

Wildlife Conservation Board

Strategic Plan Update 2019-2024

Public Review Draft

July 1, 2019

Section 1: Background and Purpose

Introduction

Created by the legislature in 1947, the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB or Board) has been serving as the state's wildlife conservation and land agent for over 70 years implementing acquisition and restoration programs and related public recreation. Through legislative appropriations, public initiatives and Bond measures, and philanthropic contributions, WCB has overseen conservation investments of nearly \$3 billion dollars over about 1.5 million acres since its inception. This investment has created recreational opportunities for millions of Californians, protected and created essential habitat for endangered and threatened species, and preserved California's iconic landscapes for future generations to enjoy. Millions of Californians now hunt, fish, and recreate in our natural landscapes thanks to opportunities created by WCB and its many partners.

Over the last 70 years, WCB's programs and priorities have changed in response to evolving public values and the changing conservation landscape. In the early years, WCB typically supported land purchases for hunting or fishing and public access in the Pacific Flyway. These acquisitions resulted in persistent availability of acres of Central Valley wetlands supporting migratory waterfowl, shorebirds, and other wildlife. More recently, WCB has included conservation of large blocks of land to support a wide variety of wildlife and fish species including those that are now declining or vulnerable due to habitat loss and degradation or from competing land uses. With the emergence of conservation planning and the scientific discipline of conservation biology in the 1980s and 90s, WCB began investing in large-scale, comprehensive conservation plans that created networks of wildlife and fish habitats for all species and that balanced these networks with responsible development.

Wildlife, fish, and natural landscapes encompass the entire spectrum of land ownership in California including public, private, state, and federal properties. Therefore, achieving the goals of providing for healthy and sustainable fish and wildlife populations requires conservation attention across all these ownerships. WCB and its partners have responded to this conservation need by including investments across private ownerships through the emerging concept of natural and working lands partnerships. In its simplest form, these partnerships incentivize landowners to support wildlife conservation with targeted habitat improvements on their land while retaining most traditional economic land uses. Now embodied in natural working lands and other programs, this approach takes advantage of the broader use of habitat restoration and habitat enhancement in addition to traditional land acquisition.

A discussion of the changing conservation landscape would not be complete without acknowledging the insidious and universal impacts of climate change. Under the leadership of the state administration and

California legislature, WCB is responding to the urgent call for new ways to address these impacts through the creation of the Climate Change Adaptation and Resiliency Program and, most recently, through specific funding in the Forest Conservation Program to address the effects of, and resiliency against, catastrophic fire. While reflected as a priority in the 2014 Strategic Plan, climate change adaptation and resiliency has become a focus of many of WCB's programs and is emphasized through the Strategic Initiatives and Objectives in this Plan Update. In addition to fire resiliency, WCB recognizes the need for investments in habitat connectivity, wildlife corridors, ecosystem services, and other important elements of a comprehensive approach to addressing existential climate change threats.

Today, WCB administers a wide array of fund sources and programs. These range from those centered around the conservation of individual species to large scale acquisition and restoration programs that benefit multiple species and contribute to landscape intactness; the cornerstone of adapting to a changing California climate. This Plan Update captures this program diversity putting forth Strategic Initiatives and discrete actions (Objectives) that will measurably and positively impact conservation over the next five years.

Put in a box

Mission - WCB protects, restores and enhances California's spectacular natural resources for wildlife and for the public's use and enjoyment in partnership with conservation groups, government agencies and the people of California.

Vision - WCB envisions a future in which California's wildlife, biodiversity and wild places are effectively conserved for the benefit of present and future generations. WCB projects and programs maximize return on taxpayer investment in conservation and wildlife-oriented recreation and empower and inspire current and future generations to protect California's precious habitat and wildlife resources.

Board Structure and Governance

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WCB is a separate and independent entity within California state government with authority and funding to carry out a variety of land acquisition, restoration, and development programs for wildlife, fish, and natural community conservation. The seven-member Board consists of the President of the Fish and Game Commission, the director of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, the director of the Department of Finance, and four public members. Two of the public members are appointed by the California legislature and two are appointed by the Governor. WCB's enabling legislation also created a Legislative Advisory Committee consisting of three members of the Senate and three members of the Assembly which meet with WCB and provide legislative oversight. WCB's Executive Director serves at the pleasure of the Board and all Board meetings are open to the public.

The Wildlife Conservation Board's Executive Director oversees all WCB programs and manages a full-time staff of 35 including an Assistant Executive Director. WCB staff include land agents, environmental scientists, and information technology specialists as well as administrative support, and other classifications.

WCB Programs

From time to time – often in response to a new funding stream or legislative priority – WCB creates organizational “programs” designed to focus staff, funding, and partner attention on a thematic or geographic conservation need. These programs are flexible and may be created or retired in response to new conservation priorities, funding, and other factors.

The following are brief descriptions of current WCB programs. These programs can be broken down into two categories; legacy WCB programs and additional WCB programs. Legacy WCB programs have been in place for 15 years or more and describe mission-centric activities that span several existing programs and are designed to deliver land-based conservation across a wide spectrum of geographies and thematic areas. Additional WCB programs are those often mandated by legislation or prescribed in bonds or other public funding for a specific conservation purpose. Readers should refer to the 2014 Strategic Plan for additional detail and WCB’s website for program fiscal information.

Legacy WCB Programs

- **Land Acquisition:** Land Acquisition is a primary legacy program of WCB established under the Wildlife Conservation Law of 1947 and is a broad programmatic category that comprises tasks and actions under most other programs. WCB acquires real property rights or interests in real property on behalf of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and provides grants to other entities for acquisition. Acquiring lands for conservation dates back several decades and is a cornerstone of past and current WCB actions. Land acquisition will continue to be a major focus of WCB programs moving forward.
- **Habitat Enhancement and Restoration:** The Habitat Enhancement and Restoration Program is a broad category that includes a variety of habitat restoration actions that may fall in or outside of other programs. This program currently includes habitat restoration for coastal, tidal, or freshwater habitats and terrestrial habitat projects including coastal scrub, grasslands, and threatened and endangered species habitat. One of the more pronounced conservation trends observed since the release of the 2014 Strategic Plan is more emphasis on habitat restoration with new funding sources. With proper long-term management funding and a commitment to the retention of intended habitat values, habitat restoration can be a powerful conservation tool which can be applied over a variety of private and public land bases.
- **Riparian Habitat:** The California Riparian Habitat Conservation Program, established through legislation more than 20 years ago, has the goal of protecting, preserving, restoring, and enhancing riparian habitat throughout California. Although this program has seen only modest recent activity, WCB is committed to refocusing attention on riparian habitat conservation through direct acquisition, restoration, and enhancement and through coordination with other WCB programs. This is one of several WCB programs that was developed around partnerships with joint ventures and other cooperatives.
- **Inland Wetlands:** Created in 1998 to partner with the Central Valley Joint Venture, the Inland Wetlands Conservation Program seeks to fund habitat acquisition and restoration of wetlands to protect, restore, and enhance wetlands and wetland habitat values throughout California but with an emphasis on California’s central valley. This program has seen episodic activity since the 2014 Strategic Plan but is crucial to successful wetlands conservation when viewed in conjunction with other agency and organization wetlands efforts.

- **Public Access:** Public access is one of the original WCB programs established under the Wildlife Conservation Law of 1947. Initially much of the activity associated with the Public Access Program focused on the protection and development of existing public access areas and the promotion of hunting and fishing opportunities through access in new areas. Over time, other public activities including boat and kayak launches, piers, observation decks, and trails have been included in this program. Proposition 68 (2018) provides new funding for this program for development of public access projects and emphasizes investment in outdoor access and experiences for disadvantaged communities.
- **Tax Credits:** The purpose of the Natural Heritage Preservation Tax Credit Program (Tax Credit Program) is to protect wildlife habitat, parks and open space, archaeological resources, agricultural land and water by providing state tax credits for donations of qualified land (fee title or conservation easement) and water rights. A landowner receives a State tax credit up to 55% of the appraised value of the donation and WCB must assure repayment of lost revenue to the the general fund from issuance of the tax credit. Designed to complement other resource protection efforts, the Tax Credit Program provides an opportunity to private landowners interested in reducing their state tax liability. Coupled with existing land protection and conservation measures, the State of California is rewarding landowner stewardship practices that preserve our natural resources. Initially implemented in 2001, the Tax Credit Program is a successful initiative that to date has resulted in the approval of \$57.3 million in tax credits, and the protection of more than 9,800 acres of critical parkland, open space, agricultural conservation easements, wildlife corridors and archaeological resources.

