

# California Wildlife Conservation Board

STRATEGIC PLAN 2014





# California Wildlife Conservation Board

## STRATEGIC PLAN 2014



Prepared by:  
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*WCB expresses its appreciation and thanks to all those  
who participated in the strategic planning process.*

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July 15, 2014

The Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) is pleased to present its first ever strategic plan. Building upon 67 successful years of conservation by the WCB, this plan will be a useful guide in implementing a vision for the next five years and will help strengthen the foundation of conservation investments moving forward.

California, one of the most biologically diverse regions in the world, faces extraordinary challenges, but is also positioned to take advantage of outstanding wildlife conservation opportunities. This plan will help the WCB meet those challenges head-on and take advantage of the opportunities more strategically than ever before.

Staff and members of the WCB have dedicated much of the past year developing this plan. It was created through hours of roundtable discussions and public workshops where we received valuable input from our many partners and constituents on what we are doing well and where we need improvement. We worked closely with our consultants to develop a framework that responds to and builds on WCB's vision, mission, goals and values. The framework includes performance measures to gauge our success and provides a set of strategic directions in order to respond to change now and in the future.

I want to personally thank the WCB staff, my fellow WCB board members, the Department of Fish and Wildlife staff, and all those who participated in helping us create this strategic plan. I look forward to the positive outcomes this plan represents for wildlife and the benefits of its implementation for years to come.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "CHB", followed by a long horizontal flourish.

Charlton H. Bonham, Chairman  
Director, California Department of Fish and Wildlife



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# I. Introduction

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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 WCB 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 more than 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. WCB awards grants to other State and local entities and non-profit organizations, and also acquires lands and property interests on behalf of the CDFW 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, WCB 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 important 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 WCB performance and success.

The first of its kind for WCB, 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 WCB 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 1947<sup>1</sup> to acquire conservation lands and fund conservation and public access projects on behalf of 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 expanded over the years in two ways. First, WCB allocations—previously focused primarily on property acquisition and wildlife-oriented recreation—are today mostly granted to a variety of organizations, agencies and landowners invested in conservation. Second, WCB's previous dedication to activities supporting fish and game management and public access for fishing and hunting has evolved into a focus on habitat conservation and restoration. WCB is now 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 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.

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



*Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area (photograph provided by Dave Feliz of CDFW)*

## **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.

Each of the seven regional offices of CDFW provides scientific guidance and biological consultation with respect to the highest priority and most regionally significant projects for funding consideration. 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 Law of 1947 is part of the Fish and Game Code (FGC) and defines the voting membership and responsibilities of WCB. The Law also:

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

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

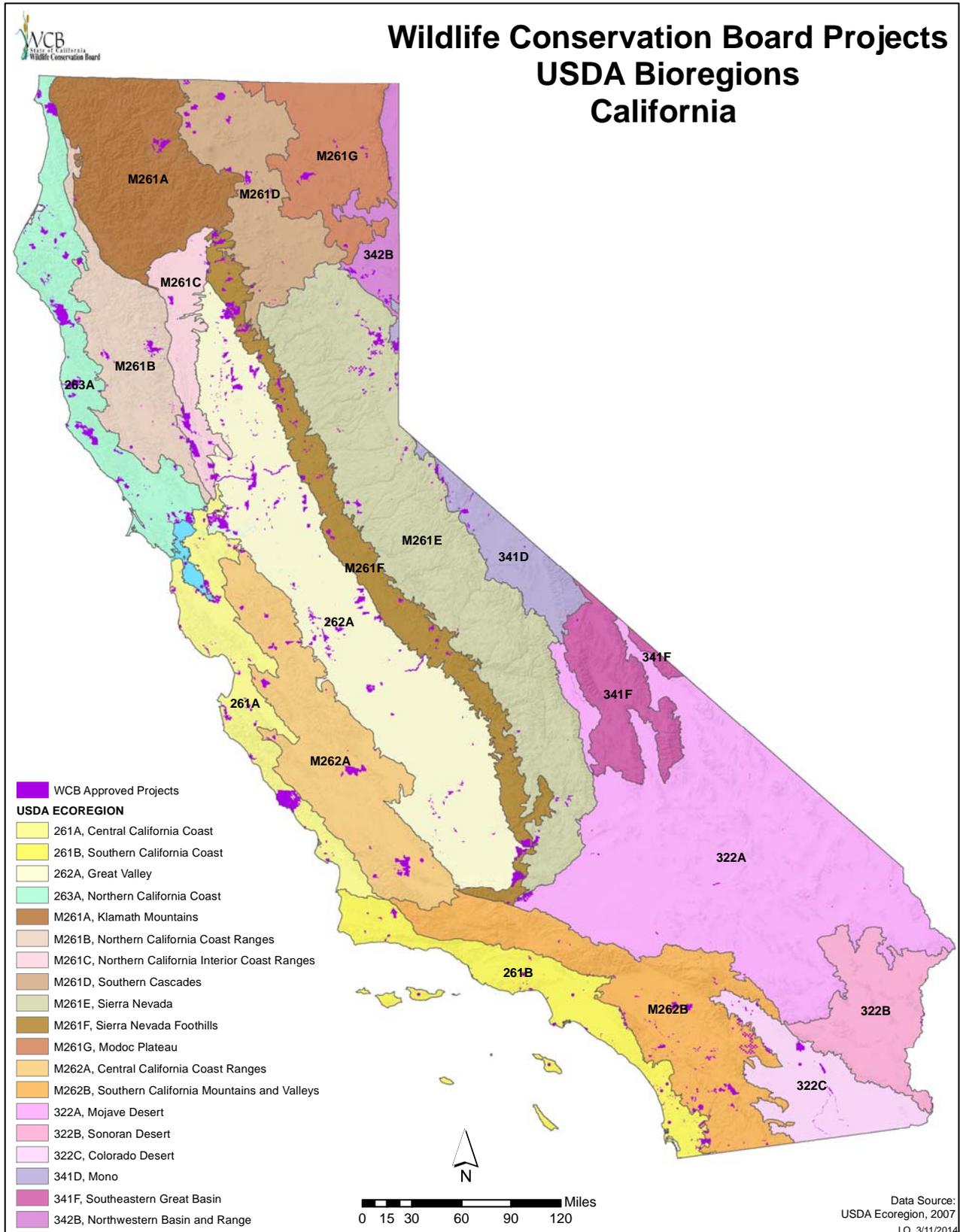
With the depletion of currently authorized bond funds, WCB is moving into an era of limited resources. This transition is occurring during a time characterized by conservation threats and challenges that are as serious as and arguably more complex than those of decades past. This Strategic Plan allows WCB to focus its use of limited resources on statewide priority conservation objectives and activities such as: investing in resilient landscapes; improving habitat and securing limited water resources for fish and wildlife; continuing recovery of threatened and endangered species through implementation of recovery plans and 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 set its geographic priorities. There currently is no State sanctioned articulation of conservation priorities—however, there are a number of regional and sub-regional planning processes that have defined lands of critical conservation value through rigorous science-based approaches. During the project selection process, WCB draws from a wide range of statewide and regional plans and initiatives. These plans and initiatives serve as a scientific and technical foundation for the WCB project selection process, and include but are not limited to:

- Natural Community Conservation Plans / Habitat Conservation Plans
- California’s State Wildlife Action Plan
- CDFW Conceptual Area Protection 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
- CDFW land acquisition evaluations (LAEs)
- Sacramento River Conservation Area Forum
- Fisheries Restoration Grant Program
- California Rangeland Coalition
- The Bay Area Critical Linkages
- Conservation Lands Network
- The South Coast Missing Linkages
- Riparian Habitat Joint Venture
- State and Federal Species Recovery Plans
- Central Valley Project Improvement Act
- Northern Sierra Partnership
- The Statewide Flood Management Planning Program (in development)
- Regional Advance Mitigation Planning (in development)
- Local, regional and State parks plans

WCB strives to advance conservation priorities (as specified on page 26) while remaining open and responsive to opportunities to implement high quality projects in partnership with willing landowners. WCB works in concert with the California conservation community as it seeks to identify projects with the highest conservation value.



