



California Biodiversity Council

*To conserve and sustain California's natural heritage
through collaboration among leaders and
cooperation across all levels of government*

Conservation Alignment In Action - Progress on CBC Resolutions & Alignment Opportunities

Wednesday January 20, 2016

8:45 am to 3:15 pm

**Harper Alumni Center
California State University, Sacramento**

Meeting Summary

Attendance by Council Members

John Laird, California Secretary for Natural Resources and CBC Co-chair

Jerome Perez, USDI Bureau of Land Management and CBC Co-chair

Bruce Gwynne, California Department of Conservation

Kevin Hunting, California Department of Fish and Wildlife

Amrith Gunasekara, California Department of Food and Agriculture

Jay Chamberlin, California Department of Parks and Recreation

Stuart Kirkham, California Department of Transportation

Kamyar Guivetchi, California Department of Water Resources

Roger Johnson, California Energy Commission

Kate White, California State Transportation Agency

Patrick Wright, California Tahoe Conservancy

Peter Perrine, California Wildlife Conservation Board

Shakoora Azimi-Gaylon, Delta Conservancy

Jim Branham, Sierra Nevada Conservancy

Randall Winston, Strategic Growth Council

Karen Buhr, California Association of Resource Conservation Districts

Nicholai Konovaloff, Rural County Representatives of California

David Roberts, San Diego Association of Governments

Charlotte Ambrose, NOAA Fisheries
Col. JJ Gamelin, USMC, Department of Defense
Randy Moore, USDA Forest Service
Luana Kiger, USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service
Larry Rabin, USDI Fish and Wildlife Service
Patricia Neubacher, USDI National Park Service

Attendance by Council Support Staff

Mike Chapel, CBC consultant
Denny Grossman, Strategic Growth Council, IRCAD Lead
Kamyar Guivetchi, California Department of Water Resources and Co-chair, CBC Executive Committee
Don Yasuda, USDA Forest Service and Chair, Interagency Alignment Team

Welcome, Introductions, Meeting Objectives and Agenda Review

CBC Co-Chairs Secretary John Laird, California Natural Resources Agency, and California State Director Jerome Perez, USDI Bureau of Land Management, opened the meeting by asking CBC members (“Council”) and other attendees for introductions.

Secretary Laird recognized three different people/organizations for their support of the CBC. He expressed his appreciation for the previous CBC Co-Chair and BLM State Director Jim Kenna’s leadership with the CBC. He also acknowledged the logistics and administrative support from the University of California and its Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR), and in particular Lauren McNees for her support while at CalFire and ANR.

Secretary Laird provided background for the meeting by reminding the Council that this meeting builds upon the Council’s resolutions to strengthen agency alignment of natural resource conservation (“2013 CBC resolution”) and partner with the Strategic Growth Council (SGC) to advance agency alignment (“2014 CBC resolution”). Previously, the SGC presented initial efforts to launch the Integrated Regional Conservation Assessment and Development program (IRCAD) and will update the Council on the IRCAD program during this meeting. SGC and the CBC Executive Committee seek the Council’s input on the IRCAD program’s applicability and utility to CBC member agencies, which will guide the Executive Committee’s next steps. Secretary Laird underscored the added urgency for the CBC to institutionalize new approaches such as the IRCAD program during the remainder of the Brown Administration.

The goals for this meeting were to:

- Learn about progress on CBC Resolutions, IRCAD Program and Demonstration Projects
- Review and approve IRCAD Action Plan
- Discuss alignment opportunities with IRCAD
- Learn about CDFW Conservation Programs, 2015 SWAP Update, and CA Headwaters/WIP

Report from the CBC Executive Committee and Interagency Alignment Team

CBC Executive Committee Co-Chair Kamyar Guivetchi of the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) provided an overview of the Executive Committee's work since the October 2014 CBC meeting. The Executive Committee has continued with its responsibilities to implement the CBC resolutions, organize CBC meetings, and receive input from the Interagency Alignment Team (IAT). Kamyar added the CBC is transitioning its administrative support from ANR to the California State University, Sacramento's Center for Collaborative Policy (CCP) temporarily. The Executive Team is considering the options for coordinating administrative support and will keep the Council apprised of the Executive Committee's decision or proposal. Kamyar acknowledged and thanked the team that prepared for the meeting comprised of staff from the SGC, DWR and CCP.

