



January 27, 2022

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor, State of California

The Honorable Toni Atkins
President Pro Tempore, California State Senate

The Honorable Anthony Rendon
Speaker, California State Assembly

Re: Fiscal Year 2022-2023 Budget Priorities for Clean Air and Water, Natural Resources, and Parks

Dear Governor Newsom, Senate Pro Tem Atkins, and Assembly Speaker Rendon,

We, the undersigned organizations representing conservation, health, environmental education, and social justice interests throughout California, appreciate your leadership in these unprecedented times. As the nation rebounds and rebuilds from the COVID-19 pandemic, and as Californians face the impacts of drought and record-breaking wildfires, it is important that we prioritize funding that revitalizes the economy and protects the safety of Californians. In support of these priorities, we respectfully offer our insight that we have gained from on-the-ground experience and science-based research, that we believe must be incorporated into the budget package this year at a sufficient level.

The following investments would meet the needs created by the COVID-19 crisis, wildfires, and the ongoing drought while also helping the state mitigate the impacts of climate change by investing in programs that move the state closer to carbon neutrality and climate resilience. Given the condition of the State Budget this year, we request that the following investments not only be included in the budget package, but receive 10% of this year's budget surplus:

Improving Air Quality and Protecting Public Health:

- Funding for the Departments of Parks and Recreation to protect, restore and enhance public lands and increase carbon sequestration
- Funding for programs to protect working lands, develop active transportation projects such as bikeways and trails (taking use by wildlife into consideration), and encourage in-fill development to reduce greenhouse gases, urban sprawl, and travel times

- Funding for projects that support soil remediation and agricultural soil quality
- Funding to reduce dependence on fossil fuels for the creation of inorganic fertilizers and pesticides

Improving Water Quality and Availability:

- Funding for infrastructure to improve safe drinking water, including preventing contamination of groundwater
- Funding to address drought protection, flood protection, sea-level rise risk reduction and adaptation, and regional emergency preparedness and community safety
- Funding for multi-benefit flood management systems and projects that reduce risks to the public, improve and protect wildlife passage and habitat, and restore natural infrastructure when altering already-built systems
- Funding for projects that prioritize and mandate off-stream groundwater recharge and improve infrastructure for and management of surface and groundwater supplies
- Funding for land acquisitions and easements in furtherance of related projects
- Funding to monitor projects and practices for meaningful results, including satellite data collection and ground/water probing methods that allow access to data in real time
- Funding for projects to update aging water infrastructure on public lands

Conserving Forests, Natural Grasslands and Scrub, Rivers, Oceans, and Wetlands:

- Funding for grants that support Natural Community Conservation Plans and Habitat Conservation Plans
- Funding to support natural and working lands as part of the state's conservation (30x30) goals, including funding for watershed, river, wildlife corridor restoration and creation, and soil remediation
- Funding to support the Wildlife Conservation Board's Forest Conservation Program
- Funding for grassland vernal pool, tidal marsh, and riparian restoration projects
- Funding to each of the State Conservancies and Agencies/Departments for the implementation of climate-beneficial projects
- Funding for projects that protect and restore rivers and watersheds, including rising water tables and increased inland and coastal flood risk through implementation of soil health and remediation practices or watershed management approaches that allow for higher water infiltration through the soil profile
- Funding to modify channels to restore natural functionality of waterways, including daylighting, natural habitat restoration, water sequestration and wildlife movement.
- Investments in projects that protect, expand or restore wildlife corridors and habitat linkages
- Protection and restoration of natural lands and natural infrastructure that are threatened by climate change or enhance climate resilience
- Investments in facilitating the availability of locally sourced, native plants for landscaping uses and the banning/awareness raising of invasive plants in the environment
- Funding for sustainable urban greening and forestry to reduce the impacts of heat-island effects
- Funding for the California Conservation Corps and Local Conservation Corps for projects that assist the state with the implementation of critical natural resources, ecosystem services, transportation, energy, and housing infrastructure, and to prepare, prevent, respond, and rehabilitate from natural disasters or climate-related impacts to communities
- Funding to restore monies to the Statewide Park and Community Revitalization Program (AB-31)
- Funding K-12 public green schoolyards
- Funding to support Department of Fish and Wildlife and Wildlife Conservation Board waterfowl and wetland habitat programs, including those administered on private lands

Facilitating Fire Recovery & Prevention:

- Funding for the Department of Forestry and Fire Prevention for activities in forest lands
- Funding for the implementation of the Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program
- Funding to the state conservancies and the Wildlife Conservation Board for nature compatible fire risk reduction, prevention, nature-based community buffer zones, and restoration projects, including

watershed protection, restoration of shrublands degraded by too-frequent fire, and land conservation to reduce sprawl and forest conversion in the wildland urban interface

- Funding to State Parks for projects, including in areas damaged by the 2020-21 wildfires
- Funding for open space districts and land trusts for projects that promote ecologically sensitive vegetation management and restoration
- Investments in fire prevention and restoration projects that maximize workforce training opportunities
- Funding for the implementation of adopted fire management plans for Natural Community Conservation Plans and Habitat Conservation Plans
- Funding to support the California Wildfire Mitigation Financial Assistance Program
- Funding for Resource Conservation Districts and the University of California Reserve System
- Funding for multi-use trails that provide fire buffer zones and public access to open space

Increasing Climate Change Awareness and Climate Readiness:

- Funding for outdoor educational programs and infrastructure focused on climate change awareness and solutions
- Funding for programs and infrastructure that increase community engagement and access to the outdoors, including educational programs
- Funding to increase public access to parks and greenspaces
- Funding for public education campaigns that increase knowledge of, resources for, and individual action for climate adaptation
- Funding for volunteer programs that increase climate change awareness and environmental stewardship
- Funding to repair coastal access infrastructure (trails, stairways, parking areas) threatened by sea level rise
- Funding to educate responsible agencies and the public about best practices for fire fuel reduction as natural habitat restoration.

We have been pleased to see the Fiscal Year 2022-23 January budget proposal released thus far. We do emphasize, however, that these investments will allow us to tackle only a fraction of the state's larger needs and urge you to increase investment in nature-based solutions to our climate crisis. Investing in conservation and natural resources is a multi-faceted way to not only spur the state's economic recovery by creating new opportunities for employment, but to ensure that we put people back to work in ways that help the state transition to an economy that promotes public health through the mitigation of air pollution; reduces the risks of catastrophic natural disasters such as fire, flood, and drought; and accelerates our progress toward carbon-neutrality.

We stand ready to engage with you to develop and advance a plan that facilitates California's economic recovery, while also advancing the state's important climate goals.

Sincerely,

Wendy Butts, President
California Association of Local Conservation
Corps

Dan Silver, Executive Director
Endangered Habitats League

David Lewis, Executive Director
Save The Bay
Ann Van Leer, Executive Director,
The Escondido Creek Conservancy

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