### 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 and natural heritage, while responding to the passion shared by the people of California 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. Together, these programs help advance California's statewide and regional conservation priorities:

- **Land Acquisition Program.** WCB acquires real property or interests in real property on behalf of 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 (including special districts and joint powers authorities) and nonprofit organizations 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 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 to protect, restore and enhance 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. WCB 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 of all current WCB programs and identifies eligible grant applicants (where applicable), primary funding sources, and the legislative authority for program implementation.

I. Introduction

Table A: WCB Program Overview

Program Purpose and Brief Description	Implementation Methods	Eligible Applicants	Authority/Enabling Legislation, Funding and Related Programs
<p><b>Land Acquisition Program (est. 1947)</b></p> <p>Acquire real property or interests in real property on behalf of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and make grants to facilitate acquisitions by others.</p>	<p>Requires willing seller, CDFW biological assessment of resource values and recommendation for acquisition of interests in real property and water rights by means of gifts, purchases, leases, easements, transfer or exchange of property, transfer of development rights or credits, and purchases of development rights, conservation easements, and other interests.</p>	<p>Federal, state, and local government entities (including special districts and joint powers authorities) and nonprofit organizations</p>	<p><b>Authority:</b> Administered pursuant to WCB's original authorizing legislation, the Wildlife Conservation Law of 1947; Fish and Game Code (FGC) Sec. 1300 <i>et seq.</i></p> <p><b>Funding:</b> Wildlife Restoration Fund; Habitat Conservation Fund; and various bond funds.</p>
<p><b>Public Access (est. 1947)</b></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><b>Authority:</b> Wildlife Conservation Law of 1947; FGC Sec. 1300 <i>et seq.</i></p> <p><b>Funding:</b> Wildlife Restoration Fund and various bond funds</p>
<p><b>Habitat Enhancement and Restoration Program (est. 1990)</b></p> <p>Restore or enhance native fisheries, wetlands that fall outside the jurisdiction of the Inland Wetland Conservation Program, 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 WCB'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><b>Authority:</b> Wildlife Protection Act of 1990; FGC Sec. 2780 <i>et seq.</i></p> <p><b>Funding:</b> 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><b>Inland Wetlands Conservation Program (est. 1990)</b></p> <p>Support the Central Valley Joint Venture in protecting, restoring and enhancing wetlands and associated habitats on public or private lands in order to increase bird populations in the Central Valley.</p>	<p>Grants to restore habitat; applicants can 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><b>Authority:</b> Inland Wetlands Conservation Program; FGC Sec. 1400 <i>et seq.</i></p> <p><b>Funding:</b> Habitat Conservation Fund, Inland Wetlands Conservation Fund and various bond funds.</p>
<p><b>California Riparian Habitat Conservation Program (est. 1991)</b></p> <p>Develop coordinated conservation efforts aimed at protecting, 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><b>Authority:</b> California Riparian Habitat Conservation Act; FGC Sec. 1385 <i>et seq.</i></p> <p><b>Funding:</b> Habitat Conservation Fund and various bond funds</p>
<p><b>Natural Heritage Preservation Tax Credit Program (est. 2000, suspended 2002, reinstated 2005)</b></p> <p>Protect wildlife habitat, parks and open space, archaeological resources, agricultural land and water by providing State tax credits for donations of qualified land and water rights.</p>	<p>WCB authorized to approve granting of State tax credits for donations of qualified land (fee title or conservation easement) and water rights made to eligible donees pursuant to the program. Tax credit equal to 55% of the appraised fair market value of the donation.</p>	<p>California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA); statutory entity within CNRA authorized to hold title to land (CNRA Entity) to which property owner has applied to donate property; local government; local government that has submitted a joint application with a CNRA Entity requesting approval of a donation to the local government; or designated nonprofit organization</p>	<p><b>Authority:</b> Natural Heritage Preservation Tax Credit Act of 2000, as amended effective January 1, 2010 (expires June 2015); Public Resources Code Sec. <i>et seq.</i></p> <p><b>Funding:</b> General Fund (reimbursable using Prop. 40, 50, and 84 bond funds and specified other non-General Fund monies)</p>

Table A continues on next page

I. Introduction

Table A: WCB Program Overview (continued)

Program Purpose and Brief Description	Implementation Methods	Eligible Applicants	Authority/Enabling Legislation, Funding and Related Programs
<p><b>Oak Woodlands Conservation Program (est. 2001)</b></p> <p>Support and encourage voluntary, long-term private stewardship and conservation of California’s 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 local land use planning that is consistent with oak woodlands preservation.</p>	<p>Grants for purchase of oak woodlands conservation easements from willing sellers; grants for land improvement; financial incentives including cost-share payments to private landowners who enter into long-term conservation agreements; technical assistance; public outreach and education.</p> <p>Applicants can request funds directly under an open filing process, so long as funding is available. Requires an Oak Woodlands Management Plan to be in place for the city or county in which the money would be spent. Proposed project must be consistent with that Plan.</p>	<p>Local government entities, park and open space districts, resource conservation districts, private landowners and tax-exempt non-profit organizations</p>	<p><b>Authority:</b> Oak Woodlands Conservation Act; FGC Sec. 1360 <i>et seq.</i></p> <p><b>Funding:</b> Oak Woodlands Conservation Fund, various bond funds.</p> <p><b>Related Programs:</b> Federal Forest Legacy Program (16 U.S.C. Section 2103); California Forest Legacy Program (Public Resources Code Section 12200 <i>et seq.</i>)</p>
<p><b>Rangeland, Grazing Land and Grassland Protection Program (est. 2002)</b></p> <p>Protect the integrity of California’s rangeland, grazing land, and grasslands by preventing conversion to non-agricultural uses, protecting the long-term sustainability of livestock grazing, and ensuring continued wildlife, water quality, watershed and open space benefits to the State from livestock grazing.</p>	<p>Direct expenditures and grants for acquisition of conservation easements over qualified property from willing sellers; applicants can request funds directly under an open filing process, so long as funding is available.</p>	<p>State agencies, local public agencies and nonprofit organizations</p>	<p><b>Authority:</b> Rangeland, Grazing Land and Grassland Protection Act, Public Resources Code Sec. 10330 <i>et seq.</i></p> <p><b>Funding:</b> Bond Funds, Prop 84</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><b>Forest Conservation Program (est. 2006)</b></p> <p>Promote the ecological integrity and economic stability of California’s diverse native forests for all their public benefits through forest conservation, preservation and restoration of productive managed forest lands, forest reserve areas, redwood forests and other forest types.</p>	<p>Grants for acquisition (fee title or conservation easement) from willing sellers; long-term management agreements; applicants can request funds 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 powers authorities) and nonprofit organizations</p>	<p><b>Authority:</b> Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006, Public Resources Code Section 75055 (a).</p> <p><b>Funding:</b> Bond Funds, Prop 84</p>
<p><b>Ecosystem Restoration on Agricultural Lands (ERAL) (est. 2006)</b></p> <p>Assist farmers in integrating agricultural activities with ecosystem restoration and wildlife protection.</p>	<p>Grant awards; applicants can request funds 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 powers authorities) and nonprofit organizations</p>	<p><b>Authority:</b> Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006, Public Resources Code 75055(d)(4).</p> <p><b>Funding:</b> Bond Funds, Prop 84</p>



