

California Native Plant Society

Conservation Visioning Meeting IV

Saturday, July 23, 2005 10:30 am – 4:00 pm
Sanhedrin Chapter hosts in Hopland, CA

I. Introduction

- This is the third of four visioning meetings to occur between January and September of 2005. Each program has its own focus. The meetings will culminate with a special session at the CC meeting in September.
- At this meeting, we will ask following questions in order to scope out the future of the CNPS Conservation Program: Where are we at now? What are we doing well? What do we need (or need to do) in the future? Priority for this meeting was agreed to be given to analyzing structure of the Conservation program.

II. FY2005 Board Priorities (Witham) and Planning Calendar

- Board set 2005 priorities based on program directors and staff core budget and duties, staff's 'dream list' of possible budget needs and the results from the first two Cross pollination meetings (where board members met with staff and volunteers from all programs to identify areas for collaboration and prioritized these opportunities).
- As their highest priority, the Board decided that to hire a part-time paid conservation director and additional development programs.
- The timing for the series conservation planning meetings is good because: there has been recent change over in staff, David Chipping is retiring in January 2006, and Emily Roberson has moved onto the Center for Biological Diversity and the program planning meeting timeline fits in well with CNPS fiscal and program planning calendar.
- In 2004, the Rare Plant Program underwent a visioning process and convened four meetings over nine months. Conservation planning will be similar, with four meetings in nine months, ending in September, and feeding into the next year. Sept. Chapter Council will make the final decision on conservation program priorities
 - Consistency exists between the meeting with attendance of Carol Witham, Ilene Anderson, David Chipping and Jessica Olson
- Carol announced that Pam Muick has left CNPS. While no interim plan is currently in place, the board will be working on developing a plan in the next few weeks.

III. Conservation Organization Overview—Where we are now

- Organization started in East Bay.
- Environmental Protection Agency, California Endangered Species Act (CESA) and California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), allowed early conservation, which was done at the chapter level.

- The common areas, or forests, were generally not covered by chapters, and were frequently under threat of logging and development. As a result CNPS hired public lands policy staff: Jim Jokerst in mid 80's, Mary Meyers in the late '80's, Emily Roberson in 1990, Ileene Anderson and consultant Vern Goehring in 1997. There is still chapter involvement in forests in some areas, but not active in others such as Northwest Forest Plan. Since Emily has moved on to work full time on the Native Plant Conservation Campaign, Ileene has also taken on some of Emily's old responsibilities with forest issues, but there is more to be done. Basically, only Jen and Vivian work on the forestry committee.
- Desert issues: Ileene Anderson was hired on in 1997 to help the Southern California chapters combat the threats to the desert. Ileene's job has expanded since then but primarily focuses on regional issues. Her work covers multiple chapters, at a regional scale, such as the Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) in Western Riverside County. Few of the other chapters have used a regional approach or collaboration. Committees for HCP's exist.
- Vern Goehring was hired as consultant in 1997 to help the legislation committee, and help with CESA CEQA guidelines and regulations
- Conservation committees in general come and go. Invasive Plant committee and Invasive Plant Council have been long-lasting and effective with passionate people like Jake Sigg. Wetlands committee has fallen over time. HCP committee has fallen because individual HCP's have taken over. Central valley HCP's are covered by Carol, CNPS plays a crucial role of bringing science to the table.
- Litigation: We have only \$10,000, but we have a success rate of over 75%. State litigation program is very useful and has a healthy interaction with CEQA, CESA, wetlands, budget, and helped legislation to getting a state grass.
- CNPS litigation issues often come from the chapter. We litigate when a development is going to hit a botanical "asset," and it violates the law. Chapters, or individuals need to fill out a form found on the website, then it goes to litigation committee. Criteria will generally go along with the question "does it have ramifications at a larger scale?" For example, making or braking case law that could help plant conservation.
- In the 70's, CNPS had several full time volunteers—working in legislation. For example, Joyce Burr worked on CNACC (California Natural Areas Coordinating Committee), Alice Howard and Joe Kitts also worked in the 70's. At this time, chapters would help chapters; East Bay Chapter was the ring leader. Mary Meyer did contract work to do literature searches. Generally things moved a lot slower but there was a lot of talking.
- Structure of existing program: Conservation director serves as the clearing house for committees and sends the chapters in the right direction. Forestry committee, legislation committee, desert, exotics, and vernal pool committee makes up the loose network for conservation program. Volunteers that are experts for local chapters exist. Southern California, large network, volunteers support each other.