Additional WCB Programs

- **Agricultural Lands:** WCB's agricultural program, known as the Ecosystem Restoration on Agricultural Lands Program, is designed to assist private landowners in developing wildlife friendly practices on their properties that can be sustained and coexist with agricultural operations over time. This program was created under Proposition 84 (2006) and received an initial \$5 million in bond funding. However, the importance of continuing this program today resides in a new emphasis on private land conservation incentives which is currently highlighted as one of the conservation trends of 2019.
- **Forest Conservation:** The Forest Conservation Program was initially funded through Proposition 84 (2006) and in various forms by Proposition 68 (2018). It is intended to promote the ecological integrity and economic stability of California's diverse native forests and fund efforts to improve forest health. This may be accomplished through a variety of conservation and preservation actions and may also include the restoration of productive managed forest lands. As stated above, the program supports the dual objectives of ecological integrity and economic stability of forest lands. This is another program that is being modified through the Plan Update process to provide emphasis on fire resilience and fire protection in California's forest lands.
- **Oak Woodlands:** The Oak Woodland Conservation Program is a long-standing program and provides grant opportunities to local governments, individuals, and conservation organizations to fund oak woodland conservation and education. While this program is intended to be statewide in scope, it is designed to provide assistance in meeting local and regional oak woodland conservation priorities. Discretionary funding available under Proposition 68 (2018) may be available for local and regional oak woodland protection and restoration projects.

- **Rangeland, Grazing Lands, and Grasslands:** The Rangeland, Grazing Lands, and Grassland Protection Program, created by the Rangeland Grazing Land and Grassland Protection Act of 2002, was established for the protection of rangeland, grazing land, and grasslands throughout California through the voluntary use of conservation easements to deliver tangible conservation for sensitive species while providing for continued use of most agricultural practices. This program has experienced some activity since the 2014 Strategic Plan and WCB will emphasize further use to reflect the conservation priority of natural and working lands partnerships. Recent (2018) changes to the natural and working lands incentives in the California Endangered Species Act will provide additional support and emphasis for this program.
- **Climate Adaptation and Resiliency:** The Climate Adaptation and Resiliency Program was created by Assembly Bill 109 (2017) and amended the 2017 Budget Act to provide \$20 million to WCB for local assistance grants and conservation easement acquisitions from the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF). The intent of this program is to provide funding to emphasize natural and working lands as a valid and vital means for sequestering carbon and reducing greenhouse gases. Funding is also available under this program for natural and working lands professionals for technical assistance and support for efforts to improve rural and urban coordination on climate change adaptation. The emphasis of this program is being modified by the new Strategic Initiatives and Objectives of the Plan Update to focus additional new resources on climate adaptation actions like wildlife corridors and connectivity through Proposition 68 funding specifically Chapter 10 that emphasized climate change adaptation activities.
- **Stream Flow Enhancement:** Created in 2014 under Proposition 1, the Stream Flow Enhancement Program seeks to fund projects that result in enhanced stream flows (i.e., a change in the amount, timing, and/or quality of water flowing down a stream, or a portion of a stream, to benefit fish and wildlife). The program has funded planning, implementation projects, acquisition and scientific studies through annual competitive solicitations since 2015 and has funding available for several more solicitations.
- **Lower American River:** The Lower American River Conservancy Program was created through Assembly Bill 1716 (2017) to implement and administer a program to receive and expend moneys for the benefit of the Lower American River and related lands in partnership with local public agencies and non-profit organizations. The intent of the program is to leverage the work being done under Sacramento County's American River Parkway Plan in providing public access by providing additional funding for habitat restoration enhancement and interpretation. Additional substantial funding for this program was provided through Proposition 68 (2018).
- **Monarch Butterfly and Pollinator Rescue:** Created by Assembly Bill 2421 and signed into law in 2018, the program seeks to recover and sustain populations of monarch butterflies and other pollinators through restoration and technical assistance. Initial projects will be implemented beginning in 2019.
- **Monitoring:** Grant recipients and land managers are required by WCB to provide monitoring information to demonstrate that a project is completed and maintained as described. Monitoring reports required by WCB include a baseline conditions report for conservation easements that is certified by a landowner and grantee upon completion of the project. Ideally, they represent an accurate description of the protected property's attributes. Easement holders are also required to document and demonstrate the condition of the conservation values on managed lands. Recently WCB expanded this program to include compliance monitoring of a

subset of all WCB projects to demonstrate, along with completion, the long-term project viability with respect to habitat values or access.

Importance of WCB's Work to the Public

Public expectations and needs relating to the conservation and restoration of California's unique wild landscapes vary. However, an important factor influencing the public's interest and active participation in outdoor experiences is the concept of natural heritage. In the same way the arts and literature define our cultural heritage, a California with intact and vibrant oak woodlands, grasslands, wetlands, riparian, and the many other natural communities comprise our natural heritage. People expect an outdoor experience that provides for their recreational and aesthetic needs while fostering a sense of well-being and connection to the natural world around them. The mission, vision, and work of WCB is central to meeting these expectations and needs.

While a sense of ownership in our natural heritage is foremost, the concept of public trust responsibilities for fish and wildlife is less evident but equally important. The California Department of Fish and Wildlife – a primary “client” of WCB – is the state agency entrusted with preserving and conserving wildlife and fish resources now and for future generations. This is an awesome responsibility that is shared by WCB as it seeks to improve how and where it invests in fish and wildlife habitat and outdoor recreation.

Finally, the public increasingly demands opportunities for experiencing the outdoors through both passive and active recreation in places close to their communities. A recent emphasis on urban or suburban parks, urban river and stream corridors, and other accessible public lands is reflected in WCB policies aligning urban needs with these investments where possible. For example, Proposition 68 provides funding to other agencies for infrastructure and other amenities that improve outdoor recreational opportunities for youth, and funding for park and open space restoration and connectivity in the Los Angeles basin. WCB administers a statewide Public Access Program for projects intended to enhance public access to hunting and fishing opportunities and other outdoor wildlife-oriented recreational activities including those in urban communities.

Public interest and expectation in WCB programs vary across our diverse state. While this presents challenges in how the WCB communicates and delivers its programs, the concepts described above embrace these differences and serve as a foundation for the WCB's connection to the public and common ground for its partnerships.

Section 2: Strategic Plan Update Process and Context

The 2014 Strategic Plan (Plan) offers broad direction for WCB programs and land-based conservation in California. It was designed around a mission and vision that captures the contemporary needs of fish, wildlife, and the matrix of natural landscapes in California. The Plan lays out a series of Goals, Strategic Directions, and Objectives and sets broad priorities centered around access and conservation investments. Much of the Plan is descriptive; offering discussions of existing WCB programs, organizational structures, WCB composition and authorities, and granting processes. The Plan continues to serve WCB well in guiding program administration and development. However, as discussed in Section 1, the art and science of conservation has changed substantially over the last five years and this

Plan Update attempts to capture those changes through development of new, more specific Strategic Initiatives and Objectives based on the Goals articulated in the Plan.

With this primary purpose, the Plan Update aligns new Strategic Initiatives and Objectives with current and anticipated funding sources, public conservation policy, and current conservation trends. The Update further describes new WCB programs (2014-2019) and lays a foundation for expanding the role of WCB as a leader in natural resource conservation in California.

Plan Update Process

An initial step in developing the Plan Update was considering the Strategic Plan goals in the context of newer legislation, state policy, and current conservation trends. This step helped drive the development of Strategic Initiatives that captured these salient policy elements and reflected current conservation trends. Table 1 summarizes the legislation and state policy used during this initial investigation phase. Policies were researched and documented that had a bearing on WCB's programs and their delivery. This involved looking through natural resource legislation and soft policy documents approved by CDFW and comparing them to WCB programs and fund source requirements. At the same time, legislative and department policies were evaluated against current conservation trends (see below).

