

Strategic Plan
2025-2030
PUBLIC REVIEW
DRAFT



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WCB MISSION

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

WCB VISION

WCB envisions a future in which California's wildlife, biodiversity and wild places are effectively conserved for the benefit of present and future generations.

WCB projects and programs maximize return on taxpayer investment in conservation and wildlife-oriented recreation and empower and inspire current and future generations to protect California's precious habitat and wildlife resources.

Introduction

WHO WE ARE

The Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) is a state grant-making agency dedicated to safeguarding California's spectacular biological diversity and wild spaces for the benefit of present and future generations. WCB works in partnership with tribes, conservation organizations, and government agencies to acquire lands and design and implement habitat restoration and public access projects statewide.

WCB was created by legislation in 1947 to administer a capital outlay program for wildlife conservation and related public recreation. Housed within the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), WCB is a separate and independent Board with authority and funding to support conservation projects statewide.

The Wildlife Conservation Board consists of seven voting members including the Director of CDFW, the Director of the California Department of Finance, the President of the Fish and Game Commission and four public members. Two public members are appointed by the California legislature and two are appointed by the Governor. Non-voting members include three advisors each, from the State Assembly and the State Senate. WCB has 44 full-time staff members with expertise in real property conservation, ecology, habitat restoration, public access, budget and administration, and multiple areas of law applicable to WCB.

WHAT WE DO

WCB implements its mission through two main programs: Acquisition and Restoration. The Acquisition Team acquires land and property interests on behalf of CDFW and works with grantees to protect habitat via purchases of land in fee or through conservation easements. The Restoration Team works with partners to plan and implement projects that restore ecosystems, reconnect important habitat areas, and create opportunities for outdoor recreation. WCB works in every corner of the state and each one of California's terrestrial biomes, administering nearly 20 distinct [programs](#).

STRATEGIC PLAN UPDATE PROCESS

This draft 2025-2030 Strategic Plan uses WCB's first strategic plan, prepared in 2014 and updated in 2019 as a foundation. This version builds on past achievements and aligns with statewide conservation priorities, emerging opportunities, and anticipated future directions as articulated in several recent state plans, including [Pathways to 30x30](#), [Outdoors for All](#), [Nature-Based Solutions Climate Targets](#), [Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan](#), [Salmon Strategy for a Hotter, Drier Future](#), and [Water Resilience Portfolio](#) among others. This Strategic Plan will be a roadmap for WCB to fulfill its mission while supporting these statewide commitments, consistent with WCB authorities.

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This Strategic Plan has been shaped by the insights, experience, and expertise of a diverse, growing, and deeply valued coalition of partners and groups across California and beyond. WCB gathered input through five public workshops in Fall 2024 (in Redding, Sacramento, Monterey, Inglewood, and Riverside), an online survey, and discussions with over a dozen California Native American tribes who shared their wisdom through formal consultation, informal meetings, and two tribal listening sessions.

OUR PRIORITIES

WCB is [funded](#) through annual budget appropriations and voter-approved bonds. Proposition 4, also known as the “California Climate Bond” approved in November 2024, designated \$1.02 billion to WCB programs and will be a key funding source for WCB over the life of this Strategic Plan.

WCB accepts applications on a rolling, competitive basis. Partners present project ideas through a short pre-application. Staff then determine if a proposed project aligns with the mission, vision, and priorities of WCB and if funding is available to support it. Only projects with strong potential for approval are invited to submit a full application. Projects are presented to and voted on by the Board at WCB’s quarterly public meetings.

Projects that demonstrate one or more of the following are most likely to be recommended to WCB’s Board for approval:

- 1. Strategic Planning:** use science-based analyses or regional planning processes to identify high value protection or restoration projects¹
- 2. Multiple Benefits:** meet one or more objectives (below) or implement actions from one or more statewide conservation strategy (30x30, Access for All, etc.)
- 3. Benefits for Justice Communities:** provide meaningful benefits to partners who have not historically accessed or benefitted from WCB’s programs including disadvantaged and severely disadvantaged communities² and tribes.
- 4. Broad Community Support:** are the result of inclusive public engagement, have support from local governments or community organizations, or include meaningful cost share.

WCB is committed to early, often, and meaningful government-to-government consultation with tribes. We strongly encourage our grantees to coordinate and collaborate with tribes throughout project development, implementation, and ongoing management.

