

# SIERRA CLUB CALIFORNIA 101

## Jumpstart to a Quick Understanding

### Version 2

**Created by Karen Maki**

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*The purpose of this document is to strengthen the relationship among Sierra Club California, the chapters, and volunteer activists by clarifying roles and processes for working together. If you want definitive details regarding a specific question, please consult the bylaws, charter, standing rules listed under Resources at the end of this document. When I was newly on the Sierra Club California Executive Committee, I was overwhelmed by the complex structure of Sierra Club California and spent many hours studying these same documents and creating a picture of how things work. Through this document, I hope to jumpstart others to a better understanding so we can win more environmental battles together.*

#### Grateful Thanks To

- The authors of the source materials: *Sierra Club California Handbook*, and *What is Sierra Club California? Your Guide to SCC, Its Structure and Process* by Margaret Okuzumi
- The editor, Eloise Maki
- The reviewers: Dan Sullivan, Kathryn Phillips, Jim Stewart, Diane Allen, Dale Stocking, Andy Sawyer, Alex Mintzer, Steve Farrell, and Barb Williams

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Note: Underlined subjects link to section in paper.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## HOW SIERRA CLUB CALIFORNIA (SCC) CAME TO BE

In most states, the local Sierra Club chapter's territory encompasses the entire state. Because California is such a large state and the Sierra Club began here, we evolved multiple local chapters. In the early 1980s it became apparent the Club needed a statewide entity in California to facilitate the Club's influence on state laws and policies. A committee of about 50 volunteers convened in 1983 to develop the framework that became Sierra Club California, and in March 1987 SCC's bylaws were adopted. The California/Nevada Regional Conservation Committee (CNRCC) was created by the national Sierra Club as one of a network of Regional Conservation Committees, which were later dissolved. After the RCC's were dissolved by national, the CNRCC was then chartered under SCC Executive Committee (CAL ExCom). In 2019, the CNRCC began calling itself the California Conservation Committee (CAL ConsCom or CCC).

## SCC PURPOSE

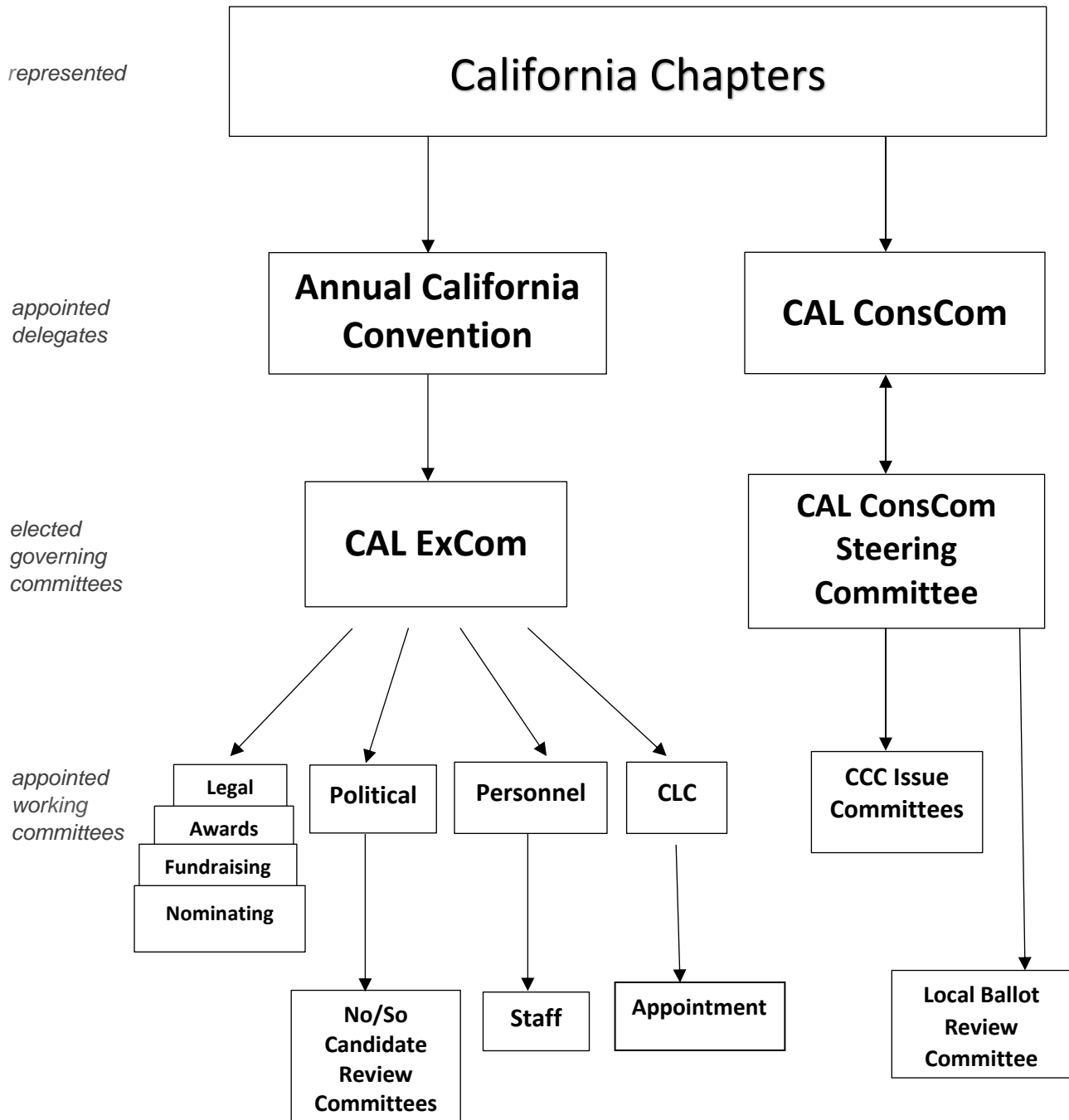
According to its bylaws, "the purposes of the Sierra Club California are to foster the purposes of the Sierra Club within the state of California by coordinating and assisting the efforts of the California chapters of the Sierra Club, by initiating and carrying out additional programs and activities."