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*Table 1
Natural Resource Legislation Passed 2014-2019 and relevancy to the 2019 WCB Strategic Plan Update
[FORMAT: Header on each page]*

2013/14		
<i>Bill or Policy</i>	<i>Summary</i>	<i>Program Relevancy</i>
AB 744 – Timber Harvest Plan Exemption	Provides for a Forest Fire Pilot Project Exemption program exemption from the Z'berg-Nejedly Forest Practice Act.	Forest Conservation; Oak Woodlands Conservation
AB 1739 SB 1319 SB 1168 - Groundwater Management Act (SGMA)	Authorizes the State Water Resources Control WCB to designate basin priorities, establish probationary basin designations, etc.	Land Acquisition; Habitat Enhancement and Restoration; Stream Flow Enhancement
AB 2193 – Habitat Restoration and Enhancement Act	Provides for efficiencies and special processes for small-scale restoration projects as defined in the Bill.	Habitat Enhancement and Restoration; Riparian Habitat; Inland Wetlands Conservation; Stream Flow Enhancement
SB 355 – Income taxes: conservation credit	Tax credit for lands donated through WCB for conservation purposes	Natural Heritage Tax Credit
SB 749 – Grazing/AG leases	Provides authority for CDFW to lease lands for agricultural uses and with proceeds identified for land management, maintenance, etc.	Rangeland, Grazing Lands, and Grassland Protection
2015/16		
AB 92 – Water and salmon	Requires CDFW to propose remedies when notifying a landowner of a diversion that is deleterious to salmon and steelhead	Stream Flow Enhancement
AB 498 – Wildlife corridors	Establishes as state policy the encouragement of voluntary steps to protect functioning wildlife corridors.	Climate Adaptation and Resiliency; Wildlife Corridor and Fish Passage
AB 559 – Monarch butterfly conservation	Authorizes CDFW to take feasible actions to conserve monarchs and their habitat, partner with other agencies and NGOs for that conservation, and requires the use of the best available science for these actions.	Monarch Butterfly and Pollinator Rescue
AB 1251 AB 2651 - Greenway Development and Sustainability Act	Defines greenways and confers certain creation and transfer provisions like conservation easements. AB 2651 modifies the Act to provide for incorporation of “amenities” within and easement of easement-like transaction.	Urban Conservation Provisions
AB 1716 – Lower American River Conservancy	Creates the LARC and authorizes it to collect and expend funds, accept the donation of goods and services, and other authorities.	Lower American River Conservancy Program

AB 1958 – Restoration of Oak Woodlands	Provides for an exemption of the Z'berg-Nejedly Forest Practice Act for Black Oak and Oregon White Oak woodlands.	Oak Woodlands Conservation
AB 2087 – Regional Conservation Investment Strategies	Authorizes CDFW or any other agency to prepare a Regional Conservation Investment Strategy that meets certain conditions and standards.	Conservation Planning Support
SB 1089 – WCB Board	Expands the number and composition of WCB membership and requires Board members to have demonstrated land acquisition and conservation experience.	Board Organization and Structure
SB 1386 – Natural and Working Lands – Climate Change	Declares state policy that protection and enhancement of natural and working lands are “an important strategy” in meeting greenhouse gas reduction goals.	Climate Adaptation and Resiliency; Rangeland, Grazing Lands, and Grassland Protection; Ecosystem Restoration on Agricultural Lands
2017/18		
AB 2348 – Winter Rice Habitat Incentive	Modifies contracting terms and duration for existing California Waterfowl Habitat Program when applied to rice cultivation. Restricts uses during the contract period to waterfowl conservation broadly. Creates a fiscal account and appropriates funding.	Rangeland, Grazing Lands, and Grassland Protection; Ecosystem Restoration on Agricultural Lands; Pacific Flyway
AB 2421 – Monarch Butterfly and Pollinator Rescue Program	Creates the Program in WCB and authorizes WCB to provide grants and technical assistance to further monarch and pollinator conservation. Requires WCB to develop and adopt project selection guidelines.	Monarch Butterfly and Pollinator Rescue
AB 2697 – Nesting Bird Habitat Incentive Program	Requires CDFW to establish the Nesting Bird Habitat Incentive Program to provide direct payments or other incentives for conservation of waterfowl, upland game birds, and other wildlife. Intended non-exclusively for idle ag lands. Authorizes CDFW to consult with WCB.	Land Acquisition; Habitat Enhancement and Restoration; Inland Wetlands Conservation; Ecosystem Restoration on Agricultural Lands
SB 473 – California Endangered Species Act	Modifies various sections and provisions of CESA. Expands the scope and availability of the Safe Harbor Program.	Climate Adaptation and Resiliency; Rangeland, Grazing Lands, and Grassland Protection; Agricultural Lands
SB 667 – DWR Riparian Stewardship	Authorizes DWR to provide technical and financial assistance for riparian restoration and improvement projects and requires coordination with riparian conservation organizations (by extension WCB)	Riparian Habitat
Other Policies		

Conservation Translocation	CDFW policy defining rationale and process for seeking approval for translocating wildlife.	Land Acquisition; Habitat Enhancement and Restoration
Ecosystem Services	Initial CDFW policy describing the range of natural resources ecosystem services and potential applications	Land Acquisition; Habitat Enhancement and Restoration; Forest Conservation; Ecosystem Restoration on Agricultural Lands; Rangeland, Grazing Lands, and Grassland Protection
Alternatives to Conservation Easements	CDFW policy describing relative protections of various land encumbrance transactions and considerations for negotiating protective status.	Land Acquisition
Managing mining and mineral encumbrance risk on public lands	CDFW policy intended to guide the land management and land acquisition process with respect to assessing mineral right reservations.	Land Acquisition

Using this information and analysis, a series of Strategic Initiatives were designed to provide focus to one or more of the Strategic Plan Goals and reflect new directions for WCB for the next five years. These Strategic Initiatives served as a foundation for developing the specific measurable Objectives which are the heart of the Plan Update. Finally, through a series of working sessions with WCB staff and through structured public meetings and discussions with key stakeholders, Objectives were developed that will drive WCB outcomes for the next five years. The Plan Update process is graphically summarized in Figure 1.

As mentioned above, formal and informal outreach was conducted to partners, grantees, state policy leaders, and the conservation community at large. An on-line survey was broadly distributed on April 15, 2019 that contained a series of questions designed to inform the nature of interactions with WCB, gain insights into the proposed Strategic Initiatives, and learn about participants priorities for the Plan Update. The survey was closed ahead of public meetings in Los Angeles (May 9, 2019) and Sacramento (May 15, 2019) and then, at the request of meeting participants, re-opened until May 31, 2019. Appendix A presents a more detailed summary of the survey results presented at the public meetings and additional information can be found on WCB’s website on the [Strategic Plan page](#).

Overall, the survey secured responses from 136 people. Of those responses, 85 were complete responses. The remaining surveys were incomplete with most respondents simply completing the first few questions of the survey. In summary, the on-line survey revealed a preference for focusing on climate change resiliency, continuing foundational land acquisition and restoration work, continuing and enhancing communication efforts, and staying focused on WCB’s unique and important mission.

