

California Wildlife Conservation Board

STRATEGIC PLAN

2014

DRAFT PLAN FOR PUBLIC REVIEW

DECEMBER 18, 2013

Prepared by:
WCB Staff and MIG, Inc.

Draft Strategic Plan is available online at: www.wcb.ca.gov/

Survey questionnaire about the draft Strategic Plan is online at: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/Wildlifeconservationsurvey>

Three public workshops will be held in January 2014 to discuss the draft Strategic Plan:

- Ontario: Tues, Jan 14, 2014, 7:00-9:00pm @ DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Ontario Airport, Strawberry Peak Room, 222 North Vineyard Avenue, Ontario, CA 91764
- San Jose: Wed, Jan 15, 2014, 7:00-9:00pm @ Holiday Inn San Jose Airport, Salon H, 1350 North 1st Street, San Jose, CA 95112
- Redding: Thurs, Jan 16, 2014, 7:00-9:00pm @ The McConnell Foundation, Headquarters Building, 800 Shasta View Drive, Redding, CA 96003

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I. Introduction

I. Introduction

The California Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) is a separate and independent body of the State within the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW, formerly the Department of Fish and Game). The California legislature created the Board in 1947 to conserve California's wildlife resources and provide for suitable public recreation. As a result of its successful performance, WCB's role has expanded throughout its 65 years of service.

In addition to fulfilling its original purposes, WCB is now also responsible for implementing a variety of legislative and voter-approved conservation programs statewide. 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 to protect wildlife habitats. WCB programs fund critical work of conservation partners throughout California, and focus primarily on acquisition of lands to conserve wildlife habitats (fee title and conservation easements), wildlife habitat restoration and enhancement, and development of wildlife-oriented public access facilities.

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. With these funds, WCB has successfully helped acquire and restore more than 1.5 million acres of essential 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. All of these activities contributed to listed species recovery, wildlife habitat integrity, and public enjoyment of the State's natural resources.

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 effectiveness 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 Act 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 expanded over the years in two ways. Board allocations once focused primarily on property acquisition and wildlife-oriented recreation. Today, the majority of WCB program funds are granted to a variety of organizations, agencies and landowners invested in conservation. Second, once dedicated to activities supporting fish and game management and creating public access for fishing and hunting, WCB today focuses on habitat conservation and restoration, and is tasked 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. Since then, the State legislature and California voters have played a more prominent role

1 The Wildlife Conservation Law of 1947 (Fish and Game Code section 1300, et seq.)

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 each from the State Assembly and the State Senate.

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

Wildlife Conservation Law of 1947

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

- Established WCB authority to acquire, sell, exchange and otherwise transfer real property, property interests, and property and water rights;
- Codified many of the Board's essential partnerships, including its relationship with CDFW, among others; and
- 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, to some degree, all of the Board's ten mandated programs and provides funding for the Board's acquisitions and restoration activities. In addition, the Act created two statewide programs:

The *Inland Wetlands Conservation Program* was added to assist the Central Valley Joint Venture in its activities. The mission of the Central Valley Joint Venture 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 Program* 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, preserving, and restoring the State's riparian ecosystems.

Additional Authorities

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* mandated and authorized WCB to establish a grant program designed specifically to protect and restore oak 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, the purpose of which is to protect California's rangeland and grassland resources through the use of conservation easements.

For a complete list of WCB programs and authorizing legislation, see **Table A: WCB Program Overview** and **Appendix A: WCB Bond Funds**.

Looking Ahead

With the depletion of bond resources, WCB is moving into an era of limited resources. This transition is occurring during a time characterized by conservation threats and challenges that are equally serious, and arguably more complex, than those of decades past. This strategic plan allows WCB to focus its use of limited resources on statewide priority conservation objectives and activities such as offsetting the impacts of climate change, securing limited water resources for fish and wildlife, continuing recovery of threatened and endangered species through implementation of Natural Community Conservation Plans, and expanding wildlife-oriented public use opportunities.

