

California Wildlife Conservation Board Strategic Plan 2014

Preliminary Administrative Draft Plan

October 11, 2013

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Chapter 1. Introduction

The Wildlife Conservation Board

The California Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) is an independent body of the State responsible for implementing a variety of conservation programs created by the California legislature. The agency awards grants to other State and local entities and non-profit organizations, and also acquires lands and property interests on behalf of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW, formerly the Department of Fish and Game) to protect wildlife habitats.

WCB programs fund critical conservation work of partners throughout California, and focus primarily on acquisition of lands to conserve wildlife habitats (fee title and easements), wildlife habitat restoration and enhancement, and development of wildlife-oriented public access facilities. WCB also provides grant funds in support of activities such as private landowner engagement, technical assistance, and community education around critical conservation issues.

Since its inception in 1947, the Board has allocated over \$2.5 billion, and has leveraged these funds to attract additional private and public resources that total close to \$2.3 billion. In addition, the WCB has successfully acquired more than 1.5 million acres of critical habitat. In 2013 alone, WCB allocated nearly \$29 million towards acquisition of over 10,000 acres of wildlife habitat by CDFW and other partners, \$14 million towards acquisition of nearly 15,000 acres of conservation easements, and \$19 million towards habitat restoration, enhancement and public access projects.

Overview of the Strategic Plan

The Wildlife Conservation Board Strategic Plan provides a high-level blueprint for WCB decision-making, and establishes the primary framework for implementing the WCB vision over the next five years (FY 2014-2019). This Plan represents a rational and disciplined approach to articulate policy-level priorities, strategic actions, and measures of Board performance and success.

The first of its kind for the Board, this Strategic Plan presents the WCB mission and vision statements, guiding principles, and goals. These elements, which are supported by the plan's strategic directions and high-level framework for performance-based management, are designed to help ensure the continued success and impact of Board stewardship of California conservation dollars.

A Brief History of WCB

The Wildlife Conservation Board was originally formed with passage of the Wildlife Conservation Act of 1947¹, to acquire conservation lands and fund conservation and public access projects on behalf of the CDFW. The Wildlife Conservation Law clearly defined WCB's role in conservation and the importance of outdoor and wildlife-oriented recreation to the California public.

The WCB focus and approach has shifted over the years in two ways. Board allocations once focused primarily on property acquisition for CDFW and wildlife-oriented recreation. Today, the majority of WCB program funds are awarded to a variety of organizations, agencies and landowners invested in conservation. Second, once dedicated to fish and game management and creating public access for fishing and hunting, WCB today focuses on habitat conservation and restoration, and is driven by a mandate to balance the habitat and wildlife-oriented recreation objectives of the State.

The story of the WCB's evolution reflects national trends in conservation policy and planning, and the gradual transition towards emphasis on habitat and species that followed enactment of the transformational federal and State environmental protection programs of the late 1960's and early 1970's.

Throughout WCB's history, the State legislature and California voters have played a prominent role in mandating investment to preserve, protect and enhance California's wildlife resources, and in creating the needed funding streams to do so. WCB continues to serve as steward and broker of critical State conservation dollars, including various bond funds and dedicated conservation funding streams.

WCB Organization and Authority

The Wildlife Conservation Board consists of three voting members: The Director of CDFW, the Director of the California Department of Finance, and the President of the Fish and Game Commission. Non-voting members include three advisors from both the State Assembly and the State Senate.

WCB has 27 full-time staff members focused on land acquisition, habitat restoration and recreational public access, budget analysis, and other program support activities.

Wildlife Conservation Act of 1947

The Wildlife Conservation Law -- passed in 1947 and now part of the Fish and Game Code (FGC) -- defines the voting membership and responsibilities of the Board. The Law also:

- Established WCB authority to acquire, sell and exchange real property, property interests, and property and water rights on behalf of the State;
- Codified many of the Board's essential partnerships, including its relationship with the Department of Fish and Wildlife, among others; and

¹ The Wildlife Conservation Law (Division 2, Chapter 4 of the California Fish and Game Code)

- Created the Wildlife Restoration Fund, providing the ability of the WCB to generate and receive conservation funding.

California Wildlife Protection Act of 1990

In response to the need for additional funds to protect California's fish, wildlife, and native plant resources, voters approved passage of the California Wildlife Protection Act of 1990, creating the Habitat Conservation Fund. The Habitat Conservation Fund supports four of the Board's ten mandated programs and provides consistent and reliable long-term funding for the Board's acquisitions and restoration activities.