SCC is somewhat analogous to the federal government in its separation of powers between an **executive** entity and a **policy-making** entity. CAL ExCom is primarily responsible for creating and managing the volunteer committees and staff who conduct the state advocacy program. CAL ConsCom is primarily responsible for deciding the overall policies that SCC volunteers and staff advocate on state environmental issues and for creating and maintaining the volunteer issue committees that advise staff and the California Legislative Committee (CLC). Both entities participate in establishing SCC's position on statewide ballot measures and candidate endorsements.

## HOW SCC IMPACTS CHAPTERS

- Takes positions on California legislation
- Manages our relationship with the legislature, executive branch and agencies
- Manages legislative and regulatory advocacy
- Creates Sierra Club conservation policy for two or more chapters or the whole state
- Reviews chapter political endorsements for state and local office
- Reviews and approves or rejects the chapter's position on local ballot measures
- Makes political endorsements for statewide offices
- Takes positions on statewide ballot measures
- Manages SCC staff and budget

## 2. SIMPLIFIED SCC STRUCTURE



### 3. EXPLANATION OF SCC STRUCTURE

National, SCC, and local chapter entities are involved in making political endorsements, and in developing or implementing conservation policy and legislative positions:

**National Board of Directors** establishes national conservation policy and endorses national political candidates (for U.S. Congress, Senate, and President). National staff and volunteers establish the Club's position on federal legislation. Chapters may be involved in establishing the Club's national position on legislation that pertains only to their state.

It has 15 members who are elected by the entire membership for 3-year terms.

**CAL ExCom** is responsible for setting priorities for SCC, managing SCC staff, ensuring that the organization is financially sound, by budgeting and helping fundraise. It appoints standing volunteer committees such as the California Legislative Committee, and takes positions on ballot propositions and statewide candidate endorsements. It also serves as an appellate body for decisions made by CAL ConsCom and participates in deciding whether SCC should enter into a lawsuit.

It has 11 members. Five are elected by the delegates Annual California Convention each year for 2-year terms. The chapter delegates are appointed by chapter leadership and CAL ConsCom at-large delegates are recommended by the vice chairs and appointed by the CAL ConsCom Steering Committee. The California Conservation Liaison (CAL ConsCom Steering Committee member) is the 11<sup>th</sup> member.

**Chapter & Group Executive Committees (ExCom), Chapter Conservation Committees (ConsCom), and Conservation Issue Committees** are responsible for policies that affect only their chapter area. They may propose state conservation policy to apply to two or more chapters or the whole state and may request that CLC take a position on a particular bill. They recommend political endorsements for candidates within their chapter.

**California Legislative Committee (CLC)** takes positions on California legislation in consultation with SCC staff advocates and the CAL ConsCom Conservation Issue Committees. The committee determines the prioritization of bills. The members also may decide the position on other matters being considered by the state legislature. See Appointments Committee section below on the process for positions on appointments by the legislature and by the Governor.

The CLC chair and up to 11 members are nominated by SCC chair in consultation with CNRCC chair and confirmed by the CAL ExCom. Term: 2 years beginning January 1 of odd-numbered years. CLC is comprised of lawyers and/or experts in environmental fields.

**California Conservation Committee (CAL ConsCom or CCC, formerly CNRCC)** creates conservation policy for all of California or several chapters by passing resolutions. CAL ConsCom policy forms the basis for CLC's legislative positions. CAL ConsCom approves positions on statewide propositions and statewide political candidates recommended by the California Political Committee. It also coordinates and implements conservation projects and programs.

Its 58 CAL ConsCom delegates include 26 chapter delegates appointed chapter excom, 24 at-large delegates (recommended by vice chairs and appointed by the CAL ConsCom Steering Committee (usually issue committee chairs), and 8 steering committee members.

**CAL ConsCom Steering Committee** organizes the work of CAL ConsCom and implements its decisions, and also votes on behalf of CAL ConsCom when time-sensitive decision-making is needed before the next CAL ConsCom meeting. To carry out its work, the steering committee may create or remove CAL ConsCom Issue Committees, special committees, and task forces.

It has 7 members, elected to 1-year terms at its spring meeting, including chair, northern vice chair, southern vice chair, northern secretary, southern secretary, liaison to CAL ExCom.

**CAL ConsCom Issue Committees** follow state legislation and agency actions and propose new statewide conservation policy for California that aligns with national policy and other state policies. The Issue Committees communicate with chapters and Sierra Club California staff about the issue and are sometimes involved in implementing conservation policy coordinated with staff and the chapters.

There are currently 14 Issue Committees (e.g., the Water Committee). The CAL ConsCom Steering Committee appoints the chair for each of the Issue Committees. Members are named by their respective chair. Chapters may appoint a member to an Issue Committee.

