



# DIRECTOR'S BRIEFING 2010

## **Wildlife Conservation Board**

**Executive Director:** John P. Donnelly

**Number of Budgeted Positions:** 27 permanent, full time positions

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## **Wildlife Conservation Board**

The Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) was created in 1947 when Governor Earl Warren signed legislation (Chapter 1325, Statutes of 1947, Fish and Game Code, commencing with Section 1300 et. seq.) to administer a program for fish and wildlife conservation and related public recreation. The landmark legislation declared, "The preservation, protection and restoration of wildlife within the State of California is an inseparable part of providing adequate recreation for our people in the interest of public welfare; and it is further declared to be the policy of the State to acquire and restore to the highest possible level and maintain in a state of high productivity, those areas that can be most successfully used to sustain wildlife and which will provide adequate and suitable recreation."

To this day, the original purpose and mandate of the WCB has withstood the test of time and remains today as initially defined: "The Board shall investigate, study and determine what areas within the State are most essential and suitable for wildlife production and preservation, and that will provide suitable recreation; and shall ascertain and determine what lands within the State are suitable for game propagation, game refuges, bird refuges, waterfowl refuges, game farms, fish hatcheries, game management areas, and what streams and lakes are suitable for or can be made suitable for fishing, hunting and shooting." To achieve this mandate, the Board reviews projects and if approved, provides funding to acquire land and water for the preservation and conservation of California's fish and wildlife and where appropriate, provides recreational facilities and opportunities for all the people of California.

Originally created within the California Department of Natural Resources, and later placed with the Department of Fish and Game (DFG), the WCB is an independent, non-regulatory Board with authority and funding to carry out acquisitions and restoration programs for fish and wildlife conservation. The Board consists of the President of the Fish and Game Commission, the Director of the Department of Fish and Game and the Director of the Department of Finance. A Legislative Advisory Committee consisting of three members of the Senate and three members of the Assembly, which meet with the Board, provide legislative oversight.