IAT Chair Don Yasuda of the USDA Forest Service (USFS) Pacific Southwest Region, summarized the IAT's work, who have met approximately bimonthly since its inception in 2013 to discuss and implement initiatives and tasks as directed by the Executive Committee and the CBC. Based on the 2014 CBC resolution, the IAT identified several overlapping tasks with the SGC IRCAD program; the IAT then realigned its tasks to support the IRCAD program, which helped advance progress with the 2013 CBC resolution. The IAT will continue to identify agency/organization integration and alignment opportunities across different conservation initiatives and projects. The IAT compiled a Planning Calendar of recurring plans for regional conservation assessments and strategies by CBC member agencies (*See Attachment A*); Mr. Yasuda invited members to provide additional information if they know of other planning efforts underway.

Advances in the Integrated Regional Conservation and Development Program (IRCAD)

SGC Executive Director Randall Winston and SGC Environmental Science & Policy Senior Advisor Denny Grossman provided context for the IRCAD presentations by reviewing SGC's objectives and the motivation for developing the IRCAD program. Mr. Winston explained the IRCAD program offers a great opportunity to help advance SGC's objectives to support sustainable communities planning and protect the state's natural resources and agricultural lands. Mr. Grossman added that, per the 2014 CBC resolution and Co-Chairs' requests, SGC has worked hard to analyze how to further efforts to develop strategic partnerships and methodologies such as the IRCAD program.

Mr. Grossman provided an overview of IRCAD program, which aims to simultaneously support efficient implementation of priority development projects with successful protection of critical natural resources at a regional scale. To achieve successful conservation and avoid/minimize/mitigate negative environmental impacts, the regional conservation priorities and goals must be known and readily accessible. Regional conservation assessments can help provide this critical information to guide sustainable regional development planning and project mitigation that support regional conservation goals, which can result in streamlined regulatory and permitting practices.

Panel Presentations: Development and Documentation of IRCAD Methods

Denny Grossman moderated a discussion on how the IRCAD approach builds on prior conservation planning information and programs in California:

- Armand Gonzales, California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), provided an overview of CDFW's data that guide the department's conservation activities such as the 2015 State Wildlife Action Plan. CDFW provides a wealth of information on species management, species data, and habitat conservation on its web portal (www.wildlife.ca.gov/conservation) and is publicly

available. CDFW's database and model analyses can serve as an excellent starting point for conducting regional conservation assessments and natural community conservation planning analyses (NCCPs).

- Jim Strittholt, Conservation Biology Institute (CBI) presented a large data-sharing platform (Data Basin – <http://databasin.org>) that can improve data accessibility, promote integration, maintain usability, and support collaboration. CBI also created several conservation models that are linked to Data Basin, such as identification of least conflict areas, species habitat vulnerability, and conserved lands information in California. The models can rapidly produce different filtered information on maps as well as in infographics.
- Denny Grossman presented an overview of the IRCAD methodology with a focus on conducting regional conservation assessments in a standardized manner. The methodology is the product of the Methodology Working Group, which consists of representatives from the CBC, CalTrans, DWR, CDFW, SGC, CA Department of Food and Agriculture, CA Department of Conservation, CA Energy Commission (CEC), The Nature Conservancy, UC Davis, and US Fish & Wildlife Services (US FWS). The working group developed the steps for conducting a regional assessment within the IRCAD framework: identify ecoregions, identify conservation targets, establish conservation goals, determine level of unmet goals, and develop and implement strategies to address unmet goals.

