



Humboldt Redwood  
COMPANY, LLC

One Maritime Plaza  
Suite 1400  
San Francisco, CA 94111  
(415) 392-3600  
[www.mrc.com](http://www.mrc.com)  
[www.hrcllc.com](http://www.hrcllc.com)

May 14, 2014

Chuck Bonham  
Michael Cohen  
Michael Sutton  
Wildlife Conservation Board  
1807 13<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 103  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Board Members,

I am sending this letter to each of you to share some comments on the current strategic planning process underway for the WCB. Before I go further, I want to again express my appreciation to each of you for supporting a review of WCB activities through a strategic planning process.

At the recent strategic planning process public workshop on May 1st, I thought some good progress was made on having the WCB identify regional conservation priorities that could be expressed in a form that the public and landowners and conservation groups can all understand. Of course, there will still be opportunistic transactions, and when they occur they will be because something specific can be accomplished that makes it worth jumping over carefully established and publicly stated priorities.

At the recent public workshop I raised the issue of transparency and how that relates to the availability of appraisal information before transactions. Without repeating every argument that can be made I just want to hit a few highlights:

- 1) We have been asking for more disclosure of appraisals for conservation investments because some bad deals have made it through the process, and we think disclosure might have made a difference. See my letter of April 2012 detailing numerous issues with the Gualala and Usal appraisals (which were used to justify \$40 million of state investment). The problems with the appraisals are pretty easy to understand, and this letter remains unanswered by the WCB staff.
- 2) Without public disclosure there really is an inadequate check in the process. It is unrealistic to think board members will review volumes of technical analysis, and it is of note to me that WCB board members can't even talk to each other outside of public meetings due to this being a three member board and Brown Act considerations.

- 3) All of the arguments about how bad transparency will be for getting deals done are betrayed by the simple fact that these appraisals are already available to the public, the day after transactions close, via freedom of information request.
- 4) Conservation investments are different from most other state property acquisitions – often times the state is the only buyer at the table, and thus these are negotiated as opposed to bid acquisitions with the price paid subject to an appraisal process with a great deal of subjectivity (again, see the attached letter from April 2012).
- 5) Our suggestion for transparency around appraisals is entirely consistent with both DFW strategic planning and the now proposed WCB strategic plan

**Page 11 of the California Fish and Wildlife Strategic Vision document –**

**...DFG/F&GC engage in broadly informed and transparent decision making.** In all aspects of their work they engaged in transparent decision making procedures and outcomes that inspire public confidence. When decisions rely on scientific or technical findings or conclusions, that information should be made available during public decision making processes.

**Page 20 of the Draft WCB strategic plan (WCB Values – shared beliefs that reflect what WCB considers significant or important)**

**...Public Accountability and Transparency –** We ensure public understanding of WCB practices, priorities and investments.

At the workshop on May 1<sup>st</sup>, Chuck and I discussed the appraisal topic. His publically stated view on May 1<sup>st</sup> was something to the effect that “perhaps this is a bigger policy issue than just the WCB, and it seems like it might make sense to defer any changes unless other agencies were also going to change.” I ask for some further consideration and leadership on this issue, as it seems obvious that transparency would be a benefit to a process that has produced bad outcomes, and the consummation of a strategic plan is an excellent time to bring policies up to date.

The existing process has produced some poor results, the benefits of transparency speak for themselves, and the stated problems continue to sound like excuses born of fear of change. If now is not a good time to update transparency issues for the WCB, when will be a good time?

I will follow up to see if you are amenable to further discussion

Many thanks and all the best,



Sandy Dean  
Chairman

Cc: John Laird, Natural Resources Secretary  
Karen Finn, Programs Budget manager  
John Donnelly, Executive Director Wildlife Conservation Board