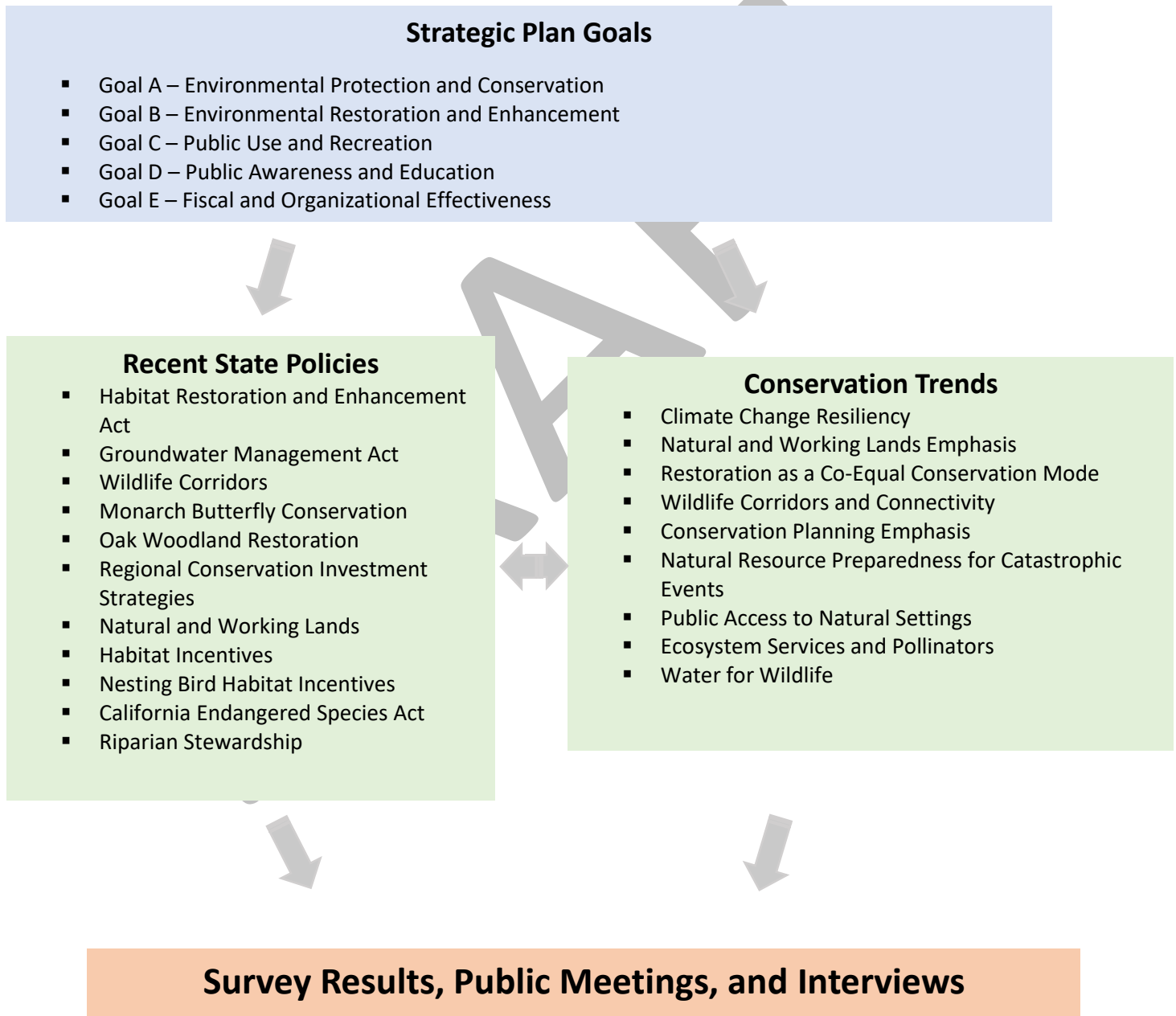
The public meetings offered an opportunity for participants to view and discuss the preliminary survey results and interact with WCB staff and leadership on proposed Plan Update Objectives through break-out groups. The meetings increased awareness of WCB activities and the draft Strategic Initiatives and

provided insights that shaped WCB’s approach to preparing the Strategic Initiatives and Objectives in this Plan Update.

This Plan Update does not supplant the 2014 Strategic Plan and is not intended to be a standalone planning document. Instead the Plan Update builds upon the good work of the Plan by presenting new Strategic Initiatives and measurable, actionable Objectives designed to fully and specifically meet the Plan Goals.

Figure 1

Developing Strategic Initiatives and Objectives





Plan Update Focus Areas and Objectives

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While this Plan Update is required as part of WCB funding under Proposition 68 (2018), WCB embraces the opportunity to create a Plan Update that fully reflects acquisition, restoration, public access, and recreational values today and for the coming five-year period.

Conservation Context

California's rich biological diversity is unique worldwide. The need for protection and conservation of California's diverse natural landscapes, fish, and wildlife is more important than ever before. California's human population will likely grow to more than 40 million people during this Plan update period. At the same time, the number of declining and vulnerable fish and wildlife species are increasing and in some parts of California habitat for these species – and outdoor spaces for recreation and enjoyment of the natural systems – are disappearing at an alarming rate. A recent report by the United Nations describes a 20% decline in biological diversity worldwide and in California, nearly 300 species and subspecies are considered in decline or highly vulnerable. To be effective, conservation actions directed at these species must result in measurable and tangible differences to their populations. WCB, through its many programs, is committed to these directed actions and, in conjunction with its many partners, is committed to substantial and targeted contributions towards recovering and stabilizing wildlife and fish populations.

The 2015 State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP), in describing the state of our fish and wildlife resources, identifies both the threats and conservation opportunities that are part of the basis for WCB and WCB partner actions. SWAP notes the importance of preserving ecological processes and representative ecological landscapes while providing for the societal values of scenic quality, open landscapes, and outdoor recreation opportunities. This is the conservation charge of WCB and is the conceptual foundation for the Strategic Initiatives and Objectives in this Plan Update.

WCB's impact on conservation in California is undoubtedly substantial. Annual reports describe successful projects in many geographies and landscapes, and for many species and ecological processes. WCB's conservation reach, when combined with that of its partners, is probably unparalleled among government or private conservation organizations. To illustrate the positive impact WCB programs have made on conserving and restoring native habitats in California, project data is summarized by select habitat types that were conserved or restored by WCB projects (Table 2). While this does not reflect all WCB projects, this summary reveals substantial habitat protection for select habitats that provide direct benefits for declining and vulnerable species. For example, Board approved projects have protected or restored over 36,000 acres of riparian habitat in California. Given the recent estimates putting remaining riparian habitat in California's Central Valley alone at approximately 40,000 acres, the contribution of Board approved projects to the protection of riparian habitat and the species it supports is remarkable.

Of course, achieving this level of conservation requires a commitment of funding and, above all, productive and mutually beneficial partnerships. The financial means for achieving meaningful conservation goals is currently provided through public initiatives or through public or legislative Bond Acts. These funding actions are successful because the public generally recognizes the importance and urgency of conserving California's natural resources and ecological systems. Meeting the overall biodiversity goals as described in the 2018 Biodiversity Roadmap of "securing the future of all existing native California species, with an emphasis on those that are not found anywhere else" and "Increasing ecosystem and native species distributions in California, while sustaining and enhancing species

Table 2

WCB Projects and Acres of Selected Habitat Types 1947-Present*

Habitat	Fee Title Acquisition		Conservation Easement		Restoration		Total Acres
	#	acres	#	acres	#	acres	
Oak Woodland/Oak Savannah	46	42,151	33	91,076	0	0	133,227
Forest	43	58,535	31	169,113	10	30,024	257,672
Coastal Sage Scrub	22	4,663	0	0	6	841	5,504
Interior Wetlands	112	107,892	40	20,590	184	137,238	265,720
Vernal Pool	28	8,693	11	22,650	1	3	31,346
Riparian	209	20,254	22	3,841	147	18,605	43,078
Coastal Wetlands	158	56,027	4	478	67	36,364	92,868
Totals	618	298,214	141	307,749	415	223,074	830,211

* This analysis is intended to illustrate the magnitude of the conservation actions benefitting selected habitat types. The acreage values are estimates based on information gathered from specific projects in WCB database. Projects completed for other purposes and not included in this analysis may have contributed to conservation of one or more reported habitat types. In some cases, conservation actions described in a project used in this analysis were general in nature and in those cases, the benefits were estimated for the selected habitat types. Finally, many other agencies and organizations have conserved or restored lands in these selected habitats so the acreages in this table are limited to WCB actions.

abundance and richness” will require ongoing targeted and partnership-leveraged approaches that maximize available funding to meet such aspirational goals.

WCB is committed to the state’s biodiversity and recreation goals and will contribute to achieving those goals through the actions described in this Plan Update. As the state agency responsible for investing in and delivering, on behalf of the public, statewide natural resource preservation, restoration, and recreation in California, WCB will continue to make substantial contributions to a California that values its natural heritage and landscapes now and for future generations.

Conservation Trends and Priorities

As previously discussed, conservation priorities, approaches, and delivery have changed substantially over the last 10 years in California. For example, in the past, the primary mode of land-based conservation in California was the acquisition and long-term preservation of private lands. With more data and information, and the advent of more advanced analytical tools, it is evident that restoration of existing lands and establishing close working relationships with private landowners for mutually beneficial conservation and land-use prescriptions will achieve a greater overall conservation outcome when used in concert with acquisition. Some of the best remaining habitat for at-risk species are on lands which might be unavailable for acquisition. Restoration extends the conservation reach across more landscapes and geographies.

