

Sierra County Board of Supervisors' Agenda Transmittal & Record of Proceedings

MEETING DATE: February 15, 2022	TYPE OF AGENDA ITEM: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Regular <input type="checkbox"/> Timed <input type="checkbox"/> Consent
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DEPARTMENT: Board of Supervisors APPROVING PARTY: Paul Roen, Chair, District No. 3 PHONE NUMBER: 530-289-3295
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AGENDA ITEM: Continued discussion/action on submitting comments on the California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA) Draft "Pathways to 30x30: Accelerating Conservation of California's Nature".

SUPPORTIVE DOCUMENTS ATTACHED: Memo Resolution Agreement Other
Lassen County Comment Letter and Cattlemen's Foundation 30x30 Talking Points.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

FUNDING SOURCE:
GENERAL FUND IMPACT: No General Fund Impact
OTHER FUND:
AMOUNT: \$ N/A

ARE ADDITIONAL PERSONNEL REQUIRED? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, -- -- <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	IS THIS ITEM ALLOCATED IN THE BUDGET? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No IS A BUDGET TRANSFER REQUIRED? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
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SPACE BELOW FOR CLERK'S USE

BOARD ACTION: <input type="checkbox"/> Approved <input type="checkbox"/> Approved as amended <input type="checkbox"/> Adopted <input type="checkbox"/> Adopted as amended <input type="checkbox"/> Denied <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> No Action Taken	<input type="checkbox"/> Set public hearing For: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Direction to: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Referred to: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Continued to: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Authorization given to: _____	Resolution 2022- _____ Agreement 2022- _____ Ordinance _____ Vote: Ayes: Noes: Abstain: Absent: <input type="checkbox"/> By Consensus
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COMMENTS:

CLERK TO THE BOARD _____

DATE _____

February 15, 2022

California Natural Resources Agency
715 P Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Submitted Via Email: Californianature@resources.ca.gov

RE: Pathways to 30x30 Strategy

This letter and comments are provided on behalf of the Sierra County Board of Supervisors on the Pathways to 30x30: Accelerating Conservation of California's Nature. The Plan's vision and avenues to meet objectives are of significant interest to Sierra County.

Sierra County strongly supports, protects and when necessary, defends sustainable agriculture as a priority land use and this is strongly implemented in existing County policies and regulations developed through the County General Plan Process. The General Plan clearly states that "The economic viability of agriculture in Sierra County-Sierra Valley and Long Valley in particular-will depend upon maintenance of large parcels required and the prevention of subdivision or conversion activity." The majority of ranches being family orientated and/or working ranches and their respective focus being sustainable agriculture is a high priority for the Board of Supervisors-past and present-to protect and enhance.

Please consider the following comments:

- 1. The state cannot currently maintain lands and facilities under its ownership.** The California Five-Year Infrastructure Plan 2021-2022 states "Deferred maintenance is maintenance that has not been completed to keep state-owned facilities in an acceptable and operable condition," estimated at \$84.2 billion. Locally, the Smithneck Creek Wildlife Area in Sierra County is a critical fire hazard with overgrown brush, invasive weeds, dilapidated fencing, in need of habitat restoration to meet wildlife goals, etc. The 30x30 strategy should focus on clearing the backlog of deferred maintenance and improving conservation values on state owned lands, prior to the state making any new acquisitions of land.
- 2. Trespassing and environmental crimes on public lands is a priority concern in our rural landscape. Illegal cannabis cultivation is a major conservation challenge, impacting our waterways, wildlife and forests, plus a threat to public safety.** The Plan fails to address a major conservation hurdle, focus should be on supporting rural law enforcement and clean-up.
- 3. The plan states: "15.2 Explore incentive-based temporary agreements and conservation restrictions to improve habitat without purchase of rights."** We suggest the Plan specifically call for refunding of subvention funds to counties to continue California Land Conservation Act of 1965 (Williamson Act), that keeps open spaces and agricultural lands intact. The Williamson Act has proven to be effective and highlight successful conservation program, yet the state has failed to meet their program obligations.
- 4. To improve intergovernmental partnerships, the State should honor its past promises to Sierra County, California's Payment-in-Lieu-of Taxes (PILT) program of 1949.** These payments are made by the State for mitigating the adverse impacts to county property tax revenues that

results when the state acquires private property for a wildlife management area. Secondly, the Sierra County Board of Supervisors are concerned this Plan will further reduce the county's tax revenue, strapping their ability to deliver basic public services, especially public safety.

