

A Charter to Secure the Future of California's Native Biodiversity

DECLARATION FOR OUR FUTURE

California is a wondrously diverse and varied state, a global biodiversity hotspot. This abundant biological diversity, the measure of a region's genetic, species, and ecosystem diversity, supports our well-being. California's native plants, in particular, enrich our lives and sustain our environment by supporting wildlife, clean air and water, soil retention, and carbon storage, providing a helpful indicator of the health of the State's biodiversity.

California is the nation's can-do state. It is technologically feasible and morally imperative to protect, restore, and conserve California's native plants and animals, and the ecosystems that they support and thrive in for current and future generations. This charter enshrines our commitment to a future that advances long-term economic and environmental gains in harmony with a growing population and the need for resilience in the face of a changing climate.

California: Home of Innovation, Sanctuary for Biodiversity

California is home to more species of plants and animals than any other state, and is home to about one third of all species found in the United States, including more rare plants than most states have plants. Despite a century and a half of rapid economic and population growth, California has managed to keep nearly all of them. This is because Californians love their common home – ranchers are proud of the sustainable grazing practices, foresters proud of their healthy forests, city dwellers proud of their Griffith, Baldwin, Ballona, Balboa, Presidio, and Bidwell parks. Collectively, we have shown the world that a thriving society can co-exist with great natural richness.

However, we are facing serious challenges and an urgent need for action. Climate change already stresses the State's natural resources. Increasingly frequent, larger, and hotter wildfires are burning our forests and communities, adding carbon to the atmosphere and damaging soil. Drought-stressed trees, in our mountains and in our cities, are succumbing to new diseases and insect pests, eliminating their cooling shade and releasing yet more carbon. Without our action, productive marshes will be flooded by rising seas, historic working landscapes will be lost, and weeds will impair the health of our headwater forests. We must work together swiftly to slow these threats and to save the native plants and animals that undergird California's economic and cultural prosperity.

California is uniquely positioned to respond to these challenges. We have the strongest conservation framework in the nation, supported by public and private partners that are committed to thoughtful, science-based stewardship of the State's natural resources. The State's climate strategy reduces greenhouse-gas emissions and builds resilience for California's people, natural resources, and infrastructure. The State's vision for 2050 commits to recognizing and protecting the values provided by healthy ecosystems and the native plants and animals on which they depend. We have recovered species, from the California condor to a rare mountain mint, from the brink of extinction; restored whole ecosystems after years of damage; and created novel partnerships to protect plants, animals, and places. Undertaking the challenge of securing our biodiversity and seeing it thrive in the face of change will require the concerted work of many across government, academia, and the private sector, but we build on a strong foundation. This charter establishes common principles and a pathway to bring these groups together to succeed.

Principles for Action

Scientific Foundation – The future we envision requires science-based management and conservation decisions consistent with economic and environmental sustainability for all Californians. Science should be embraced not ignored as a means to help navigate change and uncertainty. This scientific basis must inform decisions at every level from local to state, regional to global.

Collaboration and Partnership – Responsibility and opportunity to protect California's biological diversity cuts across local, state and federal agencies, as well as private landowners and managers. The knowledge and research to guide action lies in academic, government, non-profit and research institutions. This effort must be built on a model of partnership and collaboration.

Inclusion - Our cultural diversity, backgrounds, and traditional connections with nature are essential ingredients to form solutions. All Californians benefit from biological diversity, be it a shade tree in an El Segundo playground, resources brought by Sequoia-seeking visitors, the trout stream cooled by wild willows, or the tribe renewing their traditional arts. Threats to native plants and animals affect all, whether urban or rural, wealthy or poor, recent immigrant or indigenous, and all Californians have a right to participate in saving these species, in ways that are meaningful to them. This effort must be built on inclusion of California's diverse public, communities and perspectives.

Pathways to Success

This charter calls upon all Californians to work together to secure and recover the abundance and richness of native plants and animals in California, under both current and changing climate conditions. To achieve this goal, we must:

Understand the rich natural diversity we have in California, including where it is; what is at risk; what threats the native species and ecosystems of our state face; and what approaches to conservation, restoration, and recovery will be most effective under current and future conditions.

Protect California's native species and ecosystems, securing all of them from decline and extinction, including efforts to continue to exclude invasive plants and pests, especially in light of climate change.

Recover imperiled and damaged species and systems, and their ability to provide natural, cultural, and other values throughout their original extents.

Engage and empower all Californians in the project of sustaining our common home, with public education, outreach and involvement in citizen science and stewardship. We must harness the genius of our research institutions and technological leadership; build partnerships that embrace tribes, local and traditional knowledge, and our diverse next generation; pursue site-specific conservation actions to save the most sensitive species; forge public-private partnerships; support working landscapes; and engage all of our citizens.

Undertaking this challenge will require participation by many across government, academia, and the private sector, but California is home to a culture of innovation and creativity, with a tradition of doing and accomplishing great things. Together, we can enable California to continue to be a global leader in the stewardship of natural resources, and put into action a framework to steward our native plants and animals for future generations.

Charter Adopted, Executive Department, State of California: September 2018