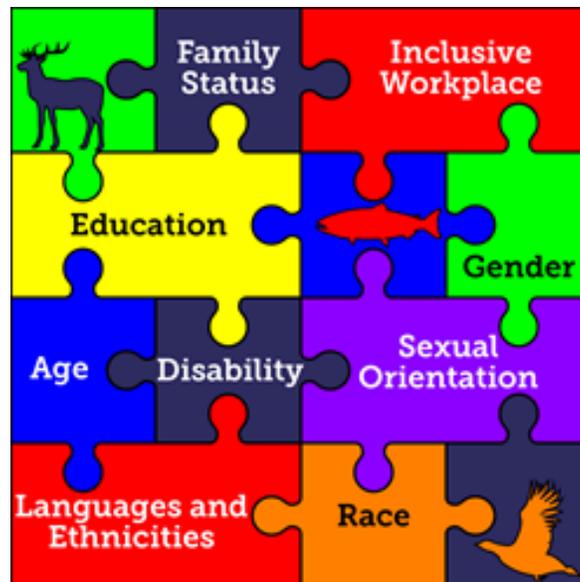


# California Department of Fish and Wildlife

## Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Action Plan



February 2, 2021

We are all connected.

California, with a population nearing 40 million people, is one of the most biodiverse places on earth. Not only in terms of natural diversity, but also in terms of our human diversity including race, ethnicity, religion, gender, age, sexual orientation, and education, among other attributes. The mission of the Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) is to manage California's diverse fish, wildlife, and plant resources, and the habitats upon which they depend, for their ecological values and for their use and enjoyment by the public. The Department faces many challenges in meeting its mission – the most significant being climate change, biodiversity loss, increasing human population and pollution.

Figuring out how to best protect and conserve California's biodiversity will be an enormous challenge, one that we must do with everyone at the table. Whether it's thinking through management approaches for wolves, Dungeness crabs, Joshua trees, salmon, or any other species that call our state home, ensuring these species and their habitats survive will depend on all of us. Not just those of us who work for the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. We need each Californian and their diverse perspectives to be part of the conversation as to how we embark on this work together.

A critical piece of our conservation effort is ensuring diversity within the Department ranks as well as working to ensure that Californians have equitable access to our public lands for outdoor recreation as well as to appreciate its intrinsic value. Guaranteeing all Californians can access the outdoors and providing educational experiences that bolster and encourage current and future conservation improves long-term health and wellness of individuals as well as species and habitats.

State legislation establishes Department programs and guides funding criteria and priorities, which underscore the need for the Department staff to be reflective of California's diverse population. Having a workforce within the Department that reflects our state is critical to ensure this work gets done effectively. Diversity, inclusion, and equality are each important but different components of having and maintaining a strong workforce.

- Diversity means the Department employs individuals with a wide range of racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and cultural backgrounds with different lifestyles, experiences, and interests.
- Inclusion means that the Department has policies and procedures to ensure all staff feel welcome, and the leaders and employees demonstrate behaviors that allow different perspectives, opinions, and experiences to be heard and recognized.
- Equality means everyone has an equal chance at an opportunity, whether in hiring, promotion, or professional development training.

Creating a fish and wildlife Department with a workforce that is reflective of and responsive to all Californians is a long-term effort. We must put resources into systems that couple diversity and inclusion throughout our entire Department and throughout our work. Our pursuit of justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI) recognizes that the impacts of a degraded environment disproportionately hurt the most vulnerable

communities, including those less able to advocate for themselves. Evidence shows this disproportionality creates a vicious cycle leading to increasing impacts and further inequities.

Ensuring the Department is fulfilling this mandate is not a one-time event or to be siloed in a separate branch that works on 'diversity.' This effort is like restoring a river system where one thing impacts all the others downstream. Fixing these challenges will take time and understanding on the part of everyone from the Department executive branch to rank-and-file employees. We need to meet this challenge with a common purpose, which for the Department, should be aligned around safeguarding the biodiversity of California for the next 100 years and beyond.

The Department and the Fish and Game Commission celebrated their 150-year anniversaries in 2020. Both the Commission and the Department can trace roots back to the 1870 state Board of Fish Commissioners. The demographics from 1870 have changed significantly through the 150 years. Looking back through history can give us clues how the Commission, Department, public, and workforce have adapted through history, and how we can continue to adapt in the future. The implications of this demographic shift will help us strategize about how to better connect our workforce and the work we do, together.

