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February 2, 2022

Secretary Wade Crowfoot
Deputy Secretary Jennifer Norris
California Natural Resources Agency
715 P Street, 20th Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814

Subject: **Pathways to 30x30 California - Response to Draft Report**

Dear Secretary Crowfoot and Deputy Secretary Norris:

Thank you sincerely for your leadership on the Governor's Executive Order to protect 30 percent of California's land and waters by 2030. As the State Senator for the 17th Senate District and former Secretary of Natural Resources, I have toured the state extensively (as I am sure you have in the last three years!) and have become keenly aware of the importance of the 30x30 initiative to mitigate the impacts of climate change and to prevent catastrophic biodiversity loss. As such, I'm grateful for your Agency's focus on the 30x30 vision and provide these comments in support of its successful implementation.

I read the draft Pathways to 30x30 California report with great interest and was impressed by many aspects of it. It contains an ambitious agenda to support the state's biodiversity and respond to the many threats of climate change, including rising seas, drought, and unprecedented and cataclysmic wildfires. I appreciate the conservation priorities to protect biodiversity in particular, and applaud the Resources Agency for acknowledging the urgent need to focus conservation efforts on (1) large, interconnected landscapes and seascapes; (2) habitats that represent the full diversity of California's ecosystem, including rare or remnant habitat types; (3) restoration of degraded and rare ecosystems; (4) protection of areas with high species richness and endemism; and (5) prioritizing places of exceptional biocultural significance.

I also applaud the Agency's priority to increase access to nature for all Californians and to achieve justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion in the implementation of the 30x30 vision. Many communities in California have long been denied access to the outdoors and have been outside of the decision-making process in the creation and public management of parks and wilderness areas. It is critical that the 30x30

initiative be based on a foundation and implemented in a manner to ensure that every Californian has the right to a healthy environment and equal access to the many benefits that nature provides, as well as to be a part of the decisions that create and sustain outdoor opportunities.

While the draft Pathways report is a terrific, first effort in moving forward the 30x30 vision, I suggest a few changes to make the final report ever more powerful and, importantly, more likely to be implemented. In summary, I suggest that the report contain (1) a specific enumeration of **projects and programs** to implement the 30x30 vision; (2) an analysis and conclusions about the **funding** required and the sources of that funding to implement those projects and programs; and (3) an analysis and conclusions about the public, private, tribal, or non-profit **organizations that need to be utilized and augmented to carry out the long-term management of projects and programs**, including public access to protected areas.

1. Specific Projects and Programs to Implement the 30x30 Vision

First, and most importantly, the report should clearly delineate the projects and programs that will need to be completed and sustained in order to meet the 2030 objectives. Within the 17th Senate District, for example, the following projects should be included in the Pathways report, all of which would protect important biological resources while providing enriching ways in which California's can explore and enjoy the outdoors:

Santa Cruz County

- Big Basin Redwoods State Park – support rebuilding and reimagining efforts for Big Basin following the devastating CZU Lightning Complex Fire. Such efforts will include reestablishing public access to the park in new and more inclusive ways; connecting to indigenous knowledge; offering new land management and design features that are resilient in the face of climate change; and connecting to a framework of roads and trails that go beyond existing park boundaries.
- Swanton Pacific Ranch – support efforts by Cal Poly and its partners in rebuilding and augmenting Swanton Pacific Ranch following the devastating CZU Lighting Complex Fire. Such efforts include creating a new Education Center and rebuilding structures and post-fire land recovery, to enhance research and educational opportunities for statewide CSU staff and students in this outdoor, field-based program, consistent with Cal Poly's "Learn by Doing" approach.
- Santa Cruz Mountains – Gabilan Range Linkage – acquire key properties and protect others with conservation easements to provide permanent linkages between two critical natural areas to support wildlife corridors and highway safety, with focus on the bottleneck area of Prunedale along Highway 101.
- Santa Cruz Long-Toed Salamander – support efforts, including land acquisitions, to create a wildlife tunnel near the Watsonville Slough Ecological Preserve to connect separate populations and critical habitat for this endangered species.