Similarly, the effects of climate change on wildlife and fish populations is already happening and will be magnified over the life of this Plan Update. Conservation actions that include corridors and connectivity in a meaningful way are an important part of addressing this critical issue. Adaptation to a changing climate in this context must also include direct management actions on existing preserved lands. Effective management prescriptions provide habitat to support the species needs today as well as providing habitat that is useful for species predicted to use landscapes differently in the future. CDFW has developed, in cooperation with the University of California, a series of climate vulnerability assessments that evaluate the risk of terrestrial wildlife and plant species to one or more climate scenarios. These assessments, along with recent statewide and regional connectivity assessments, are the basis for Plan Update Objectives addressing climate change adaptation and resiliency.

Connecting landscapes for the benefit of fish and wildlife is an important part of providing for sustainable fish and wildlife populations and is a critical tenant of conservation biology. With an increasing human population in California, much needed transportation and water infrastructure projects will put pressure on fish and wildlife populations and the remaining intact landscapes in California. For these reasons and others, fish and wildlife connectivity has become a primary conservation issue. Wildlife populations disconnected by transportation infrastructure and urban development are at a higher risk of decline than those utilizing large, intact landscapes. In the aquatic environment, local fish passage barriers, dams, and other water conveyance and storage infrastructure that impede fish movement are a primary cause in declining fish populations. Targeted investments in high priority connectivity projects and consideration of connectivity factors as part of conservation investments will be key elements in addressing climate change.

Over the past two decades, investments in large-scale, comprehensive conservation planning efforts have become a central part of the conservation picture in California. Probably the best example of large-scale conservation in California is the Natural Communities Conservation Planning (NCCP) program.

Once all currently established NCCPs are fully implemented, over 1,500,000 acres will be conserved, and equally as important, valuable partnerships have been created across diverse interests in the local government setting. Conceptually, the NCCP program is the gold standard for balancing economic and natural resource conservation interests.

State Policies

State policy relating to natural resource conservation or regulatory programs affecting fish and wildlife are a significant factor in defining the approach to conservation delivery in California. A changing conservation planning landscape reflects lessons learned from existing programs as well as innovations and new thinking about how to achieve our conservation goals. A primary outcome of this Plan Update is to create Strategic Initiatives and Objectives that better reflect current State policy and conservation approaches.

The following discussion highlights key new legislative policy, passed or adopted since the 2014 Plan, and relates these policies to potential WCB programs and activities. For more detailed information on relevant state policies see Table 1:

- ***Wildlife Corridors and Connectivity*** – The passage of the landmark infrastructure improvement program embodied in Senate Bill 1 (2017) and 2018 formal agreements between state wildlife agencies and the California Department of Transportation (CalTrans), significantly increase the focus on the need for wildlife corridors and connectivity. As evidenced by the importance of connectivity in the recent Biodiversity Initiative, this is an area that demands significant investment now and in the future. WCB will be working collaboratively with infrastructure agencies, the fish and wildlife agencies, and conservation organizations to leverage investments in this area.
- ***Climate Change Mitigation and Resiliency*** – Several state policy documents have identified climate change adaptation and mitigation in the context of natural and working lands in the past few years. The California Air Resources Board Scoping Plan, Senate Bill 1386, and the California Natural Resources Agency’s Safeguarding Plan of 2016 and 2017 all emphasize natural and working lands as important carbon sequestration and climate adaptation landscapes. WCB has an opportunity to lead natural and working lands climate mitigation and adaptation through several of its programs including the Climate Adaptation and Resiliency, Forest Conservation, Inland Wetlands Conservation, and Rangeland, Grassland and Grazing Lands programs.
- ***Conservation Planning*** – As mentioned above, the NCCP program sets the standard for comprehensive, land-based conservation planning. However, additional comprehensive planning programs have recently emerged to help bridge the conservation planning gap. For example, in 2017 the Regional Conservation Investment Strategy (RCIS) program was created by the California legislature to provide a mechanism to identify high-priority conservation lands and gain concurrence on those designations with the fish and wildlife agencies. This is an important step in setting more specific and actionable regional conservation priorities. Proposition 68 (2018) provided funding for WCB to support these activities. Similarly, recognizing the need to support conservation of private lands, the California Legislature passed sweeping changes to the California Endangered Species Act in 2018 which, among other things, made the Safe Harbor program easier and more efficient for private landowners to use. While relying upon the California Department of Fish and Wildlife as a partner to set priorities, WCB will consider how

grantees leverage funding under these policies to achieve an outcome with the greatest overall benefit.

- **Scaled Habitat Restoration** – As discussed throughout this Plan Update, WCB’s restoration activities have been bolstered through recent state bonds. Habitat restoration offers the benefit of affordability and flexibility across a variety of land ownerships. As mentioned earlier, some of the best remaining habitat for declining and vulnerable species is on public lands making restoration an important conservation tool. In 2014, the Legislature passed the Habitat Restoration and Enhancement Act which streamlines the process for approving small-scale habitat restoration projects. This policy trend of regulatory efficiencies for habitat restoration is likely to continue. WCB will track this trend and consider providing incentives in solicitations for small-scale restoration projects that qualify under this act.
- **State Groundwater Management Act (SGMA)** – This landmark set of state laws and regulations passed in late 2014 provides a framework for sustainable groundwater management. SGMA requires governments and water agencies of at-risk recharge basins to eliminate overdraft and bring groundwater basins into balanced levels of pumping and recharge. Under SGMA, these basins must reach sustainability within 20 years of implementing Groundwater Sustainability Plans (GSP). Presently, local and regional water districts are forming Groundwater Sustainability Agencies which are preparing GSPs. Demonstrating sustainability will often require a thorough examination of the Agencies’ water budget and will likely include significant cuts to certain water uses or practices. Surface water for fish and wildlife will be part of these considerations. The Inland Wetlands, Stream Flow Enhancement, and Riparian Habitat programs will likely be influenced by Agencies’ plans and solicitation criteria, as well as monitoring requirements of grantees, and should consider Agencies’ water budgets in solicitations.
- **Apiculture and Pollinator Support** – The decline of several terrestrial insect species primarily bees and butterflies in California have prompted the Legislature to address their protection through new state laws. In 2016, the state Legislature mandated the consideration of apiculture on public lands including state lands. More recently, in 2017, legislation resulted in an emphasis on protection of Monarch butterflies and other pollinators. This was the basis for creation of the Monarch Butterfly and Pollinator Rescue Program. In addition to this new program, Plan Update Strategic Initiatives and Objectives include addressing ecosystem services. Additionally, the Ecosystem Restoration on Agricultural Land, and the Rangeland, Grazing Land, and Grassland Protection programs should consider pollinator support in both solicitation criteria and grantee monitoring.

Section 3: The Wildlife Conservation Board 2014-2019

The Wildlife Conservation Board’s Role Delivering Conservation

California state government is one of many entities that play a role in ensuring preservation and conservation of natural systems in our state. The federal government, through the National Parks, National Forests, and open spaces managed by the Bureau of Land Management, are a key part of ensuring lands remain in open space and serve as wildlife habitat. On a local level, the California land trust community is critical to supporting local and regional conservation and open space networks and ensuring they remain viable. Partnerships entities, like the Landscape Conservation Partnership, habitat joint ventures, local agencies and local conservation organizations serve an invaluable role in bringing

focus to local conservation issues. Private conservation organizations also play a key role in conserving and restoring natural landscapes and providing for public access.

Within state government, CDFW serves as the trustee steward of all fish and wildlife resources and the habitats upon which they depend. In conjunction with the Administration and Legislature, CDFW sets policy and regulates land use actions to the benefit of natural resource conservation. State conservancies are departments within the California Natural Resources Agency which are charged with, among other things, acquiring land in specified geographical areas to advance specified goals. While the statutory goals of each conservancy differ, in general the conservancies were created in response to real and perceived threats to vital regional land resources. Much like WCB, conservancies are funded through legislative appropriations, bond or other public initiatives, and philanthropy and significantly contribute to meeting statewide conservation goals.