THE GEOGRAPHY OF CONSERVATION: WCB PROJECT SELECTION

WCB works cooperatively with CDFW and other partners to protect, restore and enhance lands of critical conservation value across the State. CDFW is organized according to seven 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. In addition, WCB accepts applications on a continuous basis for its public access, restoration, forest, oak woodlands, rangeland and tax credit programs. These applications are evaluated according to Board-approved guidelines and consultation with CDFW. WCB project selection is also informed by other statewide and regional plans and initiatives, including but not limited to:

- California's State Wildlife Action Plan
- Natural Community Conservation Plans / Habitat Conservation Plans
- The California Natural Resources Agency's Climate Adaptation Strategy
- North American Waterfowl Management Plan Joint Ventures
- Baylands Ecosystem Habitat Goals
- Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project
- The Statewide Flood Management Planning Program
- CDFW land acquisition evaluations (LAEs)
- 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

WCB strives to advance conservation priorities and remain open and responsive to 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 passion for the outdoors.

WCB administers ten distinct programs through which it acquires land and property interests and restores and enhances wildlife habitat and provides wildlife-oriented public access. The following programs complement one another and together help advance California's statewide 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, conservation 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, and 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, restoring and enhancing wetlands and associated habitats in the Central Valley.
- **California Riparian Habitat Conservation Program.** WCB provides grants to protect and restore riparian habitat and ecosystems statewide.
- **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 conservation easement).
- **Oak Woodlands Conservation Program.** WCB makes grants to acquire conservation easements, restore oak woodlands and support public education and outreach to encourage long-term conservation of California's oak trees and woodlands.
- **Rangeland, Grazing Land and Grassland Protection Program.** WCB acquires and makes grants to acquire conservation 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 in property, 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 grants and long-term management plans and agreements.

Existing law outlines how current WCB program funds can be allocated and used. Board conservation activities and grants are almost entirely funded by the Wildlife Restoration Fund, the Habitat Conservation Fund and various State bond funds. **Appendix A: WCB Bond Funds** provides an overview of all relevant bond acts.

Table A provides a summary account of all current WCB programs and identifies eligible grant applicants (where applicable), primary funding sources, and the legislative authority for program implementation.

Table A: WCB Program Overview

Program Purpose and Brief Description	Implementation Methods	Eligible 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 and make grants to facilitate acquisitions by others.</p>	<p>Requires willing seller, CDFW biological assessment of resource values and recommendation for acquisition of real property (fee title or interests) and water rights by means of gifts, purchases, leases, easements, transfer or exchange of property, transfer of development rights or credits, and purchases of other interests in real property.</p>	<p>Federal, state, and local government entities (including special districts and joint powers authorities) and nonprofit organizations</p>	<p>Authority: Administered pursuant to the Board’s original authorizing legislation, the Wildlife Conservation Law of 1947; Fish and Game Code (FGC) Sec. 1300 <i>et seq.</i></p> <p>Funding: Wildlife Restoration Fund; Habitat Conservation Fund; and various bond funds.</p>
<p>Public Access (est. 1947)</p> <p>Develop facilities for public access to hunting, fishing, or other wildlife-oriented recreation.</p>	<p>Financial assistance for facility development.</p> <p>Agreement to ensure long-term management and maintenance of improvements.</p>	<p>Federal, state, and local government entities (including special districts and joint powers authorities) and nonprofit organizations</p>	<p>Authority: Wildlife Conservation Law of 1947; FGC Sec. 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 or enhance 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 eligible restoration and enhancement projects that fall outside the Board’s other mandated programs.</p>	<p>Grants to restore or enhance habitat; applicants can request funds under open filing process.</p>	<p>Federal, state, and local government entities (including special districts and joint powers authorities) and nonprofit organizations</p>	<p>Authority: Wildlife Protection Act of 1990; FGC Sec. 2780 <i>et seq.</i></p> <p>Funding: Habitat Conservation Fund and various bond funds</p>

Table A continues on next page

Table A: WCB Program Overview (continued)