*Wetlands Habitat Restoration, East Grasslands (Castle Land and Cattle), Phase III*

## 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.<sup>2</sup> 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 ecoregions across the State, resulting in the development of potential conservation methods and strategies to allow species to adapt and survive within these varied ecoregions. The Governor’s draft plan “Safeguarding California Plan to Ready the State for Impacts of Changing Climate” addresses safeguards for wildlife including conserving habitat connectivity and improving forest and other habitat resilience.

There is a recognized need to protect coastal ecosystems and their watersheds, as well as habitat corridors and linkages, to allow species to move, migrate and adapt to sea level rise and precipitation and temperature changes. All of California’s ecoregions contain climate-resilient areas that require attention and offer critical wildlife refugia from the impacts of climate change.

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

## II. Key Trends and Strategic Issues

### 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 9 NCCP 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 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 to the future sustainability of ecosystems and survival of fish and wildlife species in the State.

### Habitat Loss, Fragmentation and Conflicting Regulations

With just over 37 million people (2010 Census), California is one and one half times as populous as the second most populous state in the U.S., Texas (25 million). By 2020, California's population is projected to reach 42 to 48 million.<sup>3</sup> Development of new infrastructure to accommodate this growth along with conversion of land uses will place increasingly 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.

Loss of habitat, fragmentation and other impacts of growth have created an on-going conflict between the environment and development of all sorts. As State and local agencies move forward on major infrastructure and energy projects, there are increasing opportunities to combine the

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



*Conaway Ranch*

mitigation required from these projects with other conservation plans and projects to create synergy and affect a more strategic and expanded conservation outcome. Investments that serve to maximize conservation dollars and reduce conflict need to be a key factor in setting priorities.

### **Greater Reliance on Conservation Partnerships**

California resource and conservation agencies increasingly look to resource conservation districts, open space and park districts, local water agencies, non-governmental organizations, and others (Partners) to help address conservation planning and resource management needs. The roles of our Partners have expanded in recent decades to include conservation planning, implementation, resource management, and monitoring. Looking forward, their importance for conservation cannot be underestimated. Partners providing technical assistance, financial support, management assistance, and a collaborative spirit are necessary to achieve on-the-ground results.

## II. Key Trends and Strategic Issues

### **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, supplanted by increased use of conservation easements to prohibit or limit development in the long-term and provide an effective means to acknowledge the importance of “working lands” in the conservation landscape. The use of conservation easements reflects and corresponds with the growing role of land trusts and the importance of privately held lands in landscape-level wildlife and habitat preservation. To date, a considerable 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 management practices that preserve habitat and wildlife. Going forward, conservation easements can be further refined, focusing more directly on resource values and areas and leaving less valuable areas unencumbered, effectively reducing the cost of easements and impacts on willing property owners while still obtaining the desired high levels of resource protection.

### **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 disadvantaged communities.

### **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 money to conservation and demand greater agency transparency than in decades past, including better public information about conservation activities, outcomes, and lessons learned.



*Carsen River Enhancement*

## II. Key Trends and Strategic Issues

### STRATEGIC ISSUES

WCB Board members, management 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. That said, developing such a vision is a tall order that has a long history of failure to progress. WCB does not have any conservation science capacity to address this issue, nor is the current science support provided by the CDFW regions enough to create such a strategy. This will need to be a new, multi-agency initiative that could serve to inform WCB's priorities in the future.

#### 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 conservation partners as they work to achieve their own conservation objectives.



*Central Valley Wetlands*

### **Project Evaluation and Selection**

WCB's programmatic emphasis to address conservation threats and protect wildlife habitat has evolved over time. 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 continue to work with CDFW and receive its scientific expertise in focusing 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, describe the evaluation process and share the results of that process, 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 requires a clear communications and outreach strategy to achieve 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

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## FRAMEWORK OVERVIEW

The Strategic Plan responds to and builds 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.
- **Strategic Priorities.** The specific and measurable conservation targets to be achieved through WCB-funded programs and projects.
- **Goals.** Focus areas of WCB activity.
- **Performance Measures.** Indicators to gauge WCB success.

## WCB MISSION

The Wildlife Conservation Board 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

WCB envisions a future in which California’s wildlife, biodiversity and wild places are effectively conserved for the benefit of present and future generations. WCB projects and programs maximize return on taxpayer investment in conservation and wildlife-oriented recreation, and empower and inspire current and future generations to protect California’s precious habitat and wildlife resources.

### III. Strategic Plan Framework

#### WCB VALUES

The following values guide WCB policies and actions:

**Science-Based Decision-Making** – In consultation with CDFW, we take actions that reflect the best available conservation science.

**Ecosystem Health and Diversity** – We believe that optimizing 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 disadvantaged 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.



*Lower Redwood Creek Restoration (photographs provided by the National Park Service)*

## 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** that fully represent California’s major ecoregions 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.



*Lower Redwood Creek Restoration (photographs provided by the National Park Service)*

#### WCB STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

WCB will identify priority projects for funding based on the criteria described below.

##### Regarding:

##### Goal A (Environmental Protection and Conservation), and

##### Goal B (Environmental Restoration and Enhancement)

- Project is aligned with conservation actions in the Wildlife Action Plan (WAP) bio-regions.
- Project is consistent with relevant conservation plans, e.g., HCPs, NCCPs, etc.
- Project demonstrates organizational capacity for long-term stewardship.
- Project addresses:
  - Climate change resiliency and adaptation
  - Water management best practices
  - Appropriate public use (without degrading ecosystems)
  - Species strongholds or refugia
  - Habitat connectivity and corridors
  - Threatened and endangered species
  - Under-served communities
- Project leverages multiple funding sources (both public and private).

##### Regarding:

##### Goal C (Public Use and Recreation)

- Diversity of recreation types.
- Under-served communities.
- Projected level of use with no degradation of ecosystems.
- Organizational capacity for ongoing maintenance and operations.