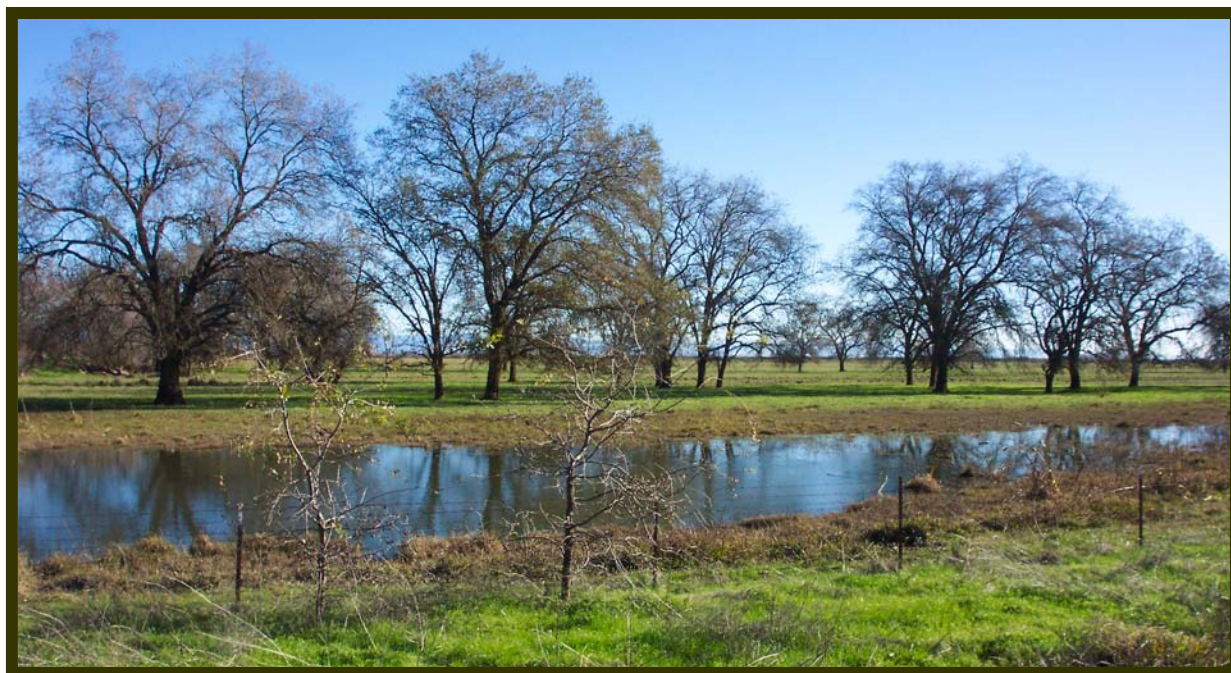
## CORE PROGRAMS

Since the Board's inception in 1947, California's population has increased from 9.8 million to approximately 35 million people. The price of a new car has increased from \$1,290 to over \$35,000 and the price of a gallon of gasoline that cost \$.15 now averages \$3.87. What has not changed over time is the need to protect, conserve and restore our critical natural resources, our fish and wildlife habitat and outdoor recreational opportunities essential for people to enjoy and experience the great environmental wonders California has to offer.

Carried out in conjunction with the DFG, the Board's main functions are land acquisition, habitat restoration and development of wildlife oriented public access facilities. While the Board's main function has remained the same, starting in 1991, several legislative initiatives have passed mandating the Board to implement and administer ten unique programs designed to protect and/or restore various habitat types and large scale landscapes across the entire State of California. The following information describes each of the unique programs administered by the Board and accomplishments to date.

### **Land Acquisition Program**

The acquisition program is administered pursuant to the Board's original legislation and is a critical component of most of the Board programs (Fish and Game Code Section 1348). The Board acquires real property or rights in real property on behalf of the DFG. To facilitate local conservation priorities, the Board also awards grants to governmental entities, nonprofit organizations or special districts to acquire real property rights. All acquisitions are made on a "willing seller" basis pursuant to an appraisal that determines the fair market value of the property. All appraisals are reviewed and approved by an independent third party, the State Department of General Services. Moreover, the acquisition activities are carried out in conjunction with the DFG, who also prepares recommendations for proposed acquisitions. Since 1947, the Board has approved \$1.6 billion to protect about 840,401 acres of habitat.



*Llano Seco Ranch, Butte County*

## **Public Access Program**

To facilitate and encourage the public's use and enjoyment of California's coastal resources, rivers, streams, forests, and other natural landscapes, the Board carries out a program (Fish and Game Code Section 1345 et. seq.) which includes the construction of recreational facilities in cooperation with local agencies for public access to hunting, fishing, hiking or other wildlife-oriented recreation. Financial assistance is provided to cities, counties and public districts for the construction of fishing piers or floats, access roads, boat launching ramps, trails, boardwalks, parking areas and restrooms. Since 1947, the Board has approved approximately \$70.6 million to assist with or construct 732 public access projects statewide including 7,269 acres that provide physical access to outdoor recreational sites.



*Juanita Lake, Siskiyou County*

## **Habitat Enhancement and Restoration Program (General)**

In addition to wetlands in the Central Valley and riparian habitat, funds are available for the enhancement and restoration of threatened and endangered species habitats, forest land habitats, wetlands outside the Valley and lands in and adjacent to the Salton Sea. Eligible enhancement and restoration projects must provide for the long-term maintenance of the restored and/or enhanced habitat. Over \$198 million has been approved to support restoration and enhancement efforts on approximately 122,990 acres across the entire state.

## **Inland Wetlands Conservation Program**

The Inland Wetlands Conservation Program (IWCP) was created in 1990 (Fish and Game Code Section 1400) to carry out the mandates of the Central Valley Habitat Joint Venture, a coalition of public, private and nonprofit organizations dedicated to protecting and restoring wetlands to increase waterfowl populations in the Central Valley of California. The Board is authorized to acquire, lease, rent, sell, or exchange any land or options acquired, for the



long-term protection of wetlands and associated uplands and riparian habitats. The IWCP has a basic mission to create and implement conservation efforts that make economic, social and environmental sense. The Board has approved over \$77.8 million to protect or restore about 174,429 acres of critical central valley wetlands and related upland habitat.