Program Purpose and Brief Description	Implementation Methods	Eligible Applicants	Authority/Enabling Legislation, Funding and Related Programs
<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 request funds under open filing process.</p> <p>Acquire property directly or through grants (fee title, interests or water rights.)</p>	<p>State and local government entities (including special districts and joint powers authorities) and nonprofit organizations described in 26 U.S.C. Section 501(c)</p>	<p>Authority: Inland Wetlands Conservation Program; FGC Sec. 1400 <i>et seq.</i></p> <p>Funding: Habitat Conservation Fund, Inland Wetlands Conservation Fund and various bond funds.</p> <p>Related Program: Central Valley Habitat Joint Venture</p>
<p>California Riparian Habitat Conservation Program (est. 1991)</p> <p>Develop coordinated conservation efforts aimed at protecting, preserving and restoring the State’s riparian ecosystems.</p>	<p>Grants to restore habitat; applicants can request funds 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 powers authorities) and nonprofit conservation organizations qualified for exempt status under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code</p>	<p>Authority: California Riparian Habitat Conservation Act; FGC Sec. 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>

II. The California Conservation Landscape: Key Trends and Strategic Issues

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KEY TRENDS

California encompasses one of the most biologically diverse regions in the world, and is one of only five 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.² The following summary reflects key trends in conservation with implications for WCB programs and activities.

Future Climate Impacts to Wildlife and Their Habitats

Californians today are faced with many challenges and phenomena associated with the changing climate. Increasingly, conservation entities are working to address the biodiversity and habitat impacts of climate change. Climate change analysis and research have focused on many of the bioregions across the State, resulting in the development of potential conservation methods and strategies to allow species to adapt and survive. Within the Governor’s draft plan “Safeguarding California Plan to Ready the State for Impacts of Changing Climate”, safeguards for wildlife include conserving habitat connectivity and improving forest and other habitat resilience.

There is a recognized need to protect coastal ecosystems and their watersheds to allow species to move, migrate, and adapt to sea level rise and precipitation and temperature changes in these areas. In addition, protection of habitat corridors and linkages will allow species to migrate and move between lower and higher elevations to adapt to temperature changes. As an example,

² California Natural Resources Agency. 2009 California Climate Adaptation Strategy. Chapter V: Biodiversity and Habitat. Introduction (p. 45).

protection of the California Cascade region landscape is highly important because this bioregion will provide resilience and critical wildlife refugia from the impacts of climate change.

Natural Community Conservation Plans (NCCPs)

NCCPs are developed based on State law and administered by CDFW. They provide the best examples within the State of regional conservation planning and prioritization of habitat protection for multiple natural communities and threatened and endangered species. Currently there are nine plans in place, with another 17 in the development process. Over the past 13 years, WCB has been instrumental in helping fund habitat protection within these plan areas, and will place a continued emphasis on funding priority projects associated with these plans. NCCPs are also an important method for attracting and leveraging federal conservation funding.

Protection and Conservation of Water Resources for Fish and Wildlife

Water quality and supply will continue to be a major concern and consideration in future planning and growth of the State and will have an impact on the protection of wildlife species and habitats, as these uses compete for limited water supplies. WCB's focused investment on projects that help protect, conserve and enhance water supplies will be paramount in the future sustainability of ecosystems and survival of fish and wildlife species in the State.

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.³ Development of new infrastructure to accommodate this growth along with conversion of land will increasingly place significant stress on wildlife and ecosystems. Housing and commercial development, as well as other land use decisions adverse to wildlife habitat, will exacerbate habitat loss and fragmentation. Agricultural lands are converting to less wildlife-friendly crops. Investments to protect wildlife habitat will become increasingly important as the threats of these classic stressors increase in step with economic and population growth.

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

Roles of Non-governmental Partners

California resource and conservation agencies increasingly look to non-governmental partners to help address conservation planning and resource management needs. The roles of non-governmental partners have expanded in recent decades to include conservation planning, implementation, resource management and monitoring. Looking forward, their importance for conservation cannot be underestimated. Non-governmental partners providing technical assistance, financial incentives, and a collaborative spirit are necessary to achieve on-the-ground results.

Scrutiny over Public Expenditures

Scrutiny over the use of public resources and decision processes has increased in recent years, particularly as funding dwindles. Californians have played a vital hand in dedicating funding to conservation and demand greater agency transparency than in decades past, including better public information about conservation activities, outcomes and lessons learned.

