

# CALIFORNIA WILDLIFE CONSERVATION BOARD STRATEGIC PLAN

## **Mission and Legislative Authority**

### **Mission (Crafted by WCB, 2005)**

To join strategically with other conservation groups, government partners and the citizens of California to help protect, restore and enhance California's spectacular natural resources for wildlife and the public's use and enjoyment.

### **Wildlife Conservation Law of 1947 (Excerpts)**

#### **Article 1. Generally**

##### **1301. Recreational Lands – Acquisition Program**

The preservation, protection and restoration of wildlife within the State is an inseparable part of providing adequate recreation for our people in the interest of public welfare....To carry out these purposes, a single and coordinated program for the acquisition of lands and facilities suitable for recreational purposes, and adaptable for conservation, propagation, and utilization of the fish and game resources of the State, is established.

#### **Article 3. Powers and Purposes**

##### **1345. The Board's Investigative Duties**

(a) The board shall investigate, study and determine what areas within the state are most essential and suitable for wildlife protection and preservation, and 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 and hunting.

(b) In determining which areas are suitable for fishing and hunting, the board, in consultation with the department, shall take into consideration areas of the state where public access and opportunity for fishing and hunting are most needed.

##### **1346. Bird Propagation Lands; Determination and Acquisition**

The board shall ascertain what lands are suitable for providing cover for the propagation and rearing in a wild state of waterfowl, shore birds, and upland birds, and the possibilities of acquiring easements on such lands to provide such cover.

##### **1347. Wildlife Restoration; Land and Water Acquisition**

As a result of the studies, the board shall determine what areas, lands, or rights in lands or waters should be acquired by the state in order to effectuate a coordinated and balanced program resulting in the maximum restoration of wildlife in the state and in the maximum recreation advantages to the people of the state.

## Draft Strategic Plan Goals

**Goal 1. Protect and Conserve:** Acquire and invest in property to protect wildlife habitat and natural areas, with an eye towards long-term conservation, habitat quality and connectivity, and the success of wildlife species and populations.

**Goal 2. Restore and Enhance:** Work with partners to restore and enhance natural areas, create valuable habitat on working lands, and ensure long-term ecosystem health and adaptive management.

**Goal 3. Provide Opportunities for Public Use and Enjoyment:** Leverage WCB's investments in programs and projects by expanding opportunities for outdoor wildlife-oriented recreation that are compatible with conservation goals.

**Goal 4. Apply Scientific Principles:** Plan and implement conservation projects based on sound goals, processes and the best available conservation science.

**Goal 5. Expand Public Awareness and Education:** Work with conservation organizations State-wide to raise public awareness of key conservation issues and goals, and to educate and support local land agencies and private landowners in protecting and enhancing habitat.

**Goal 6. Ensure Organizational Effectiveness:** Ensure that Board staff systems and organization are effective, efficient and supportive of WCB's conservation efforts.

**Goal 7. Maintain Financial Health:** Ensure that WCB has sufficient funds and resources to accomplish the long-term conservation vision for the State.

## Preliminary Vision and Values Statements

### WCB Vision

**The WCB vision statement broadly describes the Board's desired future status as an organization and its role in advancing a conservation vision for the State.**

The Wildlife Conservation Board is the lead acquisition and granting authority in preserving and expanding California's biodiversity and ecosystem health. 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.

### WCB Values

**WCB values describe the fundamental attributes and principles that characterize the Board and guide staff and Board member activities.**

**Ecosystem Health.** We strive to protect the health and integrity of our ecosystems and natural lands for wildlife and for people.

**Access to Recreation.** We believe that all Californians deserve access to nature and wildlife-oriented recreation experiences.

**Science-Based Decision-Making.** Our actions and investments reflect strategic decisions based on the best available conservation science.

**Collaborative Stewardship.** We work collaboratively with our many partners, striving to leverage our technical strengths, communicate effectively, and share science and lessons learned.

**Lasting Results.** We invest in conservation education and scientific learning and strive for tangible, on-the-ground results in the near- and long-term.

