

CALIFORNIA FISH AND WILDLIFE
STRATEGIC VISION PROJECT

PUBLIC COMMENTS FOR REVIEW

Comments Through December 25, 2011



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California Fish and Wildlife
Strategic Vision Executive Committee

21 December 2011

Re: Draft Interim Strategic Vision

Dear Executive Committee,

The Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains has worked extensively with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife in numerous ways over the past 20 years and we appreciate the opportunity to reflect on the vision presented in the Draft Interim Plan. Overall, we appreciate the effort to identify problems and develop strategies to address them. We offer the following comments for consideration.

Mission and Vision:

We support the continued effort of both the Fish and Game Commission and the Department of Fish and Game to be responsible stewards of the natural resources of California, and to ensure that these resources continue to remain viable into the future. To make this more apparent, incorporating the phrase “protect and enhance” would expand the mission from simply sustaining or managing existing resources.

Potential Common Themes:

Ecosystem based management based on the best available science; following broadly informed and transparent decision-making is key. We support all efforts to establish these goals as benchmarks for all Commission and agency management decisions.

To achieve that goal, it will be imperative that the Commission and Department proactively engage other responsible agencies, landowners and the general public. This relies upon effective data sharing and collaborative evaluation of information to develop responsible management goals. We appreciate the outlined Goals within the document, which appear to lead strongly in that direction.

General Comments:

The current structure directing DFG activities which incorporates a checks and balances approach dividing responsibility between the legislature, Fish and Game Commission and the Department mostly works. Providing clear direction and allocation of responsibilities to each entity should be continued in this planning effort.

Protecting native flora and fauna from exotic invasives is a daunting task. Strong leadership from CDFG is needed to develop appropriate and timely responses in coordination and cooperation with other agencies, NGO's and landowners. Identifying and responding to invasives early is much more cost effective than waiting until they are spreading. CDFG is the natural department to take on this important task.

Appendix B:

The four main common themes identified are all critical to the effectiveness of both the Commission and Department. We would encourage that the additional themes identified, especially theme #5 (Integrated Resource Management (interdisciplinary and interagency) and theme) be incorporated into the planning vision. All are critical to the success of the programs.

Theme: Communication, Education and Outreach

This is fundamentally the best and most essential tool required for not only developing an integrated, interdisciplinary approach to resource management, but also for creating an informed citizen base to provide essential support. We suggest that outreach efforts be expanded beyond those identified in the table to take advantage of web based venues as well as more traditional print venues.

Theme: Partnerships

Effective interdisciplinary and integrated science based stewardship and decision making relies upon the collective effort of many partners. We encourage a two pronged approach to enhancing the scientific capacity of DFG both by internal staff development and collaboration with others to integrated information obtained from universities, other agencies, independent consultant contractors, etc. Coordination of multiple research efforts should be the goal.

Strengthening public education is also critical, and we encourage greater collaboration with RCD's, watershed councils, etc. to assist in achieving this.

We especially appreciate the proposed effort to simplify permitting for restoration projects by developing programmatic 1600 permits, and adjusting fees for restoration.

As recipients of grants for almost 10 years from the Fisheries Restoration Grant Program, we feel that there has been sufficient program prioritization, but agree that a more

timely process between grant submittal and contract (usually 10-12 months), as well as more emphasis on monitoring efforts would be helpful.

Theme: Broadly-informed and Transparent Decision-making

It is important to make sure that decision making be based on the best available science, rather than political interests. We concur that a Science Committee composed of experts from a broad range of appropriate disciplines could be helpful in assisting the Commission. We also agree that appointees to the Commission should have appropriate qualifications related to natural resource management, participate in orientations and relevant meetings to enhance their knowledge base and that terms for serving and re-appointment be clearly defined.

Actions relevant to long-term stewardship of endangered species should be coordinated with the federal process. If a species is federally listed, it should also be so designated under the California Endangered Species Act. Maintaining those species that are endangered in California, but perhaps not nationally is also important, as is the category of Species of Special Concern. The decision for listing should be based on objective, scientific expertise examined by the Department. The role of the Commission should be to review the proposed listing to ensure transparency and avoid the potential for political influence.

Mitigation needs to be tailored to specific project needs, but follow a consistent framework that clearly outlines goals, objectives, and responsibilities. Funding for long term management of mitigation is also needed so that the Department has the resources to ensure compliance and/or develop suitable adaptive management strategies if necessary.

Theme: Defining and Supporting Success

Preserving ecosystem function, from basic such as protecting habitat or ensuring adequate stream flow are the fundamental requirements for long term resource protection. The metrics developed to determine appropriate mitigation actions, protection actions and to measure success need to incorporate factors such as biodiversity, trophic level stability, watershed functions (such as groundwater recharge, runoff impacts, wildlife corridors, hydrologic regimes, etc.) and carbon sequestration. Incorporating such evaluations into the CEQA process on a consistent basis would provide information critical to identifying opportunities and constraints associated with management decisions.