Increasing Use of Conservation 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 to increased use of conservation easements to prohibit or limit development of lands in the long-term. The use of these 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 conservation 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 are important for many and will remain a priority for WCB. Ensuring widespread access to nature at little or no-cost is 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

WCB Board members, WCB Management Team and staff, and conservation partners have identified the following topics as fundamental to WCB's ability to fulfill its mission.

The State's Conservation Vision

There is a need for WCB to help identify a strategy for conservation of California's valuable landscapes and ecosystems. WCB's strong reputation and credibility are assets in the process of evaluating priorities and building agreement around a long-term vision and plan of action. Through this process, WCB has the opportunity to provide greater clarity with respect to its own role in implementing high-priority conservation projects for the State.

Future Role of WCB

WCB should consider a more proactive role in conservation planning and implementation. Major conservation threats and issues to address comprehensively through WCB's work include but are not limited to impacts of climate change; availability of water for fish and wildlife; protection of the State's biodiversity; control of invasive species; protection of valuable landscapes from conversion and fragmentation; and preservation of wildlife movement and migration corridors. Rising to this challenge will require a strategic approach to project selection, in-house expertise, continued intergovernmental coordination and support for partner agencies as they work to achieve their own conservation objectives.

Project Evaluation and Selection

WCB's programmatic emphasis to address conservation threats and protect wildlife habitat has evolved over time, and this evolution continues today. While WCB programs and project selection processes are driven largely by State-level mandates, there is opportunity and a need to be more strategic when choosing projects to fund. Despite the many high quality applications that WCB receives, it will need to focus its project selection towards the State's changing conservation needs.

Conservation science and best practices must continue to influence WCB acquisitions and selection of conservation, recreation and restoration projects. Moreover, the process used to evaluate projects must be transparent, deliberate, and clearly defined. Conservation partners call on WCB to articulate its priorities, share the results of project evaluation processes, and communicate the effect of its investments.

Monitoring and Adaptive Management

Monitoring and adaptive management is a critical component of ensuring that State investments are resulting in sustainable conservation benefit. Monitoring is equally critical to WCB's ability to describe its successes and articulate and share lessons learned. WCB will leverage partnerships to advance the monitoring and adaptive management of the projects it funds.

Long-Term, Stable Funding

State bond funds and conservation resources are dwindling. 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. Additional funding will be necessary for WCB to continue its proactive collaboration with CDFW and other conservation partners. Public support for bond and other State funding will be needed; therefore, it will be important to articulate the public benefits of WCB conservation actions.

Communications and Outreach

WCB could benefit from a clear communications and outreach strategy, and a broader sharing of information around WCB priority setting, project ranking, and funding decision-making. Fostering new and lasting partnerships, raising awareness about both WCB and partner accomplishments, and maintaining a constituency and securing additional funds are all desired outcomes.

III. Strategic Plan Framework

III. Strategic Plan Framework

FRAMEWORK OVERVIEW

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

- **Mission.** The core responsibilities of WCB.
- **Vision.** WCB's preferred future.
- **Values.** Shared beliefs that reflect what WCB considers significant or important.
- **Guiding Principles.** Rules of conduct that guide day-to-day operations and decision-making.
- **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. We adopt policies and take actions that 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 all Californians deserve access to nature and wildlife-oriented recreation experiences, and strive to reach young people and urban and under-served communities.

Collaborative Conservation. We work collaboratively, leveraging our relationships and building capacity for stewardship within the conservation community.

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 focus on** statewide habitat conservation priorities and priority landscapes while allowing flexibility for conservation projects 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 ourselves, our conservation partners and recipients of State resources to high standards;
- **We anticipate changing conditions** and circumstances and plan for the long-term needs of wildlife communities and future generations of Californians; and
- **We coordinate** with conservation partners across all sectors and regions to achieve lasting results.

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:

1. Environmental Protection and Conservation
2. Environmental Restoration and Enhancement
3. Public Use and Enjoyment
4. Public Awareness and Education
5. Fiscal and Organizational Effectiveness

Potential performance measures reflect current agency thinking and direction for evaluation of program and project effectiveness. One of the Strategic Plan's implementing actions will be to develop this system of performance measurement in greater detail.