¹ Examples of regional conservation strategies that provide support for conservation projects

<https://canature.maps.arcgis.com/sharing/rest/content/items/c6de17146ae34a85bb8249ec76f23ff1/data>

² Disadvantaged community means a community with a median household income of less than 80 percent of the area average or less than 80 percent of statewide median household income. Severely disadvantaged community means a community with a median household income of less than 60 percent of the area average or less than 60 percent of statewide median household income as shown on the Department of Water Resources [mapping tool](#).

Goals, Objectives, and Targets

This strategic plan is organized around four goals:

- Protect and Restore **Biodiversity**
- Take Action on **Climate Change**
- Increase **Access to Nature**
- Improve **Program Delivery**

Each goal will be met through key objectives and numerical targets. Projects that align with multiple goals, objectives, or targets will generally be most competitive. However, all WCB projects are expected to have a clear connection to protecting or restoring biological diversity.

B PROTECT AND RESTORE BIODIVERSITY

Biodiversity refers to the variety of life on earth from genes to species to ecosystems.

Our natural world supports and sustains us, and the plants and animals that power our ecosystems rely on areas with minimal disturbance to survive and thrive. Biodiversity protection is at the core of WCB's mission.

B1. Protect and restore large, interconnected landscapes

Large, interconnected landscapes provide a wide variety of habitats and spaces for species to feed, shelter, and reproduce. Larger protected areas keep common species common and offer redundancy and resilience as climate change modifies and reduces habitat quality. Connectivity across barriers such as roads, canals and railways is key to ensuring wildlife can roam freely across landscapes.

B1.1 Each year invest in at least five habitat acquisition or restoration projects that help build connected landscapes for fish and wildlife.

B1.2 Each year, invest in at least three wildlife under- or over-crossing projects in locations deemed high priority by both transportation and fish and wildlife agencies.

B2. Protect and restore sensitive and/or rare habitats and help recover special status species

California is one of the world's 36 biodiversity hotspots, home to a wide variety of habitats and species that are found nowhere else on earth and are also at risk of extinction. WCB protects land and wildlife to ensure our rich biodiversity and critical life support systems persist for generations to come. Special status species are those that are especially vulnerable to habitat loss, climate change, or other factors and need extra support to survive. The State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) examines the health of wildlife and prescribes actions to conserve wildlife and vital habitat. Habitat protection and restoration, especially when part of strategic conservation

planning³, are critical tools in recovering species at risk of extinction. Rare habitats or those that have been historically under protected such as freshwater and tidal wetlands, riparian corridors, hardwood forests, and grasslands are especially important to conserve.

B2.1 Each year, invest in at least three acquisition and five restoration projects that advance species, habitat and natural community goals embodied in SWAP, Habitat Conservation Plans, Natural Community Conservation Plans, Regional Conservation Investment Strategies, or other regional conservation plans.

B2.2 Each year, invest in at least ten projects that will enhance stream flow, riparian habitat, and/or floodplain habitat.

B2.3 Each year, invest in at least three projects that have a primary purpose of conserving or restoring native pollinator habitat.

B2.4 Each year, invest in at least five projects that restore or enhance wetlands (coastal, valley, or mountain meadows) each year in support of migratory bird joint venture⁴ priorities.

B3. Return ancestral lands and habitat management to tribes to support ecological function and health

There is an intrinsic relationship between biodiversity and Indigenous cultures. Traditional ecological knowledge and management through the principles of kinship and reciprocity have shaped the genetic, species, and habitat diversity that is found in California today. Returning ancestral lands to Native American tribes – either through conservation purchases or through durable commitments to co-management or cultural conservation easements – is therefore an essential step in restoring ecological balance and health.

B3.1 Complete ten ancestral land return transactions.

B3.2 Support at least four projects that include cultural conservation easements.

B3.3 Invest in at least five projects that will result in tribal co-management of protected lands.

B3.4 Each year, invest in at least five restoration projects that will incorporate tribal ecological knowledge in coordination with local tribes.

³ For general information about landscape conservation planning, see <https://wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Planning>; also see <https://www.californianature.ca.gov/pages/ca-nature>

⁴ For information about migratory bird joint ventures see <https://www.fws.gov/partner/migratory-bird-joint-ventures>

C TAKE ACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE

Functioning natural ecosystems are essential to maintain community health and well-being in a changing climate. Intact and restored terrestrial, freshwater, and coastal systems remove and store carbon from the atmosphere, safeguard important resources such as clean water, and can help protect people and nature from the impacts of climate change like megafires, flooding, and extreme heat.

