

Strategic Focus Item Projects Progress Report August 21, 1997

In April 1995, the Department's Management Team¹ completed an in-depth review of the goals and strategies in the Strategic Plan, established selection criteria, and selected a set of items as the Department's Annual Focus Items for FY 95/96 (and in some cases, into FY 96/97). They identified 15 specific items for action planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. They assigned a sponsor (Management Team member) for each selected item, and gave the sponsor responsibility for leader selection and the of project teams. The Strategic Focus Item sponsors were also responsible for providing periodic updates to the Management and Executive teams on project status.

The following list includes those items that were selected as our Focus Items for action planning and implementation. Each of the Items is cross-referenced to a theme and goal from the Strategic Plan. A brief statement of the activities and results is included for each item.

Theme I: Public Service, Outreach, and Education

- A. Develop integrated that addresses identified needs and opportunities in education and communication. Relationship to the Strategic Plan: Theme I, Goal 5.

Nearly all stakeholder groups contacted during development of the Strategic Plan identified communication as something that the department could do better. Our employees have also said that we need to work on communication. We have a Conservation Education Program but it has not been organized or effective.

A team of employees met several times, looked at other states (e.g., Colorado) and looked at how Conservation Education functions currently. They identified problems and limitations of the current function (lack of quality control and evaluation, overlapping programs/missed opportunities and competition among various Department programs) and the problems associated with having public service programs in various Divisions. They identified four areas for improvement. 1) Communicating Department programs and successes to our employees and the public; 2) Providing quality departmental publications and educational materials; 3) Providing outstanding educational support; and 4) Marketing Department accomplishments and programs.

Concurrently, the Department was working on a reorganization plan. The reorganization team members identified similar problems. The consensus was that the Department should establish a branch to improve its public services. The team recommended that the mission of the branch be to provide guidance, policy development, technical assistance, and support of public programs within the Department and to develop an informed and educated public who appreciate and actively participate in the conservation of California's wildlife and their habitats.

¹ In March 1996 the Department Management Team (Regional Managers and Division Chiefs) combined

The second class (March 1997) in the Department's Leadership Academy reviewed the results from this item. They made some additional recommendations for improvement, and as of July 1997 the Department has begun implementing several of those recommendations -- including appointing a new Chief of the Conservation Education Branch and filling vacant positions in the Branch.

B. Establish enforcement priorities. Relationship to the Strategic Plan: Them I, Goal 7.

This team established five priorities for 1995-96 and beyond -- abalone, anadromous fish in the Bay and Delta, fish landing receipts, oil sumps, and herring. Wardens made progress in all areas but were most successful with the abalone, anadromous fish and fish landing receipts projects.

North of San Francisco, abalone may be taken by sport pickers and divers. This is a popular attraction and the Department has estimated the value of the sport abalone industry on the north coast at \$10,000,000. It is illegal to take abalone commercially on the north-coast; however the high market value of abalone has led to illegal take. To combat this take wardens conducted covert investigations on the north coast between Half Moon Bay and Ft. Bragg.

Both commercial divers and sport pickers were observed. Suspected commercial sea urchin boats were placed under surveillance in an attempt to observe them poaching abalone while taking sea urchins. Locations with high levels of sport diving activities were surveilled. Covert investigations of businesses suspected of illegal sales of abalone were conducted. A total of 37 people have been prosecuted for abalone related violations as a result of this operation, and intelligence was gathered for future investigations.

The illegal use of nets and set lines has been an ongoing problem in San Francisco Bay and the San Joaquin Delta. These illegal operations usually occur at night or during low visibility periods and target anadromous fish, especially salmon, striped bass and sturgeon. They have historically taken place within the one thousand miles of water ways that make up the Delta and Bay complex.

As a result of this project, cases involving five gill nets, one set line, and one throw ne/seine were made. These seven cases resulted in 21 arrests. Illegal netting and set lining appear to be down in the Bay and Delta.

Wildlife Protection Division's (WPD) third priority was to assure accurate reporting of commercially landed fish in California. By law, fish caught by commercial fishermen must be reported on fish landing receipts. Information from fish landing receipts is used by the Department to assess each fishery and to collect fish privilege taxes which are used to fund Department programs. The information is also used by the Department and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to track trip limits, quotas and harvest guidelines and to set limits each year to prevent overfishing. For 1995-96 the WPD placed an emphasis on monitoring groundfish landings for accuracy.