**California Political Committee (CAL PolCom)** manages the endorsement process for all California candidates. It develops forms for chapters to use to submit their political candidate endorsement recommendations. It appoints interview teams for statewide candidates.

The chair and members are nominated by the SCC chair and confirmed by the committee for 2-year terms starting on January 1 of odd-numbered years. They may be recalled or replaced by CAL ExCom at any time.

**Local Ballot Review Committee** reviews the chapters' endorsement positions on local ballot measures. If it does not approve the position, the decision goes to the CAL ConsCom Steering Committee.

It has 3 members and 2 alternates, is appointed by the CAL ConsCom chair and approved by CAL ExCom.

**Northern/Southern Candidate Review Committees** review and approve local political candidate endorsements proposed by chapters.

They each have 3 members and 2 alternates and are appointed by the CAL PolCom chair for a 1-year term.

**Appointment Committee** decides SCC's position on appointments by the governor and state legislature.

CLC chair appoints the chair and a member from CAL ExCom and another from CAL ConsCom Steering Committee.

**Personnel Committee** oversees the hiring, firing, management and promotion of staff.

It has 4-5 people appointed by CAL ExCom, including representatives of CAL ExCom, CAL PolCom, CLC, and CAL ConsCom Steering Committee.

**Staff Advocates** confer with the CLC and CAL ConsCom Issue Committees regarding SCC's positions on legislation. They recommend positions to the CLC. They determine strategy for

advocating for each bill and manage SCC's relationship with the legislature, governor's office, and state agencies.

The director is hired and supervised by the Personnel Committee. The director hires and supervises the rest of the staff.

## **4. WHAT DOES THE SACRAMENTO OFFICE DO?**

The Sacramento Office houses the SCC regulatory and legislative advocacy staff, organizers, and support staff. SCC staff advocates represent all thirteen California chapters and members to state legislators, state agencies, and the governor's office. They monitor environmental legislation and regulation-making and attempt to block bad policy and support good environmental policy. In the process of doing this work, they forge relationships with legislators and regulators as well as allies.

The Sacramento Office periodically issues action alerts on proposed legislation inviting members to contact their legislator. Each year the staff compiles the Legislative Report Card, which reflects how legislators voted on key environmental bills.

The Sacramento Office is comprised of the Director, and regulatory and legislative advocacy, organizing and administrative staff. Together they perform these tasks:

- Advocate for environmental issues;
- Consult and coordinate with CAL ConsCom and chapter conservation issue experts on policy development and implementation;
- Provide up-to-date information to members about state environmental regulations and legislation;
- Mobilize member responses to legislative and regulatory issues;
- Fundraise to support SCC activities.

Staff implements regulatory and legislative policy. In other words, they manage our relationship with the legislature and state departments and commissions. The political endorsements, conservation policy, and legislative positions are determined by Sierra Club volunteer leadership. An overview of how this works is mapped out in the rest of this document.

## 5. WHO MAKES SIERRA CLUB DECISIONS

Note: The “recommendation” column lists the final decision-maker first and the preliminary recommenders last. Some boxes are blank if there is no relevant entry. In most cases, the “approver” verifies process and other implications and is not as involved as the details of the decision.

<b>Area</b>	<b>Level</b>	<b>Approval</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Consultant</b>
<b>Political Endorsements</b>	National (except Congress)	Board of Directors	National Political Team, Interview teams	
	National (Congress)	National Political Team	Chapter ExCom, Chapter PolCom, Interview teams	
	California	CAL ExCom; CAL ConsCom/ CAL Convention	Interview teams, CAL PolCom	
	Chapter	No/So Candidate Review Comm, CLC (legislative only)	ExCom, PolCom, Interview teams	Chapters with <25% of a legislative district
<b>Political Appointments</b>	California		Appointment Committee, CLC	Staff
<b>Conservation Policy</b>	National	Board of Directors	Conservation VP, National team	
	California	CAL ConsCom	CAL ConsCom Issue Committees	
			Chapter ExCom, Chapter/Group ConsCom	
Chapter	ExCom	ConsCom, Group or Chapter Issue Committees		
<b>Legislative Positions</b>	National		National staff, National Committee	On certain California issues, CCC Issue Committees, Chapters, SCC staff
	California	CLC	Staff	CAL ConsCom Issue Committees, Chapters
<b>Statewide Initiatives and Ballot Measures</b>	California	CAL ExCom CAL ConsCom /CAL Convention	Chapter, CAL ConsCom Issue Committees, CAL PolCom	Staff
<b>Local Ballot Measures</b>	Chapter	Local Ballot Measure Review Committee or CAL ConsCom Steering Committee	Chapter ExCom, Chapter/Group ConsCom	CAL ConsCom Conservation Issue Committees, Staff



## **6. POLITICAL ENDORSEMENTS**

The CAL PolCom oversees political endorsements at both the chapter and state levels. At the chapter level, the chapter political committee, interview team or Group or Chapter ExCom recommend candidate endorsements. At the state level, the CAL PolCom itself appoints interview teams that recommend endorsement of candidates for statewide office (e.g., state treasurer).

