



Wildlife Conservation Board

Strategic Plan Update | 2019-2024



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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.

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.

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SECTION 1: BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Introduction

Created by the legislature in 1947, the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) has been the state's wildlife conservation and land agent implementing acquisition and restoration programs and related public recreation for more than 70 years. During that time, WCB has overseen investments of over \$3 billion dollars to conserve or restore more than 2 million acres through legislative appropriations, public initiatives and bond measures, and philanthropic contributions. These investments have 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.

Through the 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, fishing, and public access in the Pacific Flyway. These acquisitions ensured many acres of Central Valley wetlands would remain available to support migratory



waterfowl, shorebirds, and other wildlife. More recently, WCB has included conservation of large blocks of land to support a wider 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 fish and wildlife habitats for all species, and balanced these networks with responsible development.

Fish, wildlife, and natural landscapes are found on lands across the entire spectrum of ownership in California including public, private, state, and federal properties. Therefore, providing habitat for healthy and sustainable fish and wildlife populations requires conservation across all these ownerships. WCB and its partners have responded to this conservation need by investing in properties on natural and working lands that reflect a more recent emphasis on these partnerships. These partnerships give landowners incentives to support wildlife conservation with targeted habitat improvements



on their land, while retaining most traditional economic land uses. 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 state administrations and California legislature, WCB is responding to the urgent call for new ways to address these impacts through Climate Change Adaptation and Resiliency grants and other programs. The Board recently solicited projects under 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 Section in this 2019 Strategic Plan Update. In addition to fire resiliency, WCB recognizes the need to invest in habitat connectivity, wildlife corridors, ecosystem services, and other important elements to comprehensively address 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 2019 Strategic Plan Update incorporates this program diversity by putting forth Strategic Initiatives and discrete Objectives that will measurably and positively affect conservation through 2024.

Board Structure and Governance

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 fish, wildlife, 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 (CDFW), 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, who 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 in two categories. Legacy WCB programs have been in place for 15 years or more and describe mission-centric activities that span several existing programs. These deliver land-based conservation across a wide spectrum of landscapes and thematic areas. Additional WCB programs are often those mandated by legislation or prescribed in bonds or other public funding for a specific conservation purpose. Readers should refer to WCB's website for the most recent fiscal information.

Legacy WCB Programs

Land Acquisition: Land Acquisition is a primary legacy program of WCB established under the Wildlife Conservation Law of 1947. It is a broad programmatic category that includes tasks and actions under most other programs. WCB acquires real property rights or interests in real property on behalf of the CDFW and provides grants to other entities for acquisition. Acquiring lands for conservation dates back several decades and is a cornerstone of WCB actions. Land acquisition will continue to be a major focus of WCB programs moving forward.

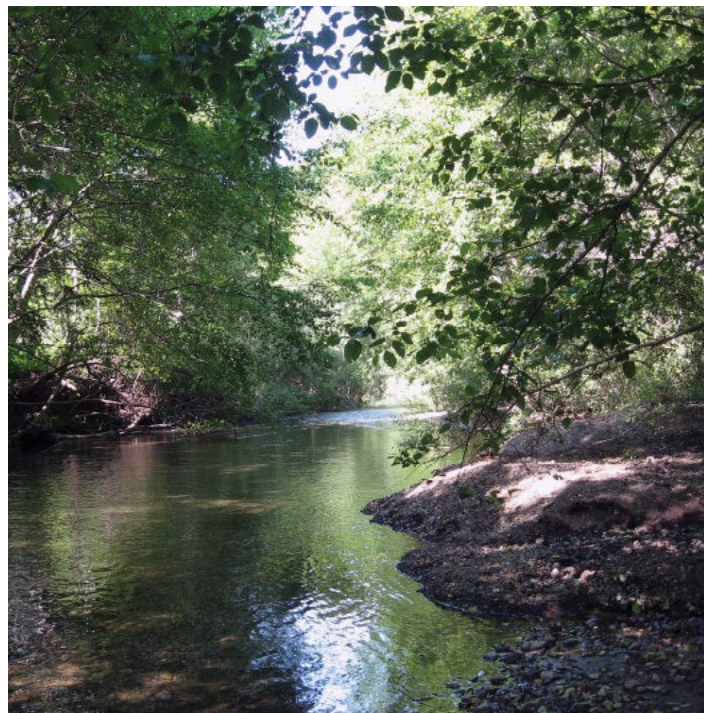
Habitat Enhancement and Restoration: The Habitat Enhancement and Restoration Program includes a variety of habitat restoration actions that may fall within or outside of other programs. This Program currently includes habitat restoration for coastal, tidal, freshwater and terrestrial habitat projects 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 habitat values, habitat restoration can be a powerful conservation tool that can be applied to a variety of private and public lands.



Riparian Habitat: The California Riparian Habitat Conservation Program, established by legislation more than 20 years ago, was created to protect, preserve, restore, and enhance riparian habitat throughout California. 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 habitat and the species it supports. It also seeks to enhance waterfowl hunting and viewing opportunities for the public. The program is statewide with an emphasis on the 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: The Public Access Program is one of the original WCB programs established under the Wildlife Conservation Law of 1947. Most of the projects under this Program have traditionally funded infrastructure to support wildlife-oriented recreation activities. These projects funded the installation of piers, boating and fishing docks, hunting blinds, educational signs, trails, and fish-cleaning stations to support hunting and fishing



opportunities, especially on CDFW properties. More recently, the Program has been able to fund additional infrastructure to support birdwatching and other passive recreation, including kayak launches, piers, observation decks, and trails accessible to those with disabilities. Proposition 68 (2018) provides new WCB funding which will allow the Program to expand and provide additional wildlife-oriented recreational infrastructure projects, to implement projects in disadvantaged communities, to provide additional infrastructure/amenities for mobility-impaired visitors, and to allow a percentage of funds for community access programs.

Tax Credits: The Natural Heritage Preservation Tax Credit Program (Tax Credit Program) protects 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 contributing landowner receives a state tax credit of up to 55 percent of the appraised value of the donation and WCB must assure repayment of lost revenue to the general fund caused by issuance of the tax credit. Designed to complement other resource protection efforts, the Tax Credit Program provides private landowners an opportunity to reduce 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 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 Ecosystem Restoration on Agricultural Lands Program provides funding for implementation of wildlife-friendly practices on private properties that can coexist with agricultural operations and be sustained over time. This Program was created under Proposition 84 (2006) and initially received \$5 million in bond funding. However, the importance of continuing this Program today resides in a new emphasis on private land conservation incentives that is currently highlighted as one of the conservation trends of 2019.