**Public Accountability.** We are honest, credible and accountable brokers of California's conservation resources.

Program Purpose and Brief Description	Conservation Tools and Engagement Methods	Eligible Grant Applicants	Authority/Enabling Legislation, Funding and Related Programs
<p><b>Land Acquisition Program (est. 1947)</b></p> <p>Acquire real property or interests in real property on behalf of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.</p> <p>In addition, all WCB programs have an acquisition component.</p>	<p>Requires CDFW biological assessment of resource values and recommendation for acquisition from willing sellers (fee title or interests) of real property and water rights by means of gifts, purchases, leases, easements, and transfer or exchange of easements, development rights or credits, and other interests in real property.</p>	<p>Federal, state, and local government entities including special districts and joint power authorities and non-profit conservation organizations pursuant to Section 26 USC 501(c)(3)</p>	<p><b>Authority:</b> Administered pursuant to the Board's original authorizing legislation, the Wildlife Conservation Law of 1947; FGC 1348</p> <p><b>Funding:</b> Wildlife Restoration Fund; Habitat Conservation Fund; and various bond funds.</p> <p><b>Related Programs:</b> Natural Communities Conservation Program</p>
<p><b>Public Access (est. 1947)</b></p> <p>Develop facilities in cooperation with local governmental entities for public access to hunting, fishing, or other wildlife-oriented recreation.</p>	<p>Financial assistance for facility development</p> <p>Grant or lease agreement to ensure long-term management and maintenance of improvements</p>	<p>Federal, state, and local government entities including special districts and joint power authorities and non-profit conservation organizations pursuant to Section 26 USC 501(c)(3)</p>	<p><b>Authority:</b> Wildlife Conservation Law of 1947; FGC 1350</p> <p><b>Funding:</b> Wildlife Restoration Fund and various bond funds.</p>
<p><b>Habitat Enhancement and Restoration Program (est. 1990)</b></p> <p>Restore native fisheries, wetlands that fall outside the jurisdiction of the Inland Wetland Conservation Program, and in-stream habitat, and other projects that improve native habitat quality within the State.</p> <p>Includes all restoration projects that fall outside the Board's other mandated programs.</p>	<p>Grants to restore habitat; applicants can apply under open filing process.</p>	<p>Federal, state, and local government entities including special districts and joint power authorities and non-profit conservation organizations pursuant to Section 26 USC 501(c)(3)</p>	<p><b>Authority:</b> Wildlife Protection Act of 1990; FGC 2780 et seq.</p> <p><b>Funding:</b> Habitat Conservation Fund and various bond funds</p>
<p><b>California Riparian Habitat Conservation Program (est. 1991)</b></p> <p>Develop coordinated conservation efforts aimed at protecting and restoring the State's riparian ecosystems.</p>	<p>Grants to restore habitat; applicants can apply under open filing process.</p> <p>Acquire property directly or through grants (fee title, interests or water rights.)</p>	<p>Federal, state, and local government entities including special districts and joint power authorities and non-profit conservation organizations pursuant to Section 26 USC 501(c)(3)</p>	<p><b>Authority:</b> California Riparian Habitat Conservation Act</p> <p><b>Funding:</b> Habitat Conservation Fund and various bond funds.</p> <p><b>Related Program:</b> California Riparian Habitat Joint Venture</p>
<p><b>Inland Wetlands Conservation Program (est. 1990)</b></p> <p>Support the Central Valley Joint Venture in protecting, restoring and enhancing wetlands and associated habitats on public or private lands in order to increase bird populations in the Central Valley.</p>	<p>Grants to restore habitat; applicants can apply under open filing process.</p> <p>Acquire property directly or through grants (fee title, interests or water rights.)</p>	<p>Federal, state, and local government entities including special districts and joint power authorities and non-profit conservation organizations pursuant to Section 26 USC 501(c)(3)</p>	<p><b>Authority:</b> FGC Section 1400</p> <p><b>Funding:</b> Habitat Conservation Fund and Inland Wetlands Conservation Fund and various bond funds.</p> <p><b>Related Program:</b> Central Valley Joint Venture</p>

