



PROGRESS ON ACHIEVING THE FISH AND WILDLIFE STRATEGIC VISION GOALS

Department of Fish and Wildlife, October 2017



FOREWORD

In 2010, under the leadership of Governor Brown and pursuant to AB 2376 (Huffman), the California Natural Resources Agency convened a committee to develop a strategic vision for the then California Department of Fish and Game (DFG) and the California Fish and Game Commission.

The California Fish and Wildlife Strategic Vision project was intended to establish a strategic vision for DFG and the commission that included, among other things, improving and enhancing capacity and effectiveness in fulfilling public trust responsibilities for protecting and managing the state's fish and wildlife. As part of the project, a blue ribbon citizen commission and a stakeholder advisory group supported an executive committee in developing a 2012 report entitled, [*Recommendations for Enhancing the State's Fish and Wildlife Management Agencies*](#).

Department and commission stakeholders were actively engaged in the original vision process. Public meetings were held around the state, online resources were made available, stakeholders acted as conduits for their constituencies and direct email access gave the public multiple opportunities to weigh-in on the process. The 2012 report detailed 28 recommendations to help achieve the goals and objectives of the vision. In the seven years since 2010, and the five years since the report, the department has made much progress on these recommendations.

The Budget Act of 2017 required the department to reconvene the stakeholder group and provide a report to the Legislature regarding the status of implementation of the strategic vision recommendations.

The following document is a report on the progress made by the renamed California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) toward implementing the recommendations set forth in the strategic vision.

Serving as director of the department has been an incredible honor and one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. The accomplishments described in this document would not have happened without the leadership of Governor Brown, Secretary for Natural Resources John Laird and Commission President Eric Sklar. Furthermore, none of these successes would have been possible without the dedication of the department's outstanding employees. For that, I am very grateful.

The department has addressed the vast majority of the strategic vision recommendations head-on. CDFW increased the number of wildlife officers in the field to the highest number in the history of the department. The department created a Science Institute to promote the greater use of science in decision-making. We created clear principles to evaluate new partnership requests and existing partnerships. The department also streamlined permitting processes and increased transparency of decision-making processes. The commission took on and made great progress in accomplishing its recommendations as well. We have come a long way and hope to continue the pace of change and improvement going forward. There is always more to do, however.

Even though reports going back to the 1950s have consistently identified this problem, we still have not found a secure, long-term funding source for the department charged with safeguarding the fish, wildlife and plants of one of the most biodiverse regions in the world. With all of the progress we have made to date, the most significant issue facing the department remains unaddressed. We are now turning our focus, along with the stakeholder group, to zeroing-in on a source of sustainable funding.

Please direct questions about this report to CDFW Assistant Deputy Director Clark Blanchard at (916) 651-7824 or clark.blanchard@wildlife.ca.gov.

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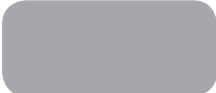
PREFACE

This report is a brief overview of progress made on the goals set forth by the Fish and Wildlife Strategic Vision process and examples that illustrate CDFW’s efforts to improve capacity and effectiveness in fulfilling our public trust responsibilities of protecting and managing the state’s fish and wildlife.

CDFW has broad trustee responsibility over California’s wildlife resources. This responsibility covers such a large swath of program work in a state of immense biological wealth and a growing population projected to exceed 50 million people by the year 2055. With an eye on our vision and mandate to manage and protect the state’s natural resources, we welcome stakeholder engagement to chart this next chapter of our work on behalf of all Californians.

In this report, you will find a list of issue areas the Fish and Wildlife Strategic Vision Stakeholder Advisory Group found to be of great importance and several examples of the progress made by the department to accomplish the strategic vision’s recommendations in those areas. This report also includes notable examples of actions taken at the Fish and Game Commission.

In an effort to keep this summary succinct, we only included a fraction of the progress we’ve made in response to the strategic vision recommendations. Much has been achieved; more remains to be done. We have included an overall assessment of our progress at the end of each section noting if that set of recommendations, in our opinion, has been fully, substantially, partially or not implemented.



BARRIERS TO IMPLEMENTATION

As part of developing the California Fish and Wildlife Strategic Vision, an [assessment](#) was conducted examining past evaluations of CDFW and the Fish and Game Commission – and the degree to which recommendations from those evaluations were implemented. The purpose of the assessment was to provide feedback on how effective the department and the commission have been in implementing past recommendations for improvement and identify any barriers that have constrained or prohibited implementation of past recommendations.

In concert with the assessment, a literature review was conducted to identify and describe commonalities and differences in the barriers that government agencies (particularly those with public trust roles for protecting natural resources) encounter in their efforts to fulfill their responsibilities.

As part of the process of assembling the Barriers to Implementation Report, interviewees were asked to make recommendations to ensure that future planning like the Fish and Wildlife Strategic Vision would be implemented. The report noted that the overarching barrier to change identified by all interviewees and respondents was limited funding.