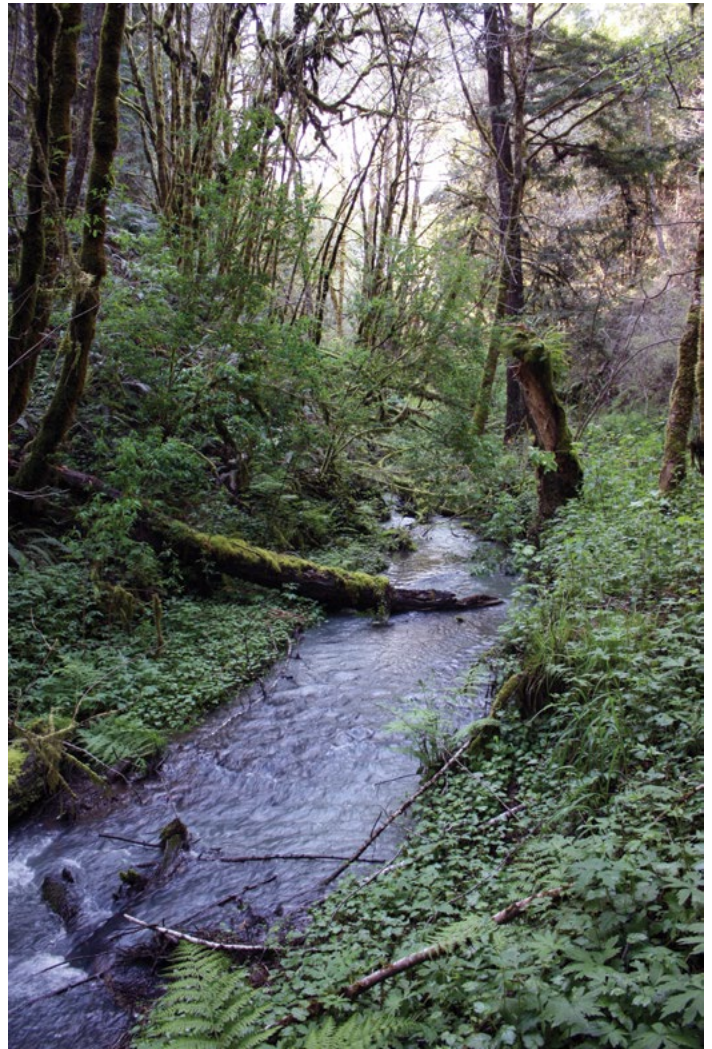


Forest Conservation: The Forest Conservation Program was initially funded through Proposition 84 (2006) and in various forms by Proposition 68 (2018). It promotes the ecological integrity and economic stability of California's diverse native forests and funds efforts to improve forest health. This is accomplished through a variety of conservation and preservation actions that may include the restoration of productive managed forest lands. This is another program that is being modified through the Plan Update process to emphasize fire resilience and fire protection in California's forest lands.

Oak Woodlands: The Oak Woodland Conservation Program is a long-standing program that provides grant opportunities to local governments, individuals, and conservation organizations to fund oak woodland conservation and education. While this Program is statewide in scope, it supports 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 Lands and Grassland Protection Act of 2002, was to protect rangeland, grazing land, and grasslands throughout California. The voluntary use of conservation easements delivers tangible conservation for sensitive species while permitting continued use of most agricultural practices. This program has experienced limited activity due to lack of funding since the 2014 Strategic Plan but will be reinvigorated with funding from Proposition 68 and will emphasize 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 (CESA) 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 from the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF) through the Air Resources Board California Climate Investments Program to WCB for local assistance grants and conservation easement acquisitions. This Program provides funding to emphasize natural and working lands as a valid





and vital means for sequestering carbon and reducing greenhouse gases. This program also funds technical assistance for natural and working lands professionals to improve rural and urban coordination on climate change adaptation. The emphasis of this program is being modified by this Plan Update to focus additional resources on climate adaptation. For example, Proposition 68 Chapter 10, emphasizes adaptation and specifically identifies funding to support creation of wildlife corridors that support connectivity.

Stream Flow Enhancement: Created in 2014 under Proposition 1, the Stream Flow Enhancement Program funds projects that will result in a change in the amount, timing, and quality of water flowing down a stream, or a portion of a stream, that benefits fish and wildlife. The Program has funded project planning and implementation, land acquisition, and scientific study projects through annual competitive solicitations since 2015 and has funding available for several more solicitations.

Lower American River: The Lower American River Conservancy (LARC) Program was created through Assembly Bill 1716 (2017) to implement and administer a program to receive and expend monies for the benefit of the Lower American River and related lands in partnership with local public agencies and non-profit organizations. The Program works in particular with the County of Sacramento in its role as Parkway Manager, to help fund projects to restore, enhance, protect and improve public access to the Parkway and its resources. Substantial additional funding for LARC 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 are being implemented 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 that the habitat is being maintained as described in the easement. 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 public access.

Value 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. Additionally, the California public enjoys multiple benefits from healthy ecosystems including pollinator services and clean drinking water. 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 responsibility for fish and wildlife is less evident but equally important. CDFW—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 in this Plan Update. Map 1 highlights the number of projects WCB has funded in and around metropolitan areas such as Los Angeles and San Diego. Additionally, WCB administers a statewide Public Access Program for projects that will enhance public access to hunting and fishing opportunities and other outdoor wildlife-oriented recreational activities, including those in more urban settings.

Public interest in and expectations of WCB programs vary across our state, that is diverse in both natural landscapes and human populations. While this affects how WCB communicates and delivers its programs, the concepts described above embrace these differences and serve as a foundation for 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 to capture 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, 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 2019 Strategic Plan Update (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 Plan Update also 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 to consider the Plan’s 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 for the Plan Update. Certain bond initiatives such as Proposition 1 and Proposition 68 are not listed in the table but discussed elsewhere in the document.

We researched and documented policies that had a bearing on both 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).

TABLE 1

Natural Resource Legislation Passed 2014-2019 and relevancy to the 2019 WCB Strategic Plan Update

2013/14		
BILL OR POLICY	SUMMARY	RELEVANT PROGRAMS
<u>AB 744</u> Timber Harvest Plan Exemption	Provides for an exemption of the Z’berg-Nejedly Forest Practice Act for Forest Fire Pilot Project Exemption program.	Forest Conservation; Oak Woodlands Conservation
<u>AB 1739 SB 1319 SB1168</u> Groundwater Management Act (SGMA)	Authorizes the State Water Resources Control Board to designate basin priorities, establish probationary basin designations, etc.	Land Acquisition; Habitat Enhancement and Restoration; Stream Flow Enhancement; Riparian Habitat Conservation

2013/14

BILL OR POLICY	SUMMARY	RELEVANT PROGRAMS
<u>AB 2193</u> 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 Conservation; Inland Wetlands Conservation; Stream Flow Enhancement
<u>SB 355</u> Income taxes: conservation credit	Tax credit for lands donated through WCB for conservation purposes.	Natural Heritage Preservation Tax Credit
<u>SB 749</u> Grazing/ag. leases	Authorizes CDFW to lease lands for agricultural uses, with proceeds identified for land management, maintenance, etc.	Rangeland, Grazing Lands, and Grassland Protection

2015/16

<u>AB 92</u> 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
<u>AB 498</u> Wildlife corridors	Encourages voluntary steps to protect functioning wildlife corridors as a state policy.	Climate Adaptation and Resiliency; Wildlife Corridor and Fish Passage; Riparian Habitat Conservation
<u>AB 559</u> Monarch butterfly conservation	Authorizes CDFW to take feasible actions to conserve monarchs and their habitat and partner with other agencies and NGOs for that conservation; requires use of the best available science for these actions.	Monarch Butterfly and Pollinator Rescue
<u>AB 1251 AB 2651</u> Greenway Development and Sustainability Act	Defines greenways and confers certain creation and transfer provisions, such as conservation easements. AB 2651 modifies the Act to provide for incorporation of “amenities” within an easement or easement-like transaction.	Land Acquisition
<u>AB 1716</u> Lower American River Conservancy	Creates the LARC Program and authorizes it to collect and expend funds to support the lower American River Parkway.	Lower American River Program
<u>AB 1958</u> 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
<u>AB 2087</u> Regional Conservation Investment Strategies (RCIS)	Authorizes CDFW or any other agency to prepare a Regional Conservation Investment Strategy that meets certain conditions and standards.	Conservation Planning Support; Habitat Enhancement and Restoration; Land Acquisition

