

JOINT POLICY ON HARDWOODS

I. INTRODUCTION

The Fish and Game Commission (Commission) and the State Board of Forestry (Board) find that the hardwood resources on hardwood-rangelands and timberlands of California are a vitally important natural and economic resource.

Over 30 species of hardwood trees in California, including oaks of the genus *Quercus*, occur widely as individual trees and distinct habitat types throughout the State. Hardwoods themselves and hardwood-dominated habitats are extremely important to the fish, wildlife, and natural resources of California. Hardwoods throughout California support a wide variety of wildlife species by providing habitat with feeding, breeding, cover, and related needs. In addition, some hardwoods benefit fishery resources by preventing the erosion of hillsides and stream banks, moderating water temperatures by shading and contributing nutrients and food-chain organisms to waterways.

Hardwoods also provide substantial worth to landowners in the form of aesthetic, open space, recreational, wood products, range and property values and these same values also provide certain public benefits.

California has grown rapidly in population; homes and recreational use have intensified greatly in many formerly rural areas--including those dominated by hardwoods. Lands have been subdivided and ownerships fragmented. Hence, the Board and Commission have determined that human uses in hardwood habitats, such as development and fuelwood harvesting, have produced controversy related to public impacts to water quality, fish and wildlife, and other resources. The Board and Commission are also concerned about the adequate regeneration of some hardwood species.

The Board and Commission recognize that there are local differences in land use conditions, pressures and patterns, and management goals and practices that affect conservation needs that include, firewood harvest in the northern Sacramento valley and development in Southern California, the San Francisco Bay Area, and the Sierra-Nevada foothills. The Board and Commission also recognize that there is local variation in the hardwood resource between larger geographic areas. This variation should be addressed with an array of management approaches for different hardwood species, wildlife habitats, and vegetative communities.

The Board has been concerned with the impacts of population growth and various associated land uses on hardwood resources since 1981. The Commission has had a hardwoods policy since 1985. In 1987, the Board, the Commission, the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF), the Department of Fish and Game (DFG), and University of California Cooperative Extension started an Integrated Hardwood Range Program designed to provide for research, education, and monitoring of the hardwood resource. This program has received the support of landowners, governmental agencies, and the public. Since its inception, substantial research and educational efforts have taken place.

In May of 1993, the Board reviewed the results of the Integrated Hardwood Range Program to see if it was accomplishing its goals. This review took place after complaints of the impact of firewood harvesting in a few Northern Sacramento Valley counties and the continued development of hardwood lands in other parts of the state. The Board reviewed the need for statewide regulation of hardwoods and decided that such controls are not warranted at this time. Rather the Board opted for a renewed effort to encourage local government and citizens to design strategies that will address local hardwood management and conservation. Should this fail, the Board, in consultation with the Commission, Department of Fish and Game, Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, Integrated Hardwood Range Management Program, the Range Management Advisory Committee and any interested parties, will examine the need for statewide legislation and take regulatory action, if necessary, to control harvesting and conversion of hardwood-rangelands using existing statutes.

II. JOINT POLICY OF BOARD AND COMMISSION FOR THEIR RESPECTIVE DEPARTMENTS

The Board and the Commission recognize the need to work together to provide for a unified policy for California's hardwood resource. To this end, the following joint policy is established for CDF and DFG:

A. The hardwood resources of California should be managed for the long-term perpetuation of their local and broader geographic representation and to continue to provide for their inherent natural and biological values and processes. These values and processes may include, but are not limited to, regeneration, plant species composition, vegetation structure and age class distribution, water quality, and other biotic and abiotic resources. Management should also address soil resources, air quality, rangeland improvement practices, recreational opportunities, and other benefits. Consistent with such conservation of the hardwood resource, state and local incentive policies should be designed to promote ecological viability as well as economic return from hardwood resource management.

B. The Board and the Commission support continued implementation of the Integrated Hardwood Range Management Program.

C. The Board and Commission support the desire of local government to be able to utilize their expertise in selecting locally appropriate conservation options and encourage them to seek early project review by Departmental personnel.

D. If issues related to hardwood conservation cross county lines, the Board and Commission will encourage multicounty and local approaches and if necessary will provide for assessment, information, and suggested standards. As appropriate, the Board and Commission will encourage collection of data that can assist local government in addressing issues related to hardwoods and which can be aggregated to provide information across larger geographic areas or statewide.