The interviewee recommendations included:

- Strong leadership and a commitment to change by the CDFW director and the executive director of the commission will be required.
- Recognize that any lasting and effective change is a long term process that involves CDFW and commission leadership, staff, internal cultural changes, external stakeholders and legislative support.
- Engage CDFW employees at all levels as well as external stakeholders in shaping CDFW's strategic plan.
- Seek legislative relief from unfunded and underfunded mandates.
- Encourage partnerships with non profit organizations and other public departments and agencies to leverage limited funding.
- Brand and market CDFW as a protector of California's wildlife for the benefit of all citizens.
- Strengthen relationships with legislators and legislative staff.
- Hire more wardens.
- Continue the Strategic Vision Stakeholder Advisory Group or some set of stakeholders that also includes employee representation.



Overall Assessment of Progress

In many if not most cases, the department's response to achieving the strategic vision goals considered and addressed these barriers to implementation. For example, there is strong leadership and commitment from the department's executive staff, the fish and game commissioners and the commission's executive director to successfully transform CDFW and the commission into more open and responsive organizations. The department is engaging its employees at all levels as well as external stakeholders in shaping the future of

CDFW. The department has focused on communicating the importance of fish and wildlife to all Californians and strong relationships are being fostered with legislators and legislative staff. Grading yourself is, of course, a biased endeavor. The department considers success to be progress across all 28 recommendations. However, it is literally the case that more can be done in each core area. The overarching barrier to change identified was funding. There is still much work needed on this front. The department is committed to finding a way to solve this long-standing issue.



PARTNERSHIPS

(Recommendations A2-A3)

The first recommendation that came out of the strategic vision process was for the department to create an internal culture that supports partnerships, encourages collaboration and promotes cooperation. Partnerships are essential to planning and delivering CDFW's wildlife and fisheries conservation programs. The department has a long history of successful partnerships and they are considered a guiding principle in program development and conservation delivery.

The importance of focusing time and resources on partnerships, coupled with an outpouring of offers to partner on a broad array of programs, prompted CDFW to develop partnership principles that describe a set of characteristics common to all successful partnerships and criteria that may be used by CDFW staff and management on a case by case basis to evaluate new partnership requests as well as existing partnerships.

The following is a brief overview of how and where partnerships operate within CDFW with some examples that illustrate the breadth and depth of interactions between CDFW and partners.

California State University (CSU) and University of California (UC):

The scientific and research arm of the California state government system is a critical partner in providing applied research to wildlife management, cooperating in the management of wildlife, fisheries and natural resource data, and providing analytical support to CDFW's management programs. CDFW interacts with the CSU and UC systems on topics ranging from forest species management to human-wildlife conflict man-

agement. For example, does the Western pond turtle, a freshwater species native to the Pacific Coast, hold secrets to survive climate change and adapt to rising sea levels? CDFW biologists want to know and have partnered with UC Davis and the Department of Water Resources to conduct a long-term study in Solano County's Suisun Marsh to better understand the aquatic reptiles.

Tribal:

Out of respect for tribal sovereignty and the unique and separate governmental status of tribes, CDFW seeks and encourages collaborative relationships with tribes. In 2014, CDFW adopted their first-ever Tribal Communication and Consultation Policy and appointed a tribal liaison to help establish and foster these relationships. As an example, in 2013, CDFW's North Central Region collaborated with a collective of nine organizations of Maidu Indians, the Pacific Gas & Electric Company and the Pacific Forest and Watersheds Stewardship Council to return ownership of Humbug Valley, an important piece of Maidu ancestral lands, to the tribes.

Conservation Implementation Teams, Working Groups and Technical Committees:

Department participation in working groups, technical committees and implementation teams have proven to be effective collaborations especially for local conservation and recreation efforts. CDFW is involved in over 50 of these programs statewide. For example, the department participates on the management board and technical advisory committees of the Central Valley Joint Venture for the conservation of wetlands.



Blue Creek Acquisition

In 2014, the Wildlife Conservation Board partnered with the Western Rivers Conservancy, the State Coastal Conservancy, the Wyss Foundation and the Yurok Tribe to fund the acquisition of 6,479 acres of land known as Blue Creek Phase 2B for the protection of a mixed conifer forest property, including riparian corridors, salmonid streams, coastal watershed and habitat linkages.

In addition to recovery of coho salmon, other species likely to benefit from protection of the property include fall-run Chinook salmon, winter-run steelhead, coastal cutthroat trout and Pacific lamprey as well as small numbers of spring-run Chinook, summer steelhead and chum salmon. The project area is also important for several terrestrial species including federally and state listed species such as the northern spotted owl and marbled murrelet and for several other species of conservation concern, such as the Humboldt marten and Pacific fisher.

The Yurok Tribe now manages the property to enhance its tremendous fisheries values and safeguard this gateway to the cultural heart of the Yurok people.