Goal A. Environmental Protection and Conservation

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

Potential Performance Measures:

- Number of acres of priority landscapes preserved
- Types of habitats protected
- Geographic distribution of funding
- Reported changes in species populations

Goal B. Environmental Restoration and Enhancement

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

Potential Performance Measures:

- Number of acres restored/enhanced (by habitat type)
- Reported changes in ecosystem health of restored/enhanced areas, as defined by such attributes as species stability, diversity, resilience, abundance and sustainability

Goal C. Public Use and Enjoyment

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

Potential 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 and Education

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

Potential Performance Measures:

- Number of WCB-funded projects that include a stewardship or public education and outreach component
- Number of conservation partners engaged in WCB projects and programs
- Increased WCB participation in local, regional and statewide meetings and events
- Increased presence in print, broadcast and social media channels

Goal E. Fiscal and Organizational Effectiveness

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

Potential Performance Measures:

- Ratio of overhead to program dollars
- Leveraging of grant program funds including non-State funds
- Timely project delivery
- Depth of staff expertise

IV. Strategic Directions

IV. Strategic Directions

GOAL A. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND CONSERVATION

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

Potential Performance Measures:

- Number of acres of priority landscapes preserved
- Types of habitats protected
- Geographic distribution of funding
- Reported changes in species populations

Primary Objectives:

- Focus habitat protection on statewide conservation priorities, including projects and landscape areas that help offset the impacts of climate change or provide conservation of water resources for fish and terrestrial wildlife.
- Continue funding the implementation of Natural Community Conservation Plans and recovery of species.

Goal A – Strategic Directions	
A.1	Invest a portion of funding on projects and landscape areas that help offset the impacts of climate change.
	WCB will place greater emphasis and target a portion of its investments on projects and landscapes that clearly support and help offset the impacts of climate change, including projects that allow migration and movement of species, provide for habitat connectivity, help offset impacts of sea level rise on coastal areas, or are located in regions where climate models indicate wildlife can best adapt to future changes, such as the Sierra Nevada and Klamath Cascade regions of the State. Amend program guidelines to allow greater focus and emphasis on these types of projects in the evaluation and selection process. The verification of climate benefits would be based on CDFW review and collaboration with other agencies and partners with adopted plans and strategies for offsetting the impacts of climate change on wildlife.
A.2	Invest a portion of funding on projects and landscapes that conserve, protect or enhance water resources for fish and wildlife.
	WCB will place greater emphasis and target a portion of its investments towards projects and landscapes that help conserve, protect or enhance water resources for fish and wildlife, including watersheds supporting salmonid species, wetland areas supporting migratory waterfowl and riparian corridors, and high mountain meadows supporting threatened and endangered species. Amend program guidelines to allow greater focus and emphasis on these types of projects in the evaluation and selection process. The verification of benefits would be based on CDFW review and collaboration with other agencies and partners with adopted plans and strategies to conserve water resources and aquatic, wetland and riparian habitat.
A.3	Invest a portion of funding on projects that support the implementation of Natural Community Conservation Plans and recovery of listed species.
	WCB will continue to devote a portion of its funding that supports implementation of Natural Community Conservation Plans and recovery of listed species.

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Goal A – Strategic Directions (continued)	
A.4	Invest in priority conservation projects recommended under CDFW’s acquisition evaluation process or within other regional conservation plans supported by CDFW.
	WCB will continue investments in regional priority projects supported by CDFW to take advantage of opportunities to acquire properties that support important species and habitats from willing landowners.
A.5	Improve transparency of WCB and CDFW project evaluation and recommendations to approve or deny applications.
	Project selection and implementation require frequent communication and close coordination of CDFW and WCB. WCB will document the collaborative decision-making process, and provide greater transparency in the evaluation and selection of projects to promote better understanding of grant processes.
A.6	Coordinate acquisition application processes to ensure that WCB project evaluation is unified across programs to the fullest possible extent.
	Currently, grant applications differ depending on the program under which a proposal falls. WCB will apply a coordinated set of evaluation criteria across programs, in addition to program-specific criteria.

