



California Fish and Game Commission  
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California Board of Forestry & Fire Protection  
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December 26, 2005

Mr. Jeff Grover, Chair  
County of Stanislaus Board of Supervisors  
1010 Tenth Street, Suite 6500  
Modesto, CA 95354

Dear Mr. Grover:

The Board of Forestry and Fire Protection (Board) together with the California Fish and Game Commission (Commission) offer this letter in support of further dialogue with county governments on the subject of oak woodlands conservation. Though little known outside of state agency circles, the Board and Commission adopted a *Joint Policy on Hardwoods* on May 9, 1994. This Policy recognizes the unique status of hardwood resources in California and charges the Departments of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF) and Fish and Game (CDFG) with specific responsibilities for the benefit of this valued resource. The Board and Commission recently completed their annual review of this Policy at a joint meeting held this past May. Two things of note in this year's review were the Range Management Advisory Committee's (RMAC) examination of oak woodland policy in California and the passage of Senate Bill 1334 (Kuehl).

RMAC is a standing committee of the Board and was tasked with the examination of oak woodland policy in light of concerns raised by the California Oak Foundation. Among the recommendations made by RMAC was that the Board, Commission and the respective Departments strive for greater outreach to local governments. RMAC found that while the greatest threat of oak woodland loss remains catastrophic fire, highly visible and concentrated conversions of oak woodlands to commercial and residential development are locally significant and permanent. It was likewise noted that in certain instances county planning departments have been successful in protecting oak woodlands from excessive development, though such planning has not occurred consistently across county jurisdictions. This is particularly noteworthy given the complexities of balancing population growth and residential land use expansion with resource protection and preservation. As it is clear that these balancing acts are locally unique, it is incumbent upon the state to reach out in support of local entities that are closest to the situation and have access to a multitude of tools well suited to project level action.

As you may be aware, Senate Bill 1334, authored by Senator Sheila Kuehl was enacted (as Public Resources Code §21083.4) to provide additional direction to counties relative to significance determinations on CEQA projects involving oak woodland conversion. The statute also specifies certain mitigations should such conversions be determined significant and allows for a number of exemptions. It is our understanding that the California Oak Foundation (COF) and the University of California's Integrated Hardwood Range Management Program (IHRMP) have provided local planning departments with various materials highlighting this legislative addition. The Board and Commission are appreciative of these efforts and likewise wish to convey our support for this important legislative guidance to local governments.

Another important piece of legislation directly related to the conservation of California's oak woodlands was the 2001 *Oak Woodlands Conservation Act*. Enactment of this legislation created the Oak Woodlands Conservation Program and authorizes the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) to purchase oak woodland conservation easements and provide grants for land improvements and restoration efforts. It allows for 20 percent of the total bond funds allocated to the Program to be used for grants designed to provide public education and outreach, technical assistance and to develop and implement oak woodland conservation plans. To date, 18 California counties have adopted oak woodland conservation plans and five more are close to completion. The adoption of these plans will qualify the counties to participate in the Oak Woodland Conservation Program designed to protect, restore and enhance oak woodlands and provide public outreach and educational grants to eligible participants.

In addition to the assistance provided through the Oak Woodlands Conservation Program, it is important to mention that there are a number of technical and educational sources available to local governments relative to the management of hardwood resources. The IHRMP provides direct assistance through technical advisors located throughout the state and has an extensive list of available publications as well as a periodic newsletter that may be located through their website at <http://danr.ucop.edu/ihrmp/>. Their 2004 update of the publication entitled, A Planner's Guide for Oak Woodlands may be quite useful to local planning departments. CDF's Fire and Resource Assessment Program (FRAP) completed its latest statewide assessment of resource conditions in 2003 and produced a summary of its findings entitled, The Changing California: Forest and Range 2003 Assessment. The Assessment is available source of information from which to gain broad perspective on land use trends and related impacts, and is available on the FRAP website at <http://frap.cdf.ca.gov/>, as well as in print form.

Upon receipt of environmental documents from the State Clearinghouse and Planning Unit direct assessment and commentary in CEQA project review is provided by our respective Departments. As it is our Departments' responsibility to provide county governments with assistance in the evaluation of CEQA projects, we encourage you to let us know whether or not the present level of assessment and commentary is effective.

To help ensure success of local government efforts toward conservation of oak woodlands, it is essential that comments from state entities are useful and timely.

In order that the Board and Commission may be better informed of local efforts, we would be pleased to receive a copy of current or proposed oak woodland conservation plans and/or local government resolutions. We would also appreciate periodic updates as to issues you are facing and the impact of state legislation and policy upon local conservation objectives. The Board and Commission will likewise endeavor to keep local entities informed as to relevant policy deliberations at the state level.

In closing, the Board and Commission look forward to enhanced communications between state and local entities. The success of oak woodlands conservation in California is a matter of shared perspective and collaboration. It is our hope that this correspondence is a positive step in that direction.

Sincerely,

Mr. Jim Kellogg, President  
Fish and Game Commission

Mr. Stan Dixon, Chair  
Board of Forestry &  
Fire Protection