*Productive Wetlands in the Yolo Wildlife Area, Yolo County*

### **California Riparian Habitat Conservation Program**

Established in 1991, the California Riparian Habitat Conservation Program (CRHCP) was created (Fish and Game Code Section 1385) to develop coordinated conservation efforts aimed at protecting and restoring the state's riparian ecosystems. To accomplish these goals, the program supports the assessment of the current amount and status of riparian habitat throughout the state, works to identify the areas most critical to the maintenance of California's riparian ecosystems and those areas most in danger of destruction or significant degradation, prioritizes the protection needs based on the significance of the site and potential loss or degradation of habitat, develops and funds project specific strategies to protect, enhance, or restore significant riparian habitat; and serves as a focal point for statewide riparian habitat conservation efforts.

Recognizing the benefits of public/private partnerships, the program works closely with the California Riparian Habitat Joint Venture, a coalition of public, private and nonprofit organizations dedicated to protecting and restoring riparian habitat in California. Since the program's inception, the Board has approved \$201.9 million to protect and or restore approximately 149,946 acres of riparian and associated upland habitat.

## Natural Heritage Preservation Tax Credit Program

The intent of the Tax Credit Program (NHPTCP), established in 2000 under the Natural Heritage Preservation Tax Credit Act (Public Resources Code Section 37000), is to foster public/private partnerships designed to resolve land and water use disputes, to reward and assist habitat stewardship and to demonstrate the state's commitment to encourage and reward landowners who perceive habitat as an asset rather than a liability. The program allows landowners to donate land or water rights to state and local agencies or designated nonprofit organizations for conservation purposes. In exchange for a qualified donation, the donor is eligible for tax credits valued at 55 percent of the appraised fair market value of the contribution. Further, any un-used tax credit can be carried forward for an additional eight years to offset future tax liabilities of the donor.

Unlike other tax credit programs, this incentive program is unique as there is no impact upon the General Fund. To avoid any negative impact upon the General Fund, the recipient of the donation is required to reimburse the General Fund for the total cost of the tax credit. While this reimbursement requirement is a cost, the recipient of the donation still saves 45 percent on the cost of the property, thus leveraging limited fiscal resources and rewarding private landowners for their stewardship practices. To date, the Board has approved the donation of approximately 8,006 acres of qualified properties with an appraised value of \$88.5 million, in exchange for \$48.5 million in tax credits, reflecting a savings of \$40 million.

## Oak Woodlands Conservation Program

The Oak Woodlands Conservation Program, established in 2001 (Fish and Game Code Section 1360), offers landowners, conservation organizations, cities and counties, an opportunity to obtain funding for projects designed to conserve and restore California's oak woodlands. While the Program is statewide in nature, it provides opportunities to address oak woodland issues on a regional priority basis. The Program is designed to help local efforts achieve oak woodland protection. More importantly, this Program provides a mechanism to bring ranchers and conservationists together in a manner that allows both to achieve both sustainable ranch and farming operations and healthy oak woodlands.



*Outdoor Oak Woodland Education Class  
Santa Margarita Elementary School, San Luis Obispo County*



The Act authorizes the Board to purchase oak woodland conservation easements, provide grants for land improvements and restoration efforts. In addition, the Board is authorized to fund education and outreach efforts by local governments, park and open space districts, resource conservation districts and nonprofit organizations. Since 2001, the Board has approved \$14.5 million for the protection of 27,574 acres of oak woodland habitat and \$484,000 for oak education and outreach efforts.