The Wildlife Protection Act of 1990 effectively shifted the emphasis of WCB responsibilities away from wildlife-oriented public access and towards wildlife habitat protection by requiring that the public have "reasonable" access to lands acquired in fee with Habitat Conservation Funds, "except when that access may interfere with habitat protection."²

Additional Legislative Measures

A number of additional State legislative acts collectively define the scope of Board activities, including the focus of the grant-making and the incentive-based conservation strategies WCB employs. Key acts are described below. For a complete list of WCB programs and authorizing legislation, see the following section and Table A: WCB Program Overview.

The *Inland Wetlands Conservation Act* established the Inland Wetlands Conservation Program to assist the Central Valley Joint Venture in its activities. Central Valley Joint Venture's mission is to protect, restore and enhance wetlands and associated habitats to increase bird populations in the Central Valley, a critical stop-over along the Pacific Flyway.

The *California Riparian Habitat Conservation Act* declared California's rivers, wetlands and waterways, and the fisheries and wildlife habitat they provide, as valuable, finite and threatened resources and established the California Riparian Habitat Conservation Program. The mission of this program is to develop coordinated conservation efforts aimed at protecting and restoring the State's riparian ecosystems.

The *Natural Heritage Preservation Tax Credit Act of 2000* established an important tax credit program for private landowners who donate qualified land, water or water rights for conservation purposes. As amended effective January 2010, the Tax Credit Act provides WCB the authority to approve qualified donations and tax credits until June 30, 2015.

The *Oak Woodlands Conservation Act of 2001* mandated and authorized WCB to establish a grant program designed specifically to protect and restore oak trees and woodlands. Partnership with private landowners in jurisdictions with an approved oak woodlands management plan is the primary means of program implementation.

The *Rangeland, Grazing and Protection Act of 2002* designated WCB as the lead agency for carrying out the California Rangeland, Grazing Land, and Grassland Protection Program, whose purpose is to protect California's rangeland and grassland resources through the use of conservation easements.

² California Fish and Game Code Section 2799.5

WCB Timeline:

- 1947: Passage of the Wildlife Conservation Act of 1947 and the Wildlife Restoration Fund, and formation of the Wildlife Conservation Board.
- 1955: Statutes are amended to allow any local, State or federal entity to operate and maintain a WCB project, opening the gates for projects designed to provide fishing, hunting and other public access programs.
- 1964: California voters passed the first bond act benefiting the WCB, the State Beach, Park and Recreational and Historical Facilities Bond Act of 1964 (WCB received \$5 million).
- 1968: The California Ecological Reserve System is established to conserve areas for the protection of rare plants, animals, and unique habitat types.
- 1969: The National Environmental Protection Act is enacted, followed by the California Environmental Quality Act in 1970.
- 1970: The Nation celebrates Earth day for the first time on April 22. The California population reaches 20 million.
- 1972: WCB begins to receive special legislative funding, including revenue from the Environmental License Plate Fund.
- 1978: The Board approves and funds its first conservation easement.
- 1990: Voters pass the California Wildlife Protection Act of 1990, creating the Habitat Conservation Fund. The WCB is designated to receive \$21 million annually.
- 1990: Legislation provides WCB with the authority to award grants to local governments, special districts, and nonprofit organizations, and to sell, exchange and lease property and purchase land interests (conservation easements, development rights, etc.).
- 1991: Department of Fish and Game establishes the Natural Community Conservation Program, large-scale regional conservation plans that play a critical role in advancing landscape level conservation in the State. WCB uses the priorities in these plans to help guide funding decisions.
- Early 2000's: Voter-approved bond funds lead to the creation of many WCB-managed conservation programs. Propositions 12, 40, 50 and 84 nearly tripled the amount WCB had received total, to date.
- 2008: The WCB is required to disencumber all contracts. This restriction is lifted 6 months later.
- 2012: WCB adopts a new real estate appraisal policy in response to a desire for increased transparency and review of major acquisitions of \$5 million or more.

The Geography of Conservation: WCB Project Selection

The Wildlife Conservation Board works hand in hand with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) and other partners to protect, restore and enhance lands of critical conservation value across the State. CDFW is organized according to six territorial regions; each regional office provides scientific guidance and biological consultation with respect to the highest priority and most regionally significant projects to fund. Conceptual area protection plans (CAPPs) developed by CDFW are one tool used to help establish land acquisition priorities at the regional level. WCB also seeks opportunities to fund projects that support State-wide conservation objectives and priorities.

WCB strives to achieve a balance between a) advancing the State's highest priorities in landscape-level conservation; and b) remaining open and responsive to often smaller-scale opportunities to implement high-quality projects in partnership with willing landowners.

WCB Programs Today

WCB works closely with dozens of conservation partners throughout the State to identify, fund and implement projects critical to protect California's biodiversity, natural heritage, and culture of the outdoors.

