

California Native Plant Society

Conservation Visioning Meeting II

Saturday, March 12, 2005 10:30 am – 4:00 pm

Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area, 45211 County Rd. 32 B (Chiles Rd.), Davis, CA 95616

I. Introduction

- This is the second of four visioning meetings to occur between January and September of 2005. The meetings will culminate with a special session at the CC meeting in September. Future meetings will be held on:
 - Saturday, July 9 in Santa Clara
 - Saturday, July 23 in the North Coast area
 - Saturday & Sunday, September 8-9 at the Chapter Council meeting in Southern California
- 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?
- As David Chipping said: 'this meeting is for dream-like stuff, go wild.'

II. FY2005 Board Priorities (Witham) and Planning Calendar (Muick)

- Board set priorities based on 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 paid conservation director and re-hire a development director.
- 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 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, Pam Muick, Ileene Anderson, David Chipping and Jessica Olson
- Meeting notes for each visioning meeting will be posted on website.
- **Southern California meeting summary:**
 - Southern California Chapters have been getting together for the past several years for the opportunity to get feed back, integration, understanding, and information sharing.

- There were 24 attendees, 12 chapters represented, along with staff from Joshua Tree National Park, Fish and Wildlife Service, Forest Service and local agencies.
- Chipping observed that the ideas presented were relatively conservative for big picture thinking

III. Conservation Organization Overview (Chipping / Muick)

- Conservation program started in the East Bay hills with a regional park issue and San Luis Obispo joined next with a fire issue.
- Environmental Protection Agency, California Endangered Species Act and California Environmental Quality Act, 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 in mid 80's, Emily Roberson in 1990, Ilene Anderson and consultant Vern Goehring in 1997.
- There is still chapter involvement in forests in some areas, but not active in others such as Sequoia National Park. Since Emily has moved on to work full time on the Native Plant Conservation Campaign, Ilene has also taken on many of Emily's old responsibilities with forest issues, but there is more to be done.
- Desert issues: Ilene Anderson was hired on in 1997 to help the Southern California chapters combat the threats to the desert. Ilene'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.
- Vern Goehring was hired as consultant in 1997 to help the legislation committee.
- Conservation committees general come and go. Invasive Plant committee, and Invasive Plant Council has been long-lasting and effective with passionate people like Jake Sigg. Wetlands committee has fallen over time. Forest committee has risen and fallen. HCP committee has fallen because individual HCP's have taken over. Central valley HCP's have fallen below our radar.
- Generally: Not enough volunteers and time issues exist with those volunteers that remain. Holes exist in our coverage of issues throughout the state therefore big projects have fallen between the cracks.
- But we do need to recognize we are a small, scientific organization. We get our authority from the Plant Sciences. So we can't grow without them.
- In the East Bay in the 1970s women were active because they did not have jobs. Several full time volunteers—working in legislation and Joyce Burr working on CNACC (California Natural Areas Coordinating Committee) Some of the information they compiled, or research they did was put on the shelf because it was not considered to be done by professionals. Now women have jobs, thus we don't have the luxury of full time volunteers. As a result in 2004 East Bay hired a part-time Conservation Analyst. Volunteers are not cutting back on hours, but actually increasing their hours. Conservation Analyst works with new volunteers who are just getting into the planning process. One such volunteer,

Carol Castro, “adopted a site,” which means she will check planning websites at her home town for EIRs, etc. Conservation Analyst writes letters and sends them to committee for edits, creating a very interactive process. Meetings are covered by both volunteers and Conservation Analyst. But one group Union/Environmentalist group, only staff can attend. Volunteers also feel like they can cover issues if they have little time, they can ask Conservation Analyst for help.

- We have large numbers in terms of volunteers, but the volunteers have no time to do the work. Few people have the luxury of doing full-time volunteer work. It seems more feasible to do multiple chapter work in urban areas, like the Bay Area and LA. No one knows each other from northern chapters, even within the interior of Northern California.