Discussion

CBC members and panelists shared their thoughts on how the available information and data management tools can feed into the IRCAD process, how agencies and organizations might use the information and tools, and how that interaction might occur. Some conclusions were:

- The IRCAD method identifies the lands that are important for conservation, as well as those lands that are more appropriate for development. Proponents of development projects need this information to readily determine what development opportunities exist across an ecoregion.
- CDFW's database and model analyses offer valuable species, habitat, and species management information statewide at a 30-meter pixel resolution. The model outputs may require additional field data for verification, which other organizations and agencies may be able to provide.
- Several CBC members expressed an interest to incorporate their data with CDFW's conservation database and Data Basin; the exact process will warrant further discussion. For instance, with a few extra layers of programming, agencies with high firewall protections can still share critical information in Data Basin while maintaining the necessary level of privacy.
- Agencies face the challenge to move away from traditional intra-agency project development processes to interagency communication and information-sharing early in the process.

Panel Presentations: Advancing Strategic Demonstration Pilots

Denny Grossman facilitated a second set of panel presentations that focused on specific strategic projects that demonstrate key IRCAD components.

- Kate White, CalTrans, described the High Speed Rail (HSR) program's commitment to modeling high standards of environmentally responsible project delivery (e.g., zero net emissions during construction and HSR running on 100% on renewable energy). Ambitious large-scale projects such as these require collaborative partnerships among agencies, stakeholders, and businesses

to identify conservation priorities and develop/implement strategies that achieve conservation goals.

- Tom Pogacnik, USDI Bureau of Land Management (BLM), provided an overview of the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan's (DRECP) biological mitigation strategy. DRECP has been a large-scale and long-term planning process primarily among four agencies (CEC, US FWS, CDFW, and BLM) with input from several other agencies, counties, tribal groups, and stakeholders. The DRECP partnering agencies used a collaborative approach to develop landscape-level conservation and mitigation strategies very similar to the IRCAD framework. Data Basin contains several datasets/galleries related to DRECP, including the DRECP Proposed LUPA and Final EIS information ([Follow this link to the DRECP FEIS dataset](#)).
- Don Yasuda, USFS, presented several opportunities for using IRCAD approach in USFS planning processes (e.g., forest fire management) and aligning with other agencies' planning efforts (e.g., State Wildlife Action Plan and CA Transportation Plan). The IRCAD approach can help assess conditions to determine management needs, prioritize efforts, focus/coordinate funds and resources, develop implementation strategies, and support broad communication and shared reporting/monitoring. He emphasized that climate change has shortened planning timeframes, and agencies must quickly problem solve and find new ways to collaborate.

Discussion

CBC members and panelists reflected on how the IRCAD approach might have affected planning development and primarily focused on the DRECP example. Comments included:

- Agencies need to determine whether the IRCAD process provides enough value for the agencies to embrace the approach and move away from the traditional planning processes in "silos."
- If agencies had adopted an IRCAD approach when DRECP first launched, the effort may have shortened, because the involved agencies and stakeholders needed the time to learn how to work collaboratively, collect data, determine how to utilize the data, etc. An IRCAD approach may have streamlined some of these learning and information gathering phases.
- The DRECP was a highly science-based document, which made information readily available to the public; however, the document was also highly complex and possibly overwhelming. Mapping and other infographics help to convey complex information more intuitively.

Discussion & Action: Next Steps for Advancing IRCAD

Denny Grossman presented the proposed IRCAD 2-year action plan (*See Attachment B*) that outlines the needed actions to advance the IRCAD program. All CBC member agencies were asked to engage in the development and implementation of this program, and to engage in the use of IRCAD products to achieve an integrated conservation vision for California. Some agencies with special expertise and responsibilities were asked to provide staff and information resources to help accomplish specific tasks. The action plan describes four main areas of activities:

- 1) Establish **framework and standards** for implementation of the IRCAD program;
- 2) Integrate the methods into **project implementation** with regional conservation assessments and demonstrate the process and value of this approach to effectively achieve regionally sustainable conservation and development objectives;
- 3) Implement a **information technology platform** that supports advancing IRCAD projects objectives and develop/manage the necessary **data** with associated support technology; and

- 4) Identify and advance **financial and policy strategies** to support IRCAD implementation and institutionalization.