5. **Resource Conservation Districts (RCDs) are a missing element of the Plan.** RCDs are the "Go-to hubs for local conservation." The state's 30x30 strategy must recognize, build, and prioritize support for RCDs for their decades of successful partnerships and conservation success. Specifically, the Sierra Valley RCD that serves Sierra County has facilitated millions of dollars in conservation work to reduce invasive species and promote watershed health. Currently the Sierra Valley RCD is overseeing a project to address deferred maintenance and fire risk on state owned lands!
6. **Forest Management is of greatest important to Sierra County, as we have watched communities around us burn.** Intensifying wildfires driven by lack of forest management, drought, and climate change are fueling catastrophic fires. The Sierra County Board of Supervisors fears Plan's approach to fund preservation - when what we need is an investment to manage forests and reduce fire fuels to create more resilient communities and forested landscapes.
7. **Support expanding multifaceted recreation on state owned lands, including future acquisitions.** The Sierra County Board of Supervisors recognizing the tourism economy that is driven by recreation on public lands in our region. We support a diverse spectrum of recreational opportunities, including hunting, fishing, OHV, camping, biking, horseback riding, etc. Our community and visitors appreciate the diversity of recreation options; therefore, we want to ensure this in the future.
8. **Improving nature-based solutions by cutting the "green tape."** Project after project in Sierra County has been delayed and costs increased due to environmental hurdles. Mismanagement of forestlands is a crisis exacerbated, due to environmental laws and regulations that are slowing the implementation of science based on-the-ground management. Prioritization of the Plan should shift focus on management of state and federal public lands to reduce invasive species, prevent catastrophic fires through timber harvesting and fuel breaks, along with post-fire restoration, etc.
9. **Supporting working landscapes NOW and in the future in the 30x30 Plan.** The Plan arbitrarily removes agricultural conservation easements. Specifically, the plan states on page 28 GAP Status 3 lands, including Agricultural easements are not counted for the 30x30 plan, yet on page 4 it states "increase Voluntary Conservation Easements" as a 2nd of 9 strategies to meet 30x30 target. Furthermore, page 30 states "Meaningful conservation that contributes to California's 30x30 goal occurs in many forms, including working landscapes" and it is further expanded on page 31.

Sierra County farmers and ranchers have voluntarily entered into permanent conservation easements on over 30,000 acres. However, the plan provides absolutely no recognition for this perpetual conservation that is taking place in Sierra County.

Furthermore, we disagree with the Plan's assertion for competing priorities between grazing, agriculture and conservation. Managed livestock grazing is being used across the state to improve and maintain habitat for listed species (e.g., California Red Legged Frog), critical habitats (e.g., vernal pools), to reduce fire-fuel loads, and help control non-native plants,

including on the California Department of Fish and Wildlife Hallelujah Junction Wildlife Area in Sierra County! Managed livestock grazing to promote conservation values is supported by peer-reviewed literature, including that conducted by the University of California. We respectfully request that you revise the Plan to recognize the value of working landscapes in meeting the 30x30 objective and recognize grazing as a tool to manage lands within the Plan.

10. The Plan distorts the conservation that has taken place in California. Lands coded under GAP Status 1, 2, and 3 should all be included in the Plan's 30x30 objective. Some specific examples of bias of category 3 lands include:

- National Wildlife Refuges in status 2: they also including multiple use management including passive recreating, hunting, agricultural production (e.g., rice), managed cattle grazing. However, the plan fails to include National Forest and Bureau of Land Management land due to multiple use management.
- Ecological Reserves in status 2, whereas DFW Table Mountain Ecological Reserve includes both managed livestock grazing and THOUSANDS of annual recreational visitors. Yet, the Plan does not include private agricultural easements that provide the same values, without the impact from recreation.