## **Benefits of embracing justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion**

### Better Problem Solving

Increasing the diversity of all people both within the Department as well as those with whom we work or partner is critical for us to do our jobs effectively. Increasing diversity in the workplace yields multiple benefits for our workforce and the environment. For example, a diverse team can provide different perspectives on issues, such as understanding how to better work with communities across California, including bringing new or creative approaches, ideas, and perspectives not previously considered - leading to overall more informed decision making.

### Wider Talent pool

Employees are no longer simply seeking a 9-5 job that pays well. They are looking for an environment where they can grow, feel accepted, and be challenged. In many cases they want to be connected to the mission of the organization. As a Department that actively seeks diversity in candidates, we will have access to a wider talent pool. Efforts to reach out to candidates with different backgrounds and/or skills, including backgrounds and skills that may be different than or go beyond the skills traditionally believed necessary for successfully completing the job, may increase applicants to the job, ensuring that the most qualified applicant is hired.

### More Innovation

With the challenges facing the Department it will be imperative that the Department find innovative ways to achieve conservation goals and meet our mission. Workplace diversity leads to innovation. If you have a more homogeneous staff, chances are their life experiences, biases, and problem-solving experiences will tend to be very similar. On

the other hand, a more heterogeneous group of employees will be able to contribute more unique life experiences and perspectives that can lead to breakthroughs and creativity of thought, resulting in more innovation. Complex challenges require innovation. And, the Department faces many complex challenges in the days ahead.

#### Better Retention and Turnover Rate

Making inclusivity in the workplace much more common will benefit the Department. Where a focus on inclusivity has been implemented successfully, employees report feeling valued for their distinctive qualities. Employees also tend to stay at places where they feel valued and happy, resulting in less employee turnover. Negative interactions and lack of value create an atmosphere of discontent and results in employees burning out and looking elsewhere for employment. At the end of the day, emphasizing inclusivity allows us to focus our work on our jobs, versus spending time repeatedly interviewing people to replace those who have left.

#### Productivity

Finally, making diversity (of all kinds) a priority in the workplace maximizes productivity. Diversity and inclusion reinforce each other. Creating an environment where employees see a variety of cultures, backgrounds, and perspectives of thought represented encourage contributions and creativity. Novel ideas and passion bring excellent outcomes, build relationships, and increase productivity.

### **Disparities Within the Department of Fish and Wildlife**

Currently the Department's workforce does not reflect California's diversity. The lack of diversity or representatives from a variety of backgrounds throughout the Department is inconsistent with the rest of the state we are to serve. This lack of diversity disconnect between fish and wildlife organizations throughout the U.S. is not novel to California<sup>1</sup>, but it is important to address. To be relevant and effective, the Department should reflect the population it serves.

The facts are simple. The story they tell is powerful. Collectively as a Department we must be honest, accountable, and up front with these facts as foundations of our commitment to the future.

Below are charts that provide insight on the demographic makeup of the state and of the Department. The first is from the Public Policy Institute of California, describing racial make-up of California's population.

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<sup>1</sup> (Dorceta E. Taylor, "The State of Diversity in Environmental Organizations" (Washington: The Green Diversity Initiative, 2020), available at [https://www.diversegreen.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/FullReport\\_Green2.0\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.diversegreen.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/FullReport_Green2.0_FINAL.pdf).)

