



BLUE OAK WOODLAND FACT SHEETS

WILDLIFE CONSERVATION BOARD

California Oak Woodlands Conservation Program

An innovative effort called the California Oak Woodlands Conservation Program, enacted by Chapter 588, Statutes of 2001 has been implemented. The Act recognizes the importance of California's oak woodlands, how they enhance the natural and scenic beauty of this great State, the critical role of the private landowner and the importance of private land stewardship. The Act further acknowledges how oak woodlands increase the monetary and ecological value of real property and promote ecological balance.

Oak woodlands provide habitat for more than 300 species of wildlife, moderate temperature extremes, reduce soil erosion and sustain water quality. Moreover, oak woodlands facilitate nutrient cycling and provide forage for numerous wildlife species.

The oak tree has played such an important role in California history that one only has to travel a few miles to find a town, city or residential complex named after the majestic oak tree. Yet, in spite of the importance and critical role oaks have played in shaping California's history, its economy and landscape, the State continues to lose oak woodlands to development, firewood harvesting and agricultural conversions.

Approximately two-thirds or 10 million acres of California's oak woodlands remain intact, about 80 percent of which are found on private property. Of the remaining oak woodlands, only about 4 percent are protected from conversion. Today, the single largest threat to oak woodlands is residential, commercial and industrial development. Conversion of oak woodlands to intensive agricultural development such as orchards and vineyards also takes a heavy toll.

Other factors, contributing to the loss of oak woodlands include woodcutting, the lack of oak regeneration and Sudden Oak Death (SOD). For these reasons and because the preponderance of remaining oak woodlands can be found on privately owned property, the California Oak Woodlands Conservation Program is designed to accommodate the needs of the private landowner while fostering protection for oak woodlands.

Opportunities for People and Oak Woodlands

Although the rate of conversion of oak woodlands, coupled with the lack of oak regeneration and the emergence of SOD present a very dismal outlook and future for California oak woodlands, there is an opportunity to reverse the present trend. With 80 percent of the remaining oak woodlands on private lands, an opportunity exists to compensate landowners who have maintained economic opportunities for the property without sacrificing open space, healthy watersheds and quality wildlife habitat. In addition, opportunities exist for private landowners to restore oak woodlands while further enhancing the economic potential of their ranchlands.

The Oak Woodlands Conservation Program

The Oak Woodlands Conservation Program offers landowners, conservation organizations, cities and counties, an opportunity to obtain funding for projects designed to conserve and restore California's oak woodlands. While the Program is statewide in nature, it provides opportunities to address oak woodland issues on a regional priority basis.



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The Program is designed to help local efforts achieve oak woodland protection. More importantly, this Program provides a mechanism to bring ranchers and conservationists together in a manner that allows both to achieve that which is so valued, -- sustainable ranch and farming operations and healthy oak woodlands.

Legislative Intent

Recognizing the importance of oak woodlands and the critical role private landowners have in the conservation of oaks, the Legislature created the Oak Woodlands Program with the expressed intent the Program accomplish the following:

1. Support and encourage voluntary, long-term private stewardship and conservation of California oak woodlands by offering landowners financial incentives to protect and promote biologically functional oak woodlands;
2. Provide incentives to protect and encourage farming and ranching operations that are operated in a manner that protect and promote healthy oak woodlands;
3. Provide incentives for the protection of oak trees providing superior wildlife values on private land, and;
4. Encourage planning that is consistent with oak woodlands preservation.

Purpose and Authority

To accomplish the legislative intent, the Act identifies the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) as the responsible entity to implement the Oak Woodlands Conservation Program. The Act authorizes the WCB to purchase oak woodland conservation easements and provide grants for land improvements and restoration efforts.

In addition, the WCB is authorized to award cost-sharing incentive payments to private landowners who enter into long-term agreements. Such agreements will be structured to include management practices that benefit oak woodlands and promote the economic sustainability of the farming or ranching operation.

The Act requires that at least 80 percent of the money be used for grants for the purchase of easements, for restoration activities or for enhancement projects. In addition, the funds may be used for grants that provide cost-share incentive payments and long-term agreements.

The remaining 20 percent may be used for public education and outreach efforts by local governments, park and open space districts, resource conservation districts and nonprofit organizations. Within the 20 percent category, funds may also be used for grants designed to provide technical assistance and to develop and implement oak conservation elements in local general plans.
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