California Waterfowl Association and Ducks Unlimited:

These non-profit organizations are integral to the successful delivery of on-the-ground habitat restoration and creation projects focusing on waterfowl but benefitting a wide spectrum of wetland-associated wildlife species. CDFW interacts with both California Waterfowl Association and Ducks Unlimited on dozens of projects each year. For example, these groups are working on the McNabney Marsh Enhancement Project, the Chelsea Wetland Restoration Project and wetland and water delivery enhancements at several CDFW wildlife areas.

California Trout and Trout Unlimited:

These highly respected and effective non-profit organizations work closely with CDFW on a variety of restoration and conservation programs including salmonid restoration on the north coast, Sierra Nevada native trout programs and program development support across the state. For example, these groups are working on the Sequoia National Forest Prioritized Meadows Restoration Project, the Modoc Plateau Meadows Assessment and Restoration Design Project and the Central Valley Salmon Partnership, just to name a few.

Land Trust Community:

California is home to more than 100 land trusts that share a common mission and interest in land-based conservation with CDFW. They contribute to identification of land acquisition opportunities and priorities, function as land managers on behalf of CDFW and are partners in developing lands policy and practice. For example, the California Rangeland Trust, in partnership with the Wildlife Conservation Board and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, conserved the historic 12,284-acre Avenales Ranch ensuring an important tule elk wildlife corridor and breeding area will be preserved and protected forever.



Humane Society of the United States:

The CDFW Law Enforcement Division has collaborated with the Humane Society on wildlife trafficking efforts across the state and the department's K-9 program. In addition, the Humane Society often offers rewards via CalTIP to help CDFW apprehend wildlife poaching suspects.

Resource Conservation Districts:

These special districts of the state of California bring local expertise and knowledge of land management practices to CDFW through partnerships emphasizing land stewardship, grazing and other management techniques important to targeted management efforts and serve to extend CDFW's labor force for achieving wildlife area and ecological reserve goals. For example, the department recently improved leasing and management protocols with resource conservation districts to increase efficiency and land management collaboration.

Partners of the Bay Area Classroom Aquarium Education Program (CAEP):

CDFW partners with 23 local organizations in order to present the Bay Area CAEP program, which allows teachers to hatch fish in their classrooms and release the fish under permit into local bodies of water. CDFW staff and the partner agencies train each teacher. Each teacher is assigned a community partner that provides financial and volunteer support in the classroom. Due to the effectiveness of the program and generosity of the partners, we are able to serve approximately 400 classrooms in the Bay Area (43 percent of the total number of classrooms served by this program statewide).

Natural Community Conservation Planning:

Every Natural Community Conservation Plan (NCCP) in preparation or being implemented in California is a proactive long-term partnership among diverse stakeholders. Each plan involves local jurisdictions, stakeholders such as housing developers, agricultural and environmental communities, as well as state and federal regulatory agencies. The department recently joined forces with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to identify the top plans for completion as a means to prioritize up to a dozen plans across California.

Timberland Management Program:

The management and conservation of California's timberlands has moved away from a more typical regulatory model into one of increased collaboration. Besides reviewing and approving timber harvest plans, the program has committed to extensive outreach with many of California's private timberland owners. The collaboration ranges from joint applied research activities (e.g., owl recovery) to joint management programs and extends further into proactive conservation like developing and implementing safe harbor agreements. Engaging directly with timber companies and legislation in 2012 created an ability to rebuild the department's timber program, which had shrunk to less than five positions, and has increased processing on regulatory approvals.

Marine Fisheries Management Efficiency Collaboration:

Efficient and robust data collection are central to monitoring the health of our marine fisheries. The essential data provided by fishermen and others working in the marine environment provide for



management of our fisheries in a sustainable way that supports local and regional economies. In 2016, the department partnered with the Sportfishing Association of California to develop a program that allows for electronic (and wireless) submission of CPFV logbook data, increasing the efficiency of data collection. CDFW will introduce an electronic commercial fishing landings system shortly that will also improve efficiency, accountability and our ability to sustainability manage fisheries.

Water Management:

Some of the state's most challenging management decisions are about allocation of water. This is particularly true in the Delta. The department leads the Interagency Ecological Program, which is a consortium of state and federal agencies which provide and integrate relevant and timely ecological information for management of the Delta ecosystem and the water that flows through it. CDFW is working to build science partnerships with others such as the State Water Contractors and through processes like the Collaborative Science and Adaptive Management Program. \$10 million from Prop. 1 went toward scientific work related to these partnerships to protect water and natural resources.