### **The Rangeland, Grazing Land and Grasslands Protection Program**

In September of 2002, the Rangeland, Grazing Land and Grassland Protection program was established (Public Resources Code, commencing with Section 10330) to protect California's rangeland, grazing land and grasslands through the use of conservation easements. The purpose of the program is to prevent the conversion of rangeland, grazing land and grassland to nonagricultural uses, protect the long-term sustainability of livestock grazing, and ensure continued wildlife, water quality, watershed and open-space benefits to the State of California from livestock grazing. The Board has approved \$29.1 million to support this very popular and successful program and has protected 63,050 acres of rangeland, grasslands and grazing land.



*Productive oak woodlands and vernal pools sustained through managed grazing.*



*Healthy oak woodlands, grazing and grasslands. Bottom Photo: Converted oak woodlands and grazing land.*





## Ecosystem Restoration on Agricultural Lands

In 2007, the Board was authorized to administer a program (Public Resources Code, commencing with Section 75055) to assist farmers with Ecosystem Restoration on Agricultural Lands (ERAL). Acknowledging the important role of the farming and ranching community, funds were provided to the Board to assist farmers in integrating their agricultural practices with ecosystem restoration and wildlife protection efforts. The focus of the program is the farmer and rancher and their privately owned agricultural properties that provide on-site benefits to wildlife in addition to the food and fiber products essential to the people of California and locations throughout the world. Since 2007, the Board has approved \$1.8 million for improvements on approximately 1,180 acres of agricultural land.



*Top Photo: Hedgerows planted between row crops supporting beneficial insects, small birds and small mammals. Bottom Photo: Native grasses beneficial to small birds, and insects sustained through managed grazing .*



## Forest Conservation Program

In response to threats and pressures impacting timberlands and forest ecosystems, in 2007, the Board was authorized to implement a grant program (Public Resources Code, commencing with Section 75055) for forest conservation and protection projects. Working forests are the primary emphasis of this new program designed to promote the ecological integrity and economic stability of California's diverse native forests.

The program strives to preserve California's diverse forestlands for all their public benefits through forest conservation, preservation, and restoration of productive managed forest lands, forest reserve areas, redwood forests, and other forest types, including the conservation of water resources and natural habitats for native fish, wildlife and plants found on these lands. Since the program's inception in 2007, the Board has approved \$ 14.5 million to protect in perpetuity, approximately 13,263 acres of important forest ecosystems and working forest.



## ADVISORY CAPACITY

The WCB has long been known as one of the premier real estate acquisition entities within state government. The Board's technical expertise, coupled with an emphasis on coordinating acquisition and restoration efforts with local and statewide conservation organizations, and other state and federal governmental entities, has positioned the Board to serve in an advisory capacity on several other boards, conservancies and statewide planning efforts. The following information provides a brief overview of the role WCB plays in other statewide and regional planning efforts.



## **Voting Membership**

### San Joaquin River Conservancy:

The mission of the San Joaquin River Conservancy is to provide leadership and acquire, preserve, manage, and promote access to lands within the flood plain on both sides of the San Joaquin River from Friant Dam to Highway 99. The Conservancy is governed by a 15 member Board representing local agencies, state agencies, and local citizens to coordinate and mediate diverse public interests. The WCB, Executive Director is one voting member.

### Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy:

The mission of the Conservancy is to protect the natural and cultural resources of the Coachella Valley, including the scenic, wildlife, cultural, geologic, and recreational resources. The Conservancy is a state agency directed by a 21-member Governing Board. The WCB, Executive Director is one voting member of the Conservancy.



## **Ex-Officio/Advisory Capacity**

### San Diego River Conservancy:

The San Diego River Conservancy was established to preserve, restore and enhance the San Diego River Area. The Conservancy is a new, independent, non-regulatory agency within the Natural Resources Agency of the State of California. The Conservancy's nine-member Governing Board consists of both state and local representatives, creating a partnership which reflects the diversity and dedication to conserving this highly valued resource of statewide significance. The WCB, Executive Director serves as an ex-officio member in an advisory capacity.