WCB, as the only statewide government entity that secures land- and water-based conservation and access across the entire state, serves a unique role in California conservation. First, WCB grants funding to other entities to secure identified conservation and access needs. This is the traditional role and was WCB's initial guiding concept. Secondly – and equally as important – WCB pursues, incubates, and grows conservation partnerships. Various joint ventures, local and regional non-governmental conservation groups, national conservation organizations, and other state and federal agencies are active WCB partners. Finally, the scope and breadth of WCB programs offers opportunities for a more robust leadership position in all aspects of fish and wildlife conservation. WCB will seek, with its partners, to actively define conservation priorities for California.

[INSERT some sidebars that highlight successes since 2014]

New Programs and Areas of Emphasis

Since the 2014 Strategic Plan, WCB has responded to current conservation needs and funding priorities expressed by the legislature by creating new programs or emphasis areas. For example, Proposition 68 provides funding for wildlife corridors and connectivity. Connectivity projects could include construction of wildlife overcrossing and could include rehabilitation, construction, removal, or modification of fish passage barriers (e.g., culverts) to connect upstream and lower watershed habitat. These actions will be completed within existing programs and will be emphasized in solicitations and through the objectives in Section 4. Additional programs or areas of emphasis include:

- ***Stream Flow Enhancement:*** This Proposition 1 (2014) program is designed to meet the three working goals of the California Water Action Plan; water reliability, restoration, and resilience. The program is focused on investments that will improve the timing and quality of water availability for anadromous fish, threatened, endangered, or at-risk species, or provide resilience to climate change in the aquatic environment. Enhancing stream flows expressly for improving habitat conditions for native fish is a new area of conservation focus for WCB.
- ***Conservation Planning Support:*** Funding provided through Proposition 68 (2018) will support new and existing conservation planning in California. Proposition 68 provides significant funding for support, land acquisition, restoration, and other protections and enhancements relating to NCCP programs. In addition, the Regional Conservation Investment Strategy (RCIS) program received first-time funding to support technical and planning assistance to local governments and others embarking on an RCIS or Regional Conservation Assessment (RCA).

- **Monarch Butterfly and Pollinator Rescue:** This program provides grants for a variety of purposes including restoration and enhancement of appropriate breeding habitat, restoration and enhancement of overwintering Monarch butterfly habitat, and technical assistance to further our understanding of applied Monarch butterfly and pollinator conservation. This program will work in tandem with the Ecosystem Restoration on Agricultural Lands Program to produce and account for ecosystem services benefits.
- **Wildlife Corridors and Fish Passage:** Proposition 68 also provides funding for expenditures on wildlife and fisheries needs including the provision of wildlife corridors and connectivity. For terrestrial wildlife, connectivity means construction of wildlife overcrossing and undercrossing as part of implementing the statewide Essential Connectivity program jointly developed by CDFW and CalTrans. For fisheries, this means the rehabilitation, construction, removal, or modification of fish passage barriers (e.g., culverts) to connect upstream and lower watershed habitat.
- **Climate Change and Resiliency:** This program was created by AB109 which amended the Budget Act of 2017 to provide funds for local assistance, payable from the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF). The intent of this grant program is to fund projects that provide climate adaptation and resilience on California's natural and working lands.

The Conservation Toolbox

Advances in conservation assessment and planning have resulted in the development of important tools for use by WCB and its partners. These tools are currently used to help set conservation priorities, assist in local and regional conservation decisions, and continually evaluate the status of habitat and species populations. Chief among these are the State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP), the California Department of Fish and Wildlife Areas of Conservation Emphasis (ACE III) analyses, and the series of ranked species assessments comprising the Species of Special Concern program. Each of these systems played a role in refining the 2014 Plan goals and were considered when creating the Objectives for this Plan Update. While there are many tools available to the conservation community, these are most frequently used due to statewide scope and tool reliability. The following discussions summarize each of these systems:

- **State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP)** - The SWAP examines the status and health of California's wildlife and ecological landscape and prescribes actions to conserve wildlife and vital habitat before they become rarer and costlier to protect. The plan also promotes wildlife conservation while furthering responsible land uses and addressing the needs of a growing human population. The comprehensive wildlife plan was completed in 2015 and is based on the most recent science and working knowledge of land managers, conservationists, and policy makers. It identifies wildlife and habitat conservation targets within a series of ecoregions across the state. The SWAP is accompanied by a series of companion documents that further explore wildlife and habitat population needs in the context of a series of sectors or land use interests. These include transportation, agriculture, energy, forestry, land-use planning, marine resources, tribal lands, and water management. A final companion plan explores consumptive and recreational uses of public and private lands and is an important resource for evaluating public lands access.
- **Areas of Conservation Emphasis (ACE III)** - ACE III is a CDFW program to analyze extensive map-based data in a targeted, strategic way, and expressed visually, so decisions can be informed around important goals like conservation of biodiversity, habitat connectivity, and climate

change resiliency. The ACE III maps provide a coarse level view of information for conservation planning purposes, ranging from ecological research and modeling to local land-use planning and conservation decision-making. The ACE program supports thousands of data layers from multiple sources including state and federal wildlife agencies, University of California, consultants, nongovernmental organizations, and other conservation entities. The data in the ACE program can be manipulated in a wide variety of ways to express analyses for one or more specific conservation purposes. The system helps inform species and habitat priorities reflected in the Objectives for the Plan Update.

- ***Species of Special Concern*** – CDFW Species of Special Concern program seeks to set species-level priorities for conservation in California by ranking major taxonomic groups of wildlife based on a set of intrinsic and extrinsic factors. The assessments represent the best available science for each species. The rankings provide a solid basis for setting land-based conservation priorities. Each of the major Species of Special Concern assessments is accompanied by a climate vulnerability assessment using predictive models to determine species range and habitat use under a variety of future climate change scenarios.

Funding Source Considerations

While legacy WCB programs offer some flexibility with respect to funding across the California geography, other WCB programs often come with geographic, biological, or other constraints that direct funding to a specific intended purpose. For example, WCB programs funded through Proposition 68 carry requirements for addressing underserved communities thereby ensuring the benefits of open spaces and natural landscapes are shared by all Californians. Other fund sources may carry specific requirements to address fire resiliency or climate change adaptation. In some cases, funding sources within a WCB program may constrain funding to a specific geographic region, corridor, or other natural feature such as upper watershed projects in the Sierra Nevada or Cascades. Grant guidelines and solicitations for each program will identify all funding source constraints and opportunities. Each major WCB program may contain several fund sources that provide an emphasis or focus in a given geography or biological context. However, WCB's discretion within and between funding opportunities and constraints will always emphasize the overall program goals and objectives and provides opportunities to ensure high priority actions are getting implemented.

The Strategic Initiatives and Objectives in this Plan Update are intended to operate at the programmatic rather than fund source level. Similarly, the monitoring and success criteria for each Objective will assess the incremental progress of meeting that Strategic Initiative and, in turn, the overall 2014 Plan Goals. Compliance with specific fund source criteria and requirements (rather than Objectives) is carried out more comprehensively by the state for all departments, boards, and conservancies including WCB. Unless otherwise stated, the objectives are to be implemented over the next five year period.

Section 4: Plan Update Strategic Initiatives and Objectives - 2019-2024

SI 1 - Climate Change Adaptation, Resiliency, and Mitigation (Plan Goals A, B, and C): There is no greater threat to biological diversity of California than climate change. The effects of climate change exacerbate the ongoing impacts of fragmentation, habitat degradation, and direct habitat loss by changing essential habitat elements in every landscape. WCB can play an effective role in helping to mitigate these impacts. Investments in natural landscapes that are

carbon sinks (sequestration) can contribute to reducing greenhouse gas effects. Incorporating species climate change vulnerability and predicted habitat use patterns into investment decision making can create supporting habitat now and under future climate scenarios. Providing for connectivity among and between intact landscapes will facilitate local and regional wildlife movement and colonization as traditional habitats become less suitable. Survey respondents identified these actions as a top priority for WCB during the Plan Update horizon and beyond. The following Objectives are designed to address this priority and begin to re-focus WCB programs to address climate change threats more comprehensively.

