

ISSUE 4. Protecting and Managing Natural Resource Values

Natural resource values that make California a special place to live and play are being subjected to unrelenting pressures.

It is often the natural resource values that define the character and aesthetic appeal of an area and make it desirable and interesting. Overuse, misuse and poorly planned uses of parks and outdoor recreation resources can have a significant impact on natural resource values and on the experiences of those wishing to enjoy them.

The living biota occupying California's parks and outdoor recreation areas are sensitive to any kind of use. Many plants and animals, along with the physical components of soil, water, and air can be irretrievably damaged with even light human use. For the extreme ecosystems of desert or alpine environments, even one set of tire tracks on the desert floor or a lightly used hiking trail through an alpine meadow can leave indelible marks on the landscape for decades. A single massive oak tree standing guardian over the landscape for hundreds of years can be "loved" to death by those seeking shade in a matter of a few years.

The ever increasing population and subsequent number of visitors pursuing outdoor recreation activities threatens the proper functioning of ecosystems, disrupts and displaces wildlife and degrades the natural, environmental and aesthetic quality of an area and ultimately the very recreational experience being sought. Examples might include pollution of air, water and soil resources, soil erosion, and the spread of noxious weeds and virulent diseases. Monitoring and maintaining healthy and sustainable ecosystems places a strain on management techniques and practices, activities that are typically under-funded.

With California's growing population, the need for housing expands urban areas and foothill developments, placing unrelenting pressure on the lands located between these areas and larger expanses of undeveloped lands. Not only are wildlands being lost to development, the remaining undeveloped lands are placed at higher risk from a catastrophic event such as wildfire. The fragmentation and isolation of these lands pose a unique threat, the loss in biological diversity and connective corridors crucial for maintaining balanced and sustainable ecosystems. And, with greater demand and increased competition for outdoor recreation resources, there is greater potential for conflict between uses and users, which tends to accelerate environmental degradation.

There are other natural resource related consequences associated with population growth. For example, visitors unfamiliar with natural ecological processes or use ethics are often unaware of the consequences of their actions. Cultural attitudes toward natural resources can pose serious threats to these resources, as in the practice of subsistence gathering of flora and fauna. Multiple land uses by different landowners, individually insignificant, can collectively have devastating results on natural resource values if activities and actions are not well planned and managed. Consider the

cumulative effects of siltation to salmon spawning beds from such sources as recreation trails, roads, campgrounds and timber operations all occurring in the same drainage.

Park, recreation and natural resource management agencies can also have an unintended effect on outdoor recreation experiences, natural resource values and ecosystem conditions through management practices and administrative processes. All too often, agencies are limited in scope and effectiveness in recognizing and mitigating trends affecting resource conditions, particularly when outside their immediate jurisdiction. While partnerships and cooperation between agencies, organizations and individuals have grown, at the landscape scale efforts are often fragmented and opportunities are missed to achieve broader environmental and outdoor recreation goals. Conflicting missions between agencies and organizations also make management of adjoining lands difficult. Recreation and natural resource management practices undertaken by public agencies are often not well understood by, or communicated to, the public which tends to lessen public support for funding or when confronted by controversial issues. Examples might include controlled burning or recreation area closures due to special status species. And activities such as natural and recreation resource maintenance, monitoring conditions, ecosystem restoration and conducting science-based research are often deferred because of other priorities or inadequate funding. All too often lessons learned regarding research, new techniques and practices and evolving technology are not uniformly shared or there is considerable lag time in implementing findings.

Key Points:

- Overuse and misuse of natural resources threatens the proper functioning of ecosystems, disrupts wildlife and degrades the natural setting, environmental and aesthetic quality and recreation experiences.
- Collaboration and regional coordination on the encroachment of urban development, pollution, erosion and the spread of noxious weeds and virulent diseases is inconsistent.
- Cumulative impacts from poorly planned multiple actions can have devastating effects on resource values.
- Cooperation among outdoor recreation providers on managing ecosystems and biological diversity is often fragmented and inconsistent.
- The ability of outdoor recreation providers to recognize and mitigate trends affecting resource conditions, particularly outside their immediate area of jurisdiction, places resource values at risk.
- Resource management practices undertaken by public agencies are often not well understood by, or communicated to, the public thereby lessening public support for funding or when confronted by controversial issues.

Actions:

1. The California Legacy Project, under the direction of the State Resources Agency, should complete a comprehensive gap analysis of biological diversity, bio-corridors and linkages, and sustainable landscapes noting priority areas.
2. The California Biodiversity Council, headed by the State Resources Secretary and including representatives of the major federal and state resource land managers, should facilitate a coordinated land acquisition strategy so as to ensure that resource-based land acquisitions give priority to:
 - A. Comprehensive coverage of under-represented critical ecosystems as identified in the gap analysis to be completed by the California Legacy Project.
 - B. Additional lands for resource-based recreational activities so as to reduce pressure on sensitive, yet heavily impacted, resource lands.
3. Establish a Council on Carrying Capacity based on input from the California Biodiversity Council, the California Roundtable on Recreation, Parks, and Tourism, the U. C. and CSU systems. From this, a guide should be developed for resource managers to use in how to plan for and assess visitor use, resource values at risk, and the quality of the recreation experience to minimize damage to both environmental and social carrying capacity.
4. Adopt a statewide environmental education program and code of ethics for appropriate use of parks and recreation areas and make materials readily available for any public, private and non-profit provider.
 - A. Research environmental education programs by private nonprofit vendors to determine their capability, ability to publish multiple languages, and the adequacy, availability, and cost of materials.
 - B. Develop a contract with a vendor to provide desired environmental outreach materials.
 - C. Develop an outreach plan to distribute the code of ethics, especially to youth, and implement such as through PSA's.
 - D. Promote a Child's Bill of Rights for California's Outdoors.
5. The major federal and state resource land managers should undertake an aggressive public education and outreach program to better inform the public on the objectives.

6. Identify successful models for large-scale regional projects, e.g., The Blue Ridge/Berryessa Natural Area Conservation Partnership. Prepare a chronology of events that lead to the success of the project for others to model their projects after.