Wardens in all three coastal regions monitored groundfish landings. Continual monitoring appeared to increase the accuracy of reported landings of targeted species that

have small trip limits or quotas, such as Thornyheads and Sablefish. Fish landing receipts remained a priority in 1996-97.

- C. Contingency planning for public safety issues. Relationship to the Strategic Plan: Theme I, Goal 10.

Wildlife Management, Wildlife Protection, Oil Spill Prevention and Response, and Conservation Education program staff served on this team. The purpose of the project was to develop guidelines for responding to public safety incidents involving wildlife through the use of the Incident Command System (ICS).

The team recommended combining guidelines and procedures for responding to mountain lion, black bear, deer, coyotes, and large exotic carnivore public safety incidents using the ICS. Other recommendations related to developing standard procedures for responding to reports from the public, developing training for employees, and developing outreach projects to increase public awareness and interagency cooperation.

The Leadership Team has reviewed the team's report and conceptually approved the recommendations and products. The final version of the public safety guidelines were recently completed and distributed. Additional training needs may be identified as the Department gains experience using the new guidelines, procedures, and ICS in a variety of situations.

Theme II: Cooperative Approaches to Resource Stewardship and Use

- A. Implement clarifying definitions and application of policies for the Lake and Streambed Alteration Agreement (FGC 1600) process as they relate to stakeholder groups (e.g., cattle ranchers and flood control districts). Relationship to the Strategic Plan: Theme II, Goal 3.

The Environmental Services Division took the lead on this project. They reviewed the definitions, applications, and policies and made recommendations to update the 1600 processes. A series of meetings was held with the regions to obtain their recommendations. The final product was submitted to the General Counsel for legal review.

- B. Coordinate implementation and use of GIS and setting standards for data gathering and sharing. Relationship to the Strategic Plan: Theme II, Goal 4. This effort was to build on the results of the group involved with resource assessment and research priorities (see Theme III B). Since that group's recommendations were not ready soon enough, this group defined and included a project in the Department's Information Technology Strategic Plan for "Department Data Inventory and Needs Assessment." The tasks in this new project, to be accomplished after reorganization, will inventory existing data and future needs, and establish and promulgate standards for the collection of data.

- C. Implement a "Land Contracts" policy and process as an incentive for private landowners to maintain habitat on their lands. Relationship to the Strategic Plan: Theme II, Goal 3.

a team of managers began an effort to assess all of the Department's land conservation and stewardship programs and policies. This assessment is expected to result in statements of principles to guide the Department's land stewardship efforts, including conservation planning and conservation banking.

- D. Implement a program with the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) to acquire land in anticipation of future mitigation needs – a mitigation land bank. Relationship to the Strategic Plan: Theme II, Goal 1.

WCB land acquisition, in anticipation of mitigation banking opportunities, is a subject which has been proposed for inclusion in the development of the Department's Lands Policy. This policy is currently under review by the Department's Leadership Team. The Department has approved WCB action on two acquisitions, one in Santa Rosa and one at Honey Lake, which are targeted for mitigation banking.

- E. Establish fishery improvement and protection projects in coordination with marine commercial and sport fishing interests: White Seabass Pilot Program. Relationship to the Strategic Plan: Theme II, Goal 1.

In 1993 sport fishing interests reached agreement with commercial fisheries representatives to test manage one marine fin fish, white seabass, under one management authority, the Director of the Department of Fish and Game. As a result, the Department was directed by the Legislature to prepare a white seabass management plan as a pilot program. The Marine Resources Division took this on as a focus project.

The major problem to overcome was philosophical. Recreational fishing interests in southern California for years expressed concern that California's division of recreational and commercial fisheries authority between the Legislature and the Fish and Game Commission results in fragmented and politicized marine fisheries management.

Recreational fishing interests in general prefer that a single fishery council have authority, while commercial fishing interests are generally comfortable the Legislature retaining control of commercial fisheries and the Fish and Game Commission setting sport fishing regulations. A draft white seabass plan was completed in June of 1995 as an environmental document to comply with CEQA. The draft plan was submitted to the Fish and Game Commission in July, and to the Legislature in August of 1995. The Commission held two public hearings on the plan during August and October of 1995 and took action at its 1995 Commission meeting.