GOAL B. ENVIRONMENTAL RESTORATION AND ENHANCEMENT

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

Potential Performance Measures:

- Number of acres restored/enhanced (by habitat type)
- Reported changes in ecosystem health of restored/enhanced areas, as defined by such attributes as species stability, diversity, resilience, abundance and sustainability

Primary Objective:

- Achieve measurable improvements to ecosystem health through WCB-funded projects and programs.

Goal B – Strategic Directions	
B.1	Invest in projects and landscape areas that help offset the impacts of climate change, enhance water resources for fish and wildlife and enhance habitats on working lands.
	WCB will place greater emphasis and target a portion of its investments on projects to restore wildlife habitat that support migration and movement of species, help offset impacts of sea level rise in coastal areas and coastal watersheds, or are located in regions where climate models indicate wildlife can best adapt to future changes; restore wetlands, riparian corridors, and habitats for anadromous salmonids; and enhance wildlife habitats on working farms, ranches and forests.
B.2	Strengthen the grant application to further highlight the importance of the following factors in project design and selection: climate change adaptation, ecosystem services, water sufficiency, and compatible public use and access.
	WCB will amend grant applications to ensure that proposals are responsive to emerging conservation issues, opportunities and best available science. WCB will increase participation in and support of regional efforts, including but not limited to the Central Valley and San Francisco Bay Joint Ventures, Riparian Habitat Joint Venture, Southern California Wetland Recovery Project, Fisheries Restoration Grant Program, and watershed planning efforts.
B.3	Improve transparency of WCB and CDFW project evaluation and recommendations to approve or deny applications.
	Project selection and implementation require frequent communication and close coordination of CDFW, WCB and our partners. WCB will document the collaborative decision-making process, and provide greater transparency in the evaluation and selection of projects to promote better understanding of grant processes.
B.4	Expand project monitoring and evaluation of restoration activities to assess long-term project success, moving beyond compliance monitoring.
	WCB will monitor the effectiveness of its restoration projects in achieving conservation goals and objectives. Monitoring will be based on clear conservation goals and objectives, and will measure the impact of WCB investments and inform future actions.
B.5	Provide opportunities for greater public involvement in restoration projects.
	WCB will work with partners and encourage grantees to build an ethic of stewardship among local communities, in large part by funding projects which promote community participation in restoration activities.

GOAL C. PUBLIC USE AND ENJOYMENT

Invest in programs and projects that provide opportunities for outdoor wildlife-oriented recreation that promote enjoyment of California’s natural resources.

Potential 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

Primary Objective:

- Increase potential public use opportunities on WCB-funded projects compared to 2014 levels.

Goal C – Strategic Directions	
C.1	Support a wide range of recreational activity without degrading environmental resources including but not limited to hunting, fishing, birding, hiking, camping, etc.
	Wildlife-oriented recreation is a critical component of the WCB mission. This strategy is central to WCB’s mission to provide wildlife-oriented recreation experiences for the people of California. WCB will continue to support a diversity of outdoor recreation activities that can be enjoyed without degrading environmental resources, and will evaluate its current approach to ensure its investments target all appropriate recreation uses.
C.2	Document and describe public access project evaluation and selection processes.
	Consistent with strategic directions in resource protection and restoration, WCB will improve transparency around recreation-focused project selection.
C.3	Standardize existing project monitoring protocols to facilitate consistent reporting and improved performance management.
	WCB will compile data around facility and site use, user demographics, satisfaction levels, and opportunities for improvement. These data will be used on a programmatic level and inform site-specific decisions.
C.4	Place greater emphasis on the acquisition of lands that can accommodate compatible wildlife-oriented public uses, and support urban areas and under-served communities.
	As California continues to grow and develop, public access to the State’s natural areas will likely remain limited. WCB will place a high priority on those projects which promote access for under-served communities and youth and complement other public access programs such as CDFW’s SHARE program. Consider appropriateness of developing a program to solicit proposals and award funding in support of this direction.

GOAL D. PUBLIC AWARENESS AND EDUCATION

Raise public awareness and educate conservation partners and private landowners about WCB conservation programs and goals.