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

- Involvement w/ invasives: Jake Sigg’s letter was very powerful in support of using integrated pest management approach to invasives
- TNC (The Nature Conservancy) depends on getting expert input from CNPS to form TNC priorities on where biodiversity targets are located.
- East Bay hired a Conservation Analyst. East Bay horticulture group is giving out conservation priorities and volunteer opportunities at horticulture show.
- CNPS educational opportunities are valuable. Interested in enhancing CNPS educational involvement—with increased media involvement.
- CNPS is influential through educational publications.
- Inventory is working well: Special status species are getting recognition, successful lawsuits to get species listed.
- Chapter structure is helpful: focal point for people with passion about plants
- We are respected for our science
- Collaboration with Chico State on Table Mountain book was successful
- Focus on Habitat Conservation has been successful, specifically with the vernal pools and the Sacramento Valley Chapter.
- Tracking HCPs/NCCPs has been good
- Victories for ugly plants—CNPS 1B San Joaquin spearscale protection success with Sacramento Valley chapter
- Vernal pool campaign in Sacramento Valley is effective
- CNPS has done a great job in reviewing critical habitat proposals
- Weekend conservation workshops worked well in the past-- every fall CNPS would sponsor a weekend event for its members. The workshop consisted of several conservation presentations delivered to educate and bring participants up speed on issues going on throughout the state and at different agencies.
- We do a good job bringing in a diversity of volunteers—from computer programmers to university folks to retirees to environmental consultants.
- We use good science in policy—much more so than other conservation organizations.
- We aren’t shrill!
- We are credible.
- Conservation is confrontation, not many volunteers are interested in getting involved but those not involved are very supportive of the active conservationist.
- CNPS science makes it easy to advocate for conservation.
- We have been successful in precedent setting lawsuits because we choose cases carefully.
- Local chapters are effective in shaping local planning efforts.
- CNPS allows a freedom for volunteers to shine; they are unrestricted except to be accurate.
- Community of ages and experience, from 20’s to 80’s, CNPS keeps everyone together.

V. What do we need to be doing in the next 3-5 years?

A. HCP/NCCP General Plan update Process (presented by Carol)

- CNPS needs to gear up for HCP planning.
- NCCPs/HCPs are blueprints for conservation for the next 50-70 years.
- Stakeholder-driven process—are lengthy, tedious and often adversarial.
- Early scientific input often too vague and therefore ignored or misconstrued.
- Projects in NCCP/HCP not subject to additional CEQA review on biological aspects (provided the comply with the “Plan”).
- Current planning in 17 large regions, rumors of others.
- NCCP/HCPs will cover 90% of California in the next 10 years.
- CNPS needs to participate for several reasons:
 - plants
 - good science
 - no subsequent opportunities (such as CEQA review)
 - building the administrative record (for lawsuits on the “plan”)
- Issues:
 - problem of no data (data gaps need to be identified)
 - problems of phase II—implementation
 - too much work
- Regional plans give us a chance to:
 - be Proactive, rather than re-active
 - respect each other—ranchers, environmentalists, agencies
- Tools:
 - update NCCP/HCP handbook,
 - analysis of what areas are coming up next, (how well covered are we with conservationists in the area)
 - do’s and don’ts of HCP from people working on HCP’s
 - build network w/in CNPS
 - educate other environmentalists (about good science-based data collection, etc)
 - CNPS standards for mapping
 - Collecting examples x3 (what language to use, what plans are working well)

B. Discussion of HCP Process and Ideas for CNPS involvement

- We need protect NCCP’s stature in the legislative arena.
- TNC has done a broad scale of biological assessments of areas within HCPs and plans on revisiting several areas in Northern California. There are opportunities for sharing information/data.
- TNC also gets data on habitats, not only plants. Because HCPs generally use only existing data, TNC data can allow for a more directed focus within the HCPs.
- Comprehensive biological surveys are needed for HCPs upfront, not after plans are in place.

- Habitat mapping is not standardized throughout HCPs in the state. This makes it difficult to evaluate for conservation with no standard between plans.
- All of the best available science is not used in the HCP process and there is no interest in doing surveys prior to planning process.
- Financial and private property rights are playing into the lack of use of good science. We need to prioritize upfront what is important to conserve. For example, HCPs in the Sacramento Valley are all done independently but they are covering the extent of the Sacramento Valley.
- We should consider proposing a regional blueprint for HCP's since all current plans are based on geopolitical boundaries.
- There is a lack of leadership within the agencies (FWS), they do not come in with their own knowledge; they work off of what the consultant tells them. FWS and DFG have no way of telling the consultants what is important to conserve. We need to encourage more counties to go the larger scale, regional planning route, rather than individual HCPs.
- General plans are coming up for revision, as 17 were approved in the 80's. Tools are needed for General Plan updates that anyone can understand.
- Protecting land in HCPs is not done with a science basis, how do we protect the botanically important pieces? What do we do about cities that opt out of the plans?
- If we are going to programmatically go after HCPs we need to find leaders outside of CNPS. We need to develop scientific working groups to cover the region and make sure science is considered in the draft.
- White paper need on standards for mapping: the natural pieces of our fragmented landscape are so small they do not fit into a standard mapping pixel. The minimum mapping unit needs to be the same as the remnant piece.
- We should push Recovery Plans at the legislative level.
- We need to push the HCP law to "recovery" standard instead of the Jeopardy standard.
- Even with a Recovery Plan for high profile spp, it is used as an advisory document in the HCP process. The only leverage CNPS has in the HCP process is with previously established Critical Habitat.
- Recovery Plan (RP) is supposed to recover the endangered species so that it can be taken off the list. We need to integrate the RP into the HCP process. Critical Habitat is not getting into the plan and essential habitat science is lacking. CNPS needs to take a leadership role to develop a model for what should be in an HCP.
- Politically it will be a long time before we get the money to do Recovery Plans.
- CNPS needs a Critical Habitat policy
- We need to do research as identified in the Recovery Plans