Oiled Wildlife Care Network (OWCN):

The OWCN is the world's only oiled wildlife response organization boasting more than 30 different member organizations comprising world-class aquaria, universities, scientific organizations and rehabilitation groups. OWCN conducts training of facilities and personnel and provides key supplies as necessary for giving care to oil-

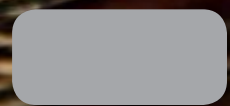
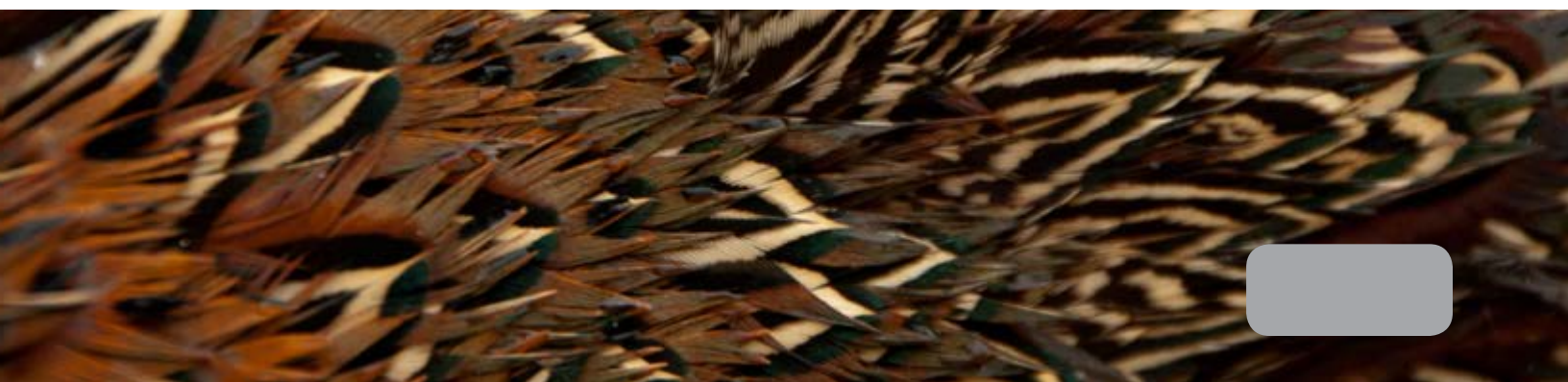
affected wildlife. In parallel to this world-renowned partnership, the Office of Spill Prevention and Response within the department formed an interdisciplinary geographic response plan steering committee that includes local, state and federal government, NGOs and industry representatives to identify priority waters at higher risk of oil spills and develop plans for emergency spill response.

Big Game Management Advisory Committee:

CDFW convenes a public advisory committee composed of interested non-profit organizations that have goals and objectives directly related to the management and conservation of big game species. In recent years, the department has breathed new life into this group as it serves in an advisory capacity to review proposals and budgets for external projects that will be funded through grants from the Big Game Management Account and for providing recommendations regarding these and other issues of relevance to CDFW's big game executive leadership team.

Overall Assessment of Progress

The partnership recommendations have been substantially implemented. Partnerships will continue to be essential to how the department achieves its mission. Significant work has gone into increasing our capacity to foster successful partnerships as is illustrated by this summary. We will continue to seek partnership opportunities that are beneficial to CDFW, other organizations and the fish and wildlife of this state. Like any relationship, each partnership will have ups and downs. This work will never be complete, but we have made changes to ensure the internal processes are in place for many future successful partnerships.



TRANSPARENT DECISION MAKING

(Recommendations A4, A7)

The stakeholder recommendations and vision statement included a number of objectives for department management, including several goals related to open communication and transparency. The stakeholders wanted the department better positioned to understand public concerns and to ensure the public would better understand department decisions. The ultimate goal of improving the interface between the department and the public was to inspire greater confidence in the job the department does for all its stakeholders. CDFW made a number of changes to respond to these concerns, including:

CDFW developed web-based processes for dedicated account reporting. Fund conditions for each dedicated fund are now online. In 2017-18, the department and commission will transition to Fi\$Cal, the state's new accounting and budgeting system, which will increase fiscal transparency. The department and commission have committed resources to ensure staff are trained in using the system and will be able to make the best use of the information that the new system will make available to the public.

The Fish and Game Commission employs a Marine Resources Committee as a forum to address marine resource issues. The commission has also advanced a Tribal Committee and bolstered its long-running commitment to a Wildlife Resources Committee.

CDFW's Marine Region maintains a blog and marine project websites to inform stakeholders.

The Marine Region also leads California's engagement at the Pacific Fisheries Management Council through extensive engagement with stakeholders.

The department created a Watershed Restoration Grants Branch to manage diverse public granting programs in a way that works closely with conservation partners.

The department's Wildlife Branch and regions conduct outreach for development of public use programs and regulations on CDFW lands. CDFW regions conduct annual workshops for stakeholders to highlight wildlife and habitat management, public use and to receive stakeholder input.

CDFW engaged environmental and stakeholder groups during its evaluation and decision to establish the California Endangered Species Act permit fee and increase the fee schedule for the Lake and Streambed Alteration Program.