The Commission directed the Department to revise the plan to reflect that the Commission, not the Director, would have management authority for white seabass. This was contrary to our recommendations. However, we modified the draft management plan as directed, and the Commission adopted it at its March 1996 meeting.

Implementing the plan appears unlikely since it requires legislation and the commercial fishing industry is opposed to the Commission having sole control of white seabass fisheries management.

- A. Conduct Central Valley in-stream flow studies in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Relationship to the Strategic Plan: Theme III, Goal 3.

This project was handled in the Environmental Services Division, and it is continuing to develop information on habitat needs of anadromous fishes within Central Valley streams. The project is nearing completion of the third year of a five-year study that is partially funded by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The investigations continue to concentrate on the upper Sacramento River dealing with fall, late-fall, winter and spring run chinook salmon and steelhead, and on the American River (fall run chinook salmon and steelhead). Information obtained from the project has been integrated into various planning efforts although the studies are not complete. The Sacramento Water Forum has relied extensively on the data in the development of a water/fish-friendly management plan for the American River. The data have formed the foundation for real time operation of Folsom Dam, including temperature and flow management to improve fall spawning conditions for chinook salmon.

- B. Establish priorities for resource assessment and research. Relationship to the Strategic Plan: Theme III, Goal 4.

A team of fifteen employees was appointed to establish priorities for resource assessment and research. They took an important step toward developing a process to evaluate and rank resource assessment and research activities for species and habitats.

Resource assessment activities serve as a barometer of the environmental health of California's wildlife and habitats. Research sets the direction for good stewardship. The first task completed by the team created a set of guidelines for evaluating the merits of proposed activities. They wanted to be sure we use our limited resources in the most efficient and effective ways.

Topics covered in these guidelines include having a clear statement of purpose or problem, use of partnerships, and good study design. These guidelines will be distributed to every region and division for their use.

Establishing a ranking process for activities within a program was the next product of this group. They prepared a draft system that takes into account the varying factors and issues we face in deciding what is most important to do: How well the activity meets ecological needs, is the funding source restricted, does the activity provide or lead to public service (recreational or commercial), does it emphasize multi-species, larger landscape approaches? Some programs have begun to test this system in developing their priorities.

- C. Direct activities toward maintaining, enhancing, and restoring wildlife communities on lands managed by the Department for wildlife benefit. Relationship to the Strategic Plan: Theme III, Goal 2.

The Department administers over 800,000 acres in over 300 management units. These lands were acquired over a long period of time, and have not been recently evaluated to determine whether they still retain their biological values or whether we can expect them

determine how our limited resources can be more effectively directed toward maintaining, enhancing, and restoring wildlife communities on our lands. We looked at the possibility of disposing of land that no longer meets our land management or wildlife related public use goals and using the proceeds for better habitat conservation purposes. Secondly, we looked at the gamut of management activities carried out on our lands to see which were not related to managing wildlife so that we can begin redirecting them towards those activities benefiting wildlife communities.

This focus team quickly recognized that it would take a concerted effort requiring additional staff and funding to adequately assess the viability of our lands. So they attempted to the foundation for such an effort by establishing criteria to dispose of property in the interim. During 1995-96, eight properties were identified, based largely on administrative considerations, and the Wildlife Conservation Board was requested to take action.

The team also identified eight types of activities carried out by our land managers that do not directly benefit wildlife communities or habitat. These include such things as providing trash pickup, managing cultural and historic resources, and horseback riding. The team concluded that very few activities on DFG lands are not related to managing wildlife or wildlife-related recreation. Those activities not related to wildlife were considered essential for other legitimate purposes. Nevertheless, we will look for opportunities to reduce the cost of such activities and to eliminate any that are truly unnecessary. The work of this team was expanded to include an assessment of our land conservation and stewardship programs.

Theme IV: Organizational Vitality

- A. Improve the budgeting and fiscal management systems. Relationship to the Strategic Plan: Theme IV, Goal 3.

The purpose of the effort was to improve the quality and timeliness of information provided to line staff and to hold line staff accountable/responsible to operate their programs within budget resources.