WCB acquires land and property interests and restores and enhances habitat and wildlife-oriented public access through its ten distinct programs. The following programs complement one another to help advance California's State-wide and regional conservation priorities:

- **Land Acquisition Program.** WCB acquires real property or interests in real property on behalf of the CDFW and makes grants to others to protect lands via acquisition (fee title, easements and other interests).
- **Public Access Program.** WCB develops public access facilities in partnership with State, federal and local government agencies to enhance opportunities for hunting, fishing, or other wildlife-oriented recreation.
- **Habitat Enhancement and Restoration Program.** WCB funds projects to restore native fisheries, in-stream habitat, habitats for threatened and endangered species, and wetlands that fall outside the jurisdiction of the Inland Wetlands Conservation Program.
- **Inland Wetlands Conservation Program.** WCB supports the Central Valley Joint Venture in protecting and restoring wetland and associated habitats in the Central Valley.
- **California Riparian Habitat Conservation Program.** WCB provides grants to protect and restore riparian habitat and ecosystems.
- **Natural Heritage Preservation Tax Credit Program.** Through this WCB-administered program, the State provides tax credit for donations of qualified conservation lands (fee title or easement).

- **Oak Woodlands Conservation Program.** WCB provides grants to acquire conservation easements, provides financial incentives and technical assistance, and enters into long-term management agreements with willing landowners to encourage long-term conservation of California’s oak trees and woodlands.
- **Rangeland, Grazing Land and Grassland Protection Program.** WCB provides grants to acquire easements on rangeland, grazing land, and grassland in order to prevent their conversion to non-agricultural uses and ensure continued wildlife, watershed and open space benefits of those lands.
- **Forest Conservation Program.** WCB promotes the ecological integrity and economic stability of California’s native forests by awarding grants, acquiring property and/or interests, and initiating long-term management agreements to protect and restore a diversity of forestlands.
- **Ecosystem Restoration on Agricultural Lands.** WCB assists agricultural landowners in developing wildlife-friendly practices that support co-existence of wildlife and agricultural operations through grant awards and long-term management plans and agreements.

Existing legislation clearly outlines how current WCB program funds can be allocated and used. Board conservation activities and grants awards are largely funded by the original Wildlife Restoration Fund (est. 1947), the Habitat Conservation Fund (discussed under “Organization and Authority”, above), and various State bond programs.

Table A provides a summary account of all WCB programs, including program description, eligible grant applicants (where applicable), primary funding sources, and the legislative authority for program implementation. Appendix A: WCB Bond Funds provides an overview of all relevant bond acts.

The work of the Wildlife Conservation Board falls under the aegis of the California Fish and Wildlife Strategic Vision. WCB programs also align with other major plans and initiatives, including but not limited to:

- California's State Wildlife Action Plan
- Natural Community Conservation Plans / Habitat Conservation Plans
- The Natural Resource Agency's Climate Adaptation Strategy
- North American Waterfowl Management Plan
- Baylands Ecosystem Habitat Goals
- Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project
- The Statewide Flood Management Planning Program
- CDFW Areas of Conservation Emphasis (Statewide)
- CDFW land acquisition evaluations (LAEs) and conceptual area protection plans (CAPPs)
- Sacramento River Conservation Area Forum
- Fisheries Restoration Grant Program
- California Rangeland Coalition
- The Bay Area Critical Linkages
- The South Coast Missing Linkages
- Regional Advance Mitigation Planning
- Riparian Habitat Joint Venture
- State and Federal Species Recovery Plans
- Central Valley Project Improvement Act
- Northern Sierra Partnership

Table A: WCB Program Overview

Program Purpose and Brief Description	Conservation Tools and Engagement Methods	Eligible Grant Applicants	Authority/Enabling Legislation, Funding and Related Programs
<p>Land Acquisition Program (est. 1947)</p> <p>Acquire real property or interests in real property on behalf of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.</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>Authority: Administered pursuant to the Board's original authorizing legislation, the Wildlife Conservation Law of 1947; FGC 1300 <i>et. seq.</i></p> <p>Funding: Wildlife Restoration Fund; Habitat Conservation Fund; and various bond funds.</p> <p>Related Programs: Natural Community Conservation Program</p>
<p>Public Access (est. 1947)</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>Authority: Wildlife Conservation Law of 1947; FGC 1300 <i>et. seq.</i></p> <p>Funding: Wildlife Restoration Fund and various bond funds</p>
<p>Habitat Enhancement and Restoration Program (est. 1990)</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>Authority: Wildlife Protection Act of 1990; FGC 2780 <i>et seq.</i></p> <p>Funding: Habitat Conservation Fund and various bond funds</p>
<p>Inland Wetlands Conservation Program (est. 1990)</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>Authority: Inland Wetlands Conservation Program; FGC Section 1400 <i>et. seq.</i></p> <p>Funding: Habitat Conservation Fund and Inland Wetlands Conservation Fund and various bond funds.</p> <p>Related Program: Central Valley Joint Venture</p>
<p>California Riparian Habitat Conservation Program (est. 1991)</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>Authority: California Riparian Habitat Conservation Act; FGC 1385 <i>et. seq.</i></p> <p>Funding: Habitat Conservation Fund and various bond funds</p> <p>Related Program: California Riparian Habitat Joint Venture</p>