- Watsonville Slough Farm Harvest Trails – support efforts to provide public access to trails, boardwalks, wildlife viewing platforms, and “u-pick” orchards for economically disadvantaged communities in this region containing wetlands, grasslands, forest, and organic farming.
- West Cliff Drive Adaptation and Management Plan – support the development and implementation of a climate-resilient plan to guide public access, coastal habitat, recreation, cliff protection, and public works projects along this scenic 4-mile drive in the heart of Santa Cruz.
- College Lake Management Plan – support the development and implementation of a management plan to ensure protection of this culturally significant area with critical wintering and migratory stop-over habitat for waterfowl, shorebirds, wading birds, and raptors.
- Regional Conservation Investment Strategy - support efforts by the Santa Cruz RCD in developing a comprehensive survey of biodiversity in Santa Cruz County and a guide to how conservation investments should be made there to best protect biological resources.
- Integrated Watershed Restoration Programs – support species recovery efforts by the Santa Cruz RCD (and district/statewide RCDs in general) for amphibian habitat, stream and riparian habitats, dam removals, coho recovery, and other regional efforts to support biodiversity and avert species extirpation.

Monterey County

- CEMEX – acquire 400 acres of rich coastal dune habitat and provide protection for the area’s snowy plover population, while building upon existing protected property in the coastal region and augmenting public access to the coast.
- Carmel River Floodplain Restoration and Environmental Enhancement (“Carmel River FREE”) – support this multi-benefit project that will restore natural floodplain function to Carmel River’s lower floodplain/estuary system, while increasing riparian and wetland habitat for sensitive species, reducing flood risk to adjacent residential communities, facilitating public access, and preserving 36 acres of coastal farmland.
- Rana Creek Ranch – acquire the 14,000-acre Rana Creek Ranch, the largest inholding in the Carmel Valley, containing seasonal creeks, vernal pools, and listed species including the red-legged frog and California tiger salamander. The project would protect a key wildlife corridor between the Salinas Valley and Los Padres National Forest as well as providing public recreational opportunities for underserved communities in the Salinas Valley.
- Basin Ranch – acquire the 5000-acre Basin Ranch, to augment the landscape level protection provided in connection with the Rana Creek Ranch conservation (per above), and to bridge the connection between BLM lands to the east and the Los Padres National Forest, protecting a key wildlife corridor, protection of listed species, and augmenting public recreation in underserved areas.

- Big Sur Coast – Acquire properties totaling over 1500 acres (Pico Blanco Boy Scout Camp, Yamagata, and Edmonson) within the ecologically and culturally rich Big Sur region, containing old growth forests, redwood groves, and mixed evergreen forests for large-scale landscape protection and to augment existing public holdings and improve trail access.
- Hiss Property - acquire 84 acres of coastal native grasslands, riparian areas, and oak woodlands along the scenic Highway 68 corridor, while connecting conserved lands to the Joyce Stevens Monterey Pine Forest and other protected regional properties, thereby augmenting public access to trails in the region.
- Elkhorn Slough Watershed – acquire remaining, key in-holdings within the protected lands of the Elkhorn Slough watershed, an ecologically rich estuary and tidal salt marsh, containing a diversity of resident and migratory birds and marine mammals, including sea otters, harbor seals, sea lions, and over 340 bird species. Also, support restoration efforts on the 150-acres of diked and degraded tidal marsh in the North Marsh area.

San Luis Obispo County

- Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary - support NOAA’s establishment of a new marine sanctuary located off 140 miles of coastline between Monterey and the Channel Islands, a diverse ecosystem of marine, wetland, and estuary resources, containing extensive Chumash sites and sacred areas and world-class scenic vistas and outdoor recreational opportunities.
- Diablo Canyon Lands – acquire, conserve, and provide sustainable public access and a 20+ mile extension to the California Coastal Trail on the 12,000-acre lands surrounding Diablo Canyon Power Plant, while conserving intact coastal habitat and rare pristine tidal areas while enabling tribal ownership and protection of sacred Chumash cultural sites.
- Hearst Ranch Trail – complete first (3.5 mile) segment of the California Coastal Trail along the County’s north coast with significant coastal/marine resources including Elephant Seal beaches.
- Camatta Ranch – acquire a conservation easement on 30,000 acres containing threatened foothill oak woodland habitats currently underrepresented in the existing public lands network, as well as a critical wildlife corridor between the Carrizo Plain and inland mountains.
- Toro Coast Preserve – acquire 2,250 acres of coastal land threatened by estate development between Cayucos and Morro Bay and create a new, premier open space preserve broadly accessible for hiking and other passive recreation, with low-impact, low-cost camping and trail connection to the beach.
- Warren Ranch – acquire a conservation easement on 712 acres to buttress other conservation projects in the region and protect coastal streams, threatened and endangered species habitat, oak woodlands, and productive rangeland.

