

California Wildlife Action Plan

What is a wildlife action plan?

Congress asked each state to develop a wildlife action plan, known technically as a comprehensive wildlife conservation strategy. These proactive plans examine the health of wildlife and prescribe actions to conserve wildlife and vital habitat before they become more rare and more costly to protect.

California snapshot

Geography: California's landscape highlights include deserts, mountain ranges, wetlands, woodlands, and 1,100 miles of coastline. It provides habitats for more than 391 bird species, 222 mammals, 160 reptiles and amphibians, and 116 freshwater fishes.

Landscape: California's land mass spans more than 158,000 square miles. Water resources include 4,955 lakes and reservoirs, 103 major streams, and 74 major rivers.

Wildlife: Island foxes are recovering on several Channel Islands, the only place in the world where they are found. Fairy shrimp exist in California's remaining vernal pools. Millions of reddish-orange Monarch butterflies continue their migration from Mexico to California's central coast each year. Abalone, a native species of the California coast, cling to rocks and wave-swept ledges. And the Common murre can dive to depths of more than 300 feet to catch squid and fish.



Clapper rail/Jeremy Rowell

recommend conservation actions based on sound science and stakeholder involvement. The Action Plan continues an ecosystem approach to conservation issues. This approach recognizes the interdependence of multiple species and their habitats. The plan also considers the needs of select species inhabiting a particular region of the state.

The action plan looks at 807 vulnerable wildlife species and what actions are likely to ensure their survival. The plan is largely based on the idea that the best strategy the state can implement is to expand the study of species and habitats—in order to answer such questions as: What are the species and habitats in greatest conservation need and where are they found? And what is threatening their survival and

how can we effectively work together to strengthen conservation actions?

The Action Plan identifies five key issues: 1) integrating wildlife conservation into local land-use decisions; 2) restoring and conserving riparian habitats; 3) providing essential water for wildlife; 4) controlling invasive species; 5) and expanding conservation education.

The action plan is organized into nine geographic regions. To complement the plan, a user-friendly website was created to provide conservationists with digital

California's planning approach

California's Wildlife Action Plan (Action Plan) was developed as a reference for conservationists and the general public alike. The mission was to draw upon decades of conservation efforts and to

“California’s Wildlife Action Plan represents a plan of investment in our natural heritage that will benefit both wildlife and people. There is a shared consensus in support of clean air and water and the preservation of agriculture and scenic landscapes...and a growing recognition that wildlife needs to be included in these efforts. This plan identifies key objectives and challenges in wildlife management that can help direct positive conservation efforts.”

*– L. Ryan Broddrick,
Director, California
Department of Fish
and Game*

maps depicting the regions of the state where various species are found.

Primary challenges to conserving wildlife in California



San Joaquin Kit fox. Copyright Photographer, Jeremy Rowell

California’s Wildlife Action Plan identifies four primary statewide threats or “stressors” – each with major consequences for species, ecosystems, and habitats. Additional threats were also identified on a region-by-region basis. Growth and development, water management conflicts and invasive species have all contributed to the decline in the state’s wildlife species.

Human activities: population growth and development have placed even-greater demands on the state’s land, water, and other natural resources. Without conservation planning, development can eliminate or fragment important habitats, decrease the quality of remaining natural areas, and disrupt fish and wildlife migration routes.

Limited water resources are stretched between meeting the demands of residential and agricultural land uses, and not enough water is being secured for wildlife. The operation of dams and water diversions and other causes have also reduced the amount of water available for fish and wildlife in certain areas of the state, including many species of concern. Coordinated water planning and advances in technology can help with the allocation of water for wildlife.

Invasive species, including animals, plants, and pathogens rank among the major statewide threats affecting California’s native wildlife. Invasive plants (more than a thousand types) such as medusa-head and French broom pose a direct threat to animals by producing harmful awns and seeds. Many key habitats are under siege by nonnative species that invade and take over ecosystems, resulting in a lack of nutritional forage for animals.