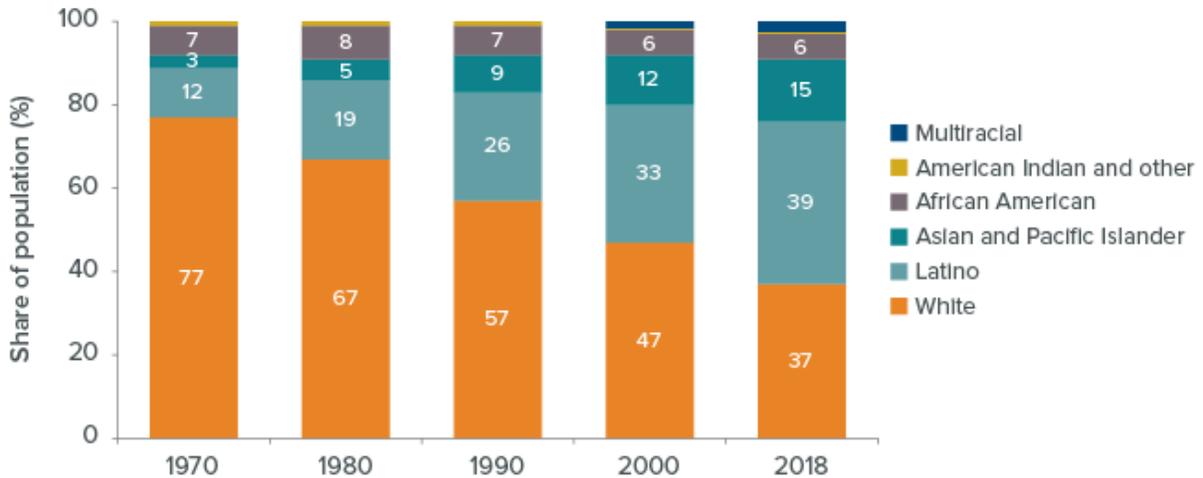


Figure 1 Racial statistics of California (PPIC) - SOURCE: California Department of Finance 1970–2000; American Community Survey 2018.

The following graphs for the Department were developed with data from CalHR on metrics in 2019. This data can be accessed through the CalHR [website](#) and shows data for our Department and all other state Departments going back 10 years. We have provided the breakdown for the Department by classification (rank and file, manager, supervisor, and executive staff.) Note that the information presented in these graphs is based on the voluntarily provided information reported by applicants as part of submitting the standard employment application (form STD 678). But it gives us a good perspective on the challenge we face. CalHR collects specific federal and state demographic information of the civil service workforce to evaluate equal employment opportunities. The data collected is analyzed through the Annual Workforce Analysis to identify any barriers to equal employment opportunity and to gauge the success of each Department's efforts to recruit and retain a diverse workforce. CalHR collects the data and reports its findings to the Legislature annually.

