

## Department Lands

With a current land ownership of approximately 637,000 acres, and additional management oversight and responsibility for 486,000 acres through conservation easements and management agreements, the Department of Fish and Game (DFG) is the second largest state land manager in California. DFG lands include wildlife areas and ecological reserves for wildlife conservation and public opportunities to hunt, fish, watch wildlife and learn about nature. In addition, DFG owns and operates fish hatcheries, fishing accesses, public accesses and manages marine reserves established through the Marine Life Protection Act. DFG lands are acquired using a variety of funding sources, and for purposes consistent with DFG's mission. Each property is subject to a public process for establishing appropriate and allowable uses culminating in a Land Management Plan. These plans have been completed, are being revised, or are in progress for approximately 88 percent of existing DFG lands.

Land ownership carries with it management responsibilities to maintain and enhance inherent biological values, attend to up keep to meet current local, state and federal regulations, provide law enforcement, as well as to provide safe access, and support existing and new facilities for carrying out the intended purpose of the land acquisition. Some acquisitions come with endowments, or other revenue to support these activities. However, in many cases DFG receives lands without provisions to fund necessary, and sometimes required management, law enforcement and maintenance. For example, leases from other state agencies rarely come with funding, however DFG accepts the management responsibilities because of the importance of the natural resources present on the property. DFG lands are often viewed by local government and others as open space that may be used for a variety of purposes, such as defensible fire space, active recreation areas, or as mitigation sites for development actions. However, these uses may be incompatible or conflict with the intended and planned use for the lands. There is also an increase in vandalism, trespassing and homeless encampments requiring an additional law enforcement presence from DFG's game wardens.

Proponents of an active land acquisition program believe strategic acquisitions are the cornerstone of strong land-based, wildlife conservation, especially because the land base is limited, particularly for specific habitat types. Therefore, acquisitions consistent with conservation objectives should be made based on opportunity regardless of the availability of accompanying funding for tax neutrality or long-term management. Others believe land acquisition by DFG should be done only in full consideration of local government factors, local land ownership patterns, and contingent upon a consistent management and maintenance funding stream. Local government factors can include an exemption from the payment of property taxes on state-owned lands. It is possible this may negatively affect the local government tax base creating tension between DFG and local government.

DFG is exploring alternatives for providing a consistent, reliable funding source for land management, law enforcement and enhancement. Its lands program works closely with local conservation organizations, federal and state partners, and local governments to maximize natural resource stewardship in the absence of sufficient funding.