### **6A. CHAPTER ENDORSEMENTS**

#### **HOW LOCAL CANDIDATE ENDORSMENTS ARE MADE**

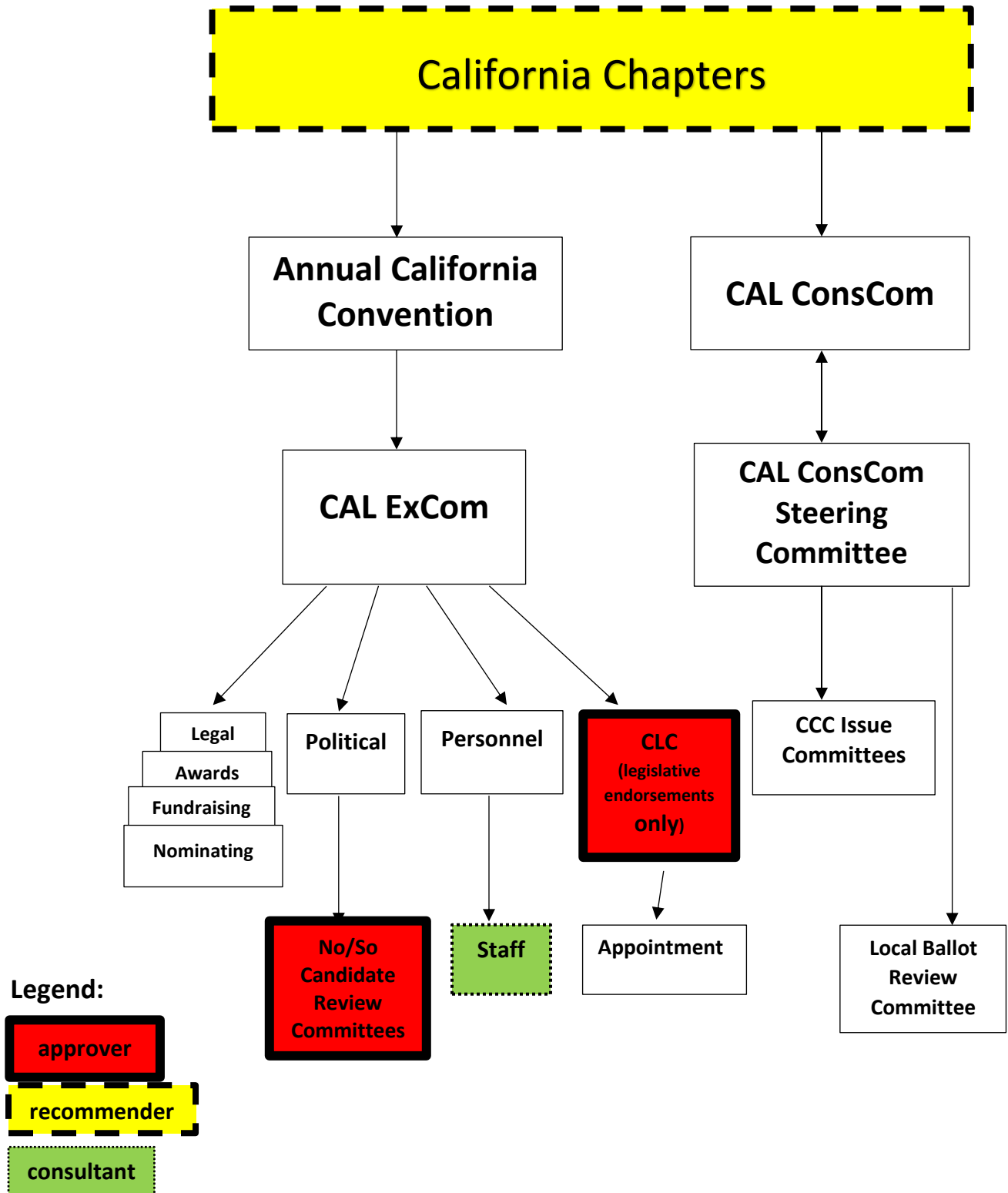
Depending on the chapter's internal procedures, the chapter political committee or other relevant committee decides which races merit Club endorsements (e.g., city councils, water districts, county supervisors, harbor district, as well as state legislators). The interview team is appointed to research the candidates, using published/broadcast media accounts, campaign information, legislative incumbents' voting records, and personal meetings with candidates. Interview teams may make endorsement recommendations, and the chapter's ExCom must approve any endorsement recommendation by a 2/3 majority. The chapter endorsement must then be approved by either the Northern or Southern Candidate Review Committee. In the case of candidates for state legislature, approval by the CLC or a designated CLC member is also required.

If the legislative district includes portions of more than one chapter, the chapter with the most Sierra Club members takes the lead, and consults with the other chapter/s. If the other chapter has 25% or more of the Sierra Club members in the district, a 2/3 vote of the chapter ExCom is also required.

#### **HOW LOCAL BALLOT MEASURE ENDORSMENTS ARE MADE**

Depending on the chapter's internal procedures, the chapter ConsCom decides which measures to make endorsements on (e.g., an open space measure). It recommends an endorsement to the chapter ExCom. The chapter ExCom must concur with the recommended endorsement by a 2/3 majority. The endorsement must be approved by the Local Ballot Measure Review Committee or the CAL ConsCom Steering Committee.

## 6B. CHAPTER STRUCTURE: POLITICAL CANDIDATE ENDORSEMENTS



## **6C. STATEWIDE POLITICAL ENDORSEMENTS**

### **HOW STATEWIDE CANDIDATE ENDORSEMENTS ARE MADE**

The CAL PolCom decides which statewide races merit endorsements (e.g., governor, lieutenant governor, secretary of state, controller, treasurer, attorney general, U.S. senators) and then appoints interview teams for each race. Each team researches and interviews the candidates and makes a recommendation, which must be approved by the CAL ConsCom or an annual California Convention and by CAL ExCom.

