

California Fish and Wildlife Strategic Vision Project

Initial Summary of Common Themes in the Barriers to Implementation Assessment

January 3, 2012 Draft

As part of developing the California Fish and Wildlife Strategic Vision (CFWSV), an assessment was conducted examining past reports and the degree to which past recommendations were implemented by the California Department of Fish and Game (DFG) and the California Fish and Game Commission (F&GC). The purpose of the assessment was to provide feedback on how effective DFG and F&GC have been in the past in implementing recommendations for improvement and identify any barriers that have constrained or prohibited the implementation of such recommendations.

Interviews were conducted with 18 key former and current state officials (legislative or executive) who had direct interaction with and/or participated in decisions affecting DFG and F&GC. In addition, 22 individuals contributed to a supplementary online survey. Interviewees and respondents represented past and present leadership of DFG and F&GC, administration representatives and legislative staff.

This preliminary draft represents a synthesis of most, although not all, interview and survey results to inform the early/mid-January CFWSV Executive Committee, Blue Ribbon Citizen Commission (BRCC), and Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG) meetings.

Overview

None of the individuals interviewed recalled specific reports and recommendations; those responding to the survey had a much higher recall rate. Regardless, the consensus view was that, in general, reports were not addressed due to one or more of the following main reasons:

- Funding – either lack of funding to implement or adequate funding negating any sense of urgency to address change
- Recommendations were not politically acceptable (e.g. recommendations to increase fees).
- Lack of political will - there is no legislative interest in fighting for change if there are no supporting constituencies
- No commitment to change within DFG

Interviewees and survey respondents also offered insights into DFG and F&GC and discussed barriers to organizational change. Several common themes emerged and are summarized in this document. Each section includes comments from the interviewees and respondents on barriers to change as well as their recommendations for overcoming those barriers. The themes include:

- Funding
- Expanded DFG Mission
- Organizational Culture
- Priorities
- Legislative Relationships
- Enforcement
- Fish and Game Commission Structure
- Staff Training
- Science
- Implementing Change

Funding

The overarching barrier to change identified by all interviewees and respondents was funding. Interestingly, it was not lack of funding (though most acknowledged this as a major problem) but rather the tension between consumptive users and those who support non-consumptive uses. That tension has resulted in creating dedicated funding sources. Not trusting DFG to fulfill its mission to support traditional hunting and fishing, respondents stated that past legislative efforts have tied funding sources to management of specific species. Currently there are in excess of 40 dedicated funds. Instead of managing habitats for the benefit of resident species and all uses, DFG is legislatively constrained to expend efforts to manage specific species.

Instead of funding dedicated to managing individual species for consumptive use, there was a general recommendation that all wildlife would be better served by managing habitats to promote both consumptive and non-consumptive uses. While consumptive users will likely not initially support license and tag funds being spent on habitat management, both species and users would benefit in the long-term from a diverse and sustainable ecosystem. All agreed that a stable funding source would be ideal. However, recognizing that limited resources are likely a fact of life for the foreseeable future, respondents indicated that combining dedicated funds would allow DFG to leverage resources and achieve economies of scale.

Expanded DFG Mission

Initially a “hook and bullet” organization with a goal of sustainable hunting and fishing, DFG’s trustee role has grown to include habitat protection, stewardship and additional regulatory responsibilities. Constituencies have expanded to include preservationists, recreationalists and other non-consumptive users. Interviewees and survey respondents believe the organization has not evolved quickly enough to meet the expectations of all users, which has fostered mistrust of DFG. Many respondents indicated that there is frequently tension between biologists who manage a species for take (ex. those who see wild pigs as a hunting resource and a source of funding) and ecologists who support bio-diversity (ex. those who see wild pigs as a pest.) Constrained by dedicated funds and further compounded by inadequate resources, DFG is inherently conflicted in meeting its mission of “managing California’s diverse fish, wildlife, and plant resources, and the habitats upon which they depend, for their ecological values and for their use and enjoyment by the public.” This conflict has become a polarizing factor and a barrier to change.