2015/16

BILL OR POLICY	SUMMARY	RELEVANT PROGRAMS
<u>SB 1089</u> Wildlife Conservation 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
<u>SB 1386</u> 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; Forest Conservation

2017/18

<u>AB 2348</u> Winter Rice Habitat Incentive	Modifies contracting terms and duration for the 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
<u>AB 2421</u> Monarch Butterfly and Pollinator Rescue Program	Creates the program 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
<u>AB 2697</u> 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. Includes idle agricultural lands. Authorizes CDFW to consult with WCB.	Land Acquisition; Habitat Enhancement and Restoration; Inland Wetlands Conservation; Ecosystem Restoration on Agricultural Lands
<u>SB 473</u> California Endangered Species Act (CESA)	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
<u>SB 667</u> Department of Water Resources (DWR) Riparian Stewardship	Authorizes DWR to provide technical and financial assistance for riparian restoration and improvement projects and requires coordination with riparian conservation organizations (which includes WCB).	Riparian Habitat Conservation

OTHER POLICIES

BILL OR POLICY	SUMMARY	RELEVANT PROGRAMS
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 restriction transactions and considerations for negotiating protective status.	Land Acquisition
MANAGING MINING AND MINERAL RISK ON PUBLIC LANDS	CDFW policy that guides mineral rights assessment during the land management and land acquisition process.	Land Acquisition
BIODIVERSITY INITIATIVE	Initiative was enacted by Executive Order B-54-18 to improve understanding of the state's biological richness and identify actions to preserve, manage and restore ecosystems to protect biodiversity from climate change.	Land Acquisition; Habitat Enhancement and Restoration; Forest Conservation; Climate Adaptation and Resiliency
NATIVE PLANTS	Policy adopted by Fish and Game Commission in 2015 to encourage support and implement strategies and tools to conserve native plants as integral elements of the state's wildlife.	Land Acquisition; Habitat Enhancement and Restoration; Forest Conservation; Riparian Habitat Conservation; Rangeland, Grazing Lands, and Grassland Protection
WATER RESILIENCY	Executive Order N-10-19 executed in April 2019 directs the California Natural Resources Agency and other state agencies to prepare a water resilience portfolio for the state.	Stream Flow Enhancement; Inland Wetlands Conservation; Riparian Habitat Conservation

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 during the next five years. These Initiatives served as a foundation for developing the specific measurable Objectives that 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 with partners, grantees, state policy leaders, and the conservation community at large in order to gather input for this Plan Update. 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 before 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. A more detailed summary of the survey results presented at the public meetings and other information can be found on the WCB [Strategic Plan page](#).

Overall, 136 people responded to the survey. Of the responses, 85 were complete responses. The remaining surveys were incomplete with most respondents only

completing the first few questions. In summary, the on-line survey revealed strong support for focusing on climate change resiliency, continuing 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 by asking them to specifically think about potential Objectives for WCB. They also 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 a stand-alone planning document. Instead, it builds on the framework established in the 2014 Plan by presenting new Strategic Initiatives and measurable, actionable Objectives designed to fully and specifically meet the Plan Goals.

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 wildlife-friendly recreational values today and for the coming five-year period.



FIGURE 1
Developing Strategic Initiatives and Objectives



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, a priority demonstrated by the state's creation and implementation of the [California Biodiversity Initiative](#). 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 plants, fish and wildlife species is increasing. In some parts of California, habitat for these species—and outdoor spaces for recreation and enjoyment of the natural environment—are disappearing at an alarming rate. A recent report by the United Nations describes a 20 percent decline in biological diversity, worldwide. In California, more than 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 fish and wildlife 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 actions by WCB and its partners. SWAP notes the importance of preserving ecological processes and representative ecological landscapes while providing for the societal values of scenic beauty, sweeping vistas, and outdoor recreation opportunities. This is the conservation charge of WCB and the conceptual foundation for the Strategic Initiatives and Objectives in this Plan Update.

WCB's impact on conservation in California is substantial. Annual reports describe successful projects in all regions of the state that benefit multiple 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 effect WCB programs have made on conserving and restoring native habitats in California, project data is summarized by select habitat types that were protected 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 more than 36,000 acres of riparian habitat in California. Given recent estimates that only about 40,000 acres of riparian habitat remain in California's Central Valley, the contribution of Board-approved projects to the survival 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 work and mutually beneficial partnerships. The financial means for achieving meaningful conservation goals is currently provided by public initiatives or through public or legislative bond acts. This funding was successful because the public generally recognizes the importance and urgency of conserving California's natural resources and ecological systems. As part of the 2018 [Biodiversity Initiative](#), the Biodiversity Roadmap described overall biodiversity goals 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 abundance and richness." To meet those goals will require ongoing targeted and partnership-leveraged approaches that maximize available funding.

WCB is committed to the state's biodiversity and recreation goals and will contribute to achieving them 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 our state, WCB will continue to make substantial contributions to a California that values its natural heritage and landscapes now and for future generations.



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 illustrates the magnitude of the conservation actions benefitting selected habitat types. The acreage values are estimates based on information about specific projects gathered from WCB's 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. 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, but the acreages in this table are limited to WCB actions.

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 habitats for at-risk species are on lands that might be unavailable for acquisition. Restoration extends the conservation reach across more landscapes and geographies.

Similarly, climate change is already affecting plant, fish, and wildlife populations, and will be magnified over the life of this Plan Update. Conservation actions that include wildlife 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 habitat that is useful for species predicted to need to use habitats differently in the future or move to areas they don't currently occupy. 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 core habitats across landscapes for the benefit of fish and wildlife is an important component of sustaining healthy fish and wildlife populations and is a critical tenet of conservation biology. With a rapidly 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 here. For these reasons, fish and wildlife habitat 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, water conveyance and storage infrastructure such as dams and other barriers that impede fish movement are a primary cause in declining fish populations. Targeted investments in high-priority connectivity projects and consideration of connectivity 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. When all currently established NCCPs are fully implemented, more than 1.5 million acres will be conserved; and equally important, valuable partnerships will have been created across diverse interests in local government settings. Conceptually, the NCCP program is the gold standard for balancing economic and natural resource conservation interests.