Program Purpose and Brief Description	Conservation Tools and Engagement Methods	Eligible Grant Applicants	Authority/Enabling Legislation, Funding and Related Programs
<p><b>Natural Heritage Preservation Tax Credit Program (est. 2000, reinstated 2005)</b></p> <p>Protect wildlife habitat, parks and open space, archaeological resources, agricultural land and water by providing state tax credits for donations of qualified land and water rights.</p>	<p>Tax credit for donations of qualified land (fee title or conservation easement) and water rights equal to 55% of the appraised fair market value</p>	<p>A State agency within the CA Natural Resources Agency (CRNA) authorized to hold title to land in which the private landowner has applied to donate property or a local government that has submitted a joint application with a CNRA State agency</p>	<p><b>Authority:</b> Natural Heritage Preservation Tax Credit Act of 2000, as amended effective January 1, 2010 (expires June 2015)</p> <p><b>Funding:</b> General Fund (reimbursable using Prop 40, 50, and 84 bond funds)</p>
<p><b>Oak Woodlands Conservation Program (est. 2001)</b></p> <p>Support and encourage voluntary, long-term private stewardship and conservation of California oak woodlands. Encourage farming and ranching operations that protect and promote healthy oak woodlands. Protect oak trees providing superior wildlife values on private land. Encourage planning that is consistent with oak woodlands preservation.</p>	<p>Conservation easement acquisitions from willing sellers                      Financial incentives: cost-share and long-term agreements                      Technical assistance                      Public outreach and education                      Applicants can apply directly under an open filing process, so long as funding is available.                      Requires that an Oak Woodlands Management Plan is in place for the city or county in which the work would be completed.</p>	<p>Federal, state, and local government entities including special districts and joint power authorities and non-profit conservation organizations pursuant to Section 26 USC 501(c)(3)</p>	<p><b>Authority:</b> Oak Woodlands Conservation Act of 2001; FGC Section 1360</p> <p><b>Funding:</b> Oak Woodlands Conservation Fund, Bond Funds, Prop 84.</p> <p><b>Related Program:</b> Federal Forest Legacy Program (16 U.S.C. Section 2103)</p>
<p><b>Forest Conservation Program (est. 2006)</b></p> <p>Promote the ecological integrity and economic stability of California's diverse native forests 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.</p>	<p>Grant awards; acquisition (fee title or easement) from willing sellers; long-term management agreements; applicants can apply directly under an open filing process, so long as funding is available.</p>	<p>Federal, state, and local government entities including special districts and joint power authorities and non-profit conservation organizations pursuant to Section 26 USC 501(c)(3)</p>	<p><b>Authority:</b> Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006, Public Resources Code Section 75055 (a)</p> <p><b>Funding:</b> Bond Funds, Prop 84</p>
<p><b>Ecosystem Restoration on Agricultural Lands (ERAL) (est. 2006)</b></p> <p>Assist landowners in developing wildlife friendly practices on their properties that can be sustained and co-exist with agricultural operations. Support restoration and enhancement of water corridors/streams, grasslands, riparian areas and floodplains, and creation of wildlife buffers and wetland areas.</p>	<p>Grant awards, long-term management plans and agreements; applicants can apply directly under an open filing process, so long as funding is available.</p>	<p>Federal, state, and local government entities including special districts and joint power authorities and non-profit conservation organizations pursuant to Section 26 USC 501(c)(3)</p>	<p><b>Authority:</b> Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006, Public Resources Code Section 75055(d)(4)</p> <p><b>Funding:</b> Bond Funds, Prop 84</p>

## **Preliminary Performance Measures**

### **Extent of Habitats Protected and Conserved**

- Number of acres of critical habitat protected
- Diversity of protected ecosystem types and their geographic range throughout the State
- Percentage of critical habitat areas, linkages and corridors protected in relation to the State's overall conservation vision

### **The Quality and Health of Protected Ecosystems**

- Degree of invasive species control
- Reduction in the rate of species lost
- Water quality levels
- Biodiversity of protected and restored lands
- Adaptation to Climate Change and Carbon Sequestration and CO<sub>2</sub> emission reductions
- Presence of T&E and other rare species

### **Degree of Public Use and Enjoyment**

- Level of working landscapes including agriculture, grazing, etc.
- Level of recreation activity including hunting, fishing, birding, hiking, etc., in accordance with sound ecosystem management principles
- Visitation rates at publicly accessible facilities

### **Application of Scientific Principles to Conservation Area Selection and Management**

- Use of conservation science in WCB decision making processes

### **Quality of WCB Staff**

- Depth and expertise of WCB staff in relation to all required professional disciplines

### **WCB Financial Health**

- Level of resources available in relation to the total needed to achieve the conservation vision
- Fund stability and sustainability
- Total project dollars acquired for WCB funds allocated (leveraging)
- Benefits achieved in relation to funds invested (ROI)
- Overhead rate

## **Key Trends**

The following summary reflects key trends in conservation with implications for WCB programs and activities. Key trends are derived from conversations with the WCB Management Team, key stakeholder informants and WCB staff.