In order to improve the information available to line staff and to be able to manage the Department's budget more effectively, the Budget Branch developed an automated Budget Management System (BMS). The FY 1996-97 printed allotments and revisions were provided from the implemented BMS. In 1997-98, both the revised 1997-98 budget and the proposed 1998-99 budget will be developed using the BMS and made available to line staff. The BMS offers flexibility and enhanced capabilities in calculating and applying budget adjustments, tracking organizational and programmatic impacts of budget changes, and applying changes to the Governor's Budget and the Budget Act. The BMS ensures that the Budget Branch has the ability to respond to internal and external inquiries regarding budgeted expenditures accurately.

In order to identify what the Department did and how those activities are funded, the Department linked current activities to current budget allotments. Through the Budget Linkage Project, all activities performed by the Department were identified. Then all employees identified the percentage of time they spend on these activities. This activity

information was then linked to current allotments to show how each activity is funded. The activities identified will be the basis for ongoing time reporting of activities and continued linkage to current budget allotments. With the budget linkage information, the Department will be able to adjust programs and funding to ensure that highest priority activities are accomplished and that they are properly funded.

- B. Improve internal communication and coordination on water, timber harvest, and endangered species policies and issues. Relationship to the Strategic Plan: Theme IV, Goal 2.

It was decided early that a water coordination should be established and meet regularly. It has been meeting about twice each month. Recommendations of this team include creating a new position of Water Policy Coordinator. This is being considered in reorganization planning.

The teams working on timber harvest and endangered species independently reached two general conclusions: (1) that the communication and coordination problems in the Department on major issues will require long-term solutions and would be helped significantly by the proposed reorganization, and (2) in the short-term electronic directory of expertise might help. The Leadership Team postponed a decision on the directory, with expressions of concern about privacy and about the workload that could be created by excess inquiries from the public to some individuals in the directory.

- C. Establish a clear process for developing policies and Department positions in the above areas (water, timber harvest, and endangered species). Relationship to Strategic Plan: Theme IV, Goal 2.

A focus team was not formed to address this project. An effort was started, however, with a group of managers to review water policies and programs in the Department and develop methods to improve the coordination of, and communication between these programs. A water policy manual was created; and an electronic reflector was created to facilitate timely communications on water-related issues; and regular meetings of this team continue.

- D. Update the Department's Information Technology Plan. Relationship to the Strategic Plan: Theme IV, Goal 3, 7.

This planning activity was initiated as a focus item from the Leadership Team, but it also meets a mandate from the Department of Information Technology (DOIT). Agencies and departments with well-conceived information technology plans and sound track records for planning and managing technology projects typically have greater flexibility in their use and deployment of information technology. In addition, those agencies are generally granted broader delegation authority for projects reflected in their *Information Technology Strategic Plan* and receive stronger support for budget augmentation proposals designed to implement specific elements of their plan.

The plan was developed in much the same manner as the Department's Strategic Plan, following a classic approach to strategic planning for the public sector. A strategic planning consultant was used. The planning team's goal was to maintain a primary focus

directed on the Department's business needs and strategies, and to ensure the plan would be consistent with the Department's Strategic Plan.

The team settled on ten major information technology issues that are closely aligned with the Department's Strategic Plan, the Director's goals and budget initiatives, and plans for fiscal and institutional reform. The team identified a set of strategies to address each issue, and developed recommended solutions in the form of information technology project proposals. The recommended project proposals and concepts were subsequently prioritized and endorsed by the Department's Information Technology Advisory Committee. Major elements in the plan address geographic information systems, business information systems (including administrative systems, program systems, and integration of work plans, time reporting, and performance based budgeting functions), data, voice, and video networks/communications, database applications and standards, technical standards, and requirements for an effective information technology organization.

The plan contains a number of recommendations concerning the Department's selection, deployment, and management of information technology over the next several years. It also contains thirty-two project proposals which address one or more information technology issues. The recommended projects are presented in priority order along with projected implementation schedules. The Department has completed Feasibility Study Reports for four of the top five projects, and obtained DOIT and Department of Finance approvals. The remaining projects are scheduled for concept discussion, initiation, and completion at varying intervals over the next several years.