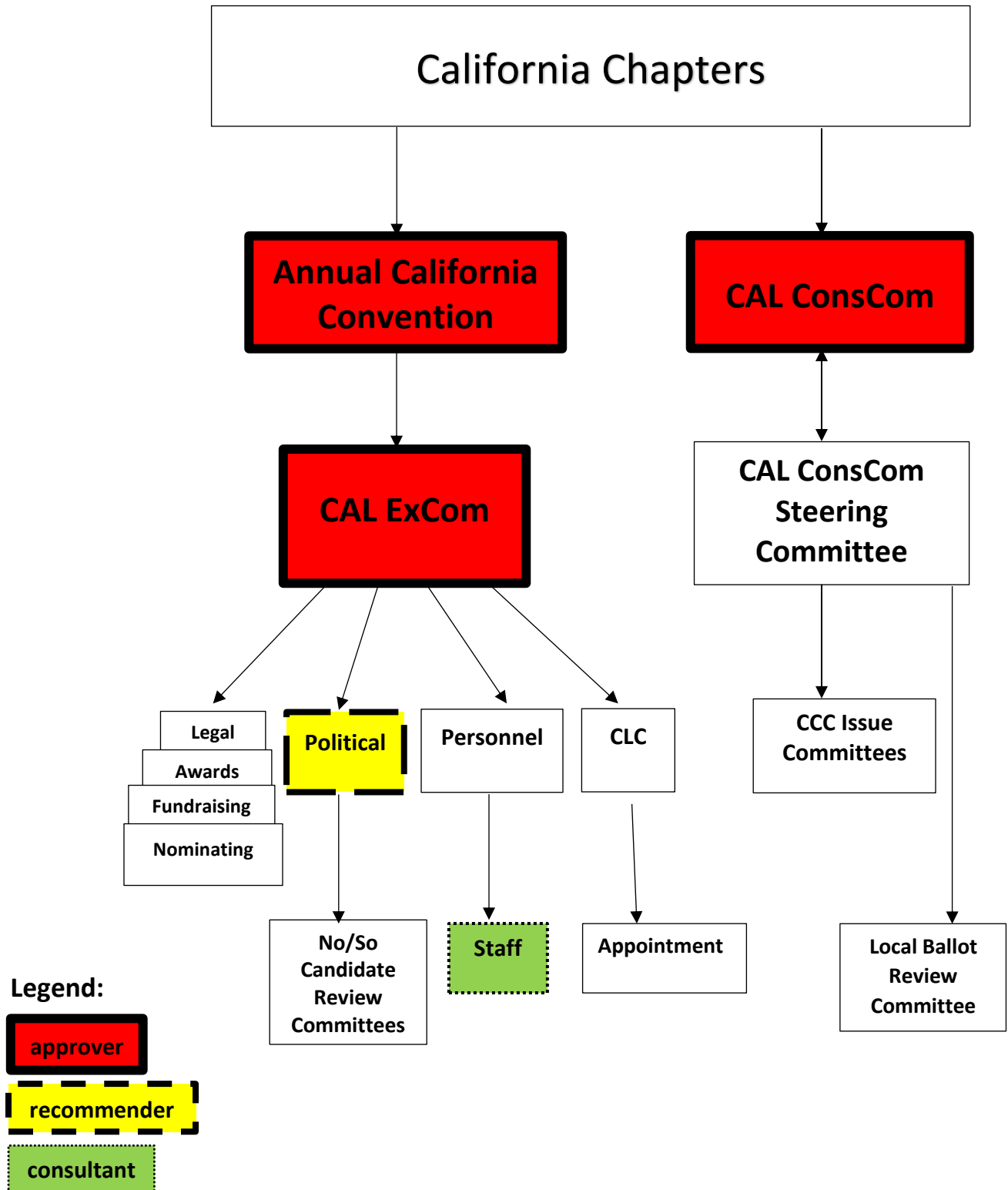
Note: Please see the flowchart for statewide candidate endorsements on the next page.

### **HOW STATEWIDE BALLOT MEASURE ENDORSEMENTS ARE MADE**

Depending on the conservation issue involved (e.g., 2014 Proposition 1 Water Bond, 2010 Proposition 23 re AB32), the CAL PolCom, a relevant Cal ConsCom Issue Committee, CLC, or a chapter entity may bring a resolution to the CAL ConsCom, proposing that SCC take a position. The CAL ConsCom or the SCC Annual Convention plus the CAL ExCom must approve the endorsement.

Note: There is no flowchart for statewide ballot measure endorsements.

# 6D. STATEWIDE STRUCTURE: POLITICAL CANDIDATE ENDORSEMENTS



## 7A. SCC CONSERVATION POLICY

### HOW SCC CONSERVATION POLICY IS USED

Every conservation position taken by staff or volunteers must comply with Sierra Club environmental policy. The position must be grounded in national Club policy. Situations that are complicated because of their California context must also be covered by a CAL ConsCom position. A situation concerning two or more chapters or more than one CAL ConsCom Issue Committee may also require a CAL ConsCom resolution to ensure that we have only one conservation position for each situation: the one club policy. (Note the Conservation Policy flowchart on page 13.)

### HOW TO DETERMINE WHETHER NEW CONSERVATION POLICY IS NEEDED

Before developing a new conservation position, determine what relevant Sierra Club conservation policy already exists.