State Policies

State policies relating to natural resource conservation or regulatory programs affecting fish and wildlife are significant factors 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 policies 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** – Passage of the landmark infrastructure improvement program embodied in Senate Bill 1 (2017) and formal agreements between state wildlife agencies and the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) in 2018, 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, fish and wildlife agencies, and conservation organizations to leverage investments in this area.
- **Climate Change Mitigation and Resiliency** – Several state policies have identified climate change adaptation and mitigation in the context of natural

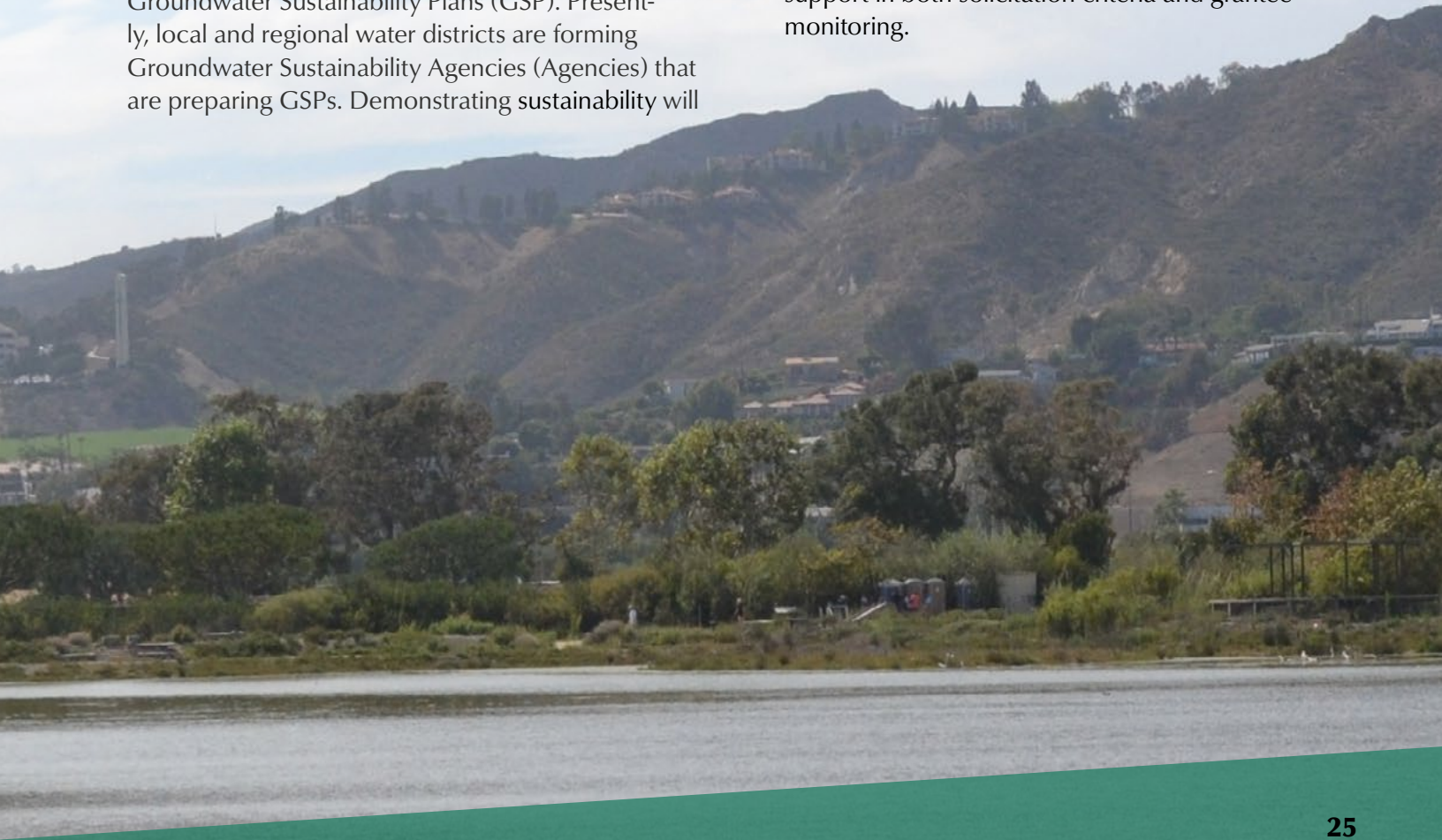
and working lands in the past few years. The California Air Resources Board's Scoping Plan, Senate Bill 1386, and the California Natural Resources Agency's Safeguarding Plan of 2016 and 2017 all emphasize natural and working lands as important carbon sequestration and climate adaptation landscapes. WCB 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 State Legislature created the Regional Conservation Investment Strategy (RCIS) program to provide a mechanism to identify high-priority conservation lands and actions. This is an important step toward setting 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 CESA in 2018. That made the Safe Harbor Program easier and more efficient for private landowners to use. While relying on CDFW 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 by recent state bonds. Habitat restoration offers the benefits of affordability and flexibility on lands held under several types of ownership. 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 with 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 (Agencies) that are preparing GSPs. Demonstrating sustainability will

often require a thorough examination of the Agencies’ water budgets and will likely include significant cuts to certain water uses or practices. Surface water for fish and wildlife and impacts to wetlands will be among these considerations. The Inland Wetlands, Stream Flow Enhancement, and Riparian Habitat Conservation 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 in California—primarily bees and butterflies—has prompted the State Legislature to address their protection through new state laws. In 2016, the Legislature mandated the consideration of apiculture on public lands. The following year, 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 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 Park Service, Forest Service, Fish and Wildlife Service and Bureau of Land Management, are important partners for ensuring lands remain in open space as wildlife habitat. On a local level, the California land trust community provides critical support for local and regional conservation and open space networks, and to ensure they remain viable. Partnership entities, like the Landscape Conservation Partnership, habitat joint ventures, local agencies, and local conservation organizations serve an invaluable role, bringing focus to local conservation issues. Private conservation organizations also play a key role in conserving and restoring natural landscapes and providing public access.