- Objective SI1.1 - Invest in at least five wildlife under- or over-crossings within the next three years in locations deemed high priority by both the transportation and fish and wildlife agencies
- Objective SI1.2 - Invest in at least five projects that have a primary purpose of meeting the goals of the California Essential Connectivity Assessment or local government assessments based on that assessment
- Objective SI1.3 - Ensure 40% of all acquisition and restoration projects are within areas identified as climate change refugia for sensitive species in current [Climate Change Vulnerability Assessments](#)
- Objective SI1.4 - Invest in at least five projects that provide long-term measurable carbon sequestration benefits
- Objective SI1.5 - Collaboratively develop and publish criteria for addressing natural resource catastrophic events like extreme fire and protracted drought for inclusion as priorities in future solicitations
- Objective SI1.6 - Collaboratively identify and fund five upper watershed improvement projects each year that have a primary or secondary purpose of providing resiliency to climate change

SI 2 - Biodiversity Actions (Plan Goals A and B): WCB programs have delivered significant conservation in California. In the past, these accomplishments have been measured by geographic distribution of funding and number of acres restored, acquired, or protected. These are meaningful but incomplete metrics for measuring success when considered in light of the urgency for stabilizing declining and vulnerable species populations or conserving remaining native habitats and landscapes. In short, WCB actions under this Strategic Initiative focus on conserving California's unparalleled biodiversity.

The following Objectives are designed to focus WCB actions on those areas deemed most important in the State Wildlife Action Plan and to best support biodiversity conservation. As described in Monitoring Strategic Initiative below, WCB will begin documenting specific habitat- and species-based benefits from project actions to better inform the impact of its programs and partnerships.

- Objective SI2.1 - Increase the statewide protection or restoration of oak woodlands, riparian habitat, and rangeland, grazing land, and grassland habitat by funding at least 10 projects in each of these programs

- Objective SI2.2 - Invest in 3 acquisitions and 2 restoration/development grants each year that advance habitat and natural community targets embodied in Regional Conservation Investment Strategies or Natural Community Conservation Plans
- Objective SI2.3 – Implement at least 5 projects each year that meet priorities in the California Water Action Plan
- Objective SI2.4 - Ensure 75% of all approved projects meet one or more conservation priorities expressed in the State Wildlife Action Plan
- Objective SI2.5 - Protect or restore at least 1,000 acres each of riparian, wetlands, and grassland habitats in priority areas as defined in the State Wildlife Action Plan

SI 3 - Public Access and Wildlife-Oriented Recreation (Plan Goal C): The discussion in Section 1, Importance of WCB’s Work to the Public, outlined why public access to natural landscapes has become more important to all Californian’s in the face of climate change and strong urban growth. Public needs and expectations for outdoor experiences have also changed and now include both passive and active wildlife and fish recreation. There is special need for public access and wildlife-oriented recreation in disadvantaged communities and in dense urban areas where many people have few outlets for enjoying the outdoors. WCB’s long-standing Public Access Program is poised to address these needs with the recognition of these changing needs. Survey respondents were generally satisfied with WCB’s program and the following Objectives are designed to emphasize continuing past public access work while embracing new access modes and opportunities.

- Objective SI3.1 - Invest in at least five projects providing public access for disadvantaged or severely disadvantaged¹ communities.
- Objective SI3.2 - Invest in at least five projects providing boating/fishing access to disadvantaged communities and providing additional facilities for mobility impaired visitors and/or access compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- Objective SI3.3 - Invest in at least five projects which provide hunting or fishing opportunities.
- Objective SI3.4 - Invest in at least five projects that have a primary or secondary purpose of passive wildlife recreation such as bird watching or hiking.
- Objective SI3.5 - Attend or conduct at least two meetings per year, providing outreach, workshops, and materials to increase visibility of the WCB Public Access Program

SI 4 - Ecosystem Services (Plan Goal A, B and D): “Ecosystem services” are benefits that humans gain from the natural environment and properly functioning ecosystems. A primary example of an ecosystem service is the clean water delivered by a healthy watershed from headwaters to basins. Degradation of the natural watershed system often results in the need for costly water treatment and distribution while investments in a healthy watershed can reduce these and other costs. Another prime example are pollinator services whereby actions to improve the health of pollinator species – from providing sufficient forage to targeted reductions in pesticides and other toxins – deliver robust pollination vectors for agriculture and for natural

¹ “Disadvantaged community” means a community with a median household income less than 80 percent of the statewide average. “Severely disadvantaged community” means a community with a median household income less than 60 percent of the statewide average.

landscapes. WCB's Monarch Butterfly and Pollinator Rescue program, as well as thoughtful criteria in grant solicitations and agreements, will help build the case studies and data that could eventually support monetizing these services throughout the conservation community. Survey respondents generally supported this initiative at a moderate priority level and the following Objectives are designed to begin integrating and identifying ecosystem services as part of all acquisition and restoration projects.

- Objective SI4.1 - Invest in at least five successful acquisition or restoration projects each year that have a demonstrated and measurable upper watershed ecosystem services benefit
- Objective SI4.2 - Invest in at least three successful projects each year that have a primary purpose of conserving or restoring native pollinator habitat in locations that provide a measurable ecosystem services benefit
- Objective SI4.3 - Invest in at least five projects that provide a tangible ecosystem services benefit to local lower watershed (urban/rural) communities and document that benefit

SI 5 - Partnerships (Plan Goals A, B, C, and D): The cornerstone of any effective public program, partnerships are a recurring theme in WCB communications, program delivery, and grant solicitations. WCB's success in contributing to conservation in California is predicated on successful partnerships. Leveraging human and fiscal resources is a common element of WCB programs and was identified as a priority among Plan Update survey respondents. The following Objectives are designed to maintain and strengthen existing partnerships while exploring and securing new ones. These Objectives seek to improve collaboration among and between WCB, conservancies, and other state and federal agencies to further leverage conservation actions.

- Objective SI5.1 – Invest in and support at least three California Safe Harbor Program partnerships.
- Objective SI5.2 - Conduct outreach to five new partners per year including meetings or field visits with potential partners in underserved geographies
- Objective SI5.3 - Implement at least three competitive grant solicitations over the next five years that have been coordinated among multiple agencies and are directed at a high priority geography or habitat.
- Objective SI5.4 - Per the USFWS Urban Wildlife Conservation Program, establish a new partnership with one urban community annually to support nature and wildlife connections consistent with WCB programs.

SI 6 - WCB Organization and Transparency (Plan Goals D and E): An organizationally sound Board and staff structure coupled with a commitment to effective and transparent operations is essential to meeting the public's conservation and access expectations. Recent changes to WCB's structure and composition provided for expanded representation and an infusion of new ideas and perspectives. The Plan Update survey confirmed staff's commitment to efficiency and open communication but pointed to the need for expanded transparency. Survey respondents also identified the need for use of expanded communication modes and venues in varied geographies. The following Objectives are designed to meet these needs:

- Objective SI6.1 - By the end of 2020, acquire and implement a system to make WCB meetings accessible online
- Objective SI6.2 - By the end 2020, make substantial progress in standardizing, solicitation content, criteria, and process and develop an online application portal for competitive grants
- Objective SI6.3 - By the end of 2020, update the WCB web presence to include current goals, targets, and metrics and conservation priorities for each program
- Objective SI6.4 - By the end of 2020, develop and make mapped data publicly available illustrating WCB projects and their relationship to program conservation objectives
- Objective SI6.5 - Hold at least one workshop annually in different parts of the state to discuss competitive grant programs and receive feedback
- Objective SI6.6 – Sponsor at least five conferences each year throughout the state and provide outreach materials about WCB programs

SI 7 - Natural Resource Conservation Leadership (Plan Goals D and E): As discussed elsewhere in this Plan Update, WCB's traditional role as state conservation land agent continues to change. Funding for WCB programs come with ever increasing requirements for specific outcomes and often in specific geographies. As technology has improved, and conservation priorities continue to evolve, WCB is poised to embrace a facilitation and convening role to catalyze the development of conservation priorities that can be used by others in the conservation community. For example, the State Wildlife Action Plan is an excellent framework for describing the state of fish and wildlife conservation in California but could be improved with more refined priorities. These priorities could drive the acquisition and restoration programs as well as many of WCB's specific programs. Survey respondents identified this leadership role as a moderate priority and further identified the need in written responses.

