

## **CNPS LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM**

### **Overview**

Most CNPS members likely know intuitively that sometimes something important for native plant conservation happens at the State Capitol in Sacramento, but not all members know how CNPS works, or how individual members can work, to ensure that those actions result in positive benefits for native plants. This paper will try to clarify these questions. The ways of the Legislature can be mysterious, however, lets first look at how CNPS has prepared itself to engage the sometimes baffling world of policy and law making.

Organizationally the Legislative program resides within the comprehensive Conservation Program and is directed by a Legislative Committee Chair. While most of our legislative efforts pertain directly to “conservation,” they may also support other CNPS priorities (e.g., eradication of invasive species). The legislative program also watches over administrative agencies, boards and commissions when they adopt regulations or take other similar actions.

This is a lot of work and the Legislative chair is aided by a Legislative Committee and a contract lobbyist. The Committee includes CNPS members with a keen interest in developing native plant legislation and policy and our lobbyist has extensive experience in legislative and general government processes.

CNPS’s legislative program works on many fronts, we initiate legislation, monitor others’ initiatives, testify in legislative hearings, meet with legislators and other interest groups, analyze legislation, propose and negotiate amendments, and we appeal to the Governor for support of our positions. We place a high priority on coordinating with other environmental groups to ensure a strong coalition supporting common goals.

The Legislative Committee reviews all legislation introduced (often more than 2,500 bills annually) to identify those bills that impact native plant conservation and protection. Later amendments to bills are also monitored to ensure that all significant provisions are identified. Following the Committee’s review and adoption of a CNPS position, the top priority bills are reported to all CNPS members via our web site ([www.cnps.org](http://www.cnps.org)), the *Bulletin* and other channels. Regular reports are also made to the Chapter Council and Board of Directors to inform these CNPS leaders and to ensure that legislative goals and positions advocated are coordinated with other CNPS programs.

### ***In the Capitol***

When we initiate legislation we draft the bill language, develop arguments for the author to use in presenting the bill in legislative hearings, join the author in hearings as the official sponsor, recruit other supporters, educate committee staff and other legislators on the issues, meet with opposition to answer questions or negotiate amendments, and generally coordinate all lobbying efforts.

When we take a position on other bills we either support or oppose them or we propose amendments to resolve concerns we may have. If our amendments are accepted by the author we frequently change our position to support. We also identify critical budget issues and lobby the Legislature’s budget committees supporting augmentations or opposing reductions.

The legislative process is long and to most people (even the experienced) confusing. Bills are introduced by a member of either the Assembly or the Senate - this person is the author of the legislation. The California Legislature uses an extensive committee process to review and fine tune bills before they are voted on by the full legislature. All bills (with some exceptions) are heard in the Senate and the Assembly by at least two committees - a policy committee and an appropriations (fiscal) committee before they are voted on by the full house. Legislative rules are extensive and

sometimes difficult to maneuver through, but knowing them is critical to success. Equally critical is knowing the unwritten protocol and customs of the Legislature.

One key, however, for CNPS members to know is that most bills must go through at least six votes before they go to the Governor. So a bill we like must pass several hurdles before we have succeeded. Likewise, the process presents several opportunities to stop a bill we don't like.

### ***In the Chapters***

Successful work in Sacramento depends on more than just skilled representation in the halls of the Capitol. To use a basketball analogy, it takes a "full-court press." While legislators may be impressed with our arguments in legislative hearings, there is little that can replace having heard from constituents. All CNPS chapters and members can contribute to our grassroots lobbying efforts. Legislators and local elected officials who are already familiar with CNPS and our good efforts will be much more receptive to our message when they make difficult voting decisions. Chapters need to undertake sustained educational efforts directed toward these officials (a large percentage of State legislators are former county supervisors or city council members).

Keep them informed regarding your chapter's activities, including meetings, workdays, local area projects, plant sales, etc. Add them to your mailing list and invite them or a staff aide to each event. Feature them as your special guest and ask them to share their thoughts on how CNPS's interests and their's overlap and how you can best work with their office. While it may be difficult getting a legislator to attend weekday meetings (they are usually in Sacramento Monday through Thursday) a reliable working relation with staff is nearly as valuable.

Chapters can additionally support our statewide legislative efforts by appointing a local legislative committee to assist in disseminating information and requests for grassroots support, ensuring that elected officials are included in chapter activities, regularly communicating with elected officials, and notifying the state Legislative Committee whenever a legislator does or says something locally particularly good or bad regarding the environment and native plants in particular.

### ***Taking Action***

To support our efforts in Sacramento, members are ask to monitor the CNPS web site for legislative news, sign-up to receive email alerts, and watch for action requests in the *Bulletin* or other special mailings. These notices will explain the issue and its urgency and how you individually can respond to support CNPS objectives. But as you know just learning of the need is not sufficient - you must take action and contact your local legislator, either through a phone call, letter or postcard, to effectively carry out the "full-court press."

CNPS members responded to an impressive degree recently when asked recently to send postcards to their local senator and the Governor. More than 1,700 came forward and were heard by the Legislature and the Administration. We anticipate more of these campaigns in the future and we are working to refine our grassroots efforts by developing the ability to focus on key legislative districts at key legislative times. This will make our efforts more efficient in the use of members time and more effective in lobbying only those legislators that need persuasion.

*Vern Goehring, CNPS Legislative Advocate, 2/27/03 (updated)*