Long term stewardship requires that management actions incorporate resiliency and support healthy ecosystems. By clearly outlining these functions, it will be possible to better evaluate success and engage public participation.

Ensuring that any conflicts regarding delegation and authorization of responsibilities for decision making are clearly identified would help defuse the perception that perhaps decisions are inconsistent, not-transparent or politically rather than science based. This

clarification needs to occur between the legislature and the Commission, as well as between the Commission and the Department.

Streamlining the permitting process to provide clear and consistent requirements, expedite restoration projects and increase coordination with other permitting agencies both for 1600 streambed alteration permits and scientific collecting permits is needed. The timelag between submitting a permit request and obtaining the actual permit is definitely a problem.

Developing this vision is an important step for the Department, but success will hinge on also developing secure funding commensurate with the need. The goals and objectives of this plan rely upon sufficient well-trained staff. Without the underlying funding support, it will be difficult to achieve any of these worthy goals.

Last but not least, we support the proposal to rename the Department of Fish and Game and to more accurately describe their mission by calling it the Department of Wildlife Conservation and Management.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute our thoughts to this important effort. We look forward to seeing the final iteration of the Strategic Vision.

Sincerely,

Rosi Dagit
Senior Conservation Biologist

From: Gallagher, Nicholas - NRCS, Woodland, CA [mailto:Nicholas.Gallagher@ca.usda.gov]
Sent: Tuesday, December 20, 2011 2:15 PM
To: Strategic Vision
Subject: Invasive species program importance

In addition to the recommendations below, without proper invasive species control and restoration activities California's waterways and rangelands are in danger of extreme water quality issues, erosion issues, and essential wildlife habitat is threatened. Funding long term weed management programs is essential for the future health of California's natural resources. If we continue to manage and treat these invasive species it will be much cheaper in the long run, rather than eliminating funding now and trying to address these issues in the future when we no longer can ignore the problem.

Invasive plants are a top threat to the state's ecological communities. DFG and the Natural Resources Agency need to address invasive plants as an essential part of managing these resources.

Funding for CDFA's invasive plant management programs (such as county-based Weed Management Areas) has been eliminated. CDFA focuses on agriculture. For invasive plants damaging the state's wildlands, the Natural Resources Agency must take the leadership role.

DFG and the Natural Resources Agency should:

- take the lead role in addressing invasive plants in California's wildlands
- dedicate significant funding to invasive plant management.
- partner with WMAs, Cal-IPC and others on invasive plant management programs.
- take an active role in leading the interagency Invasive Species Council of California and implementing the actions recommended in its Strategic Framework.

educate the public on the wildlife impacts of invasive species, and how citizens can help reduce the problem.

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-----Original Message-----

From: Rhianna Lee [mailto:rlee@dfg.ca.gov]
Sent: Tuesday, December 20, 2011 11:52 AM
To: Strategic Vision
Cc: Clark Blanchard; Melissa Miller-Henson
Subject: strategic vision comment

Dear Strategic Visioners,

My initial comment after reading through the draft material for the development of our strategic vision focuses on the lack of including the word conservation and educating that concept. Although the items listed in Chapter 3 describe the various elements of conservation, it is not defined in the overarching goal or supporting goals. The word conservation does not appear at all in the body of the vision plan at all, not in the DFG mission, and not in our overall vision statement, only in the area described as what needs to be addressed. In order for the elements of conservation to be understood as part of an overall plan to achieve, there must be a consistent message from the top downward, which supports the more focused items. The lack of using the word speaks loudly and makes me wonder if we are trying to avoid using it although everything we are trying to achieve and describe is ultimately conservation as a whole for our rich, diverse natural resources in California. By trying to achieve conservation without really describing it defeats our purpose from the beginning.

I suggest embracing the concept fully and strive to educate that conservation does not mean just preservation, but wise use for multitude types of utilization with a sustainable approach (recreation, hunting, etc. as well as ecosystem/species/habitat health). Let's not be afraid to state exactly what we intend for fear that it will be misunderstood. Rather, we must move forward with confidence, using focused leadership skills that explains what needs to be done and allows opportunities for input, questions, and consideration of other solutions.

I plan to submit more suggestions once the plan is further along. However, I don't think those comments will be very effective as long as we are not taking a strong, proactive approach at this stage of development. For an example of simple, straight-forward approach to defining conservation for natural resources for the public trust, see the State of Idaho Wildlife Conservation Strategy.

<http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/public/wildlife/cwcs/>
<http://wildlifeactionplan.org/idaho.html>

Additionally, they have an Office of Species Conservation and associated strategic plan
http://species.idaho.gov/strategic_plan.html

Best regards,
Rhianna Lee

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