Table A: WCB Program Overview

Program Purpose and Brief Description	Conservation Tools and Engagement Methods	Eligible Grant Applicants	Authority/Enabling Legislation, Funding and Related Programs
<p>Natural Heritage Preservation Tax Credit Program (est. 2000, reinstated 2005)</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 (CNRA) 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>Authority: Natural Heritage Preservation Tax Credit Act of 2000, as amended effective January 1, 2010 (expires June 2015); Public Resources Code 3700 <i>et. seq.</i></p> <p>Funding: General Fund (reimbursable using Prop 40, 50, and 84 bond funds)</p>
<p>Oak Woodlands Conservation Program (est. 2001)</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 including cost-share and long-term agreements; technical assistance; public outreach and education.</p> <p>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>Authority: Oak Woodlands Conservation Act of 2001; FGC Section 1360 <i>et. seq.</i></p> <p>Funding: Oak Woodlands Conservation Fund, various bond funds</p> <p>Related Program: Federal Forest Legacy Program (16 U.S.C. Section 2103)</p>
<p>Rangeland, Grazing Land and Grassland Protection Program (est. 2002)</p> <p>Protect the integrity of California's rangeland, grazing land, and grassland by preventing conversion to non-agricultural uses, protecting the long-term sustainability of livestock grazing, and ensuring continued wildlife, watershed and open space benefits to the State.</p>	<p>Conservation easement acquisitions and stewardship from willing sellers; 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>Authority: Rangeland, Grazing Land and Grassland Protection Act of 2002; Public Resources Code Section 10330 <i>et. seq.</i></p> <p>Funding: Bond Funds, Prop 84</p>
<p>Forest Conservation Program (est. 2006)</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>Authority: 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>Funding: Bond Funds, Prop 84</p>
<p>Ecosystem Restoration on Agricultural Lands (ERAL) (est. 2006)</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>Authority: 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>Funding: Bond Funds, Prop 84</p>

Chapter 2. The California Conservation Landscape: Key Trends and Strategic Issues

Key Trends

California encompasses one of the most biologically diverse regions in the world, and is one of only five regions in the world with a Mediterranean climate. At the same time, some estimate that more than 20 percent of the naturally occurring species of amphibians, reptiles, birds and mammals in California are classified as either endangered, threatened, or “of special concern” to State and federal agencies.³ The following summary reflects key trends in conservation with implications for WCB programs and activities.

Future Climate Impacts to Biodiversity and Habitat

Californians today - and succeeding generations -- are faced with conservation issues of an enormous scale; most notably, the many challenges and phenomena associated with the changing climate. Increasingly, conservation entities are determining how to address the biodiversity and habitat impacts of climate change, such as shifting species ranges and changes in the composition of natural communities. State conservation partners will rely on WCB to support implementation of a forward-thinking conservation strategy that supports natural communities as they adjust to survive in this changing environment.

Continuing Habitat Loss and Fragmentation

With just over 37 million people (2010 Census), California is one and a half times as populous as second-place Texas (25 million). By 2020, California’s population is projected to reach 42 to 48 million.⁴ Development of new infrastructure to accommodate this growth will continue to place significant stress on wildlife and ecosystems. Housing and commercial development, as well as other adverse land use decisions, will exacerbate habitat loss and fragmentation. Investments to protect wildlife habitat will become increasingly important as the threat of these classic stressors increases in step with economic and population growth.

Varying Conservation Priorities

Conservation needs and priorities vary across California’s diverse ecoregions. For example, many resource and conservation groups in the San Francisco Bay are focused primarily on estuarine and in-stream habitat and associated ecosystem services, 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.

³ California Natural Resources Agency. 2009 California Climate Adaptation Strategy. Chapter V: Biodiversity and Habitat. Introduction (p. 45).

⁴ Public Policy Institute of California. “California’s Population”.
http://www.ppic.org/main/publication_show.asp?i=259 Accessed September 23, 2013.

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 benefit 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 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. Acquisition of lands in fee title, while still critically important, has declined in recent decades, leading more and more to 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 and the importance of privately held lands in landscape-level change. To date, a major amount of California wildlife is found on private lands. While easements may not provide all the benefits of publicly-owned lands, they remain a cost-effective and vital tool in actively engaging private landowners to protect lands and apply improved management practices.