C1. Reduce and remove carbon pollution

Protecting and restoring natural lands helps remove and store carbon from the atmosphere. The Earth's carbon cycle transfers carbon between land, oceans, and the atmosphere, and in turn, facilitates the life cycle of all living things. During photosynthesis, plants take carbon from the atmosphere and store it in their biomass. The conservation and restoration of habitats such as forests, grasslands, wetlands, and deserts are identified in California's Nature-based Solutions Climate Targets as critical to meeting our state's climate goals. At the same time, reducing the risk of extreme wildfire, through beneficial fire and habitat restoration, helps decrease carbon emissions from our landscapes.

C1.1 Each year invest in at least 15 projects that help meet California's Nature-based Solutions Climate Targets for forests, wetlands, or deserts.

C1.2 Each year, support ten acquisition and/or restoration projects that to conserve grasslands, rangelands, or oak woodlands.

C1.3 Invest in at least ten projects that include beneficial fire or other fuel reduction activities (invasive species removal, restoration forestry) to reduce wildfire risk.

C2. Increase resilience to climate impacts for vulnerable ecosystems and communities

Ecosystems, like people, are vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Climate change exacerbates existing inequities and disproportionately impacts those with the least capacity to prepare for, respond to, and recover from the impacts of climate change. Land protection and habitat restoration can help ecological and human communities better withstand the impacts of drought, flood, extreme heat, and sea level rise. Restored rivers help manage flood risks, healthy forests reduce the potential for high severity fires, and regional green spaces offer respite and relief from extreme heat.

C2.1 Ensure that 75% of habitat improvement projects have a primary or secondary purpose of providing resilience to climate change.

C2.2 Each year, support ten acquisition and/or restoration projects that are in areas identified as refugia for vulnerable plant or animal species or represent

ecosystems highly resilient to climate change.⁵

C2.3 Invest in ten projects that provide climate benefits for vulnerable people and communities.

A INCREASE ACCESS TO NATURE

Access to nature is critical to human health and well-being. People with access to the outdoors experience the health benefits of physical activity, social interaction, reduced stress and decreased exposure to noise, air pollution, and extreme heat. In California and across the country, outdoor access and its many benefits are not equitably distributed or equally welcoming to all communities. California is committed to an Outdoors for All, and WCB supports this initiative by funding nature-oriented recreational opportunities throughout the state.

A1. Promote diverse outdoor experiences

People enjoy nature in a variety of ways from hiking and birdwatching to cycling, hunting, fishing and more. WCB is committed to providing support for the full range of outdoor activities that are compatible with our habitat protection mandate.

A1.1 Each year invest in at least three projects that provide or enhance fishing or hunting access.

A1.2 Invest in at least five private land acquisition projects that include [SHARE](#) Program Participation.

A1.3 Each year, invest in at least five projects that have a primary purpose of non-consumptive wildlife recreation, such as bird watching or hiking.

A2. Protect and restore natural areas for communities that lack access to nature

Many communities throughout the state, even those in rural counties, do not have access to open space and natural areas. Acquiring lands for outdoor recreation or restoring degraded areas to create thriving ecosystems can increase access to nature for underserved communities and provide other benefits such as reduced industrialization or traffic, cleaner air and water, or job training.

A2.1 Invest in at least ten projects that protect and/or restore natural areas which provide public access for disadvantaged or severely disadvantaged¹ communities.

A2.2 Invest in at least five projects that deliver direct benefits other than access to disadvantaged or severely disadvantaged communities.

⁵ See <https://wildlife.ca.gov/Data/Analysis/Climate> for more information about species vulnerability to climate change.

A3. Support accessible and representative education, outreach, and engagement
Outdoors for All means more than providing a physical location for recreation. Community-appropriate programming, multi-lingual interpretive signs, and access points for people of all physical abilities help create welcoming and inclusive outdoor spaces. Open spaces should be designed through inclusive public processes that ensure community needs are met and well represented.

A3.1 For all projects with a primary purpose of public access, provide educational and interpretive signage in multiple languages.

A3.2 For projects with a primary purpose of public access, support at least three projects each year that include tribal storytelling or cultural interpretive information.