IV. What are we doing right now that's working?

- Semi-autonomous nature of the committees makes the conservation program work.
- Volunteers do less of bureaucratic interfacing

- Should not underestimate the power that CNPS has in the public—just beginning involved is very powerful.
- To have presence and comments in the bureaucratic world
- We can depend on other environmental organizations to let us know, and we are able to plug in with plant information when needed.
- The chapters need to know more about what is going on at the state level. We need more working groups to boost the organization
- How much work are the chapters doing without the leadership or structure of the organization? Is that a success? Is there a better way to tie in this into the organization?
- Being able to provide public comment. Participation at a local level possible with the larger organization behind us.
- Science based advocacy: Makes us powerful, important and respected.
- How do we decide to join another group's campaign? Sometimes opposition is too strong, it doesn't always work and we need to reconsider issues/positions.
- "One song many voices policy" makes us have to talk about issues that are regional or have broader implications.
- We need to increase chapter communication
- Science based approach works- you can do conservation thru science.
- Need to revisit separation of RPP and Conservation what does the division get us?

IV. New Ideas (Unconstrained—what can be done in Conservation the next 3-5 years)

- We need an overarching conservation policy (white paper by Lori handed out)
- Working group to work on program
- CNPS should expand the organization to a native plant and natural history organization to expand the membership
- Need to address the increase in conversion of redwood forest and oak woodland land to vineyards or development.
- We need to look at not only the rare spp but large tracts of habitat and "locally rare" species because the population is growing so quickly and land is getting eaten up.
- Need to get a handle on illegal exemptions, etc.
- Work on adding population growth to statement
- Need to focus on conserving wilderness and intact ecosystems regardless of rare plants
- Need to include statement on value of successional vegetation-both early and late
- Need to develop a litigation prioritization
- State wide conservation program needs to provide training: CEQA, NEPA, General Plan, HCP
- Broadening conservation group to ecosystem function, but don't do it in a way that we lose current members
- Annual weekend trainings occurred in the past with TNC and DFG. There was a fee, but nobody minded because you get so much out of it. We could coordinate it with rare plant program to train how to do monitoring, etc. Would also be good to learn about the successes of CEQA.
- Coordination/communication could be easy with the Chapter Council meetings.
- Don't put too much effort into conservation easement
- Need to incorporate SoCal Folks in the policy discussion
- Send to all conservation chairs- engage everyone
- Provide trainings for chapters in HCP, NCCP, NEPA, CEQA, general plans- both active and passive training
- Link trainings to CC meetings- bring in more folks

- Bureaucracy all ready too much- don't need a new group.
- Broaden focus of organization to processes
- Chapter council needs to provide more feedback to programs
- Need legislation on CEQA applying to land conversions
- Get funding back for professional staff in conservation program: fulltime paid conservation director, good at communicating, organizing, grant writing, replace Emily, Northern and Central Botanist (like Ileene). Chapters don't need help with plant walks, etc, but do need help in Conservation.
- Paid staff can make volunteers more effective
- Organized by a committee of peers. Head of program can rely on a committee of experts
- We need more money, how do we raise significant amounts of capital?
- Advertising property that has native plants—we can increase the likelihood of getting a plant-friendly owner.
- How can local people partner with land trusts? Circulate and find folks that are interested in buying.
- Funding sources that are strictly for the chapter staff; leave out the central position.
- Volunteers were prevented from writing grant proposals by administration
- We need regional and central aspect of conservation structure
- Where does the policy and priorities come from?
- Conservation director could coordinate several working groups/committee: HCP/NCCP, CEQA, NEPA, Forests, Desert, Exotics, and Legal.
- We need to communicate more within the state, whether it is from chapter council or not.
- Need permanent conservation committee
- September conservation meetings should go back to what they were
- Professional staff are great and need to be retained
- Need an info exchange venue different than the Chapter Council meetings. We need recommendations for structural arrangements. We need some state force, some direct, positive way to make decisions.
- Chapter council meetings are not productive. There is something wrong with the structure that a policy has to go through chapter council.
- Thematic Chapter Council meetings should be attended by appropriate chapter person prepared to talk about theme. This could enrich the programs and the chapters
- Problems with changing names of botanical species
- Working groups should not be committees of one- need to be self-perpetuating
- Make chapters have the most appropriate person attend CC Meetings, but need to honor their desire for autonomy.
- How do we engage the chapters? We need action items and tools to be given out at the meetings.
- Have conservation meeting independent of CC business meeting
- We need to direct our conservation presentations to the right audience.
- Top down organizations can be problematic-- need to have native plant conservation as a personal passion.
- We need to be careful on having more concentrated committees so that we are not spread too thin. We do need centralization as well in order to spearhead action.
- Committees tend to go away unless there is something really specific; we need ad hoc committees when issues occur.
- Committee of peers rather than committee of expertise.
- Good for a strong chair to have access to expertise when needed but they should also be co-participants and active with the chair.