Evolving Recreation Needs and Priorities

Trends in outdoor recreation have evolved over time, influenced by a variety of demographic, economic and environmental factors. Recreation demands today are broader than during WCB's early years, when game management and development of amenities such as boat ramps and fishing piers were priority. Hunting and fishing remain important pastimes for many and will remain a priority for WCB but, overall in California, these activities have decreased in popularity relative to easy-to-reach day and overnight uses. Ensuring widespread access to nature and low or no-cost outdoor recreation experiences is increasingly important in building appreciation for wildlife stewardship. It is also vital for public health and community livability, particularly for California's youth and its urban and low-income communities.

Strategic Issues

A number of items emerged as issues of top importance for the Wildlife Conservation Board over the course of Strategic Plan development. WCB Board members, WCB Management Team and staff, and key partners and stakeholders have identified the following topics as fundamental to WCB's ability to fulfill its mission.

The State's Conservation Vision

The State of California lacks agreement around a landscape-level ecological roadmap and a clear, long-term conservation vision. WCB partners call on the Board to articulate a conservation vision that provides clarity and direction with respect to the organization's own role in State-wide conservation. Stakeholders advise that WCB address major issues and threats comprehensively through its work. These include, but are not limited to, climate change, availability of water for fish and wildlife, preservation of California's rich biodiversity and protection of rare species, control of invasive species, protection of large landscape-level land holdings from conversion and fragmentation, and preservation of wildlife movement and migration corridors.

Project Evaluation and Selection

Conservation science must drive WCB acquisitions and project selection. Moreover, the process used to evaluate projects must be transparent and deliberate. Stakeholders call on WCB to communicate its priorities, the results of project evaluation processes, and the impact of its investments.

Monitoring and Adaptive Management

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. Board members and stakeholders call on the Board to leverage partnerships to advance the monitoring and adaptive management of the projects it funds.

Future Role of WCB

WCB's programmatic emphasis has evolved over time, and this evolution continues today. While WCB programs are largely driven by State-level mandates, stakeholders recommend that WCB take a proactive approach to shaping its role and responding to the State's greatest conservation needs. Specific topics include WCB's role in conservation planning adaptive management, developing the right balance of in-house skills to meet the State's conservation needs, and working proactively to secure sustainable sources of revenue.

Long-Term, Stable Funding

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, and the Wildlife Protection Act of 1990, which established the Habitat Conservation Fund, sunsets in June 2020.

Communications and Outreach

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.

Chapter 3. Strategic Plan Framework

Framework Overview

The Strategic Plan responds to and is built on the Board's vision, mission, and values. The plan framework includes seven elements:

- **Mission.** The core responsibilities of the WCB.
- **Vision.** WCB's preferred future.
- **Values.** Axioms and descriptive attributes.
- **Guiding Principles.** High-level directives and priorities.
- **Goals.** Focus areas of WCB activity.
- **Performance Measures.** Indicators to gauge WCB success.
- **Strategic Directions.** WCB initiatives and directions for change.

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 conservation groups, government agencies and the people of California.

WCB Vision

The Wildlife Conservation Board is the lead State government 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

The following WCB values guide Board policies and actions:

Science-Based Decision-Making. Our policies and actions reflect the best available conservation science.

Ecosystem Health and Diversity. We believe that maximizing ecosystem health and diversity of the natural world is paramount to everything we do.

Access to Nature. We believe that all Californians deserve access to nature and wildlife-oriented recreation experiences, and believe this to be especially important for young people and urban and low-income communities.

Collaborative Conservation. We work collaboratively, leveraging our relationships and building capacity for local stewardship.

Lasting Results. We strive for tangible, sustainable projects that withstand the test of time.

Innovation. We embrace innovation and entrepreneurial ideas with a willingness to take calculated risks in fulfillment of WCB's conservation vision.

Public Accountability and Transparency. We ensure public understanding of WCB practices, priorities and investments.

WCB Guiding Principles

WCB operates according to the following guiding principles:

- We evaluate investment opportunities and outcomes proactively, leveraging the knowledge and resources of our many valued partners;
- We balance investments in priority landscapes with smaller-scale partnerships of local and regional significance;
- We build community capacity for conservation by empowering landowners to protect and enhance valuable habitat on their lands and share their success with others;
- We create opportunities for meaningful wildlife-oriented recreation experiences, which inspire Californians across the State to serve as conservation stewards;
- We advance the art and science of habitat conservation and management by holding partners and recipients of State resources to high standards; and
- We anticipate changing conditions and circumstances and plan for the long-term needs of wildlife communities and future generations of Californians.