- Conservation planning needs to integrate new science
- Conservation plans need connectivity—landscape conservation. Basic unit of data is patches and we need to know where they are.
- We should use today's opportunities to conserve without needing (or wanting) more data

VI. New Ideas

- CNPS education program should get more involved with media. Jim Baxter is involved with a natural history documentary and he sees CNPS fitting into that well.
- CNPS policy is needed on herbicide use for invasive species.
- We need a regional conservation biologist for the Sacramento Valley.
- We should develop focus linkages meetings (between plant and animal people) in NCCP-HCP areas or participate more in groups like this that already exist.
- Need more money in lawsuit fund, our current budget is \$10,000 per year and we are perceived as cheap to other organizations
- We need a lawsuit strategy.
- We should roll over unused funds from the lawsuit funds each year
- NOW! We should collect beneficial stories on the Endangered Species Act so that we can respond when propaganda flies.
- NOW! CNPS should support Forest Service Route Designation process. We have a great opportunity to say that the routes should not go through sensitive habitat. It is hard to get it to move once it is there. This is also an opportunity for grant-making.
- We need tools and education for effective watershed planning, and we need to know who is working on watershed issues.
- CalFed program: opportunity to pick up conservation money for plant milestones, but their vision may make availability constricting.
- California Watershed Assessment Manual is a useful tool found on the web.
- We should participate in US Forest Service ecosystem management planning at watershed level (or left-side analysis) which is going on now.
- Involvement with Forestry issues needs to increase
- We need internships in all programs.

- We need legislation on protecting our rare natural communities.
- Tools, threats, warm bodies to use them: With our time shortage, we should latch onto agencies that are already dealing with issues we care about and provide them with tools.
- We need to update our policies and get them out in a useable form.
- We need a strategy for protecting small preserves.
- We need to increase our membership and develop a strategy on how to replace ourselves - that is - how to recruit young people.
- We need to call agencies on inadequate mapping—perhaps even sue them on it.
- We need to clarify the herbicide strategy.
- Need to explore potential partnerships like the Point Reyes Bird Observatory .
- (Sent via email) Strategic Listing: Approach listing of new plants strategically. One way this could work: Form a committee with a chair who will direct the committee's actions, and members who represent different regions of the state. Assign each regional representative the job of 1) determining which unusual communities or habitat types in their area are already protected through one or more listed species, and which are not, and 2) for those that are not, select one or two species that would best protect those areas. All the committee members bring their choices back to the committee for prioritization and scheduling. Decide which species/areas are most in need of protection and work on those first. Set up a five-year schedule with the goal of achieving complete coverage or, if that's too much, cover of all areas most in need. At that point, work with the Rare Plant Program to figure out the best way to get top-quality petitions produced. Perhaps hiring professionals to do this, with data provided by RPP and oversight by subgroup of Strategic Listing Committee.
- (Sent via email) Chapter-to-chapter Conservation Network: Organize a phone/email network of chapter members who have different expertise and interests with regard to conservation. Anyone participating agrees to help others with similar issues and interests. Trade text of comment letters, strategies, ideas, commiserations. May be already happening informally to some degree, but having it "in writing" might encourage more to participate in conservation activities because they would see that they are not alone, and there are people resources they can consult.

VII. How to prioritize Conservation issues

- By regional issues
- By actions that benefit the most
- Actions that impact your objectives the most
- Does the action/activity fit the mission, the goals and the strategic plan of CNPS?

- Time sensitive projects have higher priority
- Need to do cost benefit analysis
- Reasonable likelihood of success
- Sweeps in all the other programs
- Bioregional or geographic equity
- Collaboration with other organizations
- Likelihood of success
- Bioregional equity
- Stress, Strategy... TNC's 5S framework
- Set or counter new case law, or causes changes to CEQA or NEPA
- Enjoyable to members
- Measurable objectives and decision tree

Attendees

Becky Waegell, TNC Project Manager, Cosumnes River Preserve
 Sue Britting, Conservation Chair, El Dorado Chapter
 Barbara Castro, Mount Lassen Chapter
 Charli Danielsen, Conservation Chair, East Bay Chapter
 David Chipping, CNPS Conservation Director
 Ileene Anderson, CNPS Southern California Regional Botanist
 Jessica Olson, East Bay Conservation Analyst
 John Hunter, Sacramento Valley Chapter
 Pam Muick, CNPS Executive Director
 Ramona Swenson, TNC Ecoregional Ecologist, Central Valley
 Steve Greco, UC Davis Professor, Landscape Architecture Program
 Susan Austin, TNC Project Director, Merced Grasslands Project
 Julie Evens, CNPS Senior Vegetation Ecologist
 Carol Witham, CNPS President of the Board
 Misa Ward, CNPS Rare Plant Botanist