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DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME
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Professional Foresters Registration

Mr. Eric Huff, Executive Officer
Board of Forestry and Fire Protection
Post Office Box 944246
Sacramento, California 94246

Dear Mr. Huff:

Joint Policy on Hardwoods

I am writing in response to your request for the Wildlife Conservation Board's (WCB) perspective on the Joint Policy on Hardwoods. The Range Management Advisory Committee (RMAC) has raised several points regarding the Joint Policy on Hardwoods and the public and private management of hardwoods in California.

Many of the issues contained in the Joint Policy and the RMAC issue paper are beyond the purview of the WCB. However, an issue that emerges from both perspectives involves the Oak Woodlands Conservation Act. As such, my comments are limited to the Oak Woodlands Conservation Program and its relationship to the Joint Policy on Hardwoods.

As you know, the Oak Woodlands Conservation Program was enacted with the expressed intent to accomplish, in part, the following:

1. Support and encourage voluntary, long-term private stewardship and conservation of oak woodlands;

2. Provide incentives to protect and encourage farming and ranching operation;

3. Provide incentives for the protection of oak trees providing superior wildlife values; and

4. Encourage local land use planning.

The stated objectives of the Act, coupled with the requirement that to qualify for a grant the county or city must prepare an oak woodlands management plan, have provided a vehicle to implement several provisions of the Joint Policy. During the initial stages of implementing the Oak Woodlands Conservation Program, the WCB had concerns regarding the requirement that oak woodland management plans be prepared. However, as evidenced in the nine counties that have adopted such a plan, the plan requirement served as a forum to bring together various parties and divergent constituent groups interested in oak woodlands.

For each of the counties that adopted an oak woodlands management plan, numerous meetings and discussions were held surrounding the use and management of oak woodlands. Issues were thoroughly debated and expertise was obtained from the California

Department of Forestry's Forest and Range Assessment Program (FRAP), Integrated Hardwood Range Management Program (IHRMP) and DFG. Ultimately, consensus was reached that resulted in an oak woodland management plan approved by the local county Board of Supervisors. To date, in addition to the nine counties that have formally adopted an oak woodlands management plan, six other counties are close to completing a plan. Due to the sensitivities surrounding the use and management of oak woodlands, three counties are experiencing difficulty reaching consensus on the plan and one county has voted not to adopt an oak woodland management plan.

While each of the adopted plans are unique and vary depending upon their location, the plans reflect local decisions and priority for the use, management and conservation of oak woodlands. Moreover, counties with completed plans have acknowledged their support and encouragement for private landowners, concerned citizens and planning departments to access critical resources designed to further the conservation of oak woodlands.

Another important theme that has emerged throughout the implementation of the Oak Woodlands Conservation Program was the extensive need for public education and outreach efforts designed to reach local landowners, city and county officials, and agricultural and environmental interests. Consistent with the Joint Hardwood Policy, to the extent outreach efforts were provided, local entities, private landowners and interests groups were more receptive to developing a local plan. In addition, outreach efforts that also included staff from the FRAP unit and the IHRMP, were very effective at addressing such issues as sustainability, harvesting and other oak resource concerns.

While the Oak Woodland Conservation Program provides tremendous opportunity to address local concerns regarding the use and management of oak woodlands, the program is underutilized. In part, the underutilization can be attributed to the uncertainty of funds. However, more importantly, the program may be underutilized because of the extreme controversy surrounding the use and management of lands containing oak woodlands. While statewide regulation of these lands is not the answer, local distrust and lack of understanding may be the biggest impediment toward the long-term preservation of oak woodlands.

In closing, I hope my comments surrounding the implementation of the Oak Woodlands Conservation Program are helpful. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Ms. Marilyn Cundiff, Public Land Management Specialist, at (916) 445-1079 or you can reach me at (916) 445-0137.

Sincerely,

Al Wright
Executive Director