

The California Environmental Dialogue Perspective:

Economic Growth and Habitat Protection

Over the next 15 years, even under conservative projections, we can expect to add one Californian for every four who reside here today – overwhelmingly from births to existing residents. The challenge is to guide this growth while preserving what is unique and special to California. Our state is one of the most desirable, healthiest, and prosperous places to live anywhere on the planet. Meeting this challenge will require some new ways of doing business.

This challenge is important enough to unite business and the environmental community in common cause. The California Environmental Dialogue (CED), a collaborative effort of California businesses, environmental groups, and government agencies, calls on our state and local leaders to take the following immediate actions to guide growth in a manner that protects our natural habitats, open spaces, and working landscapes:

- Secure resources for long-term protection of natural areas
- Provide incentives to the private sector for good land stewardship
- Reform planning to direct growth away from environmentally significant areas and towards more suitable areas
- Reform permitting processes and infrastructure financing to provide incentives that direct growth to more suitable areas
- Develop a statewide environmental resources database, and integrate ecological data/information early into the planning process
- Provide and train enough people to get the job done
- Measure results and make course corrections





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California's leaders have the opportunity to make the following reforms to achieve ongoing protection of natural resources supporting the quality of life Californians enjoy.

Secure resources for long-term protection of natural areas –

Invest in natural area protection and enhancement at a higher level. Current public investment in natural resources amounts to less than one percent of the state's budget. In 1999, CED identified the need to protect 4.5 million acres at a cost of roughly \$12 billion. Californians responded to this need by committing over \$5 billion in bonds to acquire and protect natural areas throughout the state. That money has largely been committed, but the job is not finished. Given the central importance of natural resource protection to the state's economy and Californians' quality of life, and the immediate critical need to invest in habitat protection, additional resources should be allocated to fulfill the recommendations made here. State leaders should work together to develop funding strategies to continue the job. California faces a substantial public investment demand to maintain and restore our existing public lands (these include Federal, State, and local holdings) and to manage these lands using stewardship practices. This will require the dedication of ongoing capital investments and maintenance expenditures to ensure that the integrity, productivity, and habitat value of our public lands are maintained and, where necessary, restored. Californians should work together to find a permanent revenue stream to fund activities required to ensure that our investments in natural areas are well protected.

Provide incentives to the private sector for good land stewardship –

Public funding alone will be insufficient to protect our state's natural areas. It is critical that in addition to enforcing existing law, the government engage the private sector in land stewardship. Many of the state's existing working landscapes provide substantial ecological benefits, but the incentives for maintaining these landscapes may be insufficient. The State should investigate possible economic incentives, such as additional tax benefits to landowners for land stewardship practices that support healthy habitat, water quality and species protection benefits on working landscapes and other ecologically valuable lands in private ownership.

Reform planning to direct growth away from environmentally significant areas and towards more suitable areas – Local General

Plans should be required to incorporate a habitat planning element based on scientific assessment of critical habitat needs within the region. The State should provide technical support to local governments to develop such planning elements, and financial incentives for protection of areas of high ecological value. Such a planning process should incorporate regional, interregional, statewide and working landscape needs. Suitable areas need to be developed in an environmentally sensitive way. Government should structure property and sales tax distributions to guide housing and other development toward suitable areas.

Reform permitting processes and infrastructure financing to provide incentives for growth in more suitable areas – A variety

of permits are needed to build development projects. To discourage development in environmentally significant areas, permitting processes should be reformed to encourage appropriate infrastructure and development in suitable areas. For example, the State should identify opportunities to shorten permitting processes without jeopardizing environmental integrity. Government should also facilitate permits for development in areas determined to be appropriate through a more comprehensive planning process with the creation of ecological preserves funded through appropriate measures.

Develop a statewide environmental resources database, and integrate ecological data/information early into the planning process – Habitat needs must be integrated into the early phases of all

State, regional, and local planning efforts. To provide for quality growth while protecting natural resources, we need to integrate ecological information early into transportation, water, energy and housing infrastructure planning efforts. The state should fund the development of a detailed, statewide, interactive, environmental resources database to support planning efforts.



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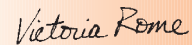
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was prepared by the California Environmental Dialogue (CED).

The mission of the California Environmental Dialogue (CED) is to engage California business, environmental, and government leaders collaboratively to produce timely and improved environmental protection while reducing costs to business, government and society. By engaging in a formal dialogue, CED builds relationships and trust, which allow its members to pursue public and private policies leading to enhanced environmental outcomes and economic efficiencies.

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Provide and train enough people to get the job done – The government agencies responsible for carrying out critical planning and environmental protection functions must be staffed and funded to efficiently carry out the responsibilities that Californians have given them. Many State environmental programs have never been adequately funded and staffed. The job these agencies do requires well-versed, scientifically trained staff. The weakened condition of these agencies has both made it difficult to do business in California and produced inadequate protection of our valuable natural resources. As previously indicated, a permanent dedicated funding stream is essential to the efficient and effective functioning of government's critical role in environmental protection.

Measure results and make course corrections – The State should provide the tools that are needed to measure progress toward a balance of habitat protection and infrastructure needs. The State has an important responsibility to make existing scientific data on the status of critical habitat areas easily accessible. State leaders must invest in monitoring systems, data collection, and analysis to support excellent planning, sound development, and real habitat protection decisions, and to measure progress.

California is at a crossroads on the subject of habitat and growth. If California leaders fail to plan for the growth we face, we are at risk of squandering the state's natural wealth, and wasting billions of dollars in acre-by-acre battles pitting development versus environmental protection. If California's leaders rise to the challenge by providing the tools and creating the incentives needed to plan for this growth, we have the opportunity to preserve and enhance California's economic vigor and natural wealth for tomorrow and future generations.