the WCB Strategic Plan (Plan) to both solicit input and have a dialogue around it. He said there is more to be done on the Implementation Actions, but that a slow arc of progress continues and that both this meeting and having completed the first cycle of the WCB's first ever competitive Grant making programs are big milestones.

Director Donnelly said he would like for the conversation to be as informative and informal as possible. That he would like it to be interactive and that while there would be an actual question and answer period at the end of the meeting, anyone who had a question during the presentation should feel free to stand up and ask that question.

He explained that the WCB has been working on the Plan this since the end of 2014 when the Board formally approved it. A shortage of staff coupled with the demands of developing the Streamflow Enhancement program guidelines and criteria had set progress on Plan implementation back about six months. However, with the WCB's first ever competitive grant program under the Streamflow Enhancement program, in place, the WCB is in good shape to implement the requests the Board made back in 2014.

Director Donnelly said that Peter Perrine of his staff would present and reminded everyone that there were speaker cards in the back, and while not required, they do help capture the names of those who speak. Mr. Perrine began his presentation with an overview of the [agenda](#) for this meeting, which initiated a general conversation as outlined below. Chair Bonham suggested that if anyone had anything to say they please just raise their hand and then speaker cards would be called before the end of the meeting.

Unified Application and Project Review Process

LAE/CAPP

Discussion on the LAE/CAPP process resulted in the Board directing staff to create a one page recommendation to the Board describing how the LAE/CAPP process could be streamlined and how that concept fits with implementation of the WCB Conservation Vision. The one page document could result in an application that follows the LAE and CAPP applications master application or could result in a unified application for the WCB projects.

Competitive Grants

A recommendation from staff to create a competitive grant process for the Public Access Program first and phase other programs in over time resulted in a discussion of the reasons for our recommendation. Staff chose the Public Access Program first for a variety of reasons:

- a desire to not expand too quickly, based on staff's experience in setting up the competitive Streamflow Enhancement Program
- a desire to do more for underserved communities
- it's a one-goal, simple but very effective program and is very well accepted state-wide.

One partner expressed concern that Public Access will focus on urban areas to the detriment of more rural areas. This concern will be satisfied through the use of a point system designed to encourage proponents to apply for projects that provide benefits to underserved communities, but would not preclude excellent public access projects anywhere in the state.

A discussion of phasing in competitive grants for other programs identified the importance of including WCB goals and objectives in all applications, no matter what program, and clearly providing ranking methods. These would include scoring for projects that collaborate with others to provide broad watershed and regional benefits. The WCB programs would be phased in once we had evaluated staff ability and program needs. There are some programs, such as the Central Valley Program, that are working so well that they may not need to be tweaked that much. However, all programs will be evaluated to determine which ones would be the most effective and easiest to establish and move into those programs as necessary.

One partner expressed concern that not all programs and projects be restricted to competitive programs and suggested that the WCB maintain flexibility and an element of staff discretion for opportunistic actions while recognizing the important benefits of a competitive grant program.

Program Review

Discussion about Program Review focused on a procedure for evaluating all the programs, identifying which ones can be modified without new legislation, determining what modifications would provide the clearest direction to stakeholders, evaluating whether some programs might be consolidated or combined. This would be accomplished by taking a look at each program, what it's done in the past and whether it will be relevant to a conservation vision going forward, and its compatibility with or advancement of other state plans, policies, and programs.

Finally, just because there is currently no funding in any given program does not mean that projects could not be completed under that program – there is flexibility and overlap from one program and fund source to the next, and that overlap will be identified. Also, we may find that once the goals and objectives and vision are developed in more detail, the goals might not be reachable with existing programs and funds, and new programs would need to be developed.

To achieve this, the State Wildlife Action Plan, a well understood model, could be used as a guide to create a road map for its programs that, over a five year cycle in the strategic plan identify specific goals to be accomplished over a given baseline. WCB staff could run each program through the gauntlet of translatable goals for purposeful achievement over a defined timeframe. A competitive grant process could be developed for each program with the application criteria driven by achievable goals. WCB staff will evaluate these possibilities and make appropriate recommendations.

Measuring Conservation Effectiveness (Monitoring)

In the long run we should monitor at three separate levels: at the top we want to evaluate the organization as a whole, then each program within it, and finally, at the bottom, the effectiveness of individual projects; and be able to go up or down at any given time to measure effectiveness at any of those three levels and how they integrate. That being said, the programmatic level now is a good place to focus. But no matter what is being monitored, measurable goals are critical in order to assure success.

Timeline

Recommendations will be rolled out at regularly scheduled Board meetings, beginning with the unified application review processes, followed by comprehensive review and recommendations for each program, , and finishing with an evaluation of conservation effectiveness.

Tribes

A discussion on tribal coordination arose, and it was suggested that an addendum to the Strategic Plan or, at a minimum, a page on the WCB website, be developed on how we coordinate with Tribes. It was suggested that the WCB move toward accounting for more traditional ecological knowledge in projects and management.

Direction

John Donnelly, the Executive Director, expressed his appreciation for the guidance from the Board, saying that this is the kind of direction we were hoping to get today and that's the kind of direction that the strategic plan laid out in the first place. He did warn, however, that six months to accomplish this is a bit aggressive, and that the WCB cannot do it on its own, but will need assistance for CDFW staff and our partners.

Finally the Board and WCB staff agreed that at the next regular Board meeting, scheduled for November 16, 2016, WCB staff would provide the Board with two one- page recommendations; one on the streamlining of the LAE/CAPP application process and one on the making Public Access a competitive grant program. Additionally, at the November meeting, WCB staff will provide the Board with the timeframe in which they will present the Board with the results of the evaluation of each WCB program and a one page recommendation for the future of that program.