Goals and Performance Measures

The WCB Strategic Plan is organized around five major goal areas. The first three Strategic Plan goals include WCB “mission goals”, which relate directly to fulfilling WCB’s stated mission. The final goals are supporting goals; without this focus, achieving the organization’s mission would not be possible. The five goal areas are:

- A. Environmental Protection and Conservation
- B. Environmental Restoration and Enhancement
- C. Public Use and Enjoyment
- D. Public Awareness, Education and Support
- E. Organizational Effectiveness and Financial Health

Goal A. Environmental Protection and Conservation

Acquire and invest in wildlife habitat and natural areas with an eye towards long-term, landscape level conservation, habitat quality and connectivity, and the success of wildlife species and populations.

Performance Measures:

- Number of acres protected and conserved
- Number of acres of priority landscapes preserved
- Diversity of ecosystems protected
- Percent of critical habitats protected

Goal B. Environmental Restoration and Enhancement

Work with partners to restore and enhance natural areas, create valuable habitat on working lands, manage adaptively, and ensure long-term ecosystem health.

Performance Measures:

- Number of acres restored/enhanced (total)
- Number of acres restored/enhanced (by habitat type)
- Ecosystem health as defined by such attributes as species stability, diversity, resilience, abundance and sustainability

Goal C. 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.

Performance Measures:

- Number of wildlife-oriented recreation projects by recreation type
- Visitation rates (by geography and demographics)
- Level of recreational activity with "no degradation" of environmental resources

Goal D. Public Awareness, Education and Support

Raise public awareness of key conservation issues and goals, and educate and support local land agencies and private landowners in protecting and enhancing habitat.

Performance Measures:

- Number of mentions in print and broadcast media
- Number of website "hits"
- Increased presence on social media channels

Goal E. Organizational Effectiveness and Financial Health

Ensure effective internal systems and organization and ensure that WCB has sufficient resources to achieve its long-term vision.

Performance Measures:

- Depth of staff and expertise
- Funding stability and sustainability
- Ratio of overhead to program dollars
- Leveraging of grant program funds including non-State funds
- Relative project benefits to project costs

Chapter 4. Strategic Directions

Goal A. Environmental Protection and Conservation

Acquire and invest in wildlife habitat and natural areas with an eye towards long-term, landscape level conservation, habitat quality and connectivity, and the success of wildlife species and populations.

Performance Measures:

- Number of acres protected and conserved
- Number of acres of priority landscapes preserved
- Diversity of ecosystems protected
- Percent of critical habitats protected

Strategic Directions:

- A.1 Invest a defined portion of WCB funds in State-wide designated priority landscapes and projects.
- A.2 Articulate State and regional ecosystem priorities and document and describe the methodology that WCB uses to identify high-priority landscapes and acquisitions, drawing on key planning documents (Natural Community Conservation Plans, Habitat Conservation Plans, Conceptual Area Protection Plans, State Wildlife Action Plans, etc.)
- A.3 Strengthen grant processes to further highlight the importance of the following factors in project design and selection: climate change adaptation, ecosystem services, and compatible public use and access.
- A.4 Improve transparency of WCB and CDFW project evaluation and recommendations to approve or deny applications.
- A.5 Consolidate acquisition application processes and ensure that WCB project evaluation is unified across programs.
- A.6 Increase WCB participation in Statewide planning processes such as the Statewide Action Plan and Joint Venture Implementation Plans (i.e., San Francisco Bay, Central Valley, etc.).

Goal B. Environmental Restoration and Enhancement

Work with partners to restore and enhance natural areas, create valuable habitat on working lands, manage adaptively, and ensure long-term ecosystem health.

Performance Measures:

- Number of acres restored/enhanced (total)
- Number of acres restored/enhanced (by habitat type)
- Ecosystem health as defined by such attributes as species stability, diversity, resilience, abundance and sustainability

Strategic Directions:

- B.1 Document and describe the strategy and methodology that WCB uses to identify high-priority restoration projects, drawing on key planning documents.
- B.2 Strengthen grant processes to further highlight the importance of the following factors in project design and restoration: climate change adaptation, ecosystem services, and compatible public use and access.
- B.3 Utilize best practices in restoration, drawing on innovations and adaptations in management and advances in ecological science.
- B.4 Expand project monitoring and evaluation of restoration activities and assess long-term project success, moving beyond compliance monitoring.
- B.5 Require that grantees conduct monitoring of WCB-funded projects and work with CDFW to design and establish monitoring requirements and protocols.

Goal C. Public Use, Enjoyment and Support

Leverage WCB's investments in programs and projects by expanding opportunities for outdoor wildlife-oriented recreation that are compatible with conservation goals.