### **Increasing Threats to California Ecosystems**

Today's generation is faced with conservation issues of enormous scale; most notably, the many challenges and phenomena associated with the changing climate. Increasingly, conservation organizations and agencies are taking a proactive approach to addressing climate impacts, or are given no choice but to prioritize responses to increasing incidence of flood, drought, wildland fire and associated impacts to water supply, natural communities and wildlife species and populations. Development of new infrastructure, including large-scale projects such as high-speed rail, poses significant threats as well.

### **Varying Conservation Priorities**

Conservation needs and priorities vary across California's diverse regions. For example, many resource and conservation groups are focused on estuarine and in-stream habitat and associated ecosystem services in the San-Francisco Bay, whereas wetlands and waterfowl are viewed as conservation issues of critical national importance in the Central Valley. In comparison, open space and public access are key needs in Southern California, where opportunities for wildlife-based recreation are less accessible for a greater number of residents than in other regions.

### **Declining State Capacity**

Department of Fish and Wildlife staff numbers are on the decline. As retirements continue and resource constraints limit the State's ability to fill open positions, California resource and conservation agencies increasingly look to non-governmental partners to help address critical gaps in conservation planning and resource management. Grants as a source of conservation funding are growing in importance, particularly as bond funds mature and federal and state resources for conservation run dry.

### **Scrutiny over Public Expenditures**

Scrutiny over the use of public resources has increased in recent years, particularly as funding becomes more scarce and questions of government agency impact and effectiveness are not always clearly answered. Californians have played a vital hand in dedicating funding to conservation and, as a result, demand greater agency transparency than in decades past, including better public information about conservation activities, outcomes and lessons learned.

## **Cooperative Conservation and Partnerships**

The roles of the private landowner and members of the general public in wildlife conservation have grown and expanded in recent decades. Looking forward, their importance for conservation cannot be underestimated. Conservation organizations have learned that providing good information, while critical, is not always enough. Technical assistance, financial incentives, and a collaborative spirit are required to achieve on-the-ground results in partnership with private landowners. In addition, conservation educators have learned that in order to create the next generation of conservationists that is so desperately needed to preserve California's natural heritage, education must be hands-on and it must start early.

## **Increasing Use of Easements**

The menu and popularity of conservation strategies and tools have changed over time, as well. Acquisition of conservation lands in fee title, while still critically important, has led the way for the use of conservation easements to prohibit or limit development of lands in the long-term. The increasing use of easements in conservation reflects and corresponds with the growing role of land trusts in conservation.

## **Emerging Recreation Needs and Priorities**

Trends in outdoor recreation have evolved over time, influenced by a variety of social, economic and environmental factors. Recreation demands today are broader than during WCB's early years, when game management and development of amenities such as boating ramps and fishing piers were priority. Hunting and fishing remain important pastimes for many, but have decreased in popularity relative to easy-to-reach day and overnight uses; particularly group camping and informal trail- and water-based recreation activities.



## Strategic Issues

Six items have emerged as issues of top strategic importance for the Wildlife Conservation Board. Strategic issues are derived from conversations with the WCB Management Team, key stakeholder informants, and WCB staff.

*Note:* Stakeholder direction to date reflects individual comments, not consensus opinion.

### A. The State's Conservation Vision

**The Issue:** The State of California lacks agreement around a landscape-level ecological roadmap and a clear, long-term conservation vision. The State Wildlife Action Plan Update is an opportunity to define a state-wide vision. Consensus and strategic collaboration around this vision will be critical to its successful implementation.