CDFW is developing several strategic plans (e.g., native trout and trout hatcheries) and will involve the public and stakeholders in the review and finalization of these plans.

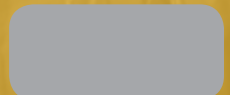
CDFW has conducted town hall meetings for impacted communities during major oil spill responses, and with the leadership of the Office of Spill Prevention and Response has taken this input and launched a broader process to update and revise spill contingency and harbor safety partnerships coast-wide.

FIS\$Cal

One state. One system.

FIS\$CAL

CDFW and the commission are currently transitioning to the state's new accounting and budgeting system, FIS\$Cal, which will greatly improve fiscal transparency for both entities. Both the department and the commission have committed resources to ensure staff are trained in using the system, including making the information it provides available to the public.





CDFW held scoping sessions and regulations workshops for industry and other stakeholders throughout the state to discuss the oil spill program’s statewide expansion.

The department and commission employ the commission’s public meeting processes to ensure an opportunity for the public to engage and provide input. In recent years, the commission has solidified and published procedures defining improved engagement opportunities.

CDFW employees expressed concerns about their own understanding and role in policy decisions.

Employees asked for better communication and a greater role in making those policy decisions. CDFW management made a number of changes to respond to their concerns:

The department director holds regular town halls, maintains a suggestion box and produces podcasts to keep staff regularly informed. As of today, the director is working on podcast #50.

CDFW reorganized branches and formed a Joint Leadership Team to improve communications between staff and management to increase internal transparency.



CDFW implemented new internal guidance to promote transparency and clear, unambiguous communications between department functions.

CDFW also conducted its first-ever, structured employee engagement survey, asking a set of 34 questions and took action on key areas of improvement based on input from the survey.

Overall Assessment of Progress

The transparent decision making recommendations have been substantially implemented. The Fish and Wildlife Strategic Vision made recommendations

related to transparency within the department and commission with the goal of inspiring public confidence in all that we do. Both the department and commission have implemented these recommendations by making systemic changes to our decision-making and information sharing processes, both internally and in our public facing roles. Maintaining transparency will require ongoing attention and diligence to ensure we continue to implement the changes described above and explore additional ways to include all of our internal and external stakeholders in our administrative decision-making and information sharing roles.



SCIENCE

(Recommendations A11-A12)

The Fish and Wildlife Strategic Vision recommended that decisions made by CDFW managers and policy makers be informed by credible science in fully transparent processes. Since the completion of the strategic vision process, the department has put much focus on scientific capacity. The list of accomplishments on the science front are too numerous to list here. Below is a summary of some of the major milestones.

External peer review of scientific and policy documents is now routine and CDFW is actively sharing information about its science programs with the public through the Science Institute webpage, news releases and social media. To advance this goal, the department published its first-ever Scientific Integrity Policy.

The department supports continuing professional development of its technical staff through attendance at scientific meetings, support for professional society memberships and by providing online access to scientific literature. In fact, since the 2012 report, the department was able to secure online scientific journal access for all its employees at relatively low cost, and in response to immense internal demand.

The Fish and Game Commission's marine and wildlife science advisors regularly communicate with state and federal agencies, including the department, on the latest research and monitoring data, to ensure integration of the best available science into the decision-making process and to guide the commission on interpretation and application of the science relied upon.





Science Institute

In 2013, CDFW created the [Science Institute](#) to ensure quality, visibility and integrity of the science conducted and used within CDFW.

The Science Institute is a virtual office of internal scientists who set scientific standards, act as a peer review body, convene over key issues and promote the use of science in decision-making.

The Science Institute has grown steadily each year and staff has participated in numerous peer-review efforts such as listing petitions, management plans, etc.





Since 2012, the Fish and Game Journal published its 100th anniversary edition, making it the longest-running journal specific to California's wildlife. The department acted on an internal recommendation made before 2010, and finally has made all journal editions available online.

The department is establishing new science-based programs in human dimensions of wildlife, wildlife genetics, biostatistics, mountain lion conservation and wolf conservation. In fact,

the department has created its first-ever institutional capacity dedicated to the critical and emerging discipline of human dimensions, following the lead of other western states.

In 2017, CDFW published a scientific integrity policy that guides the appropriate use of science in department programs, sets specific standards for publication and use of science and sets criteria for how science is incorporated into project funding proposals.



Science will continue to be a guiding force behind everything we do at the department. Significant work has gone into increasing our capacity and displaying that capacity, and we will continue to strive to improve and uphold our place as the state's premier fish and wildlife scientific entity.

Overall Assessment of Progress

The science recommendations have been fully implemented. Science will continue to be a guid-

ing force behind everything we do at the department. Significant work has gone into increasing our capacity and displaying that capacity, and we will continue to strive to improve and uphold our place as the state's premier fish and wildlife scientific entity. This work will never be complete, but by focusing on building CDFW's scientific capacity and using that science in decision-making, we have made changes to ensure the internal processes are in place for continued success.