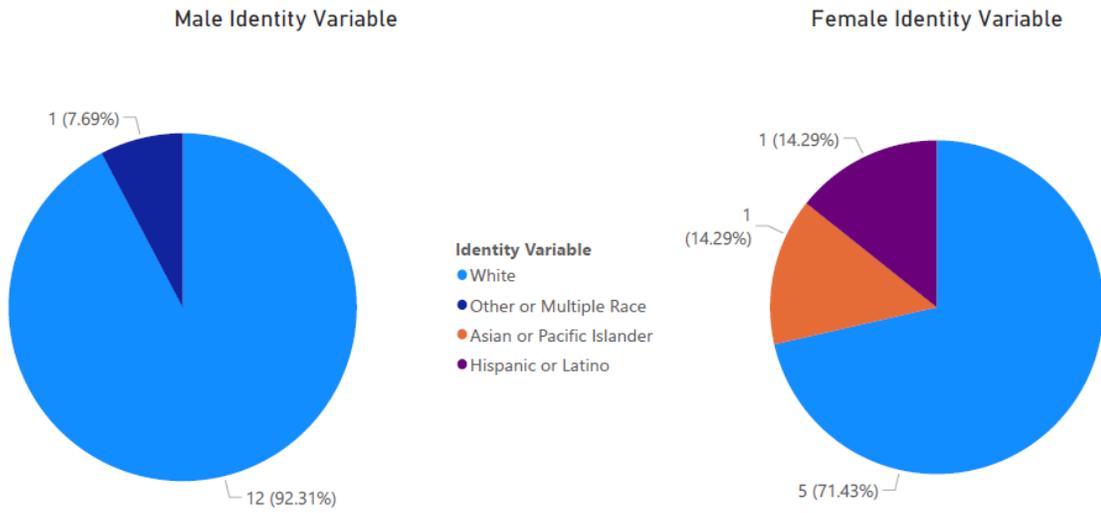


Figure 2 Executive Staff ethnicity and gender makeup CDFW 2019

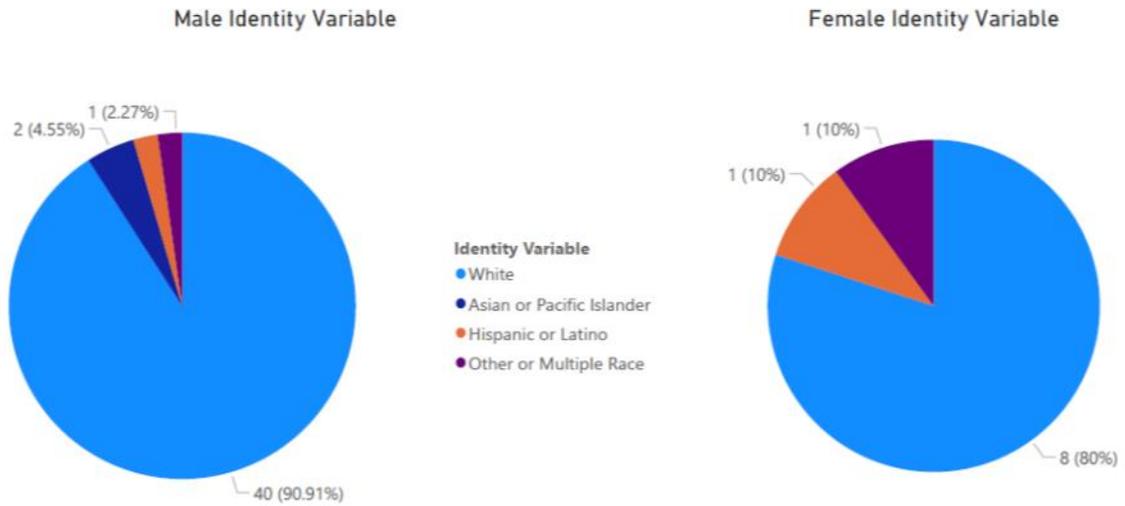


Figure 3 Managers ethnicity and gender makeup CDFW 2019

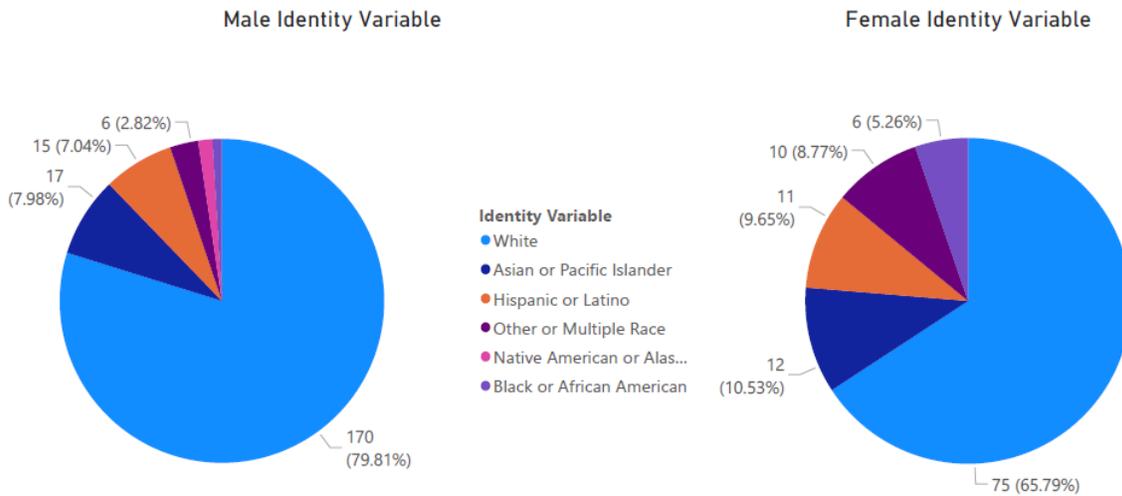


Figure 4 Supervisors ethnicity and gender makeup CDFW 2019

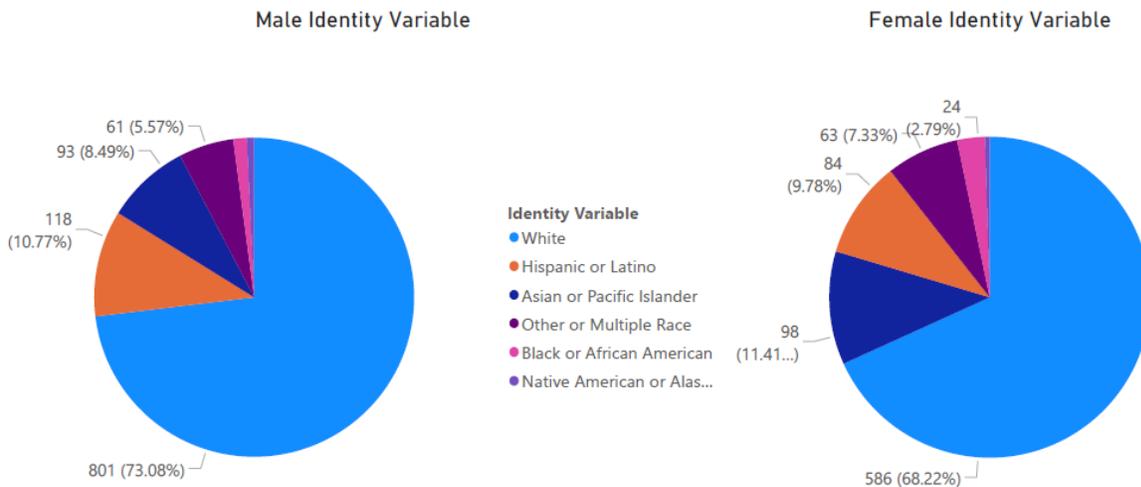


Figure 5 Rank and File ethnicity and gender makeup CDFW 2019

We can do better, and through this plan we will outline actions we can take, both short-term and long-term, in order to increase diversity within the Department. In addition, all Departments within state government are responsible for integrating equal employment opportunities into every aspect of human resource management policies and practices in the recruitment, examination, selection, training, and advancement of employees.

Below is a list of the initial areas within the Department that we plan to evaluate and, in some cases, provide additional resources (monetary or otherwise) to ensure the Department intentionally creates a workplace that is inclusive, diverse, and equitable for all employees. The goal of all these efforts is to guarantee everyone's voice is heard and that the Department is a workplace where people can feel comfortable bringing their 'full selves' to work so that we can more effectively carry out our mission.

### **Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) Team Development**

In 2019, the Department created a workgroup to foster an inclusive workplace for all Department employees. The group is working on several initiatives. Some of those efforts include developing an intranet page that shares information regarding a speaker series, best hiring practices, trainings, initiatives, and updates.

As part of that work, later in 2020, the Department began a two-year contract with Race Forward, an organization that provides broad analysis of complex race issues to help people and organizations take effective action toward racial equity. Through this partnership, the Department is participating in a learning cohort with the Capitol Collaborative on Racial Equity (CCORE), a community of California state government teams working together to advance racial equity, which means promoting a work environment that is just, impartial, and fair to all Californians.