### San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy:

The San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy's mission is to acquire and manage public lands to provide open space, low-impact recreational uses, educational uses, water conservation and watershed improvement, wildlife and habitat restoration and protection, and preserve the San Gabriel Mountains and the San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers, and their tributaries, consistent with existing and adopted river and flood control projects for the protection of life and property. The Conservancy is comprised of 13 voting members and seven ex-officio members, one of whom is the Executive Director of the WCB.



### Central Valley Joint Venture:

The Central Valley Joint Venture (CVJV) brings together conservation organizations, public agencies, private landowners and other partners interested in the conservation of bird habitat within California's Central Valley. The CVJV mission is to work collaboratively through diverse partnerships to protect, restore, and enhance wetlands and associated habitats for waterfowl, shorebirds, waterbirds, and riparian songbirds. The WCB is an ex-officio member of the CVJV.

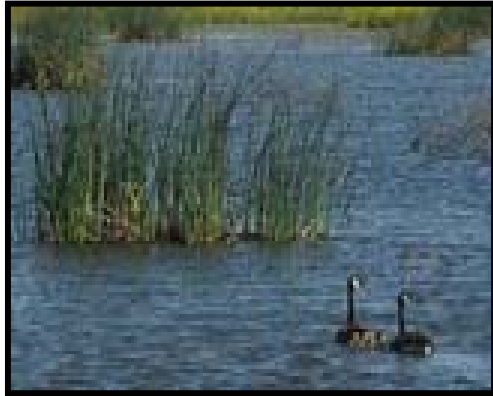
### San Francisco Bay Joint Venture:

The San Francisco Bay Joint Venture (SFBJV) brings together public and private agencies, conservation groups, development interests, and others to restore wetlands and wildlife habitat in San Francisco Bay watersheds and along the Pacific coasts of San Mateo, Marin and Sonoma counties. The goal of the SFBJV is to protect, restore, increase and enhance all types of wetlands, riparian habitat and associated uplands throughout the San Francisco bay region to benefit birds, fish and other wildlife. The WCB is an ex-officio member of the SFBJV.



### Riparian Habitat Joint Venture:

The purpose of the Riparian Habitat Joint Venture (RHJV) is to restore, enhance, and protect a network of functioning riparian habitat across California to support the long-term viability of land birds and other species. A wide variety of other species of plants and animals will benefit through the protection of forests along our rivers, streams and lakes. The RHJV mission is to provide leadership and guidance to promote the effective conservation and restoration of riparian habitats in California. The WCB is an ex-officio member of the RHJV.



### Southern California Wetland Recovery Project, Board of Governors:

The Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project (SCWRP) is a broad-based partnership, chaired by the Natural Resources Agency and supported by the State Coastal Conservancy. The organization is comprised of public agencies, non-profits, scientists, and local communities working cooperatively to acquire and restore rivers, streams, and wetlands in coastal southern California. Using a non-regulatory approach and an ecosystem perspective, SCWRP works to identify wetland acquisition and restoration priorities, prepare plans for these priority sites, pool funds to undertake these projects, implement priority plans, and oversee post-project maintenance & monitoring. The WCB is a member of the SCWRP Board of Governors.

### Regional Advance Mitigation and Conservation Planning (RAMP)

The WCB is part of an Interagency Coordination Team, including the Natural Resources Agency, the Department of Fish and Game, the Department of Water Resources, Business, Transportation and Housing Agency, Department of Transportation, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Environmental Protection Agency, Fish and Wildlife Services and the National Marine Fisheries Service to develop an innovative and coordinated new regional and statewide advance mitigation program to maximize biological benefits and provide cost effective advance mitigation for transportation and flood control infrastructure projects.

## FUNDING

When the WCB was established in 1947, there was a clear understanding that, absent sufficient funding to carry out the legislative mandates, the state's multitude of natural resources would continue to decline. Accordingly, companion legislation was enacted that created the Wildlife Restoration Fund (WRF). Following the creation of the WRF, an annual \$3.0 million transfer was required from the Fair and Exposition Fund to the WRF. For three consecutive years, a total of \$9 million was transferred into WRF. Legislation was later enacted that reduced the annual transfer to \$750,000. While the amount of the annual transfer was reduced, WCB became the recipient of a dedicated fund source from horseracing and pari-mutual betting.