1. Research national policy at <http://sierraclub.org/policy/conservation/>. If there is no applicable national policy and the conservation issue is of national relevance, you may want to pass a CAL ConsCom resolution first, but will also need to work with the Conservation Vice President of the Board of Directors to change Club policy.
2. Find out whether state policy exists by consulting with the current CAL ConsCom Issue Committee chairs and past chairs regarding resolutions and precedent-setting actions. You may also search for resolutions on Cal-Activist list serve (see page 18).
3. Consider whether new policy is really needed. Is this situation really a small extension of past policy or is it a bold next step that really needs a clarifying official position? For example, our opposition to the twin tunnels required a resolution since it is a strong visible Club position even though we have previously taken positions supporting sufficient water flows to maintain habitat.
4. Does this situation involve two or more CAL ConsCom Issue Committees or two or more chapters? If they can't agree on a position or the situation is unique, new policy is needed.

When in doubt as to whether new policy is needed, please consult the CAL ConsCom chair or vice chairs.

### HOW SCC POLICY IS DEVELOPED

If you need to develop new state conservation policy, you will need to create a CAL ConsCom resolution. A resolution has a particular format, which prompts the author to include everything that the membership will need to make a decision.

## CAL ConsCom RESOLUTION Template

**Title:** The topic, location and action in a phrase (e.g. Oppose Shasta Dam Raise)

**Resolution:** Sierra Club California supports (urges, endorses...,...choose an appropriate verb) the establishment (expenditure, endorsement,...etc.) of whatever the chapter or committee wants to accomplish. Keep this to one sentence if possible.

**Contact:** Who is submitting this resolution, email address, phone number.

**Background Information:** What is the *factual* (not argumentative) information related to the resolution. Keep this in summary form and provide references (web pages, documents, persons) for the facts.

**National Policy:** What is the relevant national policy - if there is one? Please locate the policy on <http://sierraclub.org/policy> and provide the url and relevant quote.

**Arguments For:** What are the debating points in favor of the resolution?

**Arguments Against:** What are the debating points--especially those that would resonate with environmentalists--against the resolution? If the chapter/committee cannot think of any, it should not simply posit strawman arguments.

**Who has approved this resolution:** What was the vote at the chapter ex-com, the committee meeting?

**Strategies and Action Plans:** How does the chapter/committee envision the resolution accomplishing its purpose? Simply passing a resolution is only a first step. What organizing, planning, outreach, campaign developments, and other activities need to take place--at least in the view of the chapter/committee making the resolution. Resolutions cannot direct staff or CNRCC committee work. What has the committee/chapter already done to plan and organize?

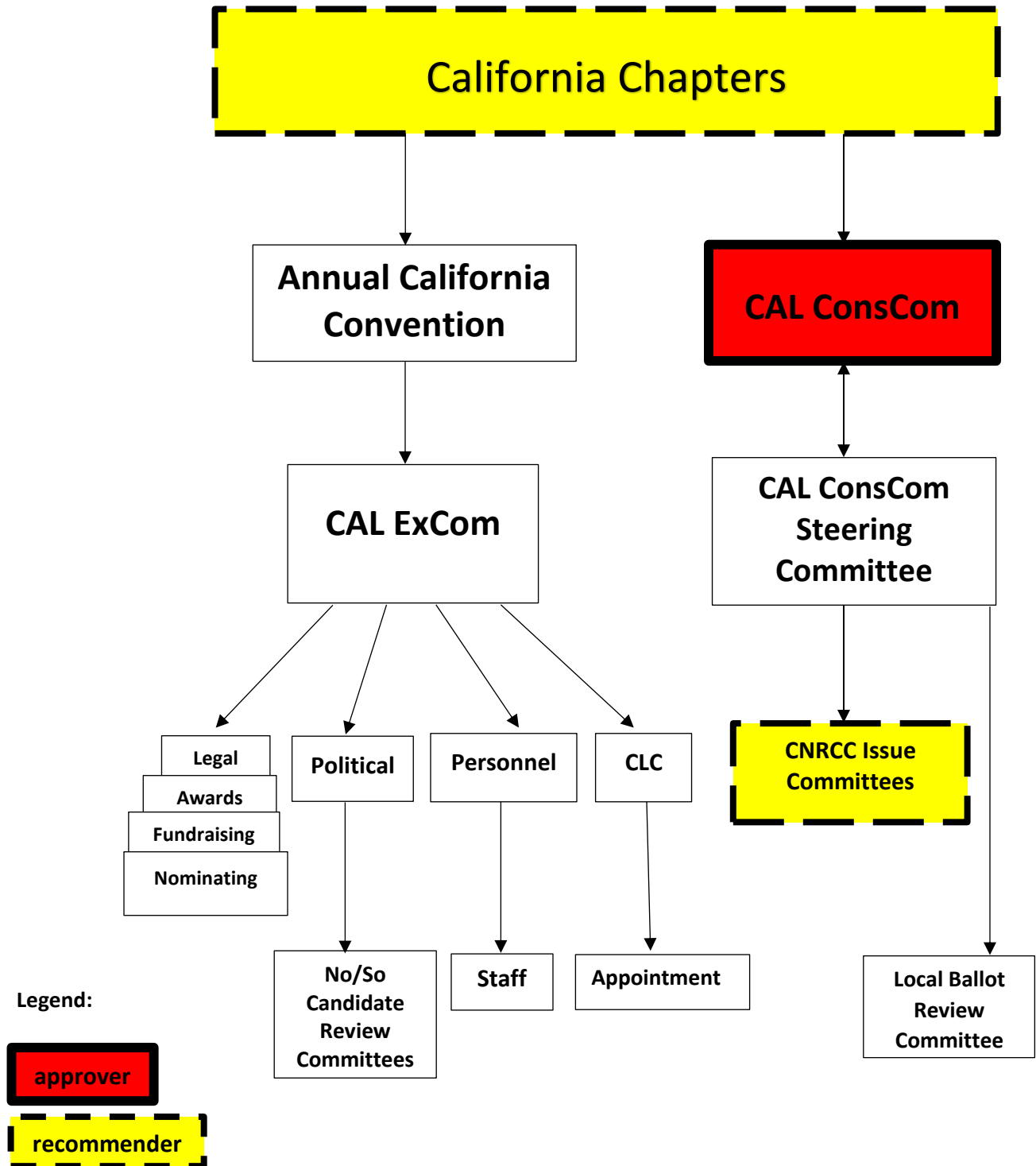
Just as a practical matter, it is suggested that the chapter/committee make contact with other chapters and with delegates and with relevant state and national staff members. The better the preparation, the more likely the resolution will pass and that the Club can move on to accomplish its goals.