The Department's CCORE group has begun to review the Department's historical laws and policies. For example, in 1860, one of the State's first license act regulations was to preclude any Chinese or Mongolian person from fishing in state waters without a four-dollar monthly license as opposed to any other group. The CCORE group is also helping to develop small groups that focus on Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion principles at the regional or small group level. The goal is to eliminate discriminatory policies or practices and encourage all of the public to take part in Department opportunities.

The Department's CCORE team reflects various levels of leadership, programs, and regions. Members include:

- Bridget Kennedy
- Beth Jackson
- Jennifer Ikemoto
- Haya Johnson
- Jeremy Valverde
- Monique Jones
- Sarah Mussulman
- Rebecca Fris
- Farhat Bajjaliya
- Dylan Wood
- Chris Stoots
- Richard Munoz
- Tina Cole
- Dave Feliz
- Valerie Termini

The CCORE and JEDI team(s) helped created the JEDI action plan you are reading now that serves as an initial broad assessment of the Department and its progress toward equity for all. This action plan is an iterative effort, additional topics will be developed to ensure that we have the knowledge, skills, experience, and relationships

necessary to meet our mission as we advance into the 21st century. The JEDI action plan, though in its beginning stages, is intended to be a comprehensive approach to how the Department will address these JEDI issues. The JEDI plan will inform and will eventually include the Racial Equity Action Plan described below and weave in other topics on justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion as we more fully develop this initiative.

## **ACTION ITEMS**

### **Development of Racial Equity Action Plan - Capitol Collaborative on Racial Equity**

The contract with Race Forward will provide 50 hours of focused training on racial equity and experiential and project-based learning. During sessions, Department participants will work within their own teams and across other state agencies to leverage shared strategies. Training curriculum includes:

- Racial equity concepts, history, language, practices, policies, and tools, including training on Race Forward's Racial Equity Tool.
- Training on structures to institutionalize equity within the Department. Sample policies and practices for communicating about racial equity and how it is connected to our mission and policy goals.
- Skill building, strategy development, and peer-to-peer networking.