Discussion

The CBC Co-Chairs facilitated the discussion about the merits of the IRCAD approach and proposed action plan. CBC members conveyed strong support for the general concept of IRCAD; some members expressed a desire to learn more about the details of implementing the IRCAD approach (e.g., data-sharing and monitoring protocols). Comments, questions, and conclusions included:

Benefits of the IRCAD process

- Offers great value and efficiency to have the data in one place.
- Is scalable to help guide local government decisions (e.g., inform project decisions in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act, CEQA, process).
- Potential to design multi-beneficial and comprehensive mitigation strategies that meet the regional conservation needs.
- Could provide an institutionalized framework to meet planning needs as they arise, such as large-scale emergencies (e.g., current tree mortality issue).
- Valuable for agencies that have less experience with conservation planning to get conservation information to their project developers early in the planning process.

Issues for further consideration

- Every agency has different methods for conducting assessments, monitoring, setting targets, etc. Aligning agencies' conservation goals and targets is achievable, but using the exact same planning process will prove more difficult due to different regulatory and statutory frameworks.
- Most permitting agency processes are not set up to consider large-scale landscape planning. Perhaps the IRCAD process provides a framework that helps develop mitigation options that support regional conservation goals and are acceptable to permitting agencies. Permitting agencies should also be part of the process to identify regional conservation priorities.
- Perhaps the IRCAD process could help prioritize and coordinate restoration and enhancement efforts in addition to impact avoidance, minimization, and mitigation.
- CBC member agencies will likely need additional assistance to familiarize themselves with what data are available, how to access and use it, and how to contribute their own data.
- Local stakeholders should continue to be engaged and involved in the regional planning process in order for their interests to be known and considered. However, incorporating local interests and priorities into regional planning poses jurisdictional challenges. State and federal agencies should help local governments practice these new integrated and large-scale planning processes.
- Consider how to integrate information on the economic value of conservation practices into planning tools.
- The IRCAD process and methods should be refined based on findings and lessons learned from demonstration projects.

Action: Agree on IRCAD Action Plan

The CBC Co-Chairs conducted a general straw poll to determine whether the Council supports the proposed IRCAD 2-year action plan. The entire Council expressed approval of the general idea of the IRCAD approach and the action plan. CBC members were encouraged to contact SGC or the Executive Committee as soon as possible if they had questions or concerns about the details laid out in the action

plan. Secretary Laird suggested that SGC then compile a list of the major issues that need refinements and share the list with the CBC member agencies.

Keynote: CA Department of Fish and Wildlife Biodiversity Conservation Programs and Alignment Opportunities with IRCAD

CDFW Chief Deputy Director Keven Hunting delivered the keynote speech that presented several CDFW's biodiversity conservation programs that could incorporate IRCAD methods. Mr. Hunting explained how IRCAD could set an overall framework of standards, goals, and targets that set unifying principles for planning efforts in a given region. For instance, IRCAD could help guide how CDFW could more strategically administer public funds for public conservation investments.

CDFW is developing its regional conservation assessment program that aims to reduce project permitting time and result in a conservation outcome sensitive to the goals and objectives of the overlying framework. CDFW also envisions the regional assessments, under the IRCAD rubric, could provide true regional advanced mitigation program incentives to encourage conservation investments before project development proposals.

Mr. Hunting reiterated how IRCAD could provide unifying principles to address the need for integrated regional conservation planning. He added that IRCAD should consider how to promote public policy and process incentives that support the IRCAD framework and goals. He expressed his support of the goals outlined in the IRCAD 2-year action plan and hopes CBC member agencies can participate in pilot programs to demonstrate IRCAD implementation as soon as possible.

Presentation: Final 2015 State Wildlife Action Plan – An Opportunity to Align Conservation Work among CBC Member Agencies

Armand Gonzales presented CDFW's recent large scale plan, the 2015 State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) as an opportunity for agencies to align their conservation efforts. SWAP sets a common vision for fish and wildlife conservation; implements conservation actions that are implementable, measurable, and time bound; and provides proactive, non-regulatory, incentive-based solutions. SWAP places a major focus on partnerships that coordinate with other agencies and organizations, leverage funding, promote education and outreach, and develop companion plans with other sectors. He emphasized that no one agency has the resources to address these major conservation issues alone, especially in the face of climate change, so agencies need to foster these partnerships ([Follow this link to the CDFW SWAP webpage](#)).