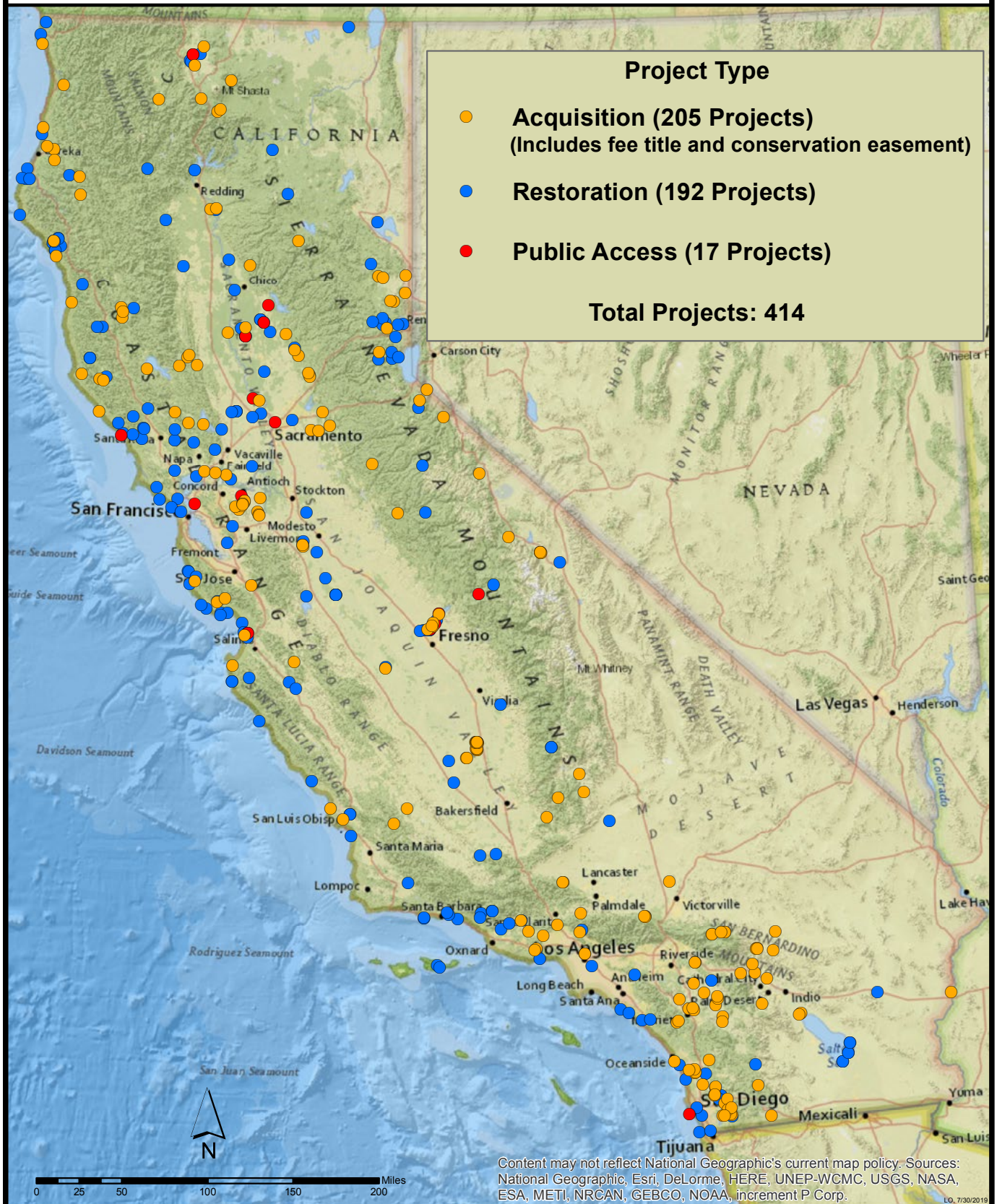
Within state government, CDFW serves as the trustee steward of all native plant, fish, and wildlife resources and the habitats upon which they depend. In conjunction with each governor's administration and legislature, CDFW sets policy and regulates land use to benefit natural resource conservation. State conservancies within the California Natural Resources Agency 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, these conservancies were created in response to real and perceived threats to vital regional land resources. Much like WCB, conservancies are funded through legislative appropriations, bonds or other public initiatives, and philanthropy. They contribute significantly to meeting statewide conservation goals.

WCB, as the only statewide government entity that secures land- and water-based conservation and access throughout 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. Second—and equally 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 seeks, with its partners, to actively define conservation priorities for California.



WCB Approved Projects Under 2014 Strategic Plan (November 2014 to Present)



ACCOMPLISHMENTS

2014-2019

Since approval of the 2014 Strategic Plan, WCB has funded over 400 projects and spent more than \$370 million dollars across the state. Map 1 highlights the projects funded under the 2014 Strategic Plan from November 2014 to present. Note the restoration category includes implementation and planning projects, and some restoration projects include public access components. The Table below highlights projects funded

under specific selected habitat types. All habitat types are not reflected in this table. Of note, under the Forest Conservation Program, since November 2014 more than 80,000 acres have been protected by fee title or conservation easement across the state, with almost 29,000 acres restored in this same time frame. Wetland and Riparian habitat acres are also highlighted showing significant contributions over the last five years.

HABITAT	ACQUISITION/EASEMENT		RESTORATION	
	#	acres	#	acres
Forest Habitat	23	84,274	10	28,824
Interior Wetlands	8	1,167	13	23,690
Coastal Wetlands	4	171	13	2,832
Riparian Habitat	11	2,736	16	1,839

STREAM FLOW ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM (SFEP):

SFEP was created in 2014 when \$200 million was appropriated to WCB for projects that enhance stream flows from Proposition 1, the Water Quality, Supply, and Infrastructure Improvement Act. Guided by the California Water Action Plan, program funding focuses on projects

that will lead to a direct and measurable enhancement to the amount, timing and/or quality of water for anadromous fish; special status, threatened, endangered or at risk species; or to provide climate change resilience. WCB has solicited proposals each year, since 2015 and has cumulatively funded 76 projects for more than \$81 million.

PROJECT CATEGORY	COUNT	AMOUNT AWARDED
Scientific Study	14	\$6,239,441
Planning	29	\$11,965,506
Acquisition	3	\$8,250,000
Implementation	30	\$54,776,363
Total	76	\$81,231,310

THE CLIMATE ADAPTATION AND RESILIENCY PROGRAM (CARP): CARP was created by AB 109, which amended the Budget Act of 2017 to provide \$20 million from the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund to WCB for local assistance. The Program is part of Cali-

fornia Climate Investments, a statewide Cap-and-Trade program. 25 projects have been selected by the Executive Director for potential funding and will move forward to the Board in 2019 and 2020 for approval.

PROJECT CATEGORY	COUNT	AMOUNT AWARDED
Conservation Easement	9	\$10,539,264
Implementation:	4	\$4,008,336
Planning:	7	\$1,868,792
Technical Assistance:	5	\$2,069,739
Total	25	\$18,486,131

OUTREACH HIGHLIGHTS

- Since 2015, WCB has conducted 13 public workshops for our grant programs under Proposition 1, Proposition 68, Climate Change Investments and Lower American River Program. Most of these were webcast to allow for attendance from a broad audience across the state.
- In 2017, WCB started a Sponsorship Program to

support key workshops and conferences and has sponsored 14 conferences to date. Staff conducts outreach as these events and provides information on WCB Programs. WCB is highlighted in the conference and workshop agendas.

- WCB is recognized when grantees present project findings at events and WCB is credited on signs at project sites as a requirement of our grant agreements.





New Programs and Areas of Emphasis

Since the 2014 Strategic Plan was written, WCB has created new programs or emphasis areas in response to current conservation needs and funding priorities expressed by the Legislature. For example, Proposition 68 provides funding for wildlife corridors and connectivity. Connectivity projects could include construction of wildlife overcrossings, or they could include rehabilitation, construction, removal, or modification of fish passage barriers to connect upstream and lower watershed habitat. These actions will be completed within existing programs and emphasized in solicitations, and through the Objectives in Section 4. Map 1 highlights the projects that have been funded since November 2014. 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