Lastly, the Plan mentions increasing voluntary conservation easements, recognizing their role for wetlands, agricultural lands, grasslands, forests – however, as the Plan reads, it is disheartening only future easements will be credited to the 30x30 vision, and historic easements are discredited.

In conclusion, we feel the Plan does not recognize Sierra County's contribution to the 30x30 target. Additionally, we are concerned with future additional lands taken off the tax rolls, expansion of deferred maintenance on public lands that increase our Sierra County's fire risk under climate change, threatening our communities and rural economies.

County of Lassen
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS



CHRIS GALLAGHER

District 1

GARY BRIDGES

District 2

JEFF HEMPHILL

District 3

AARON ALBAUGH

District 4

TOM HAMMOND

District 5

County Administration Office
221 S. Roop Street, Suite 4
Susanville, CA 96130
Phone: 530-251-8333
Fax: 530-251-2663

January 18, 2022

Wade Crowfoot, Secretary
California Natural Resources Agency
715 P Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Comment Letter, Draft "Pathways to 30x30" strategy

Dear Mr. Crowfoot:

On behalf of the Lassen County Board of Supervisors, I am pleased to provide our comments on the California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA) Draft "Pathways to 30 x 30: Accelerating Conservation of California's Nature."

30 x 30 divides California into nine regions and puts Lassen County in the Sierra Nevada Region. While a portion of the Sierra Nevada mountain range does exist in Lassen County, other equally important landscapes in Lassen County include the Cascade Range, Modoc Plateau, and Basin and Range geomorphic provinces. All of these equally important landscapes converge nearby the county seat of the City of Susanville. Lassen County covers 4,720 square miles, the 8th largest county by size, and 47th least populated county in the state. Lassen County is also the location of Eagle Lake, the second largest natural fresh water lake wholly in California. There are nine state-managed wildlife areas and 1.6 million acres of public land is managed by the federal government. Overall, approximately 59% of the land in Lassen County is owned or controlled by a federal, state or local government agency.

Please accept and give your full consideration to our comments, as follows:

Conservation Challenges:

- **Intergovernmental Partnerships:** The Draft seeks to utilize intergovernmental partnerships. A good starting point for improving intergovernmental partnerships would be for the State to honor its past promises made to counties. With regard to land conservation, the state currently owes millions of dollars to Lassen County from the California's Payment-in-Lieu-of Taxes (PILT) program of 1949 and California Land Conservation Act of 1965 (Williamson Act). These are payments made by the State for mitigating the adverse impacts to county property tax revenues that result when the state acquires private property for wildlife management areas or when private property enrolls in the Williamson Act program. The state's broken promises have impacted this county's ability to deliver basic public services, especially public safety.