The CFWSV is seen as a good effort to map out a sustainable future for DFG and F&GC by collaboratively creating a shared vision. A suggestion was made to continue the Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG), albeit a smaller group of stakeholders that includes greater employee representation, to collaboratively advise on priorities and better manage stakeholder expectations. Other suggestions included leveraging partnerships with non-profit organizations and public departments and agencies with overlapping responsibilities. One example for consideration includes partnering with California State Parks, State Lands Commission and local conservancies to manage and preserve open space,

Organizational Culture

DFG and F&GC are perceived as a conservative, closed organization with little history of involving outsiders. For the most part, DFG is seen as a traditional hunting and fishing organization with an institutional culture not conducive to change. Furthermore, staff is typically perceived as “problem finders” not “problem solvers.” Several interviewees opined that staff members see themselves as interacting with just 5% of the state’s population instead of seeing themselves as trustees of fish and wildlife resources benefitting 100% of the population. Also, while acknowledging the diverse habitat in each of the seven regions, interviewees and survey respondents commented that DFG policy is not implemented consistently across the regions.

All interviewees and respondents agreed that strong leadership committed to change will be required to transform DFG and F&GC into more open and responsive organizations. A culture of teamwork needs to be fostered to maximize resources and improve fulfillment of DFG's mission to wildlife and users alike. Also, several interviewees recommended DFG recognize non-consumptive users and instead of creating one-size-fits-all policies, tailor policies and procedures to appropriately serve diverse constituencies. One example cited is the recent change to purchase a day-use permit to visit Grey Lodge Wildlife Area. Daily visitors such as birdwatchers are said to now be subjected to the same onerous permit application process as seasonal hunting permits. Non-consumptive users can no longer simply arrive at Grey Lodge and gain admission; a DFG Lands Pass is required – which can only be purchased in advance from any of DFG's 1,400 license agents or from a DFG license sales office.

Priorities

Many interviewees observed that DFG is a conservative organization that is more reactive than proactive. Priorities are said to be currently based on legislative mandates first, judicial directives second and other mission critical discretionary activities third. Not all respondents agreed that these criteria for setting priorities served DFG well. Budget constraints and underfunded and unfunded mandates exacerbate the problem of setting priorities. The prioritization process is further compounded by the politics of competing constituencies. Several respondents indicated that it was difficult to set and stand by priorities and as such, is a significant barrier to change.

There was general agreement that the establishment of short and long-term priorities are necessary to manage change. Several interviewees commented on the need for more departmental discretion in setting DFG priorities and a more open and inclusive process. Utilizing an on-going stakeholder group, recommended in the *Expanded Mission* section above, could assist with balancing budgets with priorities.

Legislative Relationships

Any long-term change to DFG and F&GC will require legislative support. DFG is not seen as having a strong relationship with the legislature or legislative staff. A few interviewees mentioned that DFG staff have missed opportunities to strengthen those relationships. It was pointed out that California State Senate and California State Assembly staff members do not enjoy free access to DFG employees, unlike they do with other departments and agencies. Also, unlike DWR and the water contractors, it was pointed out that DFG does not enjoy a single, large stakeholder group to assist with lobbying the legislature. Instead, DFG has many diverse stakeholder groups that lobby on behalf of a variety of interests and issues.

A majority of interviewees and respondents recommended DFG strengthen relationships with legislative staffers. The DFG director needs to prioritize building a strong relationship with the legislature and legislative staff. An on-going stakeholder group, recommended in the *Expanded Mission* section above, could assist with lobbying the legislature.

Enforcement

Most interviewees opined that environmental laws were not being adequately enforced by either DFG staff or wardens – to the detriment of fish, wildlife and plant resources. As the most visible enforcement arm, all agreed that wardens were understaffed, underpaid and handicapped by outdated technology. The interviewees were split on the role of wardens. Some thought the wardens should first and foremost be DFG employees and law enforcement personnel second. Wardens should focus on enforcing environmental laws, reporting to the

regions. Others saw the warden's current role and reporting structure as appropriate. This dichotomy is a barrier to change.