These priority project selection criteria will be reviewed, confirmed and/or adjusted through the proposed conservation dialogs and summit (see Implementing Actions on page 45). Environmental threats and loss of biological resources due to advancing infrastructure projects and climate change impacts make action by WCB even more urgent. Failure to act will most certainly result in missed opportunities and permanent loss.

## 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 two goals are supporting goals—without these areas of focus, achieving the organization’s mission would not be possible. The five goal areas are:

- Environmental Protection and Conservation
- Environmental Restoration and Enhancement
- Public Use and Recreation
- Public Awareness and Education
- Fiscal and Organizational Effectiveness

Potential performance measures reflect current WCB 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. WCB’s final set of performance measures will evolve in concert with new and emerging potential funding sources such as cap and trade.

### 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, including wildlife corridors, by ecoregion
- Types of habitats protected
- Geographic distribution of funding by ecoregion
- 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 Recreation

Leverage WCB investments in programs and projects by expanding opportunities for outdoor wildlife-oriented recreational activities 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
- Number of acquisitions with a primary purpose of improving public access to wild lands



*Gray Lodge Wildlife Area*

### Goal D. Public Awareness and Education

Raise public awareness of key conservation issues and goals, and educate and support local resource 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
- 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
- Scope and depth of staff expertise



*Rancho Vierra Oak Woodland Conservation Easement*



# IV. Strategic Directions

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This chapter outlines the strategic directions for WCB, organized by the five goal areas introduced in the Strategic Plan Framework. These are:

- Goal A. Environmental Protection and Conservation
- Goal B. Environmental Restoration and Enhancement
- Goal C. Public Use and Recreation
- Goal D. Public Awareness and Education
- Goal E. Fiscal and Organizational Effectiveness

At least one primary objective is identified for each goal. An objective is a more specific target associated with its goal, and can be measured to determine progress over time. In addition to the primary objectives, this chapter presents strategic directions for each goal. These are specific activities designed to achieve each goal.

### **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 by ecoregion
- Types of habitats protected
- Geographic distribution of funding by ecoregion
- Reported changes in species populations
- Protection of species strongholds and refugia
- Strengthening of habitat connectivity and corridors
- Preservation of threatened and endangered species

#### **Primary Objectives:**

- Focus habitat protection on statewide conservation priorities, including projects and landscape areas that are resilient to the impacts of climate change; provide conservation of water resources for fish and terrestrial wildlife; or provide for wildlife corridors and habitat connectivity.
- Continue funding the implementation of Natural Community Conservation Plans and projects that support the recovery of listed species.
- Seek to maximize environmental service benefits, such as protection of watersheds, water quality and sequestration of carbon.



*Conaway Ranch*

IV. Strategic Directions

Goal A – Strategic Directions	
A.1	Fund projects and landscapes that provide resilience for native wildlife and plant species in the face of climate change.
	WCB will place greater emphasis and target a portion of its investments on intact landscapes and habitat linkages and corridors that are resilient to climate change, including projects that allow migration and movement of species and provide for habitat connectivity between identified habitat areas, 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. Revise program guidelines to allow greater focus and emphasis on these types of projects in the evaluation and selection process. WCB will consult with CDFW to verify the climate benefits of a project and collaborate with other agencies and partners with adopted plans and strategies for offsetting the impacts of climate change on wildlife.
A.2	Fund projects and landscape areas that conserve, protect, or enhance water resources for fish and wildlife.
	WCB will place greater emphasis and target a portion of its investments on streams and watersheds supporting threatened and endangered salmonids and native fish assemblages in places where: population and habitat conditions are best suited to maintain existing natural, viable populations; restore habitat of the most viable populations or areas with high habitat integrity; wetland habitats supporting waterbirds, including migratory waterfowl and shorebirds, and seasonal agricultural landscapes (e.g. natural marshes / Sacramento Valley rice fields); high quality rivers and riparian corridors throughout the State; estuaries; high mountain meadows in all ecoregions; desert oases and other interior wetlands; and, other water dependent natural communities and habitat in areas sufficiently intact (or restorable) to support stable populations. Revise 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	Fund projects that support the implementation of Natural Community Conservation Plans, Habitat Conservation Plans and recovery of listed species.
	WCB will continue to prioritize and devote a portion of its funding to support implementation of Natural Community Conservation Plans, Habitat Conservation Plans and recovery of listed species in order to proactively enhance the resilience of California’s native species and natural communities to the effects of global climate change, fragmentation and other major threats.

Table continues on next page

Goal A – Strategic Directions (continued)	
<b>A.4</b>	Invest in priority conservation projects recommended under CDFW’s land acquisition evaluation process or within other conservation plans supported by CDFW.
	WCB will continue investments in priority projects supported by CDFW to take advantage of opportunities to acquire properties or conservation easements that protect important species and habitats including “working landscapes”, offer wildlife oriented access opportunity or acquire “inholdings” within large blocks of already protected lands.
<b>A.5</b>	Improve transparency and efficiency of WCB and CDFW project evaluation and recommendations to approve or deny applications.
	WCB and CDFW communicate and closely coordinate in selection and implementation of projects. WCB will document the collaborative decision-making process, identify projects that are under consideration or in the pipeline, and provide greater transparency in the evaluation and selection of projects to promote better understanding of successful project selection.
<b>A.6</b>	Coordinate acquisition application processes to ensure that WCB project evaluation is unified across programs to the fullest possible extent.
	Currently, information solicited in grant applications differ depending on the program under which a proposal is to be considered. WCB will develop a coordinated set of evaluation criteria across programs, while maintaining any and all legislatively mandated program requirements.

#### IV. Strategic Directions

### 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.



*Chickahominy Creek Habitat Restoration*

Goal B – Strategic Directions	
<b>B.1</b>	Invest in projects and landscape areas that help provide resilience in the face 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 and enhance 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 supporting waterfowl and shorebirds, riparian corridors, and habitats for anadromous salmonids; enhance wildlife habitats on working farms, ranches and forest lands.
<b>B.2</b>	Strengthen the grant application process to further highlight the importance of the following factors in project design and selection: robustness and resilience to extreme weather events, ecosystem services (e.g. groundwater recharge, flood reduction, fire prevention, etc.), water quality and quantity, and compatible public use and access.
	WCB will revise 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, CDFW’s Fisheries Restoration Grant Program, and watershed planning efforts.
<b>B.3</b>	Improve transparency and efficiency of WCB and CDFW project evaluation and recommendations to approve or deny applications.
	WCB, CDFW, and partners communicate and closely coordinate in selection and implementation of projects. WCB will document the collaborative decision-making process, and provide greater transparency in the evaluation and selection of projects to promote better understanding of successful project selection.
<b>B.4</b>	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. WCB will coordinate with other monitoring efforts conducted by and for our partners to assure a cost-effective and complete assessment of restoration success. Monitoring will be based on clear conservation goals and objectives, and monitoring results will be used to help measure the impact of WCB investments and inform future actions.
<b>B.5</b>	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 prioritizing projects that promote appropriate community participation in restoration activities.