By December 2021, the Department will have a draft *Racial Equity Action Plan*, which will be created by internal CCORE team members and tailored to the Department's needs. Eventually, the Racial Equity Action Plan will be folded into this broader JEDI plan and will be updated regularly. The Racial Equity Action Plan is meant to better implement the state's Merit System principles and help eliminate unlawful preferences or disparate treatment based on race.

### **Workforce Related Efforts**

The State guarantees that equal employment opportunity is afforded to all applicants and employees without regard to age, ancestry, color, disability (mental or physical), engaging in a protected activity, gender, gender identity or expression, genetic information, marital status, medical condition, military veteran status, national origin, political affiliation, pregnancy, race, religion, sex, or sexual orientation. Factors other than the individual's merit and job qualifications, cannot be considered when making hiring and promotion decisions in California civil service. The Department can support a workforce free from discrimination consistent with the following actions:

- **Job Announcement Practice:** We will add desirable qualifications to job announcements, such as cultural sensitivity, experience with team collaboration, and life experience(s) pertinent to the position's duties, including cross-team collaboration. We also will include statements that the Department welcomes and values applicants with diverse personal and professional experiences. ((Human Resources (HR)), Hiring Managers)

- **Diversity Statement:** To increase awareness of our approach to an inclusive workplace, we have a newly created diversity statement that reads, *“California is one of the most biodiverse places on the planet. As such, the Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) values diverse employees working together to protect nature for all Californians. CDFW is committed to fostering an inclusive work environment where all backgrounds, cultures, and personal experiences can thrive and connect others to our critical mission.”* The Department will ensure this statement is utilized in job announcements and social media outreach among other communications. (HR)
  
- **Personal Information Redacted for CEAs:** Hiring the most qualified people is key to the Department's long-term success. Creating a hiring process that is blind to possible preconceived bias can help ensure the focus is on the accomplishments, not traits that are not relevant to the job or subjective in a candidate's resume. Currently, during the exam process we redact names and personal information – this helps ensure that the panel scores the candidate's experience without bias. Creating consistency in this process is critical. The Department will look for additional ways to eliminate bias in the hiring process. (HR)
  
- **Interview Panels:** The Department will select a qualified interview panel that reflects diversity in regard to background, experience and perspective. We understand that interview panels may be comprised of only two or three individuals, and that diversity of panels may be somewhat limited by the need to include the relevant supervisors for a position. However, the Department will strive to reflect diversity in interview panels and will consider using hiring managers from other units, offices, or departments to expand the panel's diversity. Note that the Equal Employment Opportunity office conducts Qualified Appraisal Panel (QAP) audits on the exam interview panels to monitor composition and provide recommendations to alleviate potential selection bias. (HR, Equal Employment Opportunity office (EEO), Office of Training and Development (OTD), Recruitment, Hiring Managers).
  
- **Interview Questions:** The Department will include interview questions about diversity, interacting with diverse teams and communities, and navigating community engagement challenges. Below is an example:
  - Please describe a situation in which you worked on a project with people who were from backgrounds other than your own. What was challenging or rewarding for you in this work? What did you do to make your work together successful? (HR, OTD, Recruitment, Hiring Managers)

### **Important Hiring Requirements – Compliance with State Laws**

When hiring or applying for jobs throughout the State, we must comply with State guarantees that equal employment opportunity is afforded to all applicants and employees. The Department is committed to outreach to various communities to encourage qualified individuals with diverse backgrounds apply to work at the Department at all levels. However, civil service rules and state laws require the most

qualified candidate be hired regardless of race, gender, nationality, disability, etc. No one group is to be given any preference in hiring or employment opportunities. The JEDI plan was created to help eliminate discriminatory practices and unlawful barriers to employment.

## **Outreach Efforts**

In order to create the workplace environment the Department envisions, it is important to have a more diverse and inclusive outreach for recruitment. The Department will pursue the following actions.

