



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 Californian's 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 viewpoint/perspective. Each member should be allowed to designate an alternate;
- 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.

Fifth, 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.

Sixth, 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.

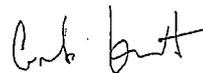
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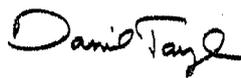
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Trout Unlimited



Kim Delfino
Defenders of Wildlife



Curtis Knight
California Trout



Dan Taylor
Audubon California



Jay Ziegler
The Nature Conservancy

Cc: John Laird, Natural Resources Agency Secretary