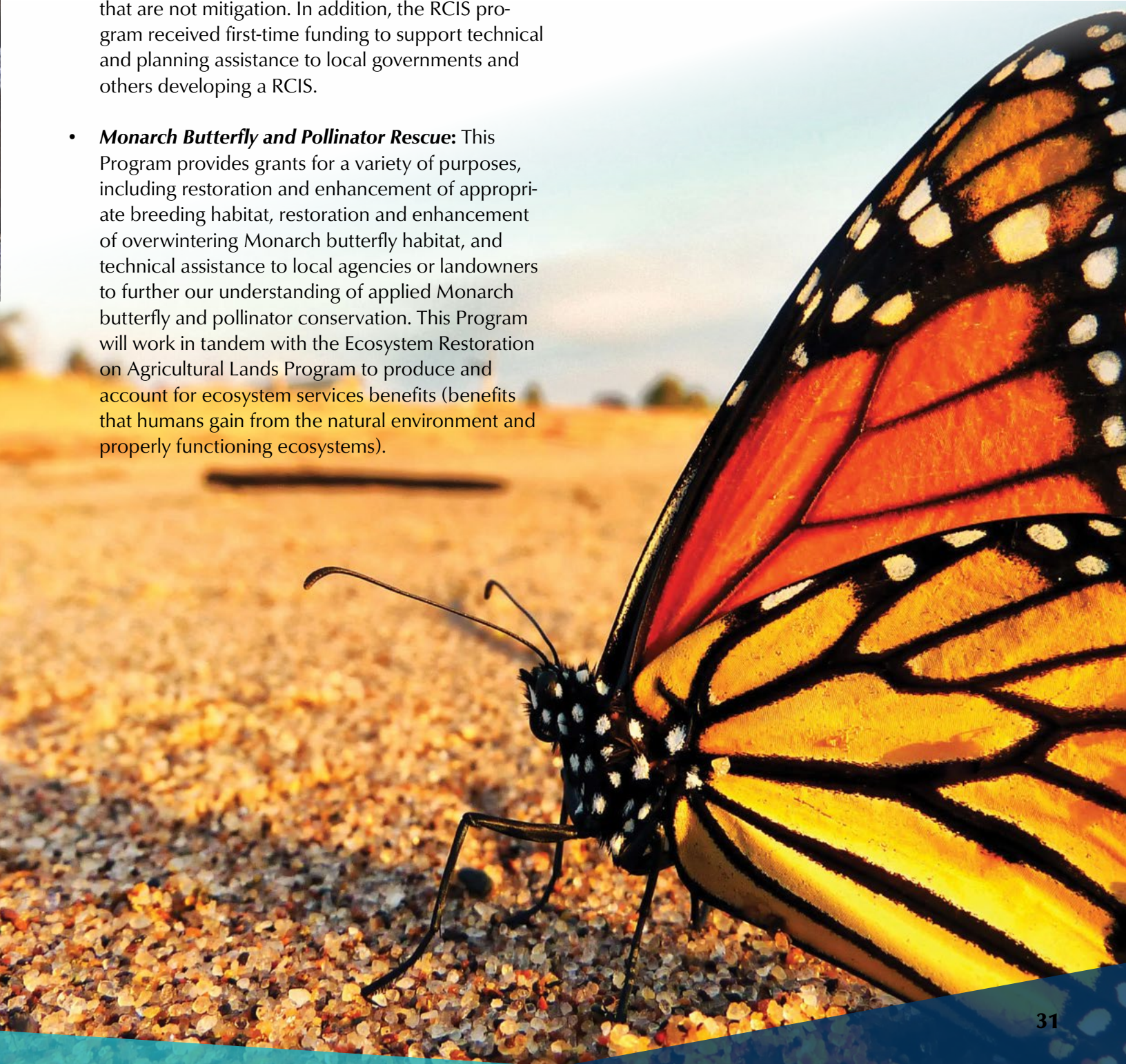
the amount, timing and quality of water flowing in streams for anadromous fish; threatened, endangered, or at-risk species; or provide resilience to climate change. Enhancing stream flows expressly for improving habitat conditions for native fish is a new area of conservation focus for WCB.

- **Lower American River:** This Program was created by Assembly Bill 1716, signed into law in 2016, and became effective January 1, 2017. The Program was created to provide a state partner to work cooperatively with local agencies, particularly the County of Sacramento in its role as the American River Parkway (Parkway) Manager. WCB works with nonprofit organizations to help fund projects and provide grants to restore, enhance, interpret, protect and improve public access to the Parkway's natural, recreational, educational and cultural resources. Funding was identified in Proposition 68 specifically for this Program.
- **Climate Adaptation and Resiliency:** This Program was created by AB 109, which amended the Budget Act of 2017 to provide funds for local assistance,

payable from the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF) through the California Climate Investments Program. The intent of this grant program is to fund projects that provide climate adaptation and resilience on California's natural and working lands.

- **Conservation Planning Support:** Funding provided through Proposition 68 (2018) will support both 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 that are not mitigation. In addition, the RCIS program received first-time funding to support technical and planning assistance to local governments and others developing a RCIS.
- **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 local agencies or landowners 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 (benefits that humans gain from the natural environment and properly functioning ecosystems).

- **Wildlife Corridors and Fish Passage:** Proposition 68 provides funding for expenditures on wildlife and fisheries needs, including wildlife corridors and connectivity. For terrestrial wildlife, connectivity means construction of wildlife overcrossings and undercrossings to implement 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.



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 SWAP, the CDFW Areas of Conservation Emphasis (ACE), and the series of ranked species assessments comprising the Species of Special Concern (SSC). Each of these played a role in refining the 2014 Plan and were considered when creating the Objectives for this Plan Update. Additionally, regional and local tools are available to help identify and prioritize projects and new assessments. New tools are being developed regularly.

While there are many tools available to the conservation community, these are the most frequently-used, due to statewide scope and reliability. The following discussions summarize each of these systems:

- **State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP)** – The SWAP examines the status and health of California’s fish and wildlife and ecological landscape, and prescribes actions to conserve fish, 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. This comprehensive 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 in ecoregions across the state. The SWAP is accompanied by a series of companion documents that further discuss 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)** – ACE is a CDFW product that provides map-based data in a targeted, strategic way. It is expressed visually, to enhance decision-making around important goals like

biodiversity, habitat connectivity, and climate change resiliency. The ACE maps provide a broad set of information layers to support conservation planning, including ecological research, modeling and information on local land-use planning. ACE compiles and summarizes information from many data layers including hundreds of species range and distribution models; thousands of mapped species occurrences; dozens of vegetation, habitat, and habitat connectivity maps; and many other data layers from multiple sources, including state and federal wildlife agencies, University of California, consultants, nongovernmental organizations, and other conservation entities. The data in ACE can be viewed in a wide variety of ways to express analyses for one or more specific conservation purposes. The system helps determine species and habitat priorities reflected in the Objectives for the Plan Update.

- **Species of Special Concern (SSC)** – The CDFW SSC is an administrative designation designed to focus attention on animals at conservation risk by state, local and federal governmental entities and others. SSC carries no formal legal status but identifies species to help achieve conservation and recovery of these animals before they meet California Endangered Species Act criteria for listing as threatened or endangered. Each of the major SSC assessments are 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 statewide, other WCB programs often come with geographic, biological, or other constraints that direct funding to a specific purpose. For example, WCB programs funded through Proposition 68 carry requirements for addressing disadvantaged communities, thereby ensuring the benefits of open spaces and natural landscapes are enjoyed by all Californians. Other fund sources may carry specific requirements to address fire resiliency or climate change. 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 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 geographic or biological context. However, WCB's discretion within and between funding opportunities and constraints always emphasizes the overall program goals and provides opportunities to ensure high-priority actions are implemented.

The Strategic Initiatives and Objectives in this Plan Update work 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

Many of the objectives in this section call for discrete and measurable actions that would, when collectively implemented, fully address the Strategic Initiative (SI). The SIs are linked to the 2014 Plan Goals. Measuring success will entail tracking each objective independently. Success in meeting a particular objective along with the standards and criteria used for evaluation will be more fully described in the reporting process. Unless otherwise stated, the objective will be im-

plemented over the five-year period of the Plan Update and progress will be reported annually. Note that these objectives highlight areas of emphasis for WCB over the next five years and will be implemented in conjunction with our ongoing programs such as Forest Conservation and Habitat Enhancement and Restoration.