**Urgency:** If the resolution is submitted after the announced deadline, what are the reasons for the late submission? What steps will the committee/chapter take to inform all the chapters and delegates about the resolution and request that they take a position? What are the consequences of a delay in taking action?

A resolution can be brought to the CAL ConsCom by a CAL ConsCom Issue Committee or a chapter. If a chapter wants to bring a resolution to the CAL ConsCom, the resolution must be passed by the chapter ExCom.

Resolutions must be submitted to the CAL ConsCom chair and vice chairs about six weeks before the meeting. There are three or four CAL ConsCom meetings per year where resolutions are voted on. If your resolution is time sensitive, the CAL ConsCom Steering Committee may be able to vote on it at one of its monthly meetings.

## 7B. SCC STRUCTURE: CONSERVATION POLICY



## 8A. SCC LEGISLATIVE POSITIONS

### HOW LEGISLATIVE POSITIONS ARE DEVELOPED

The California Legislative Committee (CLC) is responsible for deciding the SCC position on proposed legislation. Every March SCC staff create a list of environmental bills introduced in the current legislative session. Staff confers with involved chapters and CAL ConsCom Issue Committees. Staff may recommend a position and priority for a particular bill. The CLC meets with staff to discuss priorities and recommended positions and makes the final decision on our position: support (S), oppose (O), or watch (W) for further developments. The CLC continues to meet via teleconference and over email throughout the legislative session to confirm or revise our positions as bills are amended. (Note the Legislative Positions flowchart on the next page.)

When making a decision, the CLC considers national environmental policy, CAL ConsCom resolutions, advice from CAL ConsCom Issue Committees, and positions taken on prior bills. The CLC can also consider positions taken by allies, how much SCC can influence the bill's outcome, and the impact of our position on key legislators and the author.

CLC also prioritizes the position as 1 (high), 2 (medium), or 3 (low). For example, S1 are key bills for staff to lobby for, and O3 bills to oppose without much use of staff time.

You can find priority bills (with public positions) at <https://www.sierraclub.org/california/ca-legislature-and-priority-bills>. Note that SCC positions sometimes are confidential for strategic reasons. To find out our position on a particular bill, email the staff advocate at [Edward.Moreno@sierraclub.org](mailto:Edward.Moreno@sierraclub.org). If the SCC doesn't have a position on your bill, let Eddie Moreno that you would like the SCC to take a position on your bill and why.