- Outreach practices: Hire dedicated staff to conduct more in-person and virtual outreach hiring events and job fairs with underrepresented communities. (HR Recruitment, Office of Communication, Education, and Outreach (OCEO), (marketing), Law Enforcement and Regional Managers)
- Provide more clear and direct “hands-on” assistance on the state’s application process for both internal and external candidates. (HR)
- Expand outreach to high schools to fill entry-level positions with students who do not plan to pursue a college degree. Partner with Science Institute to incorporate information about career opportunities into teaching at high school levels or earlier to expand pipeline into hiring. (HR, Recruitment, OCEO, Regions)
- Social media branding – comprehensive posting on the Department’s LinkedIn page, social media accounts, and Handshake page. (HR, Recruitment, OCEO)
- Expanded job posting practices: Post job announcements via LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram with community/ethnic/stakeholder organizations tagged. Post job announcements to expanded college and university lists including, but not limited to, California State Universities, community colleges, and Historically Black Colleges and Universities via Handshake. Post job announcements within the community college networks. Share job announcements with community/ethnic/stakeholder organizations.
- Create career partnerships with indigenous Tribal organizations via active job announcement postings, in-person and virtual career fairs, and network training opportunities. (Regional Tribal Liaisons, HR, Recruitment, OCEO)

## **Employee Engagement**

Continuous employee engagement is important in creating employees who feel valued and that their input and work matters. A goal of the Department’s work in this area is to increase our engagement with all of our staff, through trainings, mentorships, coaching, and with our speaker series. The Department will prioritize these actions to improve continuous engagement and provide space for meaningful dialogue on this work.

## **Outside Volunteer Opportunities**

Recognizing that another way to increase diversity is to foster a variety of outside experiences, we will explore developing a novel volunteer program for our employees.

Employees may be able to dedicate a percentage of duty statement time to volunteer activities related to mission work of the Department. This program would encourage our employees to be more connected to the places and aspects of their work that they are passionate about and to share that with groups that want to learn more. This would allow time in our normal workday to engage with environmental/outdoor educational entities, schools, and other groups working on sharing educational awareness of the Department's mission-related work.

- Develop guidelines for how this can be implemented throughout the Department. Explore and learn about "mentoring leave," including use of personal leave credits and state paid leave for some of these activities.

## **Training**

The Department can suggest and develop a thoughtful and detail-oriented diversity program. But to be successful this effort will require cooperation of a significant portion of the Department's workforce. Managers will be influential in how new initiatives are implemented within existing state civil service laws and rules, consistent with state human resources policies and practices, and labor relation management obligations. It will be important to invest in management training to help everyone understand the Department's diversity goals, why they are important, and how to appropriately implement these goals. While training alone will not create the JEDI outcomes, understanding and learning are essential building blocks. Because of this commitment to analysis and institutional training, the Department secured implicit bias awareness training for most of our 500 managers and supervisors with Dr. Bryant T. Marks, founder of the National Training Institute on Race and Equity. Building on this training, in March of 2021, the Department's Joint Leadership Team will participate in the next series of implicit bias trainings, focused on addressing implicit bias in organizations.

Below are some additional initial steps:

- Trainings: Evaluate our professional development trainings to ensure employees throughout the Department have the opportunity to participate in JEDI trainings. In addition, managers and supervisors should learn how to manage diverse workspaces, with a range of trainings on issues such as implicit bias and cultivating an inclusive workplace, among others. (ODB)
- Hiring-specific training: The supervisor encore series training led by the Organizational Development Branch (ODB) will be expanded to include: Best practices for hiring including interviewing processes, screening, interview panels, how to add/phrased questions. Implicit bias in hiring and promotion; different leadership styles; and retention practices. Ensure that merit-system principles are appropriately applied in the job-selection and promotion process.
- Use of the Coaching and Mentoring Program (CAMP) as well as the career upward mobility program (CD/UMP) for employees in low paying classifications. This is mandated in Government Code section 19401.
- Speaker series: A speaker series will be designed yearly focusing on the Department's mission as it relates to a range of diverse communities, including talks focused on serving and working with various communities (such as people with disabilities, Indigenous peoples, and underserved communities); featuring

diverse speakers (including naturalist/outdoor speakers and health and equity speakers); and focusing on issues such as environmental justice, access to and inclusion in the outdoor space, health equity, and other topics. In the last six months of 2020 and beginning of 2021, the Department hosted the following speakers:

- Rue Mapp, OutDoor Afro
- Ricardo Torres, Tribal citizen of the Winnemem Wintu Tribe
- Panel on work-place inclusion of individuals with disabilities with the Department of Rehabilitation:
  - Joe Xavier, Director of California Department of Rehabilitation (DOR).
  - Andi Mudryk, Chief Deputy Director at DOR
  - Jessica Grove, Assistant Deputy Director at DOR
  - Araceli Holland, Staff Services Manager III for DOR