#### IV. Strategic Directions

### GOAL C. PUBLIC USE AND RECREATION

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

#### Potential Performance Measures:

- Number of wildlife-oriented recreation projects by recreation type
- Visitation rates (by geography and demographics) and level of recreational activity
- Degree of compatibility of recreational activity with conservation goals and minimization of possible impacts to environmental resources
- Number of acquisitions with a primary purpose of improving public access to wild lands

#### Primary Objective:

- Increase public access on WCB-funded projects compared to 2014 levels.



*Lake Tahoe Fishing Access*

Goal C – Strategic Directions	
<b>C.1</b>	Support a wide range of recreational activities (e.g. hunting, fishing, birding, hiking, camping, photography, etc.) in conjunction with other land uses and without degrading environmental resources.
	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. WCB will also provide information to the public on the location of WCB-funded recreation opportunities throughout the State.
<b>C.2</b>	Document and describe the current public access project evaluation and selection processes and explore the option of establishing a competitive grant making cycle for the Public Access Program.
	Consistent with strategic directions in environmental protection and restoration, WCB will improve transparency around recreation opportunities as a component of project selection.
<b>C.3</b>	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. This data will be used on a programmatic level and inform site-specific decisions.
<b>C.4</b>	Place greater emphasis on projects that accommodate compatible wildlife-oriented public uses, while supporting urban areas and disadvantaged communities.
	As California continues to grow and develop, public access to the State’s natural areas will likely remain limited. WCB will place a priority on those projects that promote access for disadvantaged communities and youth and complement other public access programs such as CDFW’s Shared Habitat Alliance for Recreational Enhancement (SHARE) program. WCB will consider the appropriateness of developing a program to solicit proposals and award funding in support of this direction.

#### IV. Strategic Directions

### GOAL D. PUBLIC AWARENESS AND EDUCATION

Raise public awareness of key conservation issues and goals, and educate and support local resource 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
- 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.



*Grassland Environmental Education Center*

Goal D – Strategic Directions	
<b>D.1</b>	Work with CDFW to prepare and implement an outreach and communications plan to increase public awareness and understanding of WCB including the benefits associated with strategic conservation and wildlife- oriented recreational opportunity (e.g. hunting, fishing, boating, birding, hiking, etc.) resulting from WCB’s actions.
	WCB will work with CDFW’s Office of Communication Education and Outreach to develop and implement a communications and outreach plan in order to strengthen awareness, create new partnerships, and better leverage its resources to further WCB’s mission. WCB will design its communication program to address a wide range of audiences and diverse constituencies throughout the State.
<b>D.2</b>	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, conferences 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.
<b>D.3</b>	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 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
- Scope and depth of staff expertise

#### Primary Objectives:

- Ensure the most effective 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.



*Pier and fisherman*

Goal E – Strategic Directions	
<b>E.1</b>	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. When possible consider opportunities to combine conservation investments with mitigation dollars, without reducing mitigation requirements and at the same time creating expanded conservation outcomes.
<b>E.2</b>	Explore the possibilities for diversifying and increasing WCB revenue sources (such as loans, environmental services credits, private sector investment capital and cap and trade revenue, among others).
	WCB will explore new funding strategies and funding streams to improve funding stability, sustainability and impact over the long-term.
<b>E.3</b>	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 and other sources.
<b>E.4</b>	Identify and apply technological advances that will improve and support WCB programs and applications.
	WCB will work with CDFW’s technology branch to assess WCB’s use of technology and identify opportunities to implement or adopt new models, tools and applications.
<b>E.5</b>	Enhance knowledge and professional development of staff.
	WCB will continue its focus on professional development for staff, and encourage and support participation in job-related training and educational activities.



*Honey Lake Valley*

# V. Implementing Actions

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## **IMPLEMENTING ACTIONS**

This chapter outlines five high-level actions that WCB will take to complement and support the strategies, actions and priority project selection criteria identified in this document. WCB will ensure that the conservation community and the broader public of California will have opportunities to provide input on each of these major implementing actions.

### **1. Dialogs on Conservation**

WCB will undertake a series of dialogs and iterative conversations with its conservation partners to obtain input on priority conservation issues and targets of opportunity for the State of California. Specifically, WCB will seek input on a number of key topics including: (i) the WCB project funding application process including project selection criteria, clarity and consistency of funding application forms and ways and means of improving transparency in project funding and property appraisals; (ii) analysis of existing WCB conservation funding programs to determine how programs can be made more strategic and aligned with high priority conservation issues; (iii) best practices in measuring the effectiveness of conservation programs; and (iv) a long range conservation vision for the State of California and WCB's role. These dialogs will culminate in a conservation summit to be held in 2015 for the purpose of considering recommendations identified by the conservation partners for the issues and topics identified above. These conversations will provide an opportunity for the statewide conservation community to provide input and comment on all proposed implementing actions prior to completion and adoption by WCB.

**Timeline for completion: Summer 2015**

## V. Implementing Actions

### 2. Conservation Summit

WCB will convene a Statewide conservation summit in conjunction with CDFW and representatives of its conservation partners to respond to the proposed recommendations emerging from the conservation dialogs described above. 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 public and private conservation partners. In addition WCB will seek confirmation of the specific conservation targets to be addressed through WCB-funded conservation projects and programs.

The summit would include participants from the fields of environmental policy, conservation science, outdoor recreation, real estate, and infrastructure.

**Timeline for completion: Winter 2015**

### 3. Unified Application and Project Review Process

Using results of the conservation dialogs and conservation summit, WCB will update and align all funding application forms and project selection processes with the priority project selection criteria identified in this strategic plan (see page 26). WCB will also take steps to ensure transparency of all project selection processes including appraisals.

**Timeline for completion: Spring 2016**

### 4. Comprehensive Program Review

In light of feedback received from the conservation dialogs and conservation summit, WCB will review and analyze its many programs to determine how programs should best continue. Current WCB programs were established over time in response to legislation and specific conservation needs. Since future government-funded program funding is likely to be very limited, it is prudent for WCB to examine these programs and identify potential modifications or new directions in light of high priority conservation needs and priorities. WCB will consider recommendations for policy direction and legislative proposals based on this strategic analysis.

**Timeline for completion: Summer 2016**

## 5. Measuring Conservation Effectiveness

WCB will work with CDFW to expand WCB's conservation effectiveness monitoring and evaluation program. The eight bio-regions identified in the Wildlife Action Plan will be used as a basis for establishing the specific conservation outcomes to be achieved by WCB-funded programs. Again, feedback from the conservation dialogs and conservation summit will be used in formulating the refined measures of conservation effectiveness. 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.