Performance Measures:

- Number of wildlife-oriented recreation projects by recreation type
- Visitation rates (by geography and demographics)
- Level of recreational activity with "no degradation" of environmental resources

Strategic Directions:

- C.1 Support a wide range of recreational activity without degrading environmental resources including but not limited to hiking, camping, hunting, fishing, birding, etc.
- C.2 Document and describe public access project evaluation and selection processes.
- C.3 Require grantees to report on public visitation rates.
- C.4 Coordinate with CDFW, State Parks, State conservancies and other organizations regarding visitor needs and levels of satisfaction.
- C.5 Identify public access projects to address the recreational needs of youth and disadvantaged communities.
- C.6 Standardize existing project monitoring protocols to facilitate consistent reporting and improved performance management.
- C.7 For WCB conservation easements, refine project scoring and selection processes to encourage compatible public access on private lands (e.g., landowner participation in the Shared Habitat Alliance for Recreational Enhancement, or SHARE, and similar programs).

Goal D. Public Awareness, Education and Support

Raise public awareness of key conservation issues and goals, and educate and support local land agencies and private landowners in protecting and enhancing habitat.

Performance Measures:

- Number of mentions in print and broadcast media
- Number of website “hits”
- Increased presence on social media channels

Strategic Directions:

- D.1 Prepare and implement an outreach and communications plan to increase public awareness and understanding of WCB.
- D.2 Ensure that WCB’s project ranking and rationale for project selection is clear and transparent to the public.
- D.3 Expand the use of online social media and the WCB website to publicize WCB partnerships, accomplishments and activities in accordance with State policies for the use of such media.
- D.4 Expand use of traditional outreach methods, including WCB participation in conferences, community meetings and events.
- D.5 Set aside a portion of WCB funds to implement large-scale State-wide conservation goals through a competitive grant-making process.
- D.6 Upgrade the scope and content of the annual report to include project case studies, success stories and lessons learned.
- D.7 Improve WCB signage including brand recognition, messaging and legibility.
- D.8 Create a regularly updated WCB “scorecard” to share information related to WCB project types and numbers, project approval rates, and the conservation impact of WCB investments.
- D.9 Build staff capacity in communications and hire new in-house staff or redirect existing resources to create a position.

Goal E. Organizational Effectiveness and Financial Health

Ensure effective internal systems and organization and ensure that WCB has sufficient resources to achieve its long-term vision.

Performance Measures:

- Depth of staff and expertise
- Funding stability and sustainability
- Ratio of overhead to program dollars
- Leveraging of grant program funds including non-State funds
- Relative project benefits to project costs

Strategic Directions:

- E.1 Increase WCB capacity to conduct smaller-scale real estate appraisals and transactions.
- E.2 Formalize project partnerships with non-profits and others that support long-term project management and cost recovery; assign staff liaisons to coordinate activities with WCB partners.
- E.3 Explore possibilities for diversifying and increasing WCB revenue sources (such as financial loans and cap and trade, among others).
- E.4 Maximize expenditure of remaining bond funds and identify opportunities to leverage existing funds as effectively as possible.
- E.5 Set aside a percentage of WCB funds for significant priority landscapes as determined by CDFW.
- E.6 Ensure that best practices are applied in all real estate transactions.
- E.7 Create set-asides and/or require grantees to fund project monitoring, evaluation and adaptive management and advocate for authorizing legislation.
- E.8 Determine a strategy to recoup WCB costs associated with federal grants.

Chapter 5. Implementing Actions

Implementing Actions

This chapter outlines three high-level actions that WCB will pursue in Strategic Plan implementation. Implementing actions complement and support the strategic directions presented in Chapter Four.

1. Conservation Summit

In collaboration with conservation partners, WCB will convene a summit to define and discuss the future of conservation, examine current science, and outline WCB's long-term conservation strategy. During Strategic Plan development, stakeholders routinely noted the need to define WCB's role in establishing and implementing a larger conservation vision for the State and to coordinate meaningfully with other entities, public and private. A key objective of the summit is to identify how conservation entities can achieve greater collective conservation impact through the strategic application of their relative skills, strengths and resources. CDFW would be a co-organizer and lead partner in this effort. The summit would include leaders in the fields of environmental policy, conservation science and outdoor recreation.

2. Comprehensive Program Review

In light of summit results, WCB will review, analyze and provide direction on its many programs to determine how programs should best go forward. Current WCB programs were established over time in response to specific conservation needs; all are critically important. Now, in light of an emerging State-wide conservation vision, it is prudent to examine these programs and identify potential new direction. Topics to explore include the potential benefits and drawbacks of re-organizing or consolidating and the legislative proposals required to modify WCB programs based on this strategic analysis.

3. Ongoing Strategic Planning

WCB will continue strategic planning on an ongoing basis, drawing on evaluation of results achieved, emerging trends in conservation science and management, and understanding of the challenges of conservation State-wide. WCB will build its in-house capacity to advance the State-wide conservation vision through its ongoing strategic activities.