- Something needs to change regarding personnel issues.
- Need mechanism to recruit new members and volunteers--- we need human relations resources
- Uneasiness of hierarchy and expertise, how to handle this? We need to stress collaboration between leaders and experts, workers and volunteers.
- Orientation on history of CNPS to staff
- What we need from conservation and executive director is a great manager and people person.
 - Director needs to facilitate chapter work
 - Cons. Director needs to know basic conservation laws, and able to lobby
 - Need to get on top of illegal CEQA applications
 - Good at facilitating people to do their work
 - Conservation position is actually a technical position
- Declare more vegetation communities rare and protected under CEQA
- Forests: At the state level, work to get better THP guidelines, better accountability for CDF and the Board of Forestry. At the Federal level, work for better Forest Service policies.
- Regional Conservation Planning: provide chapters with tools to deal with HCPs, NCCPs, and General plans
- Coast: need coordinated focus on coastal conservation issues
- State laws: work to support and strengthen state laws like CESA. Work to eliminate the NPPA.
- Agencies: work to support and strengthen agencies like the Coastal Commission and the DFG's conservation programs.
- Federal lands issues: FWS, FS, BLM, etc.
- State Parks: lobby CDPR on management issues
- Oaks hardwoods and vineyard conversion
- Focus on wetlands
- Focus on exotics
- Find ways for the state program to support the conservation goals of ALL chapters, not just those whose conservation priorities made the Top-10 list.
- Work to expand awareness of native plant conservation issues:
 - Work with other groups (ex: Xerces Society)
 - CNPS should be a presence at statewide conferences like Bioneers
 - Develop outreach materials
 - The state organization should focus on PR and outreach, not just awareness of the organization, but awareness of our issues
- Conservation program should work with volunteers to obtain grants and funding or specific projects.
- Establish contacts with graduate advisors, to do studies
- Establish common gardens to maintain rare plant populations
- Need national legislation to prevent conversion of intact habitats
- CNPS movie, floral diversity, and devastation documented
- Expand our mission beyond plants
- Promote infill development instead of outgrowth

V. **Prioritization—how to prioritize our ideas?**

- State, federal, regional, local—prioritize projects according to this order of importance.
- Fight for the things that will impact the best/most/rarest—strategic prioritization
- Focus on the project that other environmental groups/individuals are not commenting on.
- Structure is more important than prioritizing tasks or scale

Attendees

Diana Hickson, Sac Valley Chapter
Vishnu, Sanhedrin
Terese Sholars, DKY
Clare Golec, North Coast
Chuck Williams, Sanhedrin
Jessica Olson, East Bay Chapter
David Chipping, State Conservation Director
Ileene Anderson, Southern California
Carol Witham, Sacramento Valley Chapter
Bob Soost, Marin
Sue Britting, El Dorado
Jen Kalt, North Coast
Larry Levine, North Coast
Vivian Parker, El Dorado
Lori Hubbard, DKY
Mark Albert, Sanhedrin
Ann Howald, Milo Baker Chapter, Rare Plant Director
Gordon Leppig, North Coast