There was near unanimous support for increasing the number of wardens, paying them commensurate with other law enforcement agencies, and providing effective technology to assist them in performance of their duties. Several interviewees suggested that to maximize resources, oversight of wardens should be returned to the regions. This would allow wardens to support regional priorities. Their role could be expanded to issue permits that they would then enforce. Others felt expanding the number of wardens within the current structure would improve enforcement. All agreed this is a vital area to address.

Fish and Game Commission Structure

The current F&GC structure is seen as a less than effective. Most thought the role of F&GC is important, but the structure is inadequate. The F&GC makes 40 – 50 rules a year – thought to be second in number only to the California Department of Food and Agriculture. Part-time commissioners don't always have or take the time to research issues. Several interviewees commented that F&GC is supposed to provide guidance to DFG on policy priorities but lacks the legislative authority to require DFG to follow that guidance. Conversely, some policies promulgated by F&GC either conflict with existing statutes or lack the resources for DFG to implement. Of equal importance, several interviewees opined that there is no formal way for the director of DFG and F&GC members to communicate.

While the interviewees were split on the proper number of F&GC members (recommendations varied from the current number of 5 to as high as 9), almost all thought members should be required to dedicate more time to the job – and be paid accordingly. Several interviewees and respondents commented on the need for F&GC members with more diverse backgrounds. Few supported the idea of a professional F&GC. Several commented that F&GC should be a good forum for debate.

Staff Training

Inadequate staff training was cited as a barrier to change. Several interviewees commented that wardens initially receive 22 weeks of training; biologists and other staff receive one week of training a year – if they are lucky. Yet both wardens and biologists are expected to know the California Fish and Game Code.

While training is costly, the benefits are seen to outweigh the expenditures. Group trainings would provide an opportunity to communicate department policies and, at the same time, provide cross-pollination of ideas across regions.

Science

Several interviewees suggested that while science is not a barrier to change, proper use of science provides confidence in and credibility to DFG. Several interviewees observed that DFG staff have become contract managers rather than scientists. Once known for its research capacity, DFG is thought to outsource most all of its scientific research.

Several suggestions were made to create independent scientific expertise similar to the State of Florida. Others suggested creating an independent science board, similar to the Delta Stewardship Council, which would appoint panels of scientists with pertinent expertise to provide independent peer review of various research.

Implementing Change

In general, interviewees saw the transformation of DFG and F&GC as daunting but necessary. They provided the following suggestions to successfully implement change:

- Create a shared vision where all stakeholders can see something in it for them. You can't get there from here if you don't know where you're going.
- The true, underlying problem must be adequately identified before appropriate solutions can be developed and implemented.
- Recognize that any lasting and effective change is a long-term process that involves DFG leadership, legislative support, DFG cultural changes, and stakeholder involvement.
- Create short-term, medium-term and long-term recommendations. Incremental change is still change.
- Any reorganization should be undertaken collaboratively. Bring everyone (DFG leadership, staff, legislators and stakeholders including the general public) together to see commonalities of purpose through education and discussion. Then jointly figure out how to leverage resources to achieve DFG's mission, setting realistic expectations of stakeholders, staff, legislature, administration etc.
- Absent strong leadership by the director and commitment from the administration and legislature, it is highly unlikely DFG will change.
- Any change must involve DFG and F&GC staff. Success can only be achieved when internal forces buy-in to the process.
- Creating a strategic plan must include DFG staff from all levels of the organization. The leadership doesn't have a corner on creative thinking. Field and office staff often has insights that would facilitate change.
- Any reorganization must incorporate an adaptive management component. This is not a one-time fix-all process. Organizations are dynamic and create a mechanism to react to changing circumstances.
- DFG would benefit from an advocate for change. The proposed on-going stakeholder advisory group could fill that position. However, the advisory group must recognize the difference between "change" and "doing things the way I want you to do them."
- A critical question to be answered is: What is the problem and what are you willing to pay for? Change requires funding.
- DFG needs to develop people, relationships and partnerships.
- Treat all stakeholders fairly.
- DFG and F&GC need to be transparent and accountable.