D IMPROVE PROGRAM DELIVERY

WCB is committed to continued improvements in our operations and program delivery and to expanding investments across to a wider array of organizations and entities. WCB relies on partners to design, develop and implement the projects that support our goals. We work to ensure our investments are effective, equitably distributed, and delivered through transparent and efficient processes.

D1. Create new partnerships and expand engagement

Partners are the cornerstone of WCB's success. WCB is proud of its reputation for collaborative problem solving to deliver creative and effective projects throughout the State. Since 2019, WCB has worked with over 40 new organizations and will continue to build our network to share grant opportunities and ways to partner. WCB sponsors and participates in numerous public workshops, conferences, and other convenings. At the same time, WCB ensures transparency through recorded, hybrid Board meetings and regularly posted information on our website.

D1.1 Each year, attend or conduct at least two meetings that result in outreach, workshops, and materials to increase visibility of the WCB programs with at least one in a disadvantaged community.

D1.2 Sponsor at least five conferences or workshops each year throughout the state and distribute outreach materials about WCB programs.

D1.3 Develop five new partnerships per year to support nature and wildlife connections consistent with WCB programs.

D1.4 Each year, track and share progress toward meeting statewide conservation strategies (30x30, NBS climate targets, etc.) and strategic plan goals.

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D1.5 By 2027, update the WCB 75-year assessment—for WCB’s 80th anniversary—to highlight program accomplishments, including the acreage of habitat type preserved and restored, partnership metrics, and more.

D2. Ensure program and project success through ongoing monitoring and learning
WCB will continue to track and monitor implementation to evaluate whether previously completed projects are being operated, used, and maintained consistent with the terms of their grant agreement; gain a better understanding of the status of protected and restored lands; maintain an active rapport with our grantees and project landowners to help strengthen relationships and assure that the state’s investments are being stewarded appropriately; and inform program development and management.

D2.1 Continue implementation of WCB’s compliance monitoring program, with staff monitoring approximately 100 randomly selected projects per year.

D2.2 Implement a pilot effort to evaluate the feasibility and utility of incorporating remote monitoring, reliant upon free, readily available imagery, into WCB’s compliance monitoring program, as a means of increasing the number of projects evaluated on an annual basis, assessing impacts of significant events (e.g., wildfire, flood), and exploring topics of interest/concern.

D2.3 By 2028, develop an improved approach to coordinated compliance monitoring and sharing of outcomes with partner agencies (e.g., Coastal Conservancy, Sierra Nevada Conservancy, and CDFW).

D3. Improve grantmaking processes (Cut Green Tape)

WCB is committed to ongoing innovation in our grant processes to improve the experience for grantees. By simplifying grant applications, reporting processes, and payment structures, WCB is working to lower the barriers to entry for new and smaller organizations or those that have traditionally missed WCB grantmaking opportunities.

D3.1 Develop and share an online project portal that integrates and streamlines paperwork and invoicing from pre-application through project close.

D3.2 Develop and offer a grantee feedback survey to solicit ideas on how to improve processes.

D3.3 Using results from the grantee feedback survey (D3.2), identify and implement three process improvements to simplify grantmaking.

D3.4 Develop and offer grant writing workshops and/or online videos to increase understanding of and access to WCB grants.

A Note on What's Missing?

WCB's mission is broad but not boundless. Our work is governed by funding requirements, our enabling legislation, time, resources, and opportunity. Public outreach for this Strategic Plan raised many recommendations for meeting our biodiversity, access, and climate goals that fall beyond the scope of WCB's current authority. For example, WCB fund sources typically do not allow stand-alone grants for ongoing operations and stewardship, scientific research, and outdoor education. However, these activities may be incorporated into projects in certain cases. Additionally, while expanding urban parks and community trees are critical to meeting our statewide climate and access goals, such projects would be better supported through [grant programs](#) that more directly target these objectives. WCB will continue to work with partners to identify innovative solutions and connect partners with funding opportunities aligned with these needs.

WHAT'S NEXT

WCB's strategic plan is intended to provide a framework for our investments over the next 5 years, but we cannot predict the challenges that lie ahead. We are committed to making important, meaningful progress on these goals and objectives. At the same time, we will adapt as new opportunities and initiatives arise. What won't change is our commitment to serving the people of California and protecting its incredible natural world for the benefit of all.

Let's get to work!