- Guadalupe Nipomo Dunes – support efforts to enhance habitat on this rare coastal dune ecosystem with high biodiversity value, including weed removal, sustainable management of public access, climate resilience measures, and other rehabilitation projects in light of the phasing out of off-highway vehicle access on the Oceano Dunes portion.
- Black Lake Canyon and Ecological Area – protect and restore coastal wetland, dune scrub, and peat bog habitat containing threatened and endangered amphibian and plant species, while removing invasive species and augmenting public access to monarch overwintering sites.
- Adelaida Springs Ranch – acquire a conservation easement on 1500 acres to support a sustainable livestock ranch and vineyard, while protecting valley oak woodlands and an important wildlife corridor between protected lands of the national forest, Bureau of Land Management, and Camp Roberts.

Additional compelling conservation opportunities exist beyond the above three-county region, including the Coyote Valley conservation project in Santa Clara County that creates a critical wildlife linkage between the Diablo Range and the Santa Cruz Mountains, as well as the multiple opportunities for conservation and public access on the Gaviota Coast in Santa Barbara County. Additional project descriptions can be found within the attached September 14, 2021 letter outlining Central Coast 30x30 priorities submitted to the Resources Agency by a broad coalition of land trusts, environmental organizations, and tribal groups.

2. Funding Required to Implement 30x30 Vision

While the Pathways to 30x30 California report is to be lauded for its breadth of vision, it falls somewhat short in identifying the funding that will be necessary to implement that vision. The final report should carefully analyze the cost of implementing the 30x30 projects and programs that will enable the achievement of the 30x30 goals as well as identify specific state, federal, private, and/or other funding sources. My staff and I stand ready to assist in identifying the projected costs of the land acquisitions and management programs identified above.

3. Organizations to Implement the 30x30 Vision

Similar to the above, the Pathways report does not identify which agencies or entities will be tasked to implement the 30x30 project and programs, nor does it analyze whether there is existing capacity in or outside state resources agencies to get the job done. The final report should attempt to look at this question very thoughtfully – not only for initial project launch, but for sustainable, long-term stewardship of resources and public access.

An obvious agency in the business of managing natural areas and public access is California State Parks. The Pathways report should include an assessment of which activities under the 30x30 proposal are to be managed by State Parks and what long-term funding will be available to increase Parks' capacity to successfully implement this formidable challenge. I would envision significant increases in staffing, training, and infrastructure, at a minimum.

You may also wish to consider whether State Parks can expand beyond its general approach to being "all in or all out" of projects, to exploring creative partnerships where State Parks can leverage its strengths and resources with local groups who may be more in-tune with community needs and preferences. As an example, in designing a future for the conservation of the 12,000-acre Diablo Canyon Lands (upon the closure of the Diablo Canyon Power Plant), we may envision a role where State Parks, national land trusts, universities, local conservation groups, and tribal entities can work together under cooperative agreements to provide sustainable public access to the coast, including a 20-mile extension to the California Coastal Trail, while ensuring the protection of ecological and cultural resources in perpetuity.

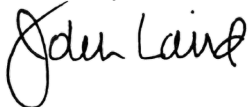
The Pathways report may also wish to consider creative inter-agency partnerships. As an example, Cal Fire could bring its substantial statewide experience and resources in managing wildfires and wildlands into a partnership with Resource Conservation Districts, building upon the community relationship-building strengths of local RCDs.

In addition, the more than 100 local land trusts across the state may also have an important role to play in supporting the 30x30 initiative. For that reason, I support the \$25 million capacity-building proposal by the California Council of Land Trusts. Because land trusts have a positive record in bringing conservation projects to fruition and reflecting the values of their local communities, I think it appropriate for the state to invest in this non-profit sector and expand resource stewardship options statewide.

Finally, we must look beyond state agencies and local land trusts to fully implement the 30x30 vision – we should carefully consider which federal, local, and/or tribal entities are well positioned to manage lands and programs, and be prepared to support those efforts to increase their capacity to ensure their long-term success.

Thank you again for your leadership on this remarkable and ambitious 30x30 agenda. I look forward to working closely with you and your colleagues in seeing through the successful implementation of this awe-inspiring vision at a most critical time in California's history.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Laird". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

John Laird
Senator, 17th District

cc: Governor Gavin Newsom