- **State priorities:** The state is not currently maintaining land and facilities under its ownership. While it is predicted in the Governor's 2022-2023 proposed budget that the state will have a \$45.7 billion surplus, the state has \$66.9 billion in deferred maintenance for state-owned facilities. In the state's California Five-Year Infrastructure Plan 2021-22, the state has identified \$66.9 billion in deferred maintenance but the then 2021-22 Governor's Budget had only proposed \$250 million for deferred maintenance projects. Needed, but not funded, deferred maintenance requests include \$1.2 billion for state parks, \$157 million for the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, and \$71 million for the Department of Fish and Wildlife. According to the state's infrastructure plan, that "deferred maintenance is maintenance that has not been completed to keep state-owned facilities in an acceptable and operable condition and that is intended to maintain or extend their useful life." The 30 x 30 strategy should solve this problem and emphasize clearing the backlog of deferred maintenance, on behalf of Californians, prior to the state making any new acquisitions of land.
- **Trespassing and environmental crimes on public lands:** Overcoming illegal cannabis cultivation's impacts, and other crimes on our public lands, are a major conservation challenge. All of the environmental harms, enforcement problems, and threats to public safety associated with illegal cannabis cultivation are proving to be unsurmountable problems that all levels of government are dealing with and achieving little success.
- **Intensifying wildfires:** Climate change alone is not the reason for wildfires. Decades of forest mismanagement by public agencies and environmental regulations have created hazardous fuels conditions throughout our public lands. Gross mismanagement has resulted in loss of life and property, destroyed businesses and lost jobs, and ruined the resource, and our local economy, now and for future generations.
- **Wildlife Migration Corridors:** According to the UC Davis Road Ecology Center; Seventh Annual Special Report on the Impact of Wildlife-Vehicle Conflict (WVC) on California Drivers and Animals, "Wildlife-vehicle collisions continue to be an under-recognized and under-reported threat to wildlife population and to drivers in certain areas." Lassen County would support actions by the state to allocate sufficient funding to build needed WVC reduction projects along the U.S. Hwy 395 corridor.
- **Groundwater exportation to the State of Nevada:** The potential and threat of water exportation from Lassen County ground water basins was demonstrated in the late 1980's and 1990's with private interests in the State of Nevada to develop projects in Washoe County, Nevada. The state has adopted groundwater restrictions to deal with exportation including the Sierra Valley Groundwater Basin Act, Honey Lake Valley Ground Water Basin Act, and Surprise Valley Groundwater Basin Act, in response to the intentions of the private interests in Nevada to pump groundwater from California.
- **State "managed" Wildlife Areas:** Lassen County is home to several state "managed" wildlife areas. As discussed above, the state has billions of dollars of deferred maintenance. 30 x 30 should address deferred maintenance, and improve the critical habitat within, state "managed" areas. Wildlife areas in Lassen County include Willow Creek, Honey Lake, Hallelujah Junction, Biscar, Ash Creek, Doyle, Surprise Valley, Bass Hill, and Silver Creek. These are areas that contain critical habitat that require greater budgetary priority by the state, especially to address issues such as invasive species,

deferred maintenance, habitat restoration, and accessibility improvements for visitors.

Important Habitats for Conservation:

- Important habitats for conservation must be those that contain critical habitat, that if acquired, will expand and increase public opportunities for hunting and fishing by the general public. Support for and expansion of hunting and fishing opportunities is well known to be a great motivation for the acquisition and conservation of land. It is very important to us that the state continue to work in partnership with wildlife and fisheries habitat conservation groups to ensure that existing lands and new acquisitions do not prohibit or exclude opportunities for hunting, fishing, and gathering.

Access Priorities:

- As stated above, the state has tens of billions of dollars of deferred maintenance. Removal of barriers to access to state-owned lands, pursuant to the Americans with Disability Act, should be a priority of the state to complete prior to the state acquiring additional properties and conservation easements.
- Multiple Use. Management of state-owned lands should provide assurance of maximum public benefit. The state should plan for multiple use and manage renewable and non-renewable resources to maximize public benefit. Access plans should accommodate all uses and users, including powered mobility-aids, all-terrain vehicles (ATV), horseback riding, foot traffic, swimming, skiing and over-snow-vehicles, target shooting, hunting, fishing, off-highway vehicles, mountain biking, camping, and other user groups.

Barriers to Access:

- According to the California Protected Areas Database, there are over 50 million acres of protected open space lands in California in addition to 49.6 million acres in 15,989 "parks". The state should aggressively focus on removing barriers to access to those lands prior to implementing 30 x 30.

Projected Climate Change Impacts:

- Projected Climate Change Impacts cannot be mitigated. Lack of funding and unfunded state mandates are the most significant threats and barriers facing Lassen County's ability to provide public services. Lack of funding and unfunded state mandates reduces the county's ability to plan, prepare for and respond to impacts facing Californians and visitors to the state, such as impacts caused from extreme temperatures, fires, drought or flooding, grid failures, and inclement weather.