Appendix B: Detailed Action Plans (*to come*) outline the specific steps needed to advance both the strategic directions and implementing actions of this plan.

Appendix A. WCB Bond Funds

WCB Bond Funds

Bond Name and Brief Description	WCB Funds	Funded WCB Programs and Activities	Authority/Enabling Legislation
<p>Proposition 12: The Safe Neighborhood Parks, Clean Water, Clean Air, and Coastal Protection Bond Fund</p> <p>For appropriation by the State Legislature for parks and resources improvements.</p>	<p>Includes a continuous appropriation to WCB of \$38 million and \$227.5 million upon appropriation from the Legislature for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- Acquisition, development, rehabilitation, restoration, and protection of real property benefiting fish and wildlife. -- 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. 	<p>WCB allocates these funds to eligible recipients for appropriate and qualified projects under the following programs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- Land Acquisition -- Public Access -- Habitat Enhancement and Restoration -- Inland Wetlands Conservation -- California Riparian Habitat Conservation 	<p>Public Resources Code Section 5096.310 <i>et seq.</i></p>
<p>Proposition 40: The California Clean Water, Clean Air, Safe Neighborhood Parks, and Coastal Protection Act of 2002</p> <p>For appropriation by the State Legislature for acquisition and development projects.</p>	<p>Includes a continuous appropriation to WCB of \$300 million for habitat protection (fee and conservation easements), restoration and development of wildlife-related public recreational opportunities.</p>	<p>WCB allocates these funds to eligible recipients for appropriate and qualified projects under the following programs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- Land Acquisition -- Public Access -- Habitat Enhancement and Restoration -- Inland Wetlands Conservation -- California Riparian Habitat Conservation -- Oak Woodlands Conservation -- Rangeland, Grazing Land and Grassland Protection -- Natural Heritage Preservation Tax Credit 	<p>Public Resources Code Section 5096.610 <i>et seq.</i></p>
<p>Proposition 50: Water Security, Clean Drinking Water, Coastal and Beach Protection Fund of 2002</p> <p>For appropriation by the State legislature to protect California's water supply and protect coastal wetlands and watersheds.</p>	<p>Includes a continuous appropriation to WCB of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - \$140 million for acquisition of land and water resources, including easements - \$750 million to acquire, protect and restore coastal wetlands, adjacent uplands, and coastal watershed lands. <p>Includes \$50 million for appropriation to WCB to meet State obligations related to California's allocation of Colorado River water supplies.</p>	<p>WCB allocates these funds to eligible recipients for appropriate and qualified projects under the following programs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- Land Acquisition -- Habitat Enhancement and Restoration -- California Riparian Habitat Conservation -- Natural Heritage Preservation Tax Credit 	<p>Water Code Section 79510 <i>et seq.</i></p>
<p>Proposition 84: Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Act of 2006</p> <p>For appropriation by the State Legislature to ensure safe drinking water and reliable supply, as well as to protect California's rivers, lakes, streams beaches, bays and coastal waters.</p>	<p>Includes a continuous appropriation to WCB of \$180 million for forest conservation and protection and \$135 million to implement the recommendations of the California Comprehensive Wildlife Strategy.</p> <p>Includes \$125 million upon appropriation by the Legislature as follows: \$90 million for Natural Community Conservation Plans; \$15 million for the Rangeland; Grazing Land and Grassland Protection Program; \$15 million for the Oak Woodlands Conservation Program; and \$5 million for the Ecosystem Restoration on Agricultural Lands Program.</p>	<p>WCB allocates these funds to eligible recipients for appropriate and qualified projects under the following programs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- Natural Heritage Preservation Tax Credit -- Land Acquisition -- Habitat Enhancement and Restoration -- California Riparian Habitat Conservation -- Oak Woodlands Conservation -- Rangeland, Grazing Land and Grassland Protection -- Forest Conservation -- Ecosystem Restoration on Agricultural Lands (ERAL) 	<p>Public Resources Code Section 75001 <i>et seq.</i></p>
<p>Proposition 1E: Disaster Preparedness and Flood Prevention Bond Act of 2006</p> <p>For appropriation by the State Legislature to to rebuild and repair California's most vulnerable flood control structures to protect homes and prevent loss of life from flood-related disasters.</p>	<p>Transfer item to the Habitat Conservation Fund and upon appropriation by the Legislature for the protection, creation, and enhancement of flood protection corridors and bypasses.</p>	<p>WCB allocates these funds to eligible recipients for appropriate and qualified projects under the following programs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- Land Acquisition -- Habitat Enhancement and Restoration -- California Riparian Habitat Conservation -- Inland Wetlands Conservation 	<p>Public Resources Code 5096.820 <i>et seq.</i></p>

Appendix B. Detailed Action Plans

Detailed action plans will be developed to correspond with plan strategic directions.