PERMITTING

(Recommendations A16-A20)

The subject of permitting was particularly important to the strategic vision stakeholders because permitting is often the setting for the department's interactions with the public. Whether it is a discussion about a pending permit or simply a preliminary inquiry related to whether a project may trigger the department's jurisdiction, the department is working toward enhancing the level of communication, predictability and mutual understanding of relevant issues. CDFW has made a number of changes over the last several years to improve the experience for the regulated community, including:

The CDFW Office of the General Counsel implemented California Environmental Quality Act and Regulatory Caucuses to work internally to provide consistent counsel on the scope and limits of department jurisdiction.

CDFW now employs permitting and environmental review staff funded by other departments (e.g., DWR, Caltrans, High Speed Rail, etc.) to provide dedicated permitting services.

CDFW meets regularly with other state and federal agencies to identify and resolve impediments to project delivery, including permitting.

CDFW and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service created an executive level team to review and act on Natural Community Conservation Plan (NCCP) completion impediments.

CDFW and CAL FIRE have a dedicated team of staff and managers that continuously monitor and

improve the Timber Harvest Plan (THP) review and approval process.

CDFW established an interagency review team to coordinate THP review with CESA permitting, LSAs, NCCPs and Safe Harbor Agreements. The department also institutionalized a regular check-in process with the timber industry for permitting efficiencies.

The Marine Region's Scientific Collecting Permit Program has in place mechanisms for coordinating permitting consistency with other permitting agencies such as NOAA's National Marine Sanctuary and National Marine Fisheries Service.

In the San Francisco Bay Area, CDFW is participating in a multi-agency permit coordination process for projects to address sea level rise, climate change and restoration around San Francisco Bay.

Legislation from the current session - AB 1133, promotes efficiency in CESA permitting by eliminating redundancy when the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service or the National Marine Fisheries Service designates a species as an experimental population under the federal Endangered Species Act.

In 2017, CDFW will conclude a revision to Scientific Collecting Permit regulations with input from permittees and the public to provide more clarity and improve consistency.

CDFW is working with CAL FIRE on a new program called "CAL TREES" so that applicants can submit THPs electronically.



Habitat Restoration and Enhancement Act of 2014

Authored by Assemblyman Richard Gordon (D-Menlo Park), the Habitat Restoration and Enhancement Act, established a simplified permitting process through CDFW for small-scale, voluntary habitat restoration across California. AB 2193, ultimately, enables the department to increase the number of critical restoration projects it authorizes each year in California.

For example, the Habitat Restoration and Enhancement Act was used to approve a fish passage project on Mill Creek, a key tributary to the Russian River, which restored fish passage for Coho salmon and steelhead to 11.2 miles of prime spawning and rearing habitat.

CDFW's Data and Technology Division is working with the Habitat Conservation Planning Branch on updating a project-tracking database that will include further automation and future online application ability.

The CDFW Automated License Data System (ALDS) is now used regularly for permit fees.

CDFW's Wildlife Incident Reporting public website allows citizens to report incidents or request depredation permits. The system does internal workflow routing to assign wildlife officers and regional biologists to each request.

The Coho Help Act (2012) removed permitting barriers for restoration projects.

In 2014, the Habitat Restoration Enhancement Act established a simplified permitting process with CDFW for landowners, state and local government agencies, and conservation organizations wanting to implement small-scale, voluntary habitat restoration projects.

CDFW consults with landowners on storm damaged watercourse crossings to expedite

large and small-scale standard and emergency LSA notifications.

CDFW participates in the multi-partner Wood For Salmon Working Group that focuses on increasing efficiency of permitting and environmental review for stream restoration projects.

Overall Assessment of Progress

The permitting recommendations have been partially implemented. The department has made significant progress toward addressing the Fish and Wildlife Strategic Vision permitting recommendations. From supporting statutory changes for streamlined permitting of small-scale restoration projects to participating in pre-project planning, the department has worked to improve our permitting functions. There are still many changes that additional resources could afford us, such as making more staff available for early consultation. This topic remains a challenging one due to the role of the department as a regulator. We look forward to continuing to implement the strategic vision permitting recommendations and to working with our stakeholders to improve the permitting experience for the regulated community.





ENFORCEMENT

(Recommendations A20-A22)

The strategic vision document called for the department to ensure successful recruitment and retention of wildlife officers. Below is a summary of some of the steps CDFW has taken to tackle these challenges:

CDFW has increased the number of wildlife officers in the field to the highest level in the history of the department. There are now 429 wildlife officers out in the field protecting California's public safety and natural resources.

In 2017, CDFW is transitioning from an open application period for warden positions to a year-round application period with a final application closure date, which is intended to increase the number of qualified applicants the department receives when recruiting for wildlife officer positions.

The department utilizes social media, the Automated License Data System, the vast network of hunter education instructors and many other outreach tools to help with recruiting efforts.