Potential Nature-Based Solutions:

- Mismanagement of public forestlands is a disaster being made worse from antiquated environmental laws and regulations that slow or prevent good science based sustainable habitat work, and other resource and forest management efforts. A potential nature-based solution would be to seek to eliminate environmental "green tape" that causes delay in controlling invasive species and delay the harvesting/planting/reforestation of wildfire destroyed forestlands, grasslands, and other critical habitats.
- Agricultural based solutions, such as Williamson Act, should be given urgency and priority over land acquisitions. Agriculture is one of California's key industries. Continued use and conservation of grazing and farmland are opportunities that also provide wildlife habitat and

water quality benefits. Using the Williamson Act would decrease the state's need to acquire and manage land, however, would add to the amount of conserved land throughout the state. The state should incentivize, through the removal of financial, policy and regulatory barriers, investments in farming and grazing practices that help to achieve the state's conservation objectives. Studies from the University California, Davis, have found that grasslands and rangelands can be more resilient carbon sinks than forests, and that proper grazing management can even help mitigate climate change.

- Restoring and maintaining fire resilient landscapes by doing hazardous fuel treatments such as chipping, thinning, burning and grazing are nature-based solutions. Fuel hazard mitigation efforts have treated over 90,000 acres in Lassen County and an additional 30,000 acres are scheduled for treatment by the Lassen Fire Safe Council, Inc. The state should continue to do more to make incentives and enact regulatory-relief measures that simplify and accelerate state and federal approvals to restore and create resilient landscapes.
- Excessive feral horse and feral burro grazing, invasive annual grasses, expansion of native western juniper, and altered frequencies of fire are cited examples by the California Wildlife; Conservation Challenges (CA State Wildlife Action Plan 2005) as major stressors negatively affecting resources. These are serious problems causing negative impacts on resource lands. Dealing with these issues, should, more than anything else, be given urgency and priority by the state as essential nature-based solutions that can provide immediate conservation benefits without the need to acquire additional land.
- Groundwater Sustainability Agencies. The state's Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) is establishing managing groundwater at the local level. Priorities that may be implemented in groundwater sustainability plans (GSPs) could include water conservation efforts that also could be advantageous to wildlife habitat and ecosystems dependent on groundwater and interconnected surface water.

Conservation Challenges:

- We completely disagree with the state's assertion of competing priorities between grazing, agriculture, and conservation. This is simply not a true statement. Livestock grazing is being used with success for improving and maintaining habitat for important species, and grazing also helps to keep potential wildfire fuels in check and helps to control non-native plants. We respectfully request that you correctly give importance to the use of grazing and agricultural practices as a successful and relevant management tool for achieving conservation objectives. Science and peer-reviewed studies on such successes are available from the University of California, Agriculture and Natural Resources publications. The state should investigate why many grazing permit allotments are not being utilized on federal lands to determine solutions that can expand grazing as a management tool.
- The state's practice of deferring maintenance of existing state-owned lands, and not partnering with local agencies to improve upon other public lands, means potentially higher costs to Californians, health and safety failures, barriers to access, and other negative implications. The state must redirect and focus its conservation priorities to deal with deferred maintenance and the restoration of existing landscapes, statewide and locally.

Conservation Successes:

- There are many notable conservation success examples. Here are a few recent publications

spanning grazing systems and conservation benefits:

- o Rangeland Ecosystem Service Markets: Panacea or Wicked Problem? Roche LM, Saitone TL and Tate KW (2021)
- o Soil Health as a Transformational Change Agent for US Grazing Lands Management, J.D. Derner et al / Rangeland Ecology & Management 71 (2018)
- o Riparian Meadow Response to Modern Conservation Grazing Management, Kristin M. Oles, et al / Environmental Management (2017)

And, specifically to Lassen County:

- o Buffalo Skedaddle Sage-grouse Working Group. A multi-stakeholder group that is still active, and on-going, a collaborative for promoting improvement of sagebrush and sage grouse habitat in eastern Lassen County (extending into Washoe County, Nevada).
- o Pine Creek Coordinated Resources Management Planning group (CRMP). A locally driven collaborative to maintain Eagle Lake water quality and Eagle Lake rainbow trout conservation, while maintaining grazing, forest management, and recreation within the Eagle Lake basin.
- o Locally, there are numerous conservation projects at a smaller scale that are too numerous to list herein.
- Resource Conservation Districts (RCDs) are promoted as the “Go-to hubs for conservation.” RCDs in Lassen County include the Fall River RCD, Honey Lake Valley RCD, Pit RCD, Sierra Valley RCD, and Feather River RCD. The state’s 30 x 30 strategy must recognize, build upon and prioritize support of RCDs for their decades of successful partnerships and conservation successes, statewide.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments.