**Timeline for completion: Fall 2016**



*Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area (photograph provided by Dave Feliz of CDFW)*



# Appendix A: WCB Bond Funds

Bond Name and Brief Description	WCB Funds	Funded WCB Programs and Activities	Authority/ Enabling Legislation
<p><b>Proposition 12: The Safe Neighborhood Parks, Clean Water, Clean Air, and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2000 (The Villaraigosa – Keely Act)</b></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 <i>et seq.</i></p>

*Table continues on next page*

Appendix A: WCB Bond Funds

Bond Name and Brief Description	WCB Funds	Funded WCB Programs and Activities	Authority/ Enabling Legislation
<p><b>Proposition 40: The California Clean Water, Clean Air, Safe Neighborhood Parks, and Coastal Protection Act of 2002</b></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 <i>et seq.</i></p>
<p><b>Proposition 50: The Water Security, Clean Drinking Water, Coastal and Beach Protection Act of 2002</b></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 <i>et seq.</i></p>

Table continues on next page

Bond Name and Brief Description	WCB Funds	Funded WCB Programs and Activities	Authority/ Enabling Legislation
<p><b>Proposition 84: The Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006</b></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"> <li>-- Natural Heritage Preservation Tax Credit Program; Land Acquisition Program, Habitat Enhancement and Restoration Program, California Riparian Habitat Conservation Program</li> <li>-- Oak Woodlands Conservation Program -- Rangeland, Grazing Land and Grassland Protection Program -- Forest Conservation Program</li> <li>-- Ecosystem Restoration on Agricultural Lands Program</li> </ul>	<p>Public Resources Code Section 75001 <i>et seq.</i></p>