E. To the extent that agency staff are involved with hardwoods, the Board and Commission adopt the following joint policies for their respective Departments:

1. Departmental personnel should be guided by the position that hardwood harvesting and other land uses should be conducted in a sustainable manner which secures

regeneration of all hardwood species, enhances the protection of fish, wildlife and plants of hardwood habitats, allows adequate recruitment of other native vegetation in hardwood habitats and meets state and federal water quality standards. The Departments should also consider private landowners goals, property rights, and community economics.

2. Department personnel should cooperate with other state and federal agencies, local governments, University of California Cooperative Extension and other academic programs, non-profit organizations, landowners, groups representing landowners, and the public to provide for necessary research, information, and education programs related to hardwoods;

3. In cooperation with the Integrated Hardwood Range Management Program and Private landowner, Departmental personnel should jointly establish a process, which includes both satellite imagery and ground checking, to monitor the status of the hardwood resource, to examine the effectiveness of local policies with respect to hardwoods, and to evaluate the performance of the Integrated Hardwood Range Management Program; staff should report annually, in joint session, to the Commission and the Board.

III. JOINT PROGRAM REVIEW

The Board and Commission will meet periodically to review implementation of this policy and to clarify and resolve issues that arise from overlapping interests of their respective departments.

IV. SPECIFIC POLICY FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

In addition to the joint policy, the Commission specifically charges the Department of Fish and Game with the following:

A. Contingent upon funding and staffing availability, the Department conduct, contract and/or support studies involving assessing the effects of the distribution and densities of the following hardwoods on terrestrial and aquatic vertebrates, including: (1) blue oak and associated plant species in blue oak-dominated habitats; (2) black oak and associated plant species in black oak-dominated habitats; (3) valley oak and associated plant species in valley oak-dominated habitats; and (4) Engelmann oak and associated plant species in Engelmann oak-dominated habitats:

B. The Department continue to review proposed timber harvesting activities and, when appropriate, recommend measures which will mitigate significant adverse impacts upon fish and wildlife resources;

C. Relative to the removal of hardwoods, the Department shall recommend, seek and support the adoption of proposals appropriate for the protection and enhancement of fish and wildlife resources;

D. The Department periodically reassess the terms and conditions of existing regulations, permit processes and other administrative measures which affect conservation of hardwood resources and, where feasible, seek corrective action when the original terms and conditions have proven inadequate;

E. If after consulting with the sponsors on project modification, and based on scientific evidence, the Department still opposes the proposed project affecting hardwood resources, it will notify the Commission of its opposition. This opposition may include, but not be limited to, the issuance of permits or licenses, authorization or programs, and the appropriation of funds which it determines will result in the removal of hardwoods and other modifications of hardwood habitats and communities in a manner that will result in significant adverse effects to fish, wildlife, or plant resources for which mitigation and compensation measures are judged to be inadequate;

F. In the event of disagreement over implementation of this policy with the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, the Department shall inform the Commission of the disagreement; and

G. The Department shall provide active liaison to the Board and Range Management Advisory Committee in issues related to hardwoods, fish, wildlife, endangered plant and animal species, and the impacts of vegetation management and wildfire on wildlife.

H. Annually, the Department will include a statement in the Director's report to the Commission addressing the status of hardwood conservation.

V. SPECIFIC POLICY FROM THE BOARD TO THE DEPARTMENT OF FORESTRY AND FIRE PROTECTION

In addition to the joint policy, the Board of Forestry charges the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection with the following:

A. Administer Departmental programs consistent with the terms of this joint policy statement;

B. Implement the Forest Practice Act, other statutes and this policy consistent with mitigation of adverse impacts to fish, wildlife and with this policy;

C. Continue to implement the Integrated Hardwood Range Management Program;

D. Conduct a program of vegetation management, fire prevention, and Fire Safe to minimize the impact of wildfire on life and property, and where possible at the same time, maximize fire's natural beneficial effects on hardwood ecosystems;

E. As part of the Board and Departmental Fire Plan, and in consultation with the Department of Fish and Game regarding the impacts on fish, wildlife, and plant resources, address issues related to the role of fire in hardwood-dominated ecosystems and the impacts of pre-fire, during-fire, and post-fire agency activities:

F. Support research and development for hardwood utilization and manufacturing;

G. Consistent with available staff and funding, provide for a thorough assessment of the status of the hardwood resource at least once every five years, commencing with 1995;

H. Consistent with available personnel, provide staff support to the Range Management Advisory Committee;

I. In the event of disagreement over implementation of this policy with the Department Fish and Game, inform the Board of the disagreement; and

J. Provide active liaison to the Commission and Range Management Advisory Committee on issues related to forest and vegetation management, wildfire protection and prevention, and the assessment of hardwood resources.