The CDFW Law Enforcement Division is currently creating a diversity work plan detailing recruitment efforts to target a broader and more diverse workforce.

The department regularly attends job fairs and presents at a variety of public venues to recruit wildlife officers.

The Fish and Wildlife Strategic Vision stakeholders also wisely recommended working to increase prosecution of wildlife crimes as well as increase deterrents to illegal take of wildlife. Great effort has gone into addressing these issues. The following is a summary of actions taken by CDFW and the commission:

CDFW has worked with the Fish and Game Commission to identify counties that lack successful prosecution of environmental crimes and coordinates with these counties to provide solutions to ensure successful prosecution of natural resource related crimes.

The department and commission recently launched an annual award to acknowledge the district attorney offices around the state making progress in enforcing against wildlife crimes. CDFW continues to work closely with the California District Attorneys Association, which funds multiple circuit prosecutors who prosecute environmental crimes in 16 of the 58 counties in California.



Fine Increases for Trophy Wildlife Poaching

In 2012, legislation sponsored by the wildlife conservation community passed approving enhancements of penalties for illegal take of trophy animals. The legislation required the Fish and Game Commission to develop regulations to define specific characteristics of trophy game mammals and wild turkeys. In 2017, the process was completed.

Any person convicted of a poaching offense related to the take of a trophy animal is subject to significant increases in penalties. For example, an out-of-state deer poacher convicted in July 2017 was assessed a \$1,500 fine in Superior Court. The same poacher, caught now, would have faced fines of \$80,000.

Recent legislation has provided a much-needed mechanism for the department to prosecute certain crimes under administrative and civil penalties. These efforts have led to the hiring of attorneys that specialize in prosecuting administrative penalty cases such as cannabis cultivation causing resource damage and wildlife trafficking violations. These new laws also substantially increase the consequences for those that poach this state's wildlife.

Overall Assessment of Progress

The enforcement recommendations have been fully implemented. The strategic vision document called for the department to ensure successful recruitment and retention of wildlife officers, increase prosecution of wildlife crimes and increase deterrents to illegal take of wildlife. Significant progress has been made in all of these areas. Although there could always be more wildlife officers in the field, we currently have the most in California history. However, these officers still face significant salary issues as the lowest paid of all California uniformed officers. New laws have significantly increased criminal and civil penalties for poaching wildlife and for fish and wildlife crimes tied to cannabis cultivation, but deterring wildlife crimes is an ongoing effort and will continue to be a priority for the department moving forward.





FISH AND GAME COMMISSION

(Recommendation A23)

The Fish and Wildlife Strategic Vision made one clear recommendation to the Fish and Game Commission – create greater stakeholder input by expanding the use of committees and holding public workshops. Since the vision process ended, the commission has taken great strides toward this end. A summary of accomplishments follows:

Multiple, collaborative stakeholder groups, such as the Fisheries Bycatch Workgroup and the Predator Policy Workgroup, have been convened to confer and develop recommendations related to fish and wildlife issues.

The commission has held several issue-specific workshops and meetings to facilitate greater understanding of fish and wildlife management issues. Examples include coastal fishing community meetings and the Delta Fisheries Forum.

As noted, the commission is now employing three formal committees – tribal, wildlife and marine. The commission has also published its own tribal consultation policy. The commission also created protocols and procedures for its governance and transparency.

Overall Assessment of Progress

The Fish and Game Commission recommendations have been mostly implemented. The commission has made great progress toward addressing the recommendations to increase stakeholder input and educate commission members on issues prior to formal hearings by expanding the use of committees and holding issue-specific public workshops. In addition, the commission membership has completely turned over since the 2012 report, as well as the commission executive director position. The commissioners are a diverse group of professionals each with relevant backgrounds and experience in public service and represents well the very diverse California population.



New Committees

In an effort to increase stakeholder participation in the decision-making process, the Fish and Game Commission created the Wildlife Resources Committee, Marine Resources Committee and Tribal Committee to expand opportunities for stakeholder input and exchange.

Each committee now meets three times per year and provides a report at regularly scheduled commission meetings. The committees make recommendations to the commission on specific subjects prior to beginning formal hearings.

STATUTES AND REGULATIONS

(Recommendations A13-A15)

The department regularly works with stakeholders and the Legislature on amendments to improve the Fish and Game Code. However, several changes in statute immediately followed the strategic vision process and implemented stakeholder proposals requiring the use of ecosystem-based management informed by credible science, incorporating adaptive management principles, establishing the department's Science Institute and improving the department's ability to adjust certain fees.

Based on strategic vision recommendations, the Legislature passed Assembly Concurrent Resolution 98 directing the California Law Revision Commission to address:

Whether the Fish and Game Code and related statutory law should be revised to improve its organization, clarify its meaning, resolve inconsistencies, eliminate unnecessary or obsolete provisions, standardize terminology, clarify program authority and funding sources, and make other minor improvements, without making any significant substantive change to the effect of the law.