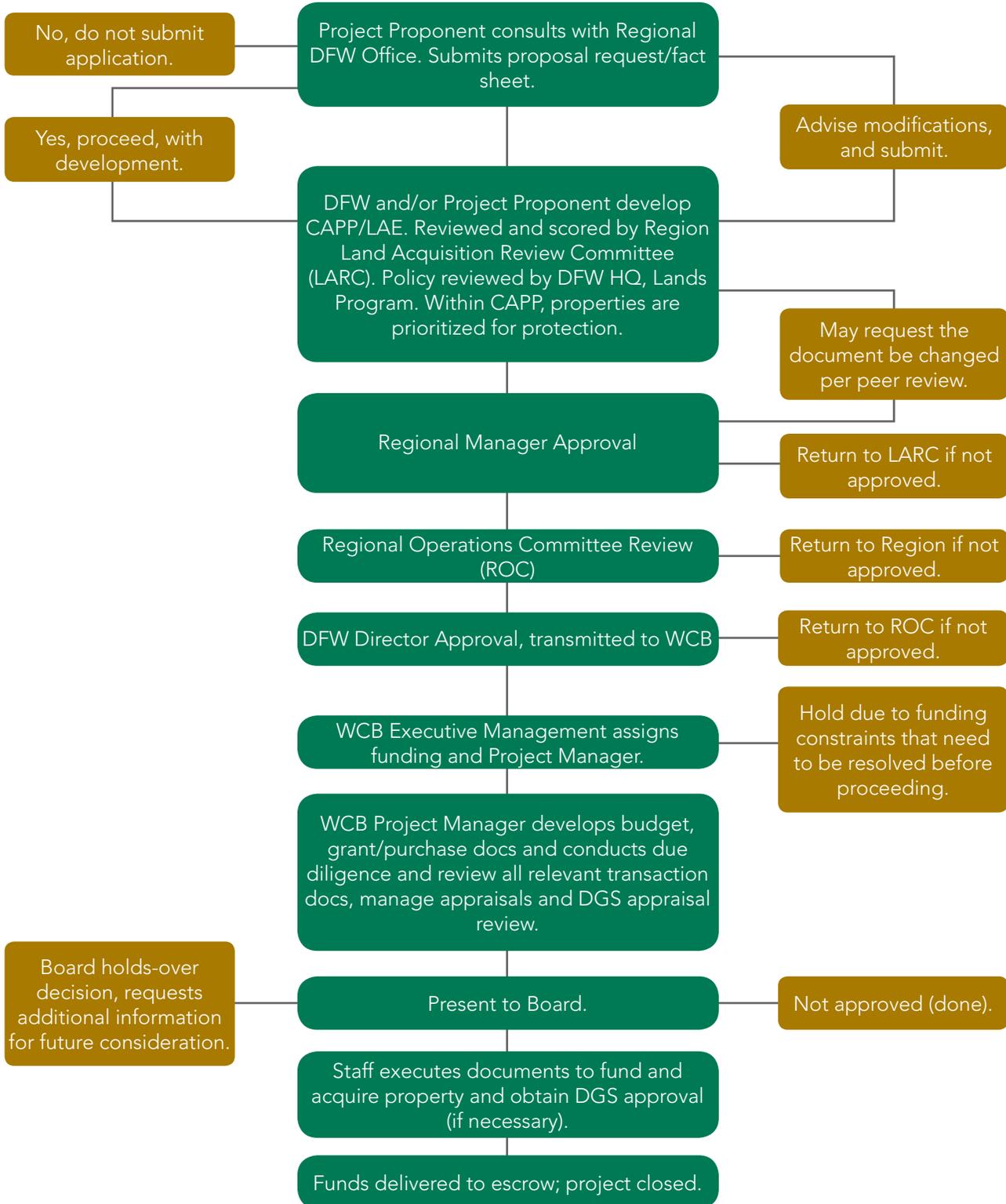
*Santa Barbara Mission Creek Eagoon*

# Appendix B: WCB Project Application Process Flow Charts

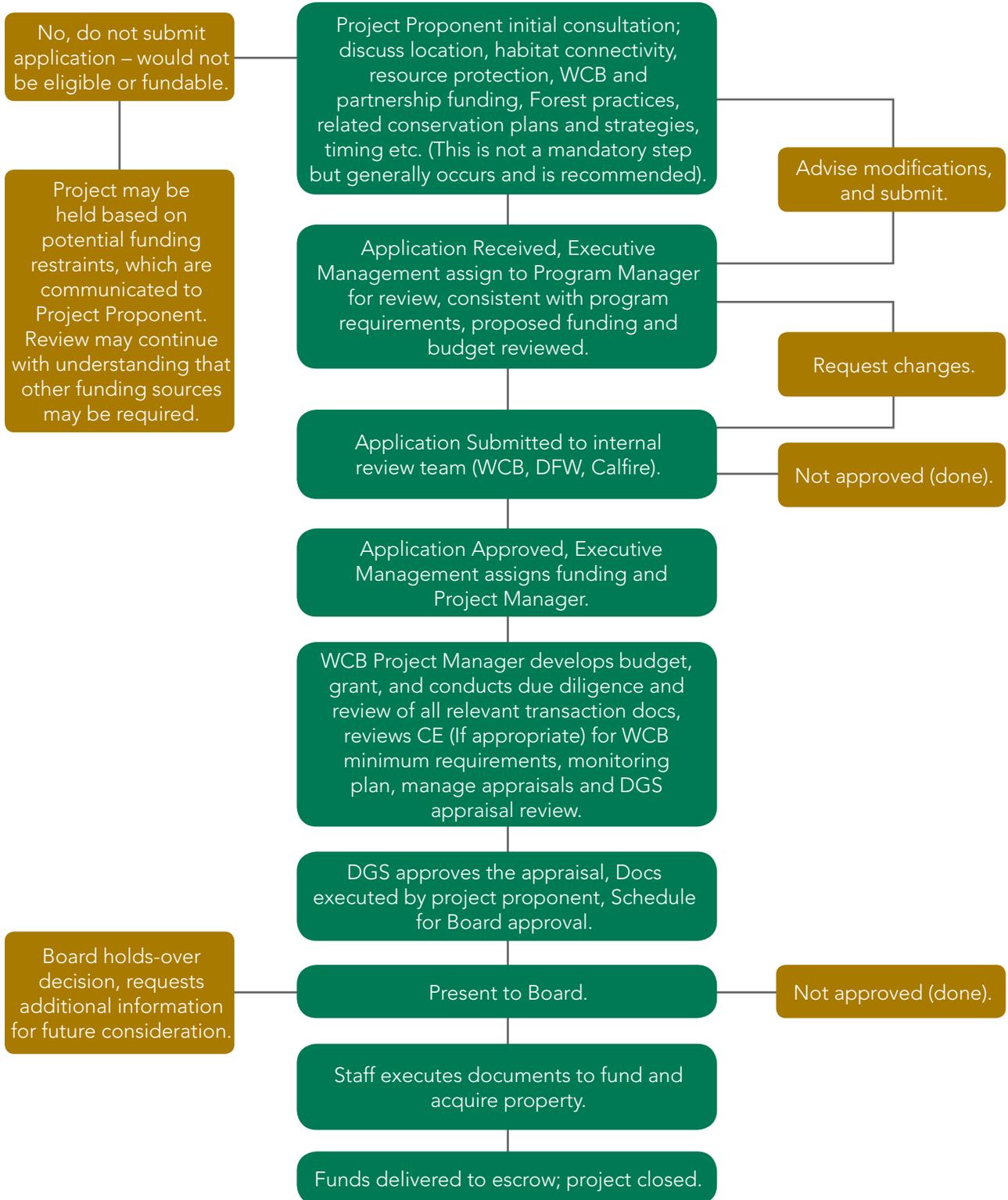
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- Land Acquisition Program – Conceptual Area Protection Plans (CAPPs) & Land Acquisition Evaluations (LAEs)
- Forest Conservation Program
- Other Land Acquisitions Plans and Projects
- Public Access
- Rangeland, Grazing Land and Grasslands, and Oak Woodlands Programs
- Restoration

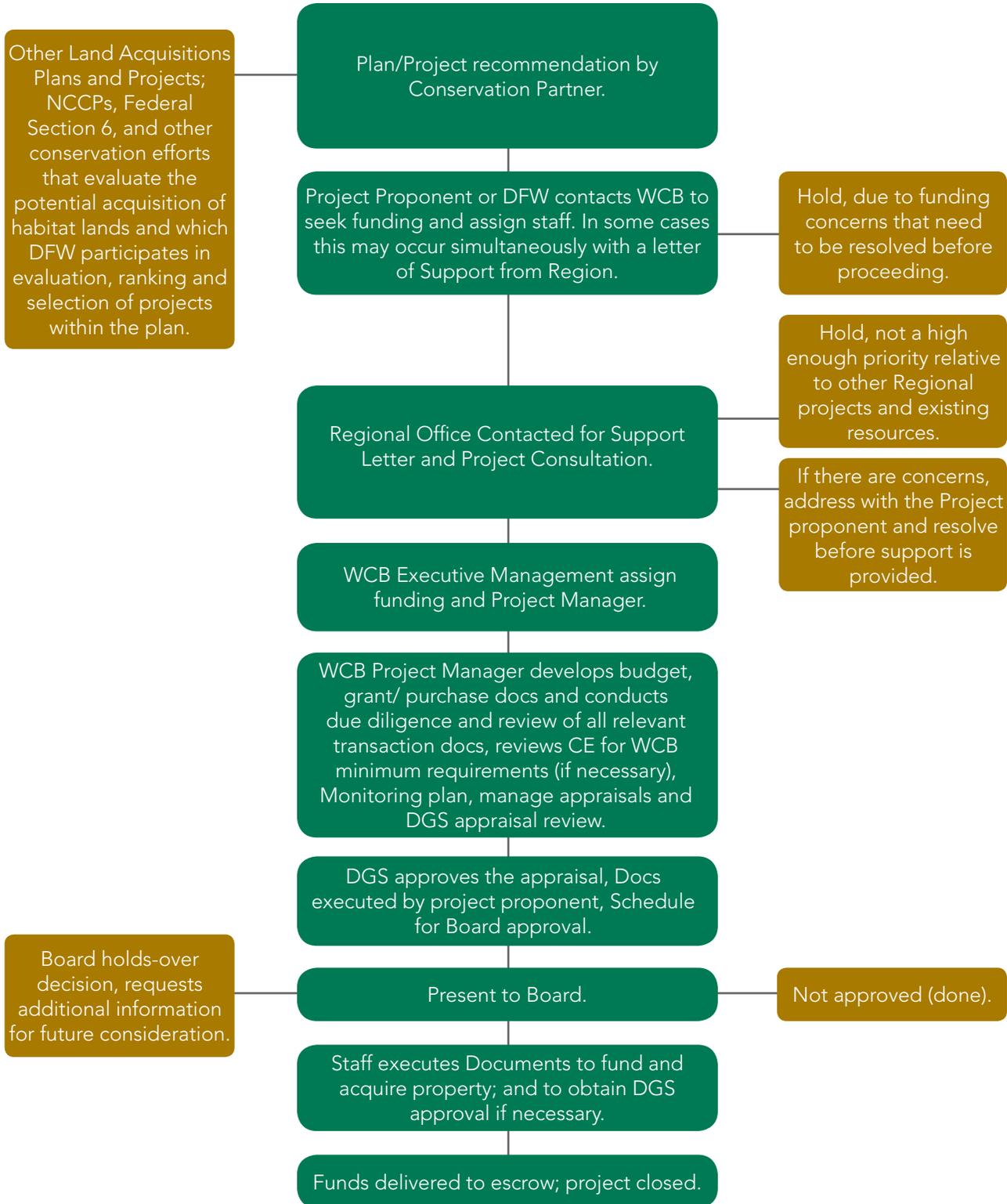
## LAND ACQUISITION PROGRAM – CONCEPTUAL AREA PROTECTION PLANS AND LAND ACQUISITION EVALUATIONS