Potential Performance Measures:

- Number of WCB-funded projects that include a stewardship or public education and outreach component
- Number of conservation partners engaged in WCB projects and programs
- Increased WCB participation in local, regional and statewide meetings and events
- Increased presence in print, broadcast and social media channels

Primary Objective:

- Improve the general public’s understanding of the role of WCB and the results of its projects and programs.

Goal D – Strategic Directions	
D.1	Work with CDFW to prepare and implement an outreach and communications plan to increase public awareness and understanding of WCB.
	WCB will work with CDFW to develop a communications and outreach plan in order to strengthen awareness, create new partnerships, and better leverage its resources to further our mission.
D.2	Expand the use of outreach methods, including social media and WCB participation in conferences, community meetings and events.
	WCB will increase staff participation in meetings and events at the State, regional and local levels and work with CDFW to investigate opportunities to implement or expand the use of broadcast and social media.
D.3	Expand the scope and content of the annual report to target a broad audience including the public and conservation partners.
	WCB will expand the scope and content of its annual report to share how it is advancing conservation statewide and help to tell WCB’s story. An expanded annual report could showcase projects and priority landscapes, provide information about WCB initiatives, and report the results of its effectiveness monitoring.

GOAL E. FISCAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Ensure optimal use of financial opportunities and staff resources to achieve WCB's long-term vision.

Potential Performance Measures:

- Ratio of overhead to program dollars
- Leveraging of grant program funds including non-State funds
- Timely project delivery
- Depth of staff expertise

Primary Objectives:

- Ensure the best uses of State funds in delivering WCB programs and identify potential future funding opportunities to continue WCB's contribution to statewide conservation efforts.
- Identify resources needed to address emerging trends in conservation such as climate change adaptation and water conservation for fish and wildlife.

Goal E – Strategic Directions	
E.1	Maximize expenditure of remaining bond funds and identify opportunities to leverage existing funds as effectively as possible.
	Increase emphasis on projects with matching funds, management endowments, reduced overhead and long-term partner commitment.
E.2	Explore the possibilities for diversifying and increasing WCB revenue sources (such as financial loans and cap and trade, among others).
	WCB will explore new funding strategies and funding streams to improve funding stability and sustainability over the long-term.
E.3	Identify ways to minimize State expenditure for overhead costs relative to capital outlay.
	WCB will capitalize on all opportunities for reimbursement associated with federal grants.
E.4	Identify and apply technological advances that will improve and support WCB programs and applications.
	WCB will work with CDFW to assess WCB’s use of technology and identify opportunities to implement or adopt new models, tools and applications.
E.5	Enhance knowledge and professional development of staff.
	WCB will renew its focus on professional development for staff, and encourage and support participation in job-related training and educational activities.

V. Implementing Actions

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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 CDFW and conservation partners, WCB will convene a summit to identify emerging conservation issues and trends in California and strategies to enable the conservation community to work collaboratively to address these needs. A key objective of the summit would be to explore how the State can achieve greater conservation impact through the application of the relative priorities, skills, strengths and resources of WCB, CDFW, and conservation partners. The summit would include participants from the fields of environmental policy, conservation science, outdoor recreation, real estate, and infrastructure.

2. Comprehensive Program Review

WCB will review and analyze 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, it is prudent to examine these programs and identify potential modifications or new directions. Topics to explore include policy direction and legislative proposals required to add or modify WCB programs based on this strategic analysis.

3. Measuring Conservation Effectiveness

WCB will work closely with CDFW to expand WCB's conservation effectiveness monitoring and evaluation program. Potential actions could include:

- Establishing performance level baselines as a point of comparison for evaluating program and project effectiveness over time;
- Defining specific and measurable outcomes;
- Applying the best available science and best practices to habitat management and results-based monitoring;
- Contributing to the current body of knowledge with respect to the impact of conservation actions; and
- Developing a cost-effective approach to tracking and evaluating the performance of conservation investments.

