

RANGE MANAGEMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

**INTEGRATING NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT
IN CALIFORNIA WITH RESOURCE CONSERVATION INVESTMENTS**

The Range Management Advisory Committee (RMAC) has prepared this paper in response to a request from the California State Board of Forestry and Fire Protection (BOF) Policy Committee. This request is to examine the use of State bond measure funds to invest in the acquisition of natural resources for conservation purposes and discuss the sustainable management of these resource investments.

During the RMAC review individuals, producers, landowners, focused interest groups, and government agencies have identified inconsistent natural resource management appropriations as a major obstacle preventing effective and sustainable natural resource management. Land managers, conservation organizations, and policy makers also acknowledge that public land stewardship is deficient in the areas of planning, maintenance, and management. It is generally accepted by public and private land managers that the costs associated with planning, environmental compliance, and permit conditions are the most common obstacles preventing sustainable resource management and stewardship.

Our research revealed parallel efforts by the Secretaries of the California Resources Agency and the Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) and the Environmental Studies Department, University of California, Santa Cruz to evaluate the disparity between monies available for initial purchase of conservation lands and funds for management of those lands.

The RMAC and the BOF met with the Resources Secretary, Mike Chrisman, and discussed the complexity and costs associated with natural resource planning and conservation for local communities. The Secretary recounted a joint review of the State and local planning process by Secretaries of the Resources Agency and the CDFA. They recognized the desirability of additional financial and administrative support for management of the state's natural resources. They also pointed out that many county and city general plans are outdated and the California Environmental Policy Act (CEQA) is often applied to individual projects in lieu of updating general plans by local planning authorities. This results in escalating costs, inconsistent decisions, and expanding timelines for development as well as for natural resource and conservation planning.

There are many individuals, universities, and organizations that also identified the need for a more coordinated natural resource management and planning process. The natural resource objectives of individuals, departments, agencies, and groups often

conflict due to single-issue focus on specific concerns such as invasive species, oak woodland habitat, recreation, wildlife habitat, endangered species, and water quality. Effective resource management requires planning and the integration of natural resource objectives into a coordinated management plan.

NATURAL RESOURCE CONSERVATION PLANNING AND INVESTMENTS

The Resources Agency led an effort in 1999 and 2000 to organize resource conservation originally known as the *California Continuing Resource Investment Strategy Project*. This project was commonly known as the *California Legacy Project, A resource conservation strategy*. The project goal was to develop a suite of tools and maps to help Californians make important decisions about conserving and protecting the state's working lands and natural resources.

It is also worthy of mention that in 1991 a Memorandum of Understanding was signed by the California Biodiversity Council the purpose of which was to develop guiding principles and policies, design a statewide strategy to conserve biological diversity, and coordinate implementation of this strategy through regional and local institutions. The efforts of the California Legacy Project and Bio-Diversity Council focused primarily on conservation and much may be learned from their principles and organizational structure that could be applied in developing an integrated natural resource management strategic plan.

During a review of \$10.1 billion in bond measures approved by California voters between 2000 and 2004, the RMAC discovered that the current Federal Tax Code bars monies that support acquisition to be used for operation and maintenance. However, it should be noted that the California Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) has been able to increase non-base budget staffing levels for resource management, which include restoration and rehabilitation projects. The focus of bond funds on capital investments versus operation and maintenance can increase the total cost of resource management to the taxpayers by deferring maintenance. For example, repairing a fence is not allowed using bond funding, however building a new fence is allowed.

Natural resource investments in planning, maintenance, and management are needed to maintain the intrinsic value of the natural resource conservation investments being made. It was recently cited in the California Performance Review, *Increase Efficiency in Using Existing Bonds for Environmental Enhancement* (CPR RES35), that land assets are often acquired without sufficient funds available to develop a management plan or to maintain the land. As a result, the land may sit idle, presenting a nuisance to adjacent landowners as a source of unwanted animals, insects, weeds and diseases. These idle lands may also cause seepage, flooding or water quality problems for adjacent landowners. Without sufficient maintenance, these lands may not even provide valuable wildlife habitat as intended or sustain the biological values which were present at the time of acquisition. Prospect Island and Liberty Island in Solano County are two

land acquisition projects that have generated many of the unintended consequences previously mentioned due to lack of funding to adequately develop, improve and maintain the lands. It was also recommended in this report that the Governor should direct the Resources Agency, or its successor, “to coordinate state efforts to maximize federal funds available from the United States Departments of Agriculture and the Interior to supplement existing state bond measure funds and to develop a plan to sufficiently fund development, operations, and maintenance costs for state-owned land used for conservation purposes.”

In summary CPR RES35 states: “State land acquisition for resource conservation projects results in unnecessary costs to the state. In addition, state purchase of private land for these projects results in an unnecessary loss of property taxes to local governments and limits California’s share of federal conservation funds. Existing state bonds should be used to more efficiently manage and enhance state conservation projects and increase use of public-private partnerships.”

SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIPS IN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Successful partnerships that result in effective resource management are not restricted to the management of publicly acquired conservation lands. The following examples illustrate successful partnerships and positive results when government agencies, producer groups and the academic community work together on resource management issues.