- Objective SI7.1 - Provide leadership in state and regional forums among the state Conservancies, WCB, and other agencies specifically for discussing and determining habitat-based priorities for upcoming competitive grant solicitations
- Objective SI7.2 - Participate in the development and implementation of the natural working lands elements of the state Safeguarding and Scoping Plans
- Objective SI7.3 - Complete a unified and simplified process with CDFW for identifying CDFW acquisition investment priorities and gaining CDFW review and endorsement of projects
- Objective SI7.4 - Participate in statewide policy development efforts aimed at improving fire resiliency and forest management through natural resource protection and restoration
- Objective SI7.5 - By 2024, define priority conservation areas for each WCB program (consistent with overall WCB goals), establish conservation impact goals, and track/report progress towards these goals in the annual report

SI 8 - Monitoring and Program Evaluation (Plan Goal E): WCB recently committed resources to develop and deliver a more robust implementation and effectiveness monitoring program. Implementation monitoring is designed to determine the degree to which a project funded by WCB was successfully implemented. Effectiveness monitoring will determine if the stated goals of the project (e.g., habitat value increase, public access increase) were met and remain in place. Project and program monitoring information gathered over the duration of this update will be

critical to modifying future solicitations and program goals. Survey respondents identified monitoring as an important priority.

- Objective SI8.1 – By 2021, define criteria for effectiveness monitoring for specific habitat types and revise current monitoring form to gather data on project effectiveness
- Objective SI8.2 - Through continued implementation of the annual monitoring program, by 2024, cumulatively monitor 20 percent of completed projects, summarize results on project compliance, and post on website
- Objective SI8.3 - By 2024, make monitoring survey platform accessible on website to be used by project partners
- Objective SI8.4 - Include monitoring data as part of the WCB annual report and include projects by County and by State Wildlife Action Plan habitat type
- Objective SI8.5 - Update the WCB 60-year assessment by 2022 for WCB's 75th anniversary to highlight program accomplishments including amounts of habitats preserved and restored

Closing

The Strategic Initiatives and Goals in this Plan Update reflect the most current conservation priorities in California while remaining true to the integrity of the 2014 Strategic Plan goals. The manifestation of those goals through implementing these Plan Update Objectives reflects an updated direction for many WCB programs. Collectively implementing each of the Plan Update Objectives over the 5-year Update horizon will move the conservation needle and be a major step forward in meeting the conservation and recreation needs and expectations of the public

Resource Links (to be linked later)

State Wildlife Action Plan

Biodiversity Initiative

Areas of Conservation Emphasis III

Species of Special Concern Program

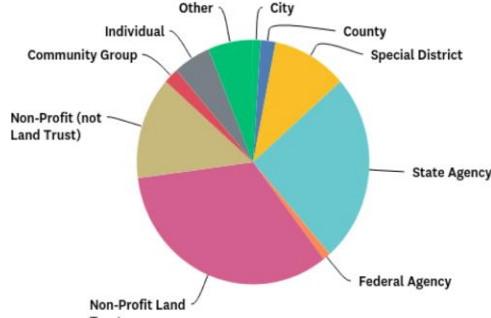
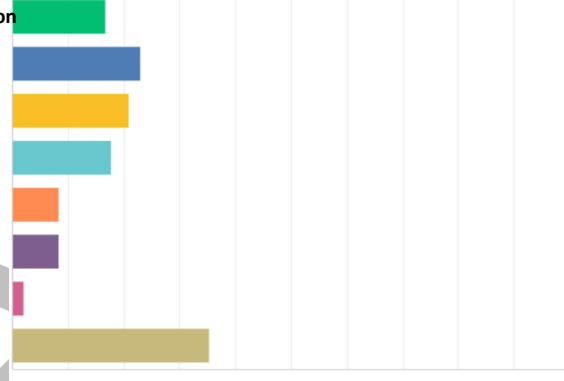
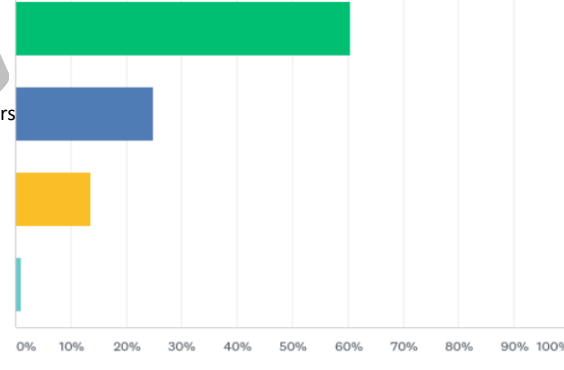
Natural Communities Conservation Program








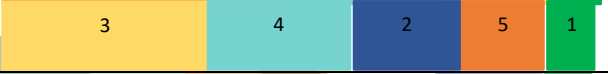

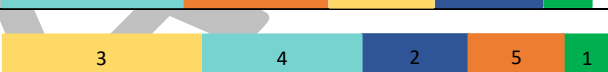





State Groundwater Management Act


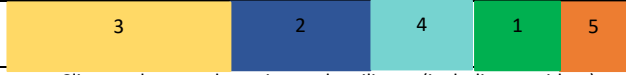
California Air Resources Board Scoping Plan

Natural Resources Agency Safeguarding Plan

Summary of Plan Update Survey Results

Question Number	Survey Question	Result Summary															
1	Participant Organization type																
2	Participant CDFW Region																
3	Partnership length																
4	Which WCB Program Focus?	<p>1) Land acquisition; 2) Habitat Enhancement and Restoration; 3) Public Access and Recreation; 4) Climate Adaptation and Resiliency; 5) Ecosystem Restoration on Agricultural Lands</p>															
5	Where has WCB been Most Successful? (5 = most successful, 1 = least successful)	<table border="1"> <tr> <td data-bbox="701 1652 917 1711">Acquisition –</td> <td data-bbox="924 1652 1140 1711">5</td> <td data-bbox="1146 1652 1274 1711">4</td> <td data-bbox="1281 1652 1409 1711">3</td> <td data-bbox="1416 1652 1438 1711">2</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="701 1719 917 1778">Restoration –</td> <td data-bbox="924 1719 1109 1778">4</td> <td data-bbox="1115 1719 1274 1778">5</td> <td data-bbox="1281 1719 1409 1778">3</td> <td data-bbox="1416 1719 1438 1778">2</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="701 1787 917 1862">Leveraging Investments –</td> <td data-bbox="924 1787 1109 1862">3</td> <td data-bbox="1115 1787 1243 1862">4</td> <td data-bbox="1250 1787 1378 1862">2</td> <td data-bbox="1385 1787 1438 1862">1</td> </tr> </table>	Acquisition –	5	4	3	2	Restoration –	4	5	3	2	Leveraging Investments –	3	4	2	1
Acquisition –	5	4	3	2													
Restoration –	4	5	3	2													
Leveraging Investments –	3	4	2	1													

		<p>Increasing Awareness – </p> <p>Organizational Efficiency - </p>
6	<i>Rate Each Potential Plan Element (5 = most important, 1 = least important)</i>	
	Align objectives with geographic and habitat priorities	
	Strengthen partnerships and leverage resources	
	Projects reflecting state conservation priorities	
	Provides long-term climate adaptation benefits	
	Fire, drought, and extreme event resiliency	
	Provides measurable ecosystem services benefits	
	Position WCB as a conservation leader	
	Provide additional access for public wildlife-oriented recreation	
	Provides opportunity for greater public involvement	
7	<i>Rate Importance of WCB Initiatives/Objectives over next 5 years (5 = most important, 1 = least important)</i>	
	Improve transparency and efficiency between WCB and CDFW	
	Coordinate acquisition application process to promote unification of project evaluations	
	Modify grant guidelines to emphasize extreme weather resiliency, water quality, and compatible public use	
	Expand project monitoring to include effectiveness and implementation	

	Prepare and implement a public education and outreach plan	
	Expand outreach methods to include social media	
8	What are the top organizational priorities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate change adaptation and resiliency (including corridors) • Continued land acquisition and restoration • Regional partnerships and improved collaboration • Addressing declining and vulnerable species
9	What are your organizations top 3 priorities relative to WCB programs?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate change adaptation and resiliency (including corridors) • Acquisition and protection of habitat (including streamflow enhancement) • Public access • Public outreach and engagement
10	List at least two ways WCB could improve to accomplish projects (most common responses)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved grant processes (application, appraisals, transparency, etc.) • Better communication with applicants and public • Increased guidance to project proponents (e.g. standards for monitoring)
11	List at least two things WCB does well and should continue to do (most common responses)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordination with project proponents • Funding projects that might not be otherwise funded • Collaboration with partners

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