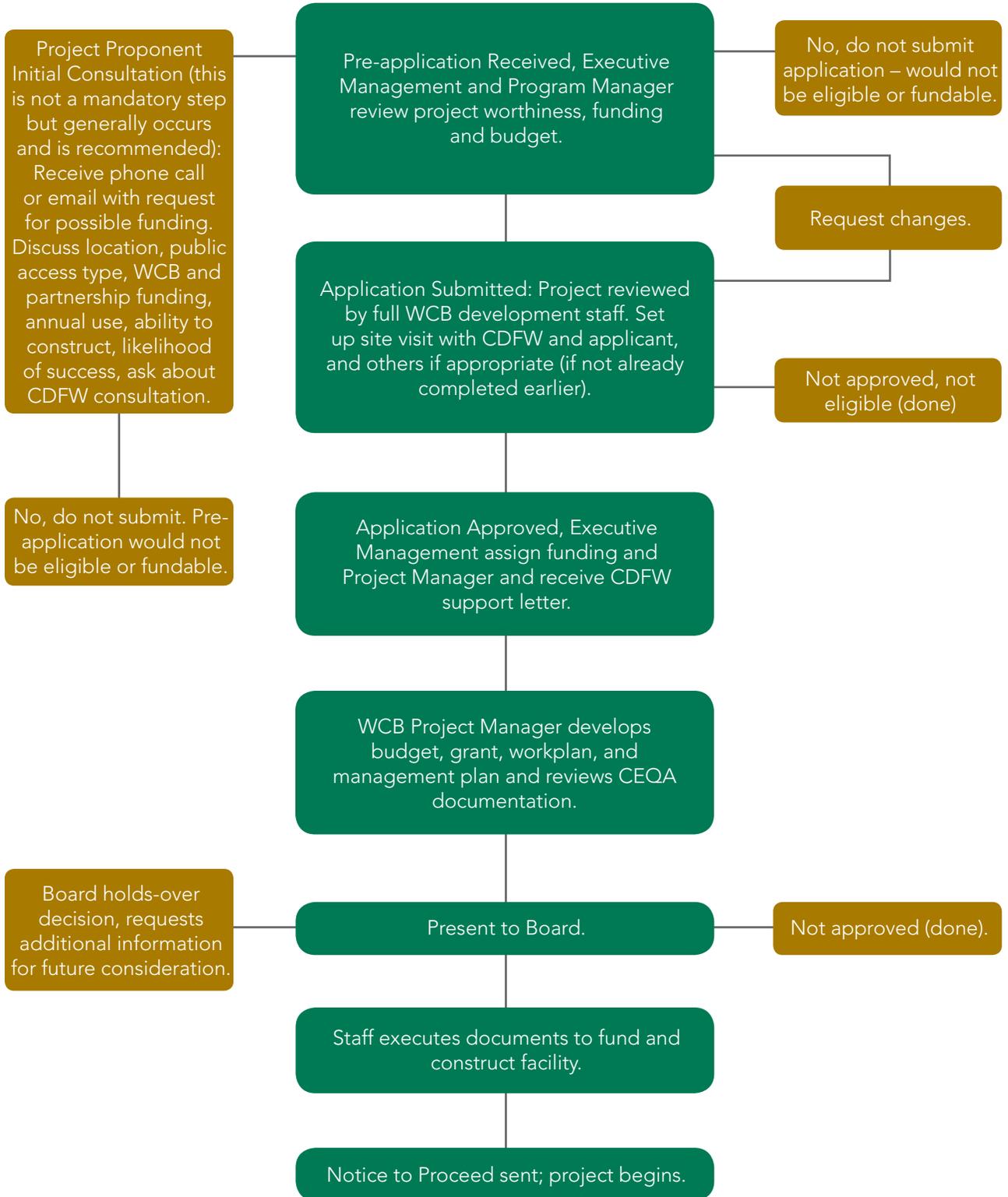
**FOREST CONSERVATION PROGRAM**



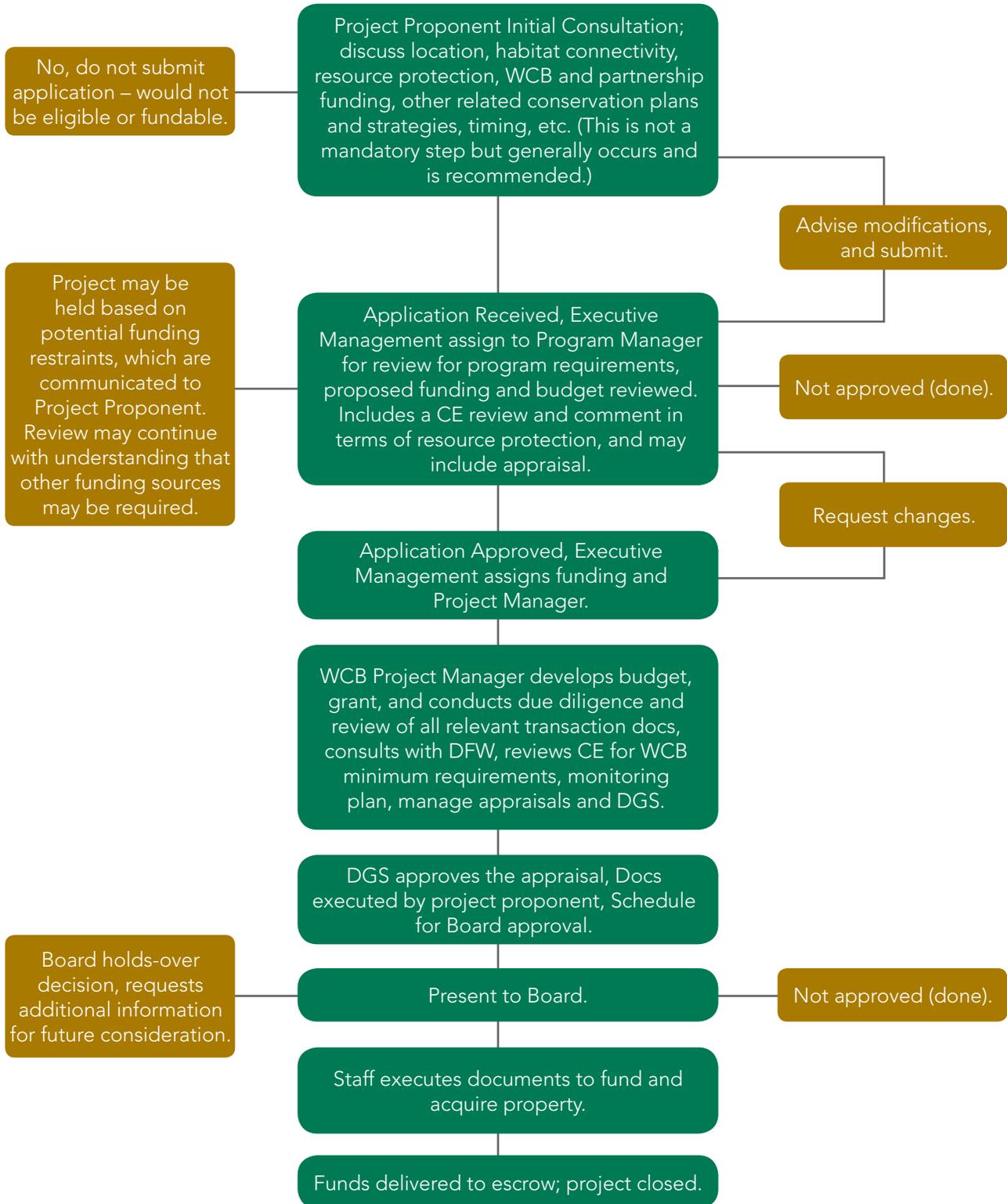
### OTHER LAND ACQUISITIONS PLANS AND PROJECTS



**PUBLIC ACCESS**



## RANGELAND, GRAZING LAND AND GRASSLANDS, AND OAK WOODLANDS PROGRAMS



**RESTORATION**