Working together for California’s wildlife

California’s Wildlife Action Plan was developed for the California Department of Fish and Game in cooperation with the California Department of Fish and

“This is an important piece of work that can help the state of California become more effective at wildlife conservation. It demonstrates that more time, effort and resources are needed to conserve the living things that are so intrinsically linked to our quality of life. This action plan shows us how we can do it. Our future depends on it.”

–Mark Burget, Executive Director, The Nature Conservancy California Program

Wildlife	Total number of species	Species of Conservation Concern*	Threatened/endangered listed species
Snails (land)	280	101	3
Fairy Shrimp	23	10	5
Insects	30,000-100,000	257	22
Freshwater Fish	116	95	29
Amphibians	68	39	12
Reptiles	92	43	9
Birds	391*	139	30
Mammals	222	123	24
Totals		807	134

*California’s “Special Animal List” includes wildlife species with populations that are rare and at risk. This includes animals closely associated with a declining habitat or very restricted distributions, and animals listed under state and federal Endangered Species Acts. Includes both species and subspecies.

**Represents regularly occurring species.

Wildlife highlights

Key Habitats	Wildlife (examples)	Issue (examples)	Action (examples)
Riparian/Aquatic Ownership: public/private	Wilson's warbler, Western pond turtle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • water quality • degraded habitat • invasive species 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperative efforts among resource agencies and conservation organizations to protect, enhance, and restore riparian habitats. • Surveys and monitoring efforts to assess the distribution and trends over time in these riparian-dependent species.
Grassland Ownership: private	Swainson's hawk, tricolored blackbird, San Pablo vole, Western burrowing owl, Buena Vista Lake shrew, American badger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breeding and or foraging on private lands/farms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide incentives to farmers to manage their lands for wildlife. • Compensation to landowners who delay harvest to allow for undisturbed nesting (proactive approach). • Integrating conservation planning into land-use decisions (regional planning). • Coordination among adjacent landowners. • Habitat mitigation guidelines. • Preserving agricultural foraging areas. • Conducting rangewide surveys to assess populations and creating long-term monitoring strategies to assist in the development of sound regional conservation plans.
Montane Meadows Ownership: public/private	Willow flycatcher, Great Gray owl, amphibian species	Rare habitats affected by land management activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Species such as these are not well-studied hence the Department is engaging in rangewide surveys to increase our understanding of habitat requirements for guiding future management.
Sierra/Cascade Lakes and Streams Ownership: mostly public	Native trout species, native amphibians such as the mountain yellow-legged frog	Introduced trout and other factors affecting the biodiversity of high-elevation lakes and waters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement rangewide surveys to determine the status and monitor the trends in species over time. • Develop management actions to reduce/eliminate potential conflicts with introduced fish and conserve/enhance native species.

Recommended actions to conserve California's wildlife

Game and the Wildlife Health Center at the University of California, Davis. The plan was created with a broad array of conservation partners, including The Nature Conservancy, Defenders of Wildlife, Ducks Unlimited, Water Education Foundation, Trout Unlimited, Natural Resource Conservation Service, California Waterfowl Association, Resource Land Owners Coalition, Riparian Habitat Joint Venture, and many others.

Nine regional public workshops, attended by more than 740 people, were held to discuss conservation issues, wildlife needs, and current conservation activities. Stakeholders also participated in another series of seven action workshops held throughout the state. Each one included between 20 and 30 conservation experts representing government agencies, universities, and outdoors and conservation organiza-





Desert Storm, Anza Borrego Desert State Park (Colorado Desert Region)/Copyright Photographer, John J. Blair, DDS

tions. The overall goal of these workshops was to identify ways to protect and preserve habitat for California's threatened species. The product of these efforts, California's Wildlife Action Plan, represents the consolidation of these wildlife management ideas.

"The California Wildlife Action Plan provides a statewide assessment of threats to our wildlife heritage. With growth and development identified as one of the greatest threats to wildlife diversity, we must move quickly to protect and restore habitat. This plan is a good starting point that Defenders of Wildlife and other conservation partners can use to focus our wildlife conservation efforts."

– Kim Delfino, California Program Director,
Defenders of Wildlife

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