The department has worked with the California Law Revision Commission for the past five years on their proposals to reorganize the Fish and Game Code with the goal of improving the clarity of the code for those who use it. This effort has resulted in two bills to improve the clarity and consistency of portions of the code with a more comprehensive bill expected in the near future.

Overall Assessment of Progress

The statutes and regulations recommendations have been mostly implemented. The department and commission have addressed the Fish and Wildlife Strategic Vision recommendations related to statutes and regulations by working with the California Law Revision Commission on its efforts to improve and reorganize the Fish and Game Code. This process will take a number of years with the ultimate goal of creating a more user-friendly code for all that use it. We will continue to participate in the legislative process as well to implement the recommendations related to further improving Fish and Game Code provisions related to fully protected species and the California Endangered Species Act.



Statutes and Regulations

In 2015, the legislature amended Fish and Game Code section 12025 to allow the department to impose administrative penalties on cannabis growers violating select Fish and Game Code sections in conjunction with cultivation on public and private land. The department has since utilized this authority to help prevent environmental destruction from cannabis cultivation. In 2016 and 2017, the department filed multiple administrative complaints against growers, resulting in over \$500,000 in penalties and the full remediation of each affected site.

FUNDING AND MANDATES

(Recommendations A7-A9)

One of the most visited, but ultimately unresolved issues, the strategic vision stakeholders considered was how to provide the department with sustainable financing. The stakeholders spent many hours researching and learning about the department's diverse mandates and funding challenges. In an effort to better understand these challenges and build confidence in how the department manages its funds, there was a recommendation for CDFW to engage in open and transparent accounting. The department has responded to this recommendation in a number of ways.

Most recently, the department and commission have begun a mission-based budgeting effort that will bring even more transparency to the department's and commission's current activities, statutory mandates and funding. The budget effort will be a collaboration with the Department of Finance, legislative staff and stakeholders. Concurrently, the California Law Revision Commission will pause its work to reorganize the Fish and Game Code, and instead, focus on its legislative direction to address CDFW mandates and funding.

The department continues to accumulate unfunded mandates annually.

Overall Assessment of Progress

The funding recommendations have not been implemented.





CONCLUSION

The Fish and Wildlife Strategic Vision process provided helpful feedback and direction for the department from our valued stakeholders, the Legislature and others. The department and commission took the recommendations seriously and worked to implement programs and other changes to address each Fish and Wildlife Strategic Vision recommendation. We have come a long way and hope to continue the pace of change and improvement going forward. It is imprudent to ever claim we have literally accomplished all that should be done with partnerships, science, transparency, permitting, enforcement and statutes and mandates. The assessment of progress on those elements is benchmarked to the recommendations from the 2012 report. Our work is far from finished.

Since at least the 1950s, countless reports identify long-term, sustainable funding as the most important problem for the department to solve. The 2012 strategic vision report concluded there appears to be near universal recognition that the department and commission do not have the resources they need. The Legislature has spoken too. The California Fish and Game Code states:

“The Legislature finds and declares that the department has in the past not been adequately funded to meet its mandates. The principal causes have been the fixed nature of the department’s revenues in contrast with the rising costs resulting from inflation, the increased burden on the department to carry out its public trust responsibilities, and additional responsibilities placed on the department by the Legislature. This lack of funding has prevented proper planning and manpower allocation. The lack of funding has required the department to restrict warden enforcement and to defer essential management of lands acquired for wildlife conser-

vation. The lack of funding for fish and wildlife conservation activities other than sport and commercial fishing and hunting activities has resulted in inadequate wildlife and habitat conservation and wildlife protection programs.”

With California’s human population projected to exceed 50 million people by 2055, the pressure on our fish and wildlife will continue to increase tremendously. Competition for scarce resources like land and water can trigger habitat and species loss. Climate change has affected our natural resources in unexpected ways. Public safety issues involving people and wildlife have become much more common as wild animals venture into urban areas in search of food and water.

Protecting and managing California’s natural resources means both meeting the expectations and mandates of the public as they exist today and looking forward to the future to anticipate those expectations and needs.

We need to take action for our landscapes, people and wildlife. We need to recover endangered species and bring back California’s iconic salmon populations. We need to create sustainable inland fisheries and a healthy marine ecosystem. We need to continue to crack down on wildlife crimes and minimize human-wildlife conflicts. We must also develop effective climate change adaptation policies that benefit fish and wildlife.

The public’s expectation of CDFW to oversee and properly manage our natural resources has increased exponentially – yet the funding necessary to conduct these activities has not. It is our goal to turn our focus, along with the natural resources stakeholder community, on a path forward toward sustainable funding for the department.





Progress on Achieving the Fish and Wildlife Strategic Vision Goals

Department of Fish and Wildlife
October 2017