Presentation: Other Conservation Alignment Opportunities – CA Headwaters Partnership and Watershed Improvement Program (WIP) for the Sierra Nevada Mountains

USFS Regional Forrester Randy Moore presented the California Headwaters Partnership, which was designated as one of seven regions in the nation through the Resilient Lands and Waters Initiative; the designation emphasizes the urgent need to restore landscapes in this region (especially as fire severity and burnt acreage have increased) and highlights existing collaboratives in the state. The partnership uses the Watershed Improvement Program (WIP) as the foundational analysis to inform how to restore watersheds to a state of resiliency ([Follow this link to the Sierra Nevada WIP webpage](#)).

Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) Executive Director Jim Branham then presented an overview of the WIP for the Sierra Nevada Mountains, which is a partnership among SNC, USFS, and many other entities. The prolific Sierra Nevada region is a major source for ecosystem services; however, current and predicted threats such as wildfires, drought, disease, development, and climate change all pose daunting challenges for the health of the region. WIP aims to address these challenges by focusing on two key outcomes – increase investment opportunities for watershed restoration and address key policy issues that affect the pace and scale of restoration. Developing and implementing WIP in a strategic, integrated, and collaborative manner will maximize the investments made and ensure policy changes are made with a comprehensive understanding of the region’s needs. Mr. Branham emphasized this requires a bold new approach to restore the watershed and proactively cultivate partnerships. He believes WIP offers many opportunities for CBC member agencies to participate in this effort and invites all agencies to be engaged.

Discussion

CBC members were invited to pose questions and reflections on any of the information shared during this meeting. Comments and conclusions included:

- Potential candidates for IRCAD demonstration projects include the Tree Mortality Task Force and the CA Headwaters Partnership/Sierra Nevada WIP.
- Reframing the issues can help advance conservation efforts that garnered less support in the past. Issues like climate change and biomass are prominent political and social topics.
- Many of the programs and projects discussed at this meeting conveyed the great sense of urgency to address major threats to the health of eco-regions as soon as possible, and to do so comprehensively and efficiently.
- The major impediment to getting things done is our traditional ways of conducting work. If there is going to be a different approach to landscape-level management, the Council has the greatest opportunity to make that difference. We must all question ourselves, “How committed are we to adapting our traditional ways of doing business and work collectively for the greater good of the landscape?”

Discussion: Topics and Format for Future CBC Meetings

CBC Co-Chairs Secretary Laird and Director Perez asked for suggestions for future meeting topics and the meeting format. Secretary Laird offered the idea of reintroducing field trips into the meeting design to connect data and information with a real project. Other suggestions included:

- Hold a meeting or discussion focused on the data – what data we have, how we could use it, what data do we need, etc.
- Send a progress report update before the next CBC meeting to keep CBC members apprised of IRCAD progress and ways to help advance the process.

Next Steps

Secretary Laird asked the Executive Committee to consider the Council’s feedback on:

- Issues with implementing the IRCAD approach that need further consideration
 - Appropriate level of standardization for the components of the IRCAD process
 - Integration with permitting processes

- Support for restoration and enhancement efforts
- Educating CBC member agencies on data use within the IRCAD framework
- Local stakeholder involvement in the regional planning process
- Incorporating economic value of conservation practices into planning tools
- Phasing the IRCAD process as an institutional practice
- Future meeting topic on data
- Distributing an IRCAD progress report before the next CBC meeting.

Secretary Laird encouraged CBC members to contact the Executive Committee if they had any additional suggestions on the IRCAD program and future CBC meetings.

Closing

The CBC Co-Chairs thanked the Council for a very productive meeting. Co-Chair Perez added that these large-scale planning efforts really require a culture change in many of the CBC agencies. He challenged CBC member agencies to think about their agency's culture and how their agency can move forward to achieve its goals.

The meeting adjourned at 3:15 pm.

List of Attachments

Attachment A - Recurring Plans for Regional Conservation Assessments and Strategies by CBC Member Agencies

Attachment B – Proposed IRCAD 2-Year Action Plan