Sincerely,



Chris Gallagher, Chairman
Lassen County Board of Supervisors

CC: Assemblymember Megan Dahle
Senator Brian Dahle
“30 x 30 Sierra Nevada Region”:
Alpine County Board of Supervisors
Amador County Board of Supervisors
Calaveras County Board of Supervisors
El Dorado County Board of Supervisors
Fresno County Board of Supervisors
Inyo County Board of Supervisors
Kern County Board of Supervisors
Madera County Board of Supervisors
Mariposa County Board of Supervisors
Modoc County Board of Supervisors
Mono County Board of Supervisors
Nevada County Board of Supervisors
Placer County Board of Supervisors
Plumas County Board of Supervisors
Tulare County Board of Supervisors
Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors
Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC)
California State Association of Counties (CSAC)

30x30 Talking Points

- The definition that CNRA provides of “conservation” is a generally broad and inclusive definition that would seem to cover a large portion of land in California. However, because CNRA restricted what it considers already “conserved” for purposes of 30x30 to USGS GAP codes 1 and 2, a limited amount of land is being counted towards 30x30.
 - CNRA should expand what it considers to conserved beyond USGS GAP codes 1 and 2 to align with its broader definition of conservation.
 - CNRA should be more inclusive of State and Federally owned lands that are permanently conserved but are currently excluded simply because they allow OHV use or logging.
 - CNRA should be more inclusive of county owned lands including parks, conservancies, permanent easements, etc.
- It is unclear the extent to which permanent conservation easements count towards the 30x30 goal. The report lists “agricultural easements” as not “conserved,” yet it goes on to highlight voluntary permanent conservation easements on natural and working lands as a primary strategy to achieve the 30x30 goal. This begs the question, if the goal is to expand voluntary permanent conservation easements, why do the existing voluntary conservation easements not count towards the goal? The concern is that the requirements for conservation easements will become much stricter.
 - We fully support the expansion and funding of voluntary permanent conservation easements.
 - When determining how to expand conservation easements, CNRA must take into account the current backlog of requests for conservation easements so that there is adequate funding both to address the backlog and expand the program.
 - The regulatory language that is eventually approved surrounding the 30x30 initiative needs to clearly define what land is already considered conserved, the methodology behind this calculation, and how we will achieve remaining conservation goals. This process must be transparent and logical.
- Many of the best practice land management techniques that the report identifies as the strategy for natural and working lands are already being used by many California ranchers. This needs to be accounted for.
 - Much of California’s opens pace currently managed by California ranchers already meets the key objectives laid out in the *Pathways to 30x30* report
 - **Protect CA’s biodiversity**—much of California’s rangeland serves as active grazing allotments that are managed by California ranchers. Grazing is an excellent regenerative tool that protects biodiversity by encouraging the growth of native plants and providing the habitat for 85 of the 143 animals in California that are federally listed as threatened or endangered.
 - **Expand equitable access to nature & its benefits**— Where ranching occurs on state- or federally-owned lands, grazed rangelands promote outdoor access and recreation in a variety of ways. Grazing on federal lands is part of federal agencies’ “multiple use” mandate, and ranching thus coexists alongside other multiple uses, including recreation. This is also true on state-owned lands; for instance, much of the grazing that is authorized on lands managed by State Parks is within recreational vehicular areas. Ranchers grazing livestock on public lands improve those lands for the benefit of all users, whether directly via

infrastructure improvements undertaken by the rancher themselves or indirectly via the payment of grazing fees to the managing agency.

- **Build climate resilience**— Ranchers are increasingly adopting regenerative ranching practices to improve rangeland soil's ability to sequester carbon. Research from UC Cooperative Extension finds that livestock grazing significantly reduces the incidence, severity, and spread of wildfires. Livestock grazing can reduce fine fuels on rangelands by an average of about 600 pounds per acre.