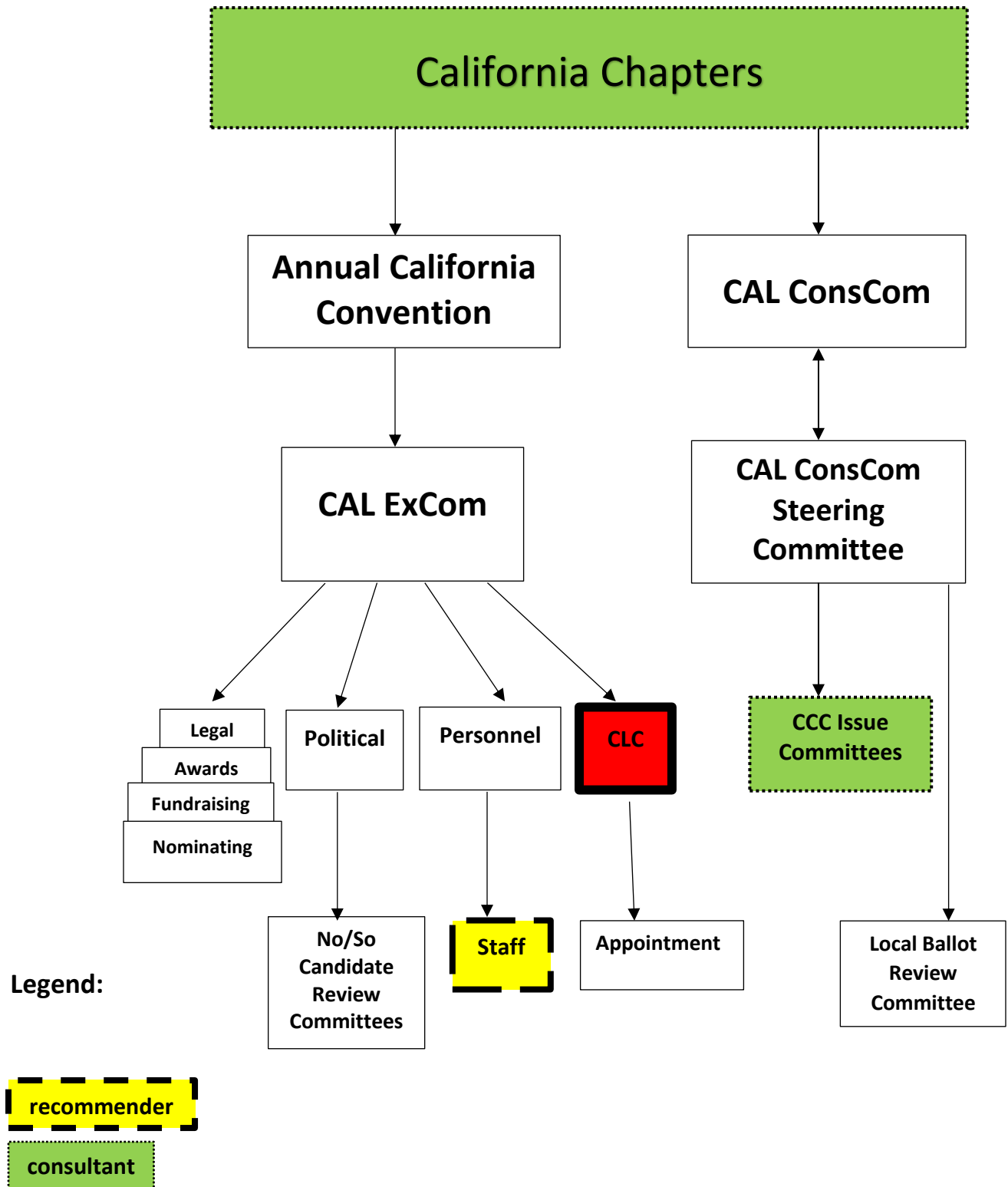
### HOW LEGISLATION IS LOBBIED

Staff is responsible for presenting oral and written statements about pending legislation to legislators and legislative committees on behalf of the thirteen California chapters. Staff decides whom to talk to and what to say.

Staff manages both SCC lobbying tactics and SCC relationships with legislators. Sierra Club members may make oral or written statements about pending legislation to legislators and legislative committees or run phone banks on behalf of chapters and CAL ConsCom Issue Committees. However, first they must confer with staff to ensure alignment of legislative position, talking points and lobbying tactics.



## 8B. SCC STRUCTURE: LEGISLATIVE POSITIONS



## **9. REWARDS, RESPONSIBILITIES, AND LIMITATIONS OF BEING A SIERRA CLUB ACTIVIST**

### **Rewards**

- Changing public policy
- Access to public officials
- Creating Sierra Club policy
- Personal growth through conservation education, new skills, and new experiences
- Hanging out with like-minded people
- Helping to create a better world

### **Responsibilities**

- Speaking as “One Club” - Promoting only official Sierra Club positions
- “Disagreeing without being disagreeable” - Being respectful to staff and volunteers
- Using Club resources to do Club work only  
(Resources = meetings, conference lines, leadership positions, list serves)
- Following Sierra Club procedures
- As a Club leader, making sure other members follow Sierra Club rules and procedures.

### **Limitations**

- Not handling frustrations or differences through insults or rude comments
- Not expressing your personal opinion when representing the Club publicly
- Not implying in testimony that you are representing the Club and its position when you are not (simply noting that you are a Sierra Club member suggests that you are representing the Club)
- Not encouraging other members to act contrary to Sierra Club policy or positions
- Not signing an ally’s official document in the name of the Club when their position doesn’t match the Club’s exactly

**See Standards of Conduct in the Campfire website for more information about what is expected of Sierra Club activists.**

# 10. RESOURCES

## WEBSITES

### **National Policy**

Sierra Club national conservation policies - <https://www.sierraclub.org/policy>

Sierra Club Grassroots Network - <http://content.sierraclub.org/grassrootsnetwork/>

### **Sierra Club California, California Conservation Committee**

Sierra Club California - <http://www.sierraclub.org/california>

CAL ConsCom website - <http://www.sierraclub.org/california/conservation-committee-cnrc>

Sierra Club California Bylaws, Standing Rules, And Basic Management Policy - <https://www.sierraclub.org/california/bylaws>

### **Legislation and Legislators**

Sierra Club California priority bills - at <https://www.sierraclub.org/california/ca-legislature-and-priority-bills>

California law and legislation, and legislature – <http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/>

Find your state legislator - <http://findyourrep.legislature.ca.gov/>

## LIST SERVES

### 1. How to create committee list serve

To create your own Sierra Club list serve, go to <http://clubhouse.sierraclub.org/communications/email/listserv/list-creation-steps.aspx> and follow the instructions. You will need to get permission from overseeing chair.

You can also find more information at <http://www.sierraclub.org/lists>

### 2. How to sign up for CAL-Activist to keep informed about Sierra Club California and California Conservation Committee

Go to <http://lists.sierraclub.org/SCRIPTS/WA.EXE?INDEX>

Click on [BOD-CAS]

Click on CAL-ACTIVISTS

Click on Subscribe and fill in your information.

### 3. How to search a Sierra Club list serve

Go to <http://lists.sierraclub.org/>

Find the list serve you want to search

Click on the list serve you want to search

Under OPTIONS, click on SEARCH ARCHIVES

On SEARCH ARCHIVES page, fill in search argument, check subfolders, and click on Search.