## **Retention/Inclusion**

Employees tend to stay at places where they feel valued for their distinctive qualities and perspectives. Creating a more inclusive work environment is important. Some actions we can take to create such an environment include:

- Promote and develop regional JEDI groups Department-wide: For example, groups could be created to discuss a range of issues such as a cultural diversity committee to promote diversity awareness through events/activities/awareness events and to provide technical assistance with program development for diverse communities.
- IDPs/performance appraisals/stay interviews: Consider adding criteria to performance appraisals and annual interviews such as workplace engagement, outreach to communities impacted by our work, creating a safe and inclusive workspace for all, etc. The Department should ensure that any new criteria are applicable to the job position at issue or, if not, permit a rating of 'not applicable.' Ensure that training for managers and supervisors connects the intent behind JEDI work and integration within the employee's day-to-day activities. All Department employees should have an equal opportunity to succeed and advance based on their merit and job performance, irrespective of race, gender, etc.
- Mentoring and mentees: Department management will support volunteering as a mentee or serving as a mentor either through the CAMP program above or in an informal setting outside of Department 'mentorship' programs.
- Career Planning: Consider working with the recruiter as well as the Workforce & Strategic Planning Unit at ODB to assist all employees with creating and executing an upward career path.
- Measuring impact: Track statistical information for employees, such as tenure or promotions for employees, lateral moves, appointments to acting roles, out of class, training, and other learning and development participation, and other stretch assignment opportunities over time.

## **Accountability and Transparency and Connectivity**

This is a long-term effort, and we want to share with all staff and with the public the steps we are taking to be more inclusive. For example, some of the initiatives in the works include:

- Land acknowledgement: The Department's Lands Program, assisted by others throughout the Department, will begin taking steps to acknowledge historical connections and usages at many of the Department's lands. Before signs and language is developed, Department staff will reach out to the Tribes historically present. We will work together to acknowledge the Tribal territories and Indigenous peoples who were present.
- The Department will review all the names of our lands and change the names of any offensive lands within the Department's jurisdiction.
- JEDI Intranet Page (currently in development): This will be a place to share information about the JEDI team's work with the entire Department. Some of the components will include:
  - JEDI blog
  - JEDI initiatives and updates
  - Speaker Series info and calendar
  - CCORE group information to share
  - Creation of regional or other program-specific groups
  - Historical context and information for the Department

The Department is also simultaneously engaged in parallel efforts with a connection to this JEDI action plan. These other efforts connect to the Department's overall commitment to a just, equitable, diverse, and inclusive agency and state. For example, within the Department is an almost 500-person strong Law Enforcement Division. Our Law Enforcement Division has been pursuing its own reforms and policy changes dealing with use of force and de-escalation, community-oriented policing, mental wellness, and resilience of our wildlife officers. One of the best examples of building trust within our community is being able to provide transparency. Our Law Enforcement Division will take precedent-setting steps to deploy body and vehicle cameras across the entire wildlife officer force.

At the same time, the Department is building the next phase of its access to our lands, as well as enhancing the work with tribal nations. As another example, on January 9, 2021, Governor Newsom's budget proposal for the Department included \$6 million in funding to enhance our work to improve access for all and biodiversity across ecological reserves and wildlife areas. The Department owns and operates approximately 1.2 million acres across more than 700 properties in the state. This funding will allow us to begin work with local partners to enhance the educational outreach and begin to foster tribal connections and acknowledgments regarding the lands that the Department owns and manages.

This is an exciting time for the Department as we work toward improving justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion. To steer all the necessary work and truly produce lasting

change, we are pleased to announce we are close to finalizing the creation of a full-time position for a JEDI deputy director who will serve in the Department's executive branch.

### **Conclusion**

The Department of Fish and Wildlife's mission is critical to everyone in the state. Saving nature is also something our employees have a passion to do. Ensuring that we meet our mission through a commitment to justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion is critical to our success.

This work is not easy, and this is just the beginning. As noted throughout the document, this effort is intended to ensure all Californians have an equitable access to our work as well as to be part of our work. This effort will take time. It is all our responsibility to make sure our workplace is welcoming, just as it is our responsibility to safeguard nature for the future. The work that we do matters, and it's our job to ensure a seat at the table for everyone. Collectively, we can make the Department more just, equitable, diverse, and inclusive for all.