This funding source, coupled with one time budget allocations from various special funds and federal reimbursements remained the primary funding sources for WCB until the mid 1990s. In 1990, Proposition 117 was enacted by the voters and the Habitat Conservation Fund (HCF) was created. As called for in the initiative, the Board receives \$21.0 million annually from the HCF pursuant to the California Wildlife Protection Act of 1990 (Fish and Game Code Section 2785) and will continue through 2020.

Following the passage of Proposition 117, numerous voter approved bond initiatives were enacted. While declining fiscal resources continue to challenge statewide conservation efforts, bond funding has become the predominant fund source for WCB. As fiscal pressure and demands upon the State's General Fund have increased, the Board is now funded primarily from the following voter approved bond funds:

Proposition 12, California Safe Neighborhood Parks, Clean Water, Clean Air, and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2000 (Public Resources Code Section 5069.350): Provided WCB with \$265.5 million for the acquisition, development, rehabilitation, restoration, and protection of real property benefiting fish and wildlife, for the acquisition, restoration, or protection of habitat that promotes recovery of threatened, endangered, or fully protected species, maintains the genetic integrity of wildlife populations, and serves as corridors linking otherwise separate habitat to prevent habitat fragmentation, and for grants and related administrative costs pursuant to the Wildlife Conservation Law of 1947). Of the \$265.5 million allocated for use by WCB, approximately \$11.1 million remains unallocated by the Board.

Proposition 40, California Clean Water, Clean Air, Safe Neighborhood Parks, and Coastal Protection Act of 2002 (Public Resources Code Section 5096.650): Provided WCB with \$300 million for the acquisition, development, rehabilitation, restoration, and protection of habitat that promotes the recovery of threatened and endangered species, provides corridors linking separate habitat areas to prevent habitat fragmentation, and protects significant natural landscapes or ecosystems such as old growth redwoods and oak woodlands and other significant habitat areas, and for grants and related administrative costs pursuant to the Wildlife Conservation Law of 1947. Of the \$300 million allocated for use by WCB, approximately \$87.9 million remains unallocated by the Board.



Proposition 50, California Water Security, Clean Drinking Water, Coastal and Beach Protection Act of 2002: Provided WCB with a total of \$940 million according to the following allocation: \$140 million for the acquisition and restoration of land and water resources for regional water quality projects, fish and wildlife habitat and regional water supply reliability projects (Water Code Section 79565); \$50 million for the acquisition and restoration of land and water resources necessary to meet the state obligations related to California's allocation of water from the Colorado River (Water Code Section 79568); and \$750 million for the acquisition and restoration of lands in or adjacent to urban areas as follows: 1) coastal wetlands as identified in the Southern California Wetlands Inventory, located within the coastal zone and other wetlands or uplands adjacent and proximate to such coastal wetlands; or 2) coastal wetlands as identified in the San Francisco Baylands Ecosystem Habitat Goals Report; and 3) coastal watershed and adjacent lands in Los Angeles, Ventura and Santa Barbara Counties. Of the \$940 million allocated for use by WCB, approximately \$85.5 million remains unallocated by the Board.

Proposition 84, Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection and Parks Act of 2006 (Public Resources Code Section 75055): Provided WCB with a total of \$440 million according to the following allocation: \$180 million for the forest conservation and protection projects; \$135 million for the acquisition and restoration of wildlife habitat, allows for expenditure on development of scientific data, mapping and research related activities and up to \$25 million in funding for UC Natural Reserve System projects; \$90 million to implement Natural Community Conservation Plans; \$15 million for California Rangeland, Grazing Land and Grassland protection projects; \$15 million for Oak Woodland Preservation projects; and \$5 million for ecosystem restoration of agricultural lands. Of the \$440 million allocated for use by WCB, approximately \$306.7 million remains unallocated by the Board.