SI 1: CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION, RESILIENCY, AND MITIGATION (PLAN GOALS A, B, AND C)

While habitat loss and other factors have been the primary contributor to the loss of global biodiversity, there is no greater prospective threat to biological diversity in California than climate change. Climate change exacerbates the ongoing impacts of fragmentation, habitat degradation, and direct habitat loss by changing essential habitat elements in every landscape. California's climate change plan, now called the [Safeguarding California Plan](#), identifies some of these impacts, which are further described in the CDFW [Vision for Confronting Climate Change](#). 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 the climate change vulnerability and predicted habitat use patterns of individual species into investment decision making can create supportive habitat for current and future climate scenarios. Providing connectivity among and between intact landscapes will facilitate local and regional wildlife movement and colonization, as traditional habitats become less suitable. WCB Survey respondents identified these actions as a top priority for WCB.



The following objectives address this priority and begin to re-focus WCB programs to address climate change threats more comprehensively.

- **OBJECTIVE SI 1.1** Invest in at least three wild-life under-or over-crossings each year for the next three years (2019 - 2021), in locations deemed high priority by both transportation and fish and wildlife agencies.
- **OBJECTIVE SI 1.2** Invest in at least five projects that contribute to connectivity as highlighted in the [California Terrestrial Connectivity Map](#), or linkages as mapped in regional assessments.
- **OBJECTIVE SI 1.3** Ensure 40 percent of all acquisition and restoration projects are in areas identified as habitat for vulnerable species or as highly resilient to climate change.
- **OBJECTIVE SI 1.4** Invest in at least five projects that provide long-term measurable carbon sequestration benefits.
- **OBJECTIVE SI 1.5** Collaboratively develop and publish criteria for addressing catastrophic natural resource events like extreme fire and prolonged drought, for inclusion as priorities in future solicitations.
- **OBJECTIVE SI 1.6** Collaboratively identify and fund five upper watershed improvement projects each year that have a primary or secondary purpose of providing resilience 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 urgent need to stabilize declining and vulnerable plant, fish and wildlife populations and conserve remaining native habitats and landscapes. In short, WCB actions under this Strategic Initiative focus on conserving California's unparalleled biodiversity.

The following Objectives focus WCB actions on those areas deemed most important in the SWAP and to best support biodiversity conservation. As described in Monitoring Strategic Initiative, below, WCB will begin documenting the specific habitat- and species-based benefits of projects to better understand the impact of its programs and partnerships.

- **OBJECTIVE SI 2.1** Increase habitat for sensitive species to support biodiversity through statewide protection or restoration of oak woodlands, riparian habitat, rangeland, grazing land, and grassland habitat by funding at least 10 projects in each of these WCB programs with at least 25 percent of restoration projects on conserved lands.
- **OBJECTIVE SI 2.2** Each year, invest in at least three acquisitions and two restoration grants that advance habitat and natural community targets embodied in RCIS, NCCPs, or regional conservation plans.
- **OBJECTIVE SI 2.3** Implement at least 10 projects each year that enhance stream flow, increase water resiliency and meet priorities in the California Water Action Plan.
- **OBJECTIVE SI 2.4** Ensure 75 percent of all approved projects meet one or more conservation priorities expressed in the SWAP.
- **OBJECTIVE SI 2.5** Protect or restore at least 1,000 acres each of riparian, wetlands, and grassland habitats in priority areas as defined in the SWAP.



SI 3: PUBLIC ACCESS AND WILDLIFE-ORIENTED RECREATION (PLAN GOAL C)

The discussion in Section 1, *Value of WCB's Work to the Public*, outlined why public access to natural landscapes has become more important to all Californians in the face of climate change and explosive urban growth. Public needs and expectations for outdoor experiences have also changed and now include both consumptive and non-consumptive fish and wildlife-related recreation. There is special need for public access and wildlife-oriented recreation in disadvantaged communities¹ 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. Survey respondents were generally satisfied with WCB's program, and the following Objectives emphasize continuing public access work and embracing new access modes and opportunities.

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.

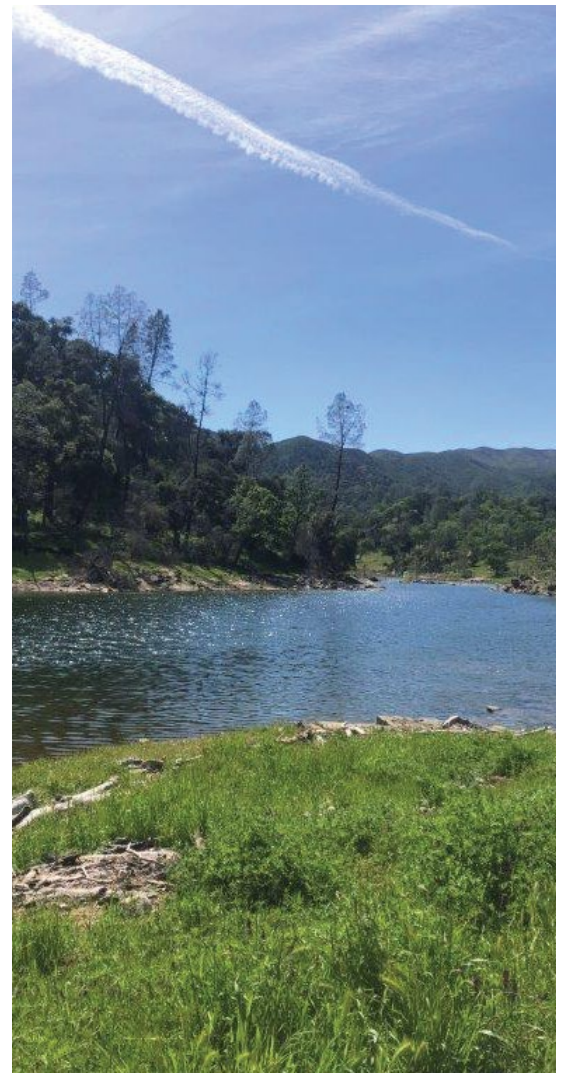
- **OBJECTIVE SI 3.1** Invest in at least five projects providing public access for disadvantaged or severely disadvantaged¹ communities.
- **OBJECTIVE SI 3.2** Invest in at least five projects providing boating/fishing/hunting access to disadvantaged communities and providing additional facilities for mobility-impaired visitors and/or access compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- **OBJECTIVE SI 3.3** Invest in at least 10 projects that provide hunting or fishing opportunities (at least five each).
- **OBJECTIVE SI 3.4** Invest in at least 10 projects that have a primary or secondary purpose of non-consumptive wildlife recreation, such as bird watching or hiking.
- **OBJECTIVE SI 3.5** Attend or conduct at least two meetings per year that provide outreach, workshops, and materials to increase visibility of the WCB Public Access Program. At least one should be in a disadvantaged community.

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 example is 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 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. The following objectives begin to integrate and identify ecosystem services as part of all acquisition and restoration projects.