In 1997 the California Cattlemen’s Association (CCA), Range Improvement Committee, was asked by its membership to investigate the development of a long-term strategy for control of noxious weeds on California rangelands. The process involved identifying the major weeds causing harm, existing public policy and regulation, existing technology, research gaps, control methodologies, and reaching out to other focused interest groups with similar concerns. The CDFA was contacted and CCA began cooperating in the California Inter-agency Noxious Weed Coordinating Committee (CINWCC) as a stakeholder. Several pilot programs were completed in cooperation with CDFA, University of California, private landowners, CCA, and two manufactures of herbicides, Dow-Elanco and DuPont. These pilot projects were very successful in controlling the targeted weeds and demonstrated that public and private interests could work together cooperatively in managing natural resources. Following these efforts RMAC’s Noxious Weed Sub-committee held numerous meetings with regulators, public interests, CDFA, and agricultural producers to develop the Strategic Plan for the Coordinated Management of Noxious Weeds in California (Noxious Weed Strategic Plan). It was approved by the BOF and signed by the Chairman of the BOF and the Director of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) in 1999.

The Noxious Weed Strategic Plan was successful in promoting the Cooperative Weed Management Areas (WMAs), which grew from six at the passage of AB1168 and continued to gain support with SB1740. Today all 58 counties in California are

represented in WMA Memorandum of Understandings (MOU). The WMAs have been successful in eradication, control, mapping, education, and early detection and rapid response for new infestations. In 2006 the Governor and legislators approved a more permanent funding mechanism for the WMA in response to passage of the Noxious Weed Control and Eradication Act of 2004, S144/HR119 (S144) that requires matching funds by the states to access grant funding appropriated under S144.

Other examples include the Integrated Hardwood Range Management Program established in 1986. This program works for the maintenance of hardwood range resources and included several state institutions such as the BOF, CAL FIRE, and the Department of Fish and Game (DFG). Private landowners involved in the maintenance of working hardwood rangelands contributed to program implementation and provided support.

The same cooperative approach between public and private interests as noted above can be applied to the management of publicly acquired land. The DFG in cooperation with the Dixon Resource Conservation District (RCD) have developed a program for managing the Yolo Wildlife Area. Under this management scenario a group of dedicated public employees, farmers, and the RCD have combined to use funds generated from farming to assist with the maintenance of one of the most productive wildlife areas for waterfowl and raptors in the State. The partnership between government and the private sector has proven to be a highly successful strategy using revenue generated from the farming community to enhance and maintain wildlife habitat.

The following example of public and private concerns working together was extracted from a recent paper submitted to the RMAC by Joe Morris, Manager of T.O. Cattle Company (TOCC). TOCC has been working with the California State Parks as a grazing concessionaire since 1994 on Hollister Hills State Vehicle Recreation Area in Hollister, California, and since 2001 on Pacheco State Park, Four Rivers District, Los Banos, California. The arrangement is a cooperative agreement by which the rancher pays for the privilege of grazing livestock on State Park lands with the intent that grazing activities shall have a positive impact on Park ecosystems. The economic component of the contract was balanced with social and ecological factors as well. For example, State Parks explicitly looked at the proposal in terms of (a) rent, (b) the concessionaire's ability to work with Park staff and the public who would visit the park, and (c) the concessionaire's ability and desire to enhance the native rangeland community. The results as described by Mr. Morris include numerous benefits such as expanding native perennial grasses and tree populations; greater numbers and diversity in annual forbs; improved stream conditions including better water infiltration, less erosion, and fewer bare areas. Mr. Morris further stated that the grazing concessions have served the public and scientific community by providing opportunities for recreation, study, and learning.

Another successful model in cooperative conservation is the California Rangeland Conservation Coalition (CRCC). Environmentalists, cattlemen and government

agencies have come together to form a most unlikely conservation partnership, the Rangeland Coalition. United by their concern over California's disappearing grasslands, the group is specifically focusing on preserving the remaining lands within California's Central Valley, adjacent foothills and interior Coast Ranges. The group is voluntarily working together to preserve private working landscapes and to keep threatened, endangered, and common species common. Partners recognize the stewardship ranchers have provided for decades to the rangeland and the abundance of research which has found that nearly all of the species of grassland birds, most native plants and the threatened vernal pool species actually benefit from responsible grazing practices.

DEVELOPING A STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE INTEGRATION OF RESOURCE MANGEMENT AND CONSERVATION INVESTMENTS

Planning and management of publicly acquired lands are possible as exhibited by the examples quoted previously and the interest shown by an extensive list of cooperators that included local tribes, State agencies and departments, Federal agencies, agriculture, industry, non governmental organizations (NGO) and communities.

The RMAC believes the State and many of its other partners in resource management recognize that without comprehensive resource management plans and maintenance of our conservation investments many of the intrinsic values for which the lands have been acquired will be lost. The RMAC recommends that the Resources Agency take the lead in a facilitated process for the development of a *Coordinated Natural Resource Management Strategic Plan*. This would be an opportunity for the Resources Agency to demonstrate statewide leadership to the legislature resulting in expanded general fund appropriations for operation and maintenance and the cultivation of an endowment fund for sustainable natural resource management in California.

Any effort to develop a cooperative and coordinated natural resource management strategic plan must include the private sector. Participating stakeholders in such an effort should include agriculture, NGOs, industry, Fire Safe Councils, Coordinated Resource Management Planning (CRMP) groups, and the general public in cooperation with the Resources Agency, Regional Council of Rural Counties (RCRC), California State Association of Counties (CSAC), Federal agencies, and the Resource Conservation and Development areas. Support for long term conservation investments from California voters and legislators is more likely with the creation of a strategic plan that will facilitate the interests of local communities, focused interests groups, Fire Safe Councils, industry, and existing Coordinated Resource Management groups.

RMAC's observations should not be viewed as a criticism of the state employees, appointees, members of committees or Boards, or individuals that are or have been involved in the State's acquisition of natural resources and the subsequent management of these resources. The dedication and commitment to the natural resources by most cannot be questioned, but the method by which public lands are acquired and managed are at a juncture that requires consideration.