Appendix A: WCB Bond Funds

Appendix A: WCB Bond Funds

Table B: WCB Bond Funds

Bond Name and Brief Description	WCB Funds ⁴	Funded WCB Programs and Activities	Authority/ Enabling Legislation
<p>Proposition 12: The Safe Neighborhood Parks, Clean Water, Clean Air, and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2000 (The Villaraigosa – Keely Act)</p> <p>For appropriation by the State Legislature for parks and resources improvement.</p>	<p>Includes a continuous appropriation to WCB of \$38 million and an additional \$227.5 million available for expenditure by WCB upon appropriation from the Legislature 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 as specified in Public Resources Code Section 5096.350(a) (1)-(5)</p>	<p>WCB allocates these funds to eligible recipients for appropriate and qualified projects under the following programs:</p> <p>Land Acquisition Program, Public Access Program, Habitat Enhancement and Restoration Program, Inland Wetlands Conservation Program, and California Riparian Habitat Conservation Program</p>	<p>Public Resources Code Section 5096.300 et seq.</p>

Table B continued on next page

4 Refer to current WCB Agenda for most recent fund balances.

Table B: WCB Bond Funds (continued from previous page)

Bond Name and Brief Description	WCB Funds	Funded WCB Programs and Activities	Authority/ Enabling Legislation
<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 as specified in Public Resources Code Section 5096.610.</p>	<p>Includes a continuous appropriation to WCB of \$300 million for acquisition, development, rehabilitation, restoration and protection of habitat that promotes the recovery of threatened and endangered species, that provides corridors linking separate habitat areas, and that protects significant natural landscapes and ecosystems.</p>	<p>WCB allocates these funds to eligible recipients for appropriate and qualified projects under the following programs:</p> <p>Land Acquisition Program, Public Access Program, Habitat Enhancement and Restoration Program, Inland Wetlands Conservation Program, California Riparian Habitat Conservation Program, Oak Woodlands Conservation Program, Rangeland, Grazing Land and Grassland Protection Program, and Natural Heritage Preservation Tax Credit Program</p>	<p>Public Resources Code Section 5096.600 et seq.</p>
<p>Proposition 50: The Water Security, Clean Drinking Water, Coastal and Beach Protection Act 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 continuous appropriations to WCB of:</p> <p>-- \$140 million for acquisition of land and water resources, including conservation easements, to protect regional water quality, protect and enhance fish and wildlife habitat, and assist local public agencies in improving regional water supply reliability.</p> <p>-- \$750 million for acquisition, protection and restoration of coastal wetlands, adjacent uplands, and coastal watershed lands in or adjacent to urban areas as specified in Water Code Section 79572.</p> <p>Includes \$50 million available for appropriation by the Legislature to WCB to meet State obligations for regulatory requirements related to California’s allocation of water supplies from Colorado River.</p>	<p>WCB allocates these funds to eligible recipients for appropriate and qualified projects under the following programs:</p> <p>Land Acquisition Program, Habitat Enhancement and Restoration Program, California Riparian Habitat Conservation Program, and Natural Heritage Preservation Tax Credit Program</p>	<p>Water Code Section 79500 et seq.</p>

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Table B: WCB Bond Funds (continued from previous page)

Bond Name and Brief Description	WCB Funds	Funded WCB Programs and Activities	Authority/ Enabling Legislation
<p>Proposition 84: The Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006</p> <p>For appropriation by the State Legislature to ensure safe drinking water, water quality, and a reliable water supply, as well as to protect California’s rivers, lakes, streams beaches, bays and coastal waters.</p>	<p>Includes continuous appropriations to WCB of: \$180 million for forest conservation and protection, \$135 million for the development, rehabilitation, restoration, acquisition and protection of habitat that promotes the recovery of threatened and endangered species, provides corridors linking separate habitat areas to prevent fragmentation, protects significant natural landscapes and ecosystems, and/or implements the recommendations of the California Comprehensive Wildlife Strategy as specified in Public Resources Code Section 75055. Includes \$125 million available for 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 Program; Land Acquisition Program, Habitat Enhancement and Restoration Program, California Riparian Habitat Conservation Program -- Oak Woodlands Conservation Program -- Rangeland, Grazing Land and Grassland Protection Program -- Forest Conservation Program -- Ecosystem Restoration on Agricultural Lands Program 	<p>Public Resources Code Section 75001 et seq.</p>

