

**Testimony of Kim Delfino, California Program Director, Defenders of Wildlife
before the
California Fish and Wildlife Strategic Vision Blue Ribbon Citizen Commission
July 21, 2011**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide my perspective on how to address the challenge of assembling a California fish and wildlife strategic vision. I am here to provide the perspective of the "public trust resource" community, but I do want to start off my comments by stating that the conservation community is very invested in this strategic vision process. I have brought copies of a letter a number of groups sent to Ms. Baker outlining some of our suggestions for how to make this a successful effort. (Attached). Our organizations were strong proponents of AB 2376 (Huffman). We are proponents because we are concerned that California is facing an immense challenge.

California enjoys amazing diversity in species and ecosystems. Unfortunately, California's growing population and its accompanying development and consumption of resources have taken a terrible toll on California's fish, wildlife and plant populations. California has nearly 300 species listed as endangered or threatened – more than any other state except Hawaii. We have major ecosystem meltdowns happening all over the state, from the Klamath to the Bay Delta to the California Desert to the Marine environment to the Salton Sea.

While a lot of focus is on endangered species, I want to make the point that the Department of Fish and Game (DFG or department) and Fish and Game Commission (Commission) are responsible for all fish, wildlife, native plants and habitat in the state. Indeed, this is the very heart of the concept of public trust and places the department and commission on the front lines for biodiversity conservation. In light of the many threats and stresses and interests, this is a tough place to be.

Unfortunately, while the situation for fish, wildlife and plants is already pretty tough, it appears that it will only become more difficult and complex in light of the challenges posed by climate change and our responses to deal with climate change. This is further complicated by the current economy and reduction in available funding for the department and commission to do their jobs. We have added to DFG's list of jobs to do – in large part as a response to the many fish and wildlife problems we are facing – but we have failed to provide the department with the funding, staff or tools to carry out these jobs. Indeed, we have cut and slashed some of DFG's core programs such as conservation planning, land management, and resource assessment. Without these basic tools, we are asking essentially the impossible and then are frustrated when there are train-wrecks. I do not mean to be overly negative here; I am trying to be pragmatic and point out an obvious problem.

While the job here is a difficult one, it is not impossible, which is why we strongly believe in this vision effort. However, I want to take a moment and point out what is perhaps obvious -- that the conservation community is not the only interested party here. Indeed, a critical part of this effort is the necessity of including the wide variety of interests and perspectives in this effort. This process must engage constructively and actively all of these interests, including other state and federal agencies, the commercial and recreational hunting and fishing community, the development community, energy developers, the resource extractors (such as mining, timber and oil), the agricultural and ranching community, tribes, and the water users. In addition, as is

pointed out in our letter, it is also crucial to involve the staff of the department and commission as they understand the culture and operations of these entities and have a perspective that none of us outside of these entities share. Moreover, whatever vision is put together, it will require implementation by the department and commission.

Another reason to include department and commission staff is that there are already existing strategic plans and planning efforts ongoing within the department and commission. Indeed, we must pay close attention to these efforts and not reinvent the wheel unnecessarily. Many of these planning efforts are good efforts and simply lack mechanism for implementation due to a variety of issues, including lack of staff, lack of funding, and lack of focus. For example, DFG has had an evolving departmental strategic plan with seven goals ranging from enhancing public education and outreach to developing partnerships to expanding science capacity. Also, DFG has produced a state wildlife action plan that details many potential actions for improving wildlife conservation. Further, the department has a developing climate change adaptation strategy.

The Blue Ribbon Citizen's Commission (BRCC) should start its efforts by looking at the existing plans and programs ongoing in the department and commission and taking time to listen to the perspectives of the various interests groups as well as staff within the department and commission. I'd also recommend that in this effort to gain a common understanding the BRCC embark on a tour of the various regions where meetings would be held with staff and interests groups. This is important because California is so diverse biologically, economically, socially, and politically.

The BRCC should also look at other states' efforts. The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies has done a good job of conducting studies looking at the structure and governance in other state and at funding efforts. The BRCC should look at these reports and talk to other state fish and wildlife agencies.

After that, the BRCC should look at the various categories identified in AB 2376 and at the goals from DFGs own strategic plan and come up with a clearly articulated set of specific goals upon which the strategic vision is built. Some very commonly accepted goals would likely include, but are not limited to:

- Improving scientific capacity both human capacity and procuring better information
- Improving regulatory structures while not undermining underlying protections
- Ensuring a sustainable and transparent financing structure
- Improving landscape-scale stewardship and resource protection
- Improving communication and partnerships

In conclusion, I'd like to reiterate the importance of this effort. California has a lot to be proud of when you look at the natural resources in our state. But, we also have a lot to lose and not a lot of time left to get it right. This process could provide a solid foundation upon which we can build up our conservation efforts for the benefit of many. I look forward to working with the BRCC and others as this process moves forward.