- **OBJECTIVE SI 4.1** Each year, invest in at least five acquisition or restoration projects that have a demonstrated and measurable upper watershed ecosystem services benefit.
- **OBJECTIVE SI 4.2** Each year, invest in at least three projects that have a primary purpose of conserving or restoring native pollinator habitat in locations that provide a measurable ecosystem services benefit.
- **OBJECTIVE SI 4.3** Invest in at least five projects that provide tangible ecosystem services benefits to local lower watershed (urban or 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 successful conservation work 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 Survey respondents. The following objectives will maintain and strengthen existing partnerships while exploring and securing new ones. These objectives seek to improve collaboration among and between WCB, conservancies, agencies and other partners to further leverage conservation actions.

- **OBJECTIVE SI 5.1** Invest in at least three projects that support state or federal Safe Harbor programs.
- **OBJECTIVE SI 5.2** Conduct outreach, including meetings or field visits to five new partners per year.
- **OBJECTIVE SI 5.3** Implement at least three competitive grant solicitations over the next five years that have been coordinated among multiple organizations and are directed at a high priority habitat per WCB program priorities.
- **OBJECTIVE SI 5.4** Per the USFWS Urban Wildlife Conservation Program, establish a new partnership with one urban community each year 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 led to expanded representation and an infusion of new ideas and perspectives. The Survey confirmed staff's commitment to efficiency and open communication, but pointed to the need for increased transparency. Survey respondents also identified the need for expanded communication modes and venues in varied geographies. We expect the following objectives to meet these needs:

- **OBJECTIVE SI 6.1** By the end of 2020, implement a system to make WCB meetings accessible online.
- **OBJECTIVE SI 6.2** By the end of 2020, make substantial progress in standardizing solicitation content,

criteria, and process, and develop an online application portal for competitive grants.

- **OBJECTIVE SI 6.3** By the end of 2020, update the WCB website to include current goals, targets, metrics, and conservation priorities for each WCB Program.
- **OBJECTIVE SI 6.4** By the end of 2020, develop and make mapped data that illustrates WCB projects and their relationship to program conservation objectives available to the public.
- **OBJECTIVE SI 6.5** Each year, hold at least one conservation partner workshop in a different part of the state, to discuss competitive grant programs and receive feedback.
- **OBJECTIVE SI 6.6** Sponsor at least five conferences or workshops each year throughout the state, and distribute 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 a state conservation land agent continues to change. Funding for WCB programs comes with ever-increasing requirements for specific outcomes, often in specific geographies. Technology has improved and conservation priorities continue to evolve. WCB will facilitate and convene partners to catalyze development of conservation priorities that can be used across the conservation community. For example, the SWAP is an excellent framework for describing the state of fish and wildlife conservation in California, but it could be improved with more refined priorities. These priorities could drive the acquisition and restoration programs, as well as many of WCB's other programs. Survey respondents identified this leadership role as a moderate priority.

- **OBJECTIVE SI 7.1** Take the lead to coordinate among the state conservancies and other agencies, regarding habitat-based priorities for upcoming competitive grant solicitations.
- **OBJECTIVE SI 7.2** Participate in the development and implementation of the natural working lands elements of the State Safeguarding and Scoping Plans.
- **OBJECTIVE SI 7.3** With CDFW, complete a unified, simplified process to identify CDFW's acquisition investment priorities and obtain CDFW's review and endorsement of WCB projects.
- **OBJECTIVE SI 7.4** Participate in statewide policy development efforts to improve fire resiliency and forest management through natural resource protection and restoration.
- **OBJECTIVE SI 7.5** Refine priority conservation areas for each WCB program (consistent with overall WCB goals), and report progress toward program-specific goals annually or biannually.





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.

Compliance monitoring will enable us to determine the degree to which a project funded by WCB was successfully implemented. Effectiveness monitoring will determine whether the stated goals of the project (e.g., habitat value increase, public access increase) were met and remain in place. The project and program information gathered over the duration of this Plan Update will influence future solicitations and program goals. Survey respondents identified monitoring as an important priority.

- **OBJECTIVE SI 8.1** By 2021, define criteria for effectiveness monitoring by program, habitat or geography.
- **OBJECTIVE SI 8.2** Through continued implementation of the annual monitoring program, by 2024, cumulatively monitor 20 percent of completed projects, summarize the project compliance results, and post on the WCB website.
- **OBJECTIVE SI 8.3** By 2024, make the monitoring survey platform accessible on the WCB website for use by project partners.
- **OBJECTIVE SI 8.4** Include monitoring data in each WCB annual report and list projects by county and by SWAP habitat type.
- **OBJECTIVE SI 8.5** By 2022, update the WCB 60-year assessment—for WCB’s 75th anniversary—to highlight program accomplishments, including the acreage of habitat type preserved and restored.



CLOSING

The Strategic Initiatives and Objectives in this Plan Update reflect the most current conservation priorities in California and reflect an updated direction for many WCB programs, while continuing to meet the 2014 Strategic Plan goals. Collectively implementing each of the Plan Update Objectives over the five-year horizon will be a major step toward meeting the conservation and wildlife-related recreation needs and expectations of the public.

RESOURCE LINKS

WILDLIFE CONSERVATION BOARD

Homepage:

www.wcb.ca.gov

WCB Strategic Plan:

wcb.ca.gov/About/Strategic-Plan

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

Homepage:

www.wildlife.ca.gov

State Wildlife Action Plan:

www.wildlife.ca.gov/SWAP

Areas of Conservation Emphasis:

www.wildlife.ca.gov/Data/Analysis/Ace

[California Terrestrial Connectivity Map](#)

Species of Special Concern Program:

www.wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/SSC

Natural Communities Conservation Plan Program:

www.wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Planning/NCCP

NATURAL RESOURCES AGENCY

California Water Action Plan:

resources.ca.gov/california_water_action_plan/

Safeguarding California Plan:

resources.ca.gov/climate/safeguarding/

DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES

State Groundwater Management Act:

water.ca.gov/Programs/Groundwater-Management/SGMA-Groundwater-Management

CALIFORNIA AIR RESOURCES BOARD

California Air Resources Board Scoping Plan:

arb.ca.gov/cc/scopingplan/document/scopingplandocument.htm

CALIFORNIA BIODIVERSITY INITIATIVE

Biodiversity Initiative:

www.californiabiodiversityinitiative.org/

PHOTOGRAPH INFORMATION

Front cover, North Table Mountain Ecological Reserve (ER); page 2, North Table Mountain ER; page 4, Snowy Plover; page 6, Los Baticuitos Lagoon; page 9, Northern Sierra Red Mountain, trout, Ten Mile River; page 11, Ten Mile River, Contra Costa County; Page 12, Tahoe National Forest, Monarch in the Mojave Desert; page 13: Carpenter Valley; page 14, Northern Sierra, Red Mountain; page 16, Northern Sierra, Red Mountain; Page 18, Perazzo Meadows; page 22, Davenport, Santa Cruz County; page 24, Malibu Lagoon; page 26, North Table Mountain ER; page 28, North Table Mountain ER; page 29, Six Rivers to the Sea tour; page 30, Gray Lodge Wildlife Area; page 33, San Diego County; page 37: Yolo Wildlife Area, San Luis Obispo County; page 38, Jenner Headlands Opening Ceremony, Lake Tahoe; page 39, Mono Lake near Mormon Meadow; page 40, Lake Forest Boat Ramp; page 41, Etiwera Creek at Knoxville Wildlife Area; page 42, San Luis Obispo County; back cover, North Table Mountain ER.



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