#### Potential Ideas and Directions from WCB Staff and Stakeholders:

- WCB should take the lead in formulating a state-wide conservation vision.
- Expand public dialogue about conservation needs.
- Develop an ecological vision, based on science.
- Define WCB's role in realizing this vision, engaging partners in the discussion.
- Create a conservation vision at the Board level.
- Address major issues and threats comprehensively, such as climate change, water resource availability, wildfire, and invasive species.

### B. Project Evaluation, Selection and Development

**The Issue:** Staff and stakeholders have expressed that project and acquisition evaluation and selection processes must be based on principles of conservation science, and the process to rank and prioritize projects must be transparent. WCB should clearly communicate the results of that process to interested groups around the state.

#### Potential Ideas and Directions from WCB Staff and Stakeholders:

- Make the process more transparent.
- Base project selection and project decisions on science.
- Create more frequent face-to-face opportunities for collaboration with regional staff.
- Involve partners in acquisition and easement prioritization.
- Require that grant applicants demonstrate climate-smart practices.
- Consider ecosystem services in project evaluation.
- Ensure true conservation impact and a return on investment.

### C. Monitoring and Adaptive Management

**The Issue:** Monitoring and adaptive management is a critical component of ensuring that State investments are resulting in true conservation impact. Monitoring is equally critical to WCB's ability to describe its successes and articulate and share lessons learned.

#### Potential Ideas and Directions from WCB Staff and Stakeholders:

- Secure funding and create set-asides to fund monitoring and adaptive management.
- Go beyond compliance monitoring; report on resources
- Work with DFW to design and establish protocols.
- Evaluate DFW, WCB and project partner success in meeting project monitoring and adaptive management requirements.
- Identify successful case studies and examples.
- Articulate and share key lessons learned (process and science outcomes).

### D. Future Role of WCB

**The Issue:** WCB's emphasis and role has evolved over time, and this evolution continues today. While WCB programs are largely driven by State-level mandates, a proactive approach to shaping WCB's role and responding to the State's greatest conservation needs may be desirable.

#### Potential Ideas and Directions from WCB Staff and Stakeholders:

- Create project partnerships with non-profits that support long-term management of a project and cost recovery.
- Look for new opportunities to generate revenue (e.g., carbon credits, timber, recreation use funds).
- Develop expert, in-house project evaluation team (appraiser, biologist, engineer, forester, surveyor).
- Make lands available for resource management and habitat conservation research.
- Assess WCB talent and expertise and determine if new areas of expertise are warranted.
- Revisit and diversify Board membership.
- Create more and new partnerships with outside organizations (public and non-profit).
- Revisit and evaluate WCB's working relationship with DFW.
- Take a greater leadership role in funding.

### E. Long-Term, Stable Funding

**The Issue:** State bond funds are maturing, and conservation resources are dwindling as a result. The Natural Heritage Preservation Tax Credit Program is set to expire in June 2015. In addition, existing legislation mandates that in July 2020, all Habitat Conservation Fund appropriations revert to the WCB.

**Potential Ideas and Directions from WCB Staff and Stakeholders:**

- Play a leadership role in identifying and pursuing revenue streams.
- Continue to pursue grants awards and donations.
- Leverage existing funds as effectively as possible.
- Consider such options as:
  - Providing loans for conservation.
  - Pursuing matching funds.
  - Creating an interest-bearing endowment.
  - Tapping into cap and trade.
  - Selling unneeded land (e.g., in response to changing habitats, and/or fee title with easements in place.)
  - Converting lands for mitigation

**F. Communications and Outreach**

**The Issue:** Stakeholders call on WCB to advance a clear communications and outreach strategy, and to share information around WCB priority setting, project ranking, and funding decision-making. Creating new and stronger partnerships, raising awareness about both WCB and partner accomplishments, and building a constituency and securing funds are all desired outcomes and benefits to WCB.

**Potential Ideas and Directions from WCB Staff and Stakeholders:**

- Create and advance a clear communications and outreach strategy.
- Use the Strategic Plan to help publicize WCB accomplishments.
- In communications, link accomplishments with those of other partners.
- Identify needed reach methods and materials.
- Expand use of online social media and the WCB website.
- Expand traditional outreach (i.e., fairs, conferences, and community meetings targeting local officials, general public and landowners.
- Improve WCB signage (branding, size and legibility).
- Utilize traditional media (e.g., TV, press releases, and newsletters).