July 15, 2011

Carol Baker
Project Director
Fish and Wildlife Strategic Vision
California Natural Resources Agency

Dear Ms. Baker,

On behalf of our respective organizations and the hundreds of thousands of Californians we collectively represent, we are writing today to offer our initial recommendations for implementing AB 2376 (Huffman, 2010) and for charting a course towards world-class natural resource conservation in the 21st Century. Our organizations have worked closely with the Department of Fish & Game (DFG) and the Fish & Game Commission (FGC) for decades. We understand the strengths of these agencies and the challenges they face, and we were among those who strongly advocated for the passage of AB 2376 (Huffman). Our support for this legislation has never been about the many good people who work tirelessly at the agencies to achieve important missions. Instead, we believe that a well-structured, well-supported, and truly comprehensive Strategic Vision process can be a catalyst for helping move California towards excellence in natural resource protection and management.

We were among the original supporters of AB 2376 (Huffman) and we are long-standing advocates for DFG/FGC reforms. We also understand that the Department and the Commission have a broad and diverse constituency. As such, we greatly appreciate the recent efforts of the Natural Resources Agency and your team to implement the legislation through the launch of an inclusive process. We expect much work ahead to achieve a broadly-supported and comprehensive outcome. Since the process is only recently commencing, we would like to highlight several key areas that are critical to success, and respectfully offer specific recommendations.

First, the appointed Blue Ribbon Citizen's Committee (BRCC) should include scientific expertise. Specifically, while we acknowledge the need for the process to get going and the importance of naming a citizen's committee, we do recommend that the Executive Committee consider appointing an additional member to the BRCC. This additional member should have broad expertise in science, regulatory agency structures (or even regulatory experience), and California's extraordinary ecosystem conservation challenges.

Second, the process should include a formal role for scientific review of various Visioning work products to ensure that these products are based on the best scientific information available and reflect other science and planning efforts that could be beneficial to the Department and the Commission's efforts. This independent science panel could also provide information to the Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG), BRCC, and Executive Committee on an as-needed basis.

Third, effective stakeholder protocols and procedures must be instituted. A clear challenge – but also a unique opportunity – for this process is the immense stakeholder constituency whose input must be factored into the final vision. Broad and active engagement by stakeholders is critical to the success of this visioning process. But, without effective and fair protocols and procedures, voluminous stakeholder input could overwhelm the effort. A first order of business for the SAG should be the development of a consensus governance protocol. Specific protocol recommendations include:

- Broad SAG participation with approximately 20-30 participants, each representing a different organization, association, or unique perspective. Each member should be allowed to designate an alternate or designee from their respective organization who can provide information and expertise based upon his/her experience working with the Department.
- Establishment of working groups for different and complementary topics, consistent with the areas of focus listed in AB 2376 (Huffman), and registration by SAG members in a limited number of such working groups;
- Executive Committee selection of chairpersons from among the working group participants to serve in a leadership, organizing, and liaising capacity;
- Scheduled working group meetings, with the full SAG meeting less frequently but still at regular intervals to ensure open communication;
- Delegation to each working group for production of two principal work products:
 - A list of issues and challenges facing the DFG and FGC (by date certain) on the topic of the working group, to be followed by
 - A list of recommendations for addressing the identified issues and overcoming the identified challenges; and,
- Working group Chairs function as liaisons between the SAG and the BRCC/Executive Committee to facilitate efficient communication.

We suggest the following working groups whose particular as well as cumulative work could effectively achieve these goals: (a) Governance and Mission; (b) Sustainable Financing; (c) Natural Resource Stewardship and Protection; (d) Regulatory Responsibilities; (e) Communication and Partnerships; and, (d) Enforcement.

Fourth, in order for this Strategic Vision to be successful, it is essential that there is input and buy-in from the very people who will be tasked with carrying out this vision – employees of the Department and Commission. We urge that the BRCC set up a process for including review and advice from Department and Commission employees. One possible approach would be to set up an advisory committee consisting of Department and Commission staff spanning a variety of those entities' program and administrative sections.

Fifth, focusing the Strategic Vision process also requires a clear articulation by the BRCC of the specific goals of the Strategic Vision early in the process. In order to move forward on such a complex issue as creating a strategic vision for wildlife resources, it is important to set out clear goals upon which the vision can be built and further explained. These goals should be rooted in the statutory directive provided by AB 2376 (Huffman).

Finally, it is important for the BRCC to discuss and decide key issues based on the best information possible and reflecting an understanding of the regional differences within California. Therefore, we

suggest that the BRCC hold meetings around California – possibly one within each Department region – to gather information about key issues within those regions.

Again, we appreciate your leadership – and the Secretary's – on this issue and we look forward to engaging fully as the Strategic Visioning process continues to unfold. We would be glad to meet in person to discuss our ideas presented in this letter. Thank you for your time in considering these suggestions.

Sincerely,



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Kim Delfino
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Cc: John Laird, Natural Resources Agency Secretary