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Governor's Natural Resources Budget

Improving and Protecting California's Environmental Infrastructure

Funding for Parks, Farmland, Wetlands, Lake Tahoe, Forests, Flood Control, Water Systems, and Coastal and Ocean Resources

Governor Pete Wilson's 1998-99 budget, seizing long-awaited opportunity in the state's booming economy, focuses on improving and protecting California's beleaguered environmental infrastructure, from the crystal waters of Lake Tahoe to the coastal wetlands of Southern California.

The spending plan aims to spruce up worn state parks facilities, restore disturbed salmon habitat, conserve crop-

producing farmland, and provide greater public access to coastal attractions.

Major Initiatives

The spending plan calls for major initiatives to enhance, preserve, and protect natural resources of the coast and ocean, watersheds, Lake Tahoe, and implementation of Natural Community Conservation Planning (NCCP), the nation's model for balancing environmental protection and economic development.

"This budget will achieve long-standing premier goals to improve and protect California's environmental infrastructure and invest in a high quality of life into the 21st century," Secretary for Resources Doug Wheeler said.

Improving Watersheds

Under the Wilson administration, California has embraced a watershed management approach to conservation, demonstrating that it is possible to manage natural resources in cooperation with stakeholders on a landscape scale.

The Watershed Initiative provides significant funding to advance objectives of the Governor's Watershed Protection Program, which is designed to improve, streamline, and coordinate state activities, and delivery of state resources to community groups and local governments.

Specifically, the budget calls for \$8.9 million for local technical assistance, including \$7 million authorized by the Legislature last year for Department of Fish

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The
Exposition
Year '98

As 1998 unfolds amid the storms of El Niño, it could for other reasons be anticipated as the "Year of Water" in California, given the magnitude and statewide impact of several crucial events over the coming months.

All areas of the state are likely to be affected, from North Coast salmon-spawning streams, to the San Francisco Bay-Delta estuary, Lake Tahoe, the Sacramento and San Joaquin Valleys, and the Colorado River basin in Southern California.

Decisions now in the making will affect the future allocation of water among competing interests, assure water quality and environmental protection, and demonstrate California's commitment to ecosystem management.

Working Together

These decisions, monumental in their long-term effects, will result from a collaborative process among local, state, and federal government agencies and non-government interests concerned with environmental and economic outcomes.

The California Biodiversity Council fosters collaboration and a spirit of cooperation among its members, who oversee

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**SAVING THE
SALTON SEA**
*Cormorants nest
at the Salton
Sea, where the
salt build-up is
an eco-disaster
in the making.*

(Photo courtesy of the Regional Water Quality Control Board, Palm Desert)

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Biodiversity:

and local governments, and to help fund a conservation easement program to encourage improved land use in community-based and local restoration projects.

"These new funds will go a long way toward involving public groups in collaboration with agency scientists in taking action in their watersheds and bring a expertise to assist local groups in training, monitoring and scientific assessment," said Don Erman, director of the Centers for Water and Wildland Resources at the University of California, Davis.

Fish and Game will receive \$1 million to provide biological and ecological fish and wildlife expertise to community watershed groups, training in watershed assessment, restoration, and monitoring; development of watershed ecological impact and recovery models, and monitoring species recovery.

In addition, \$931,000 will enable Regional Water Quality Control Boards to assess and prioritize water quality problems within targeted watersheds and find the best solutions at least cost.

Governor Wilson also proposed an environmental infrastructure bond for Watershed, Wildlife and Parks Improvement and a Water Management Bond to further improve water quality, ensure a safe, reliable water supply, improve levees, promote conservation, and meet other objectives of his water policy and work.

Bond measures must be approved by the Legislature and the voters.

Protecting Lake Tahoe

To fulfill California's commitment to fund its share of a 10-year \$904 million Environmental Improvement Program (EIP) for Lake Tahoe, Governor Wilson has proposed additional funding of \$11.5 million for budget year 1998-99 and \$95 million in his environmental infrastructure bond for subsequent years.

Under the EIP, California is responsible for \$274 million over the next decade, with the federal government supplying about \$300 million, Nevada pro-

viding \$85 million, and local and private sources putting in the rest.

This funding will help to safeguard one of California's most magnificent natural treasures against erosion, air pollution and other contaminants that are slowly degrading the water quality and robbing the lake of its clarity," Wheeler said.

News of the funding was encouraging to members of the Lake Tahoe Transportation and Water Quality Coalition who are working cooperatively on ways to safeguard the environment and tourist-dependent economy.

"The community is very excited," said Stan Hansen, vice president of Heavenly Ski Resort. "Our No. 1 goal is to protect and enhance the water quality of the region, and there is an outstanding commitment among the local folks. Governor Wilson has stepped up to the plate, and so has Governor Miller (of Nevada). We're now waiting for the federal government to put money in its budget as well."

Steve Teshara, who represents Nevada's gaming industry on the Coalition, said besides latching onto funding, the stakeholders must work together to get the work done.

"No one agency, department, or entity in the public or private sector can do it alone. They must do it as a partnership," Teshara said. He cited the California Tahoe Conservancy as "a model program" of public and private cooperation to accomplish environmental improvements. The Conservancy acquires, restores, preserves and enhances land and wildlife habitat in the lake basin, curtails erosion, and increases public access and recreational opportunities.

The \$11.5 million for budget year 1998-99 would be used to acquire and restore environmentally sensitive lands, enhance key wildlife habitats, implement high priority soil erosion control, restore watersheds, and improve recreational opportunities and public access.

Funding would provide \$721,000 to Tahoe Regreen, a multi-agency program that restores forest health to reduce fire danger, plus secure two more California Conservation Corps crews and provide program support at the Conservancy.

In addition, the budget provides \$294,000 to help meet environmental thresholds and evaluate monitoring, and \$1,500,000 to the State Water Resources Control Board to reestablish 14 water quality monitoring stations for algae, sediment, nitrogen, and phosphorus.

The \$95 million in bond funding would enable the Conservancy to restore 150 acres of wetlands and install 40 miles of roadside drainage and erosion control; preserve and restore up to 20 miles of instream fisheries habitat and 1,300 acres for wildlife; and establish new public access sites, among other objectives of the Environmental Improvement Program.

NCCP

Natural Community Conservation Planning (NCCP), hailed as a national land-use planning model, attempts to reconcile competing demands of environmental protection and economic development.

Governor Wilson's proposed budget for 1998-99 provides \$20.6 million for NCCP, including \$10.9 million to the Wildlife Conservation Board to acquire coastal sage scrub and other habitat in Southern California and \$5 million to the State Coastal Conservancy to acquire and restore coastal wetlands and watershed habitat in San Diego County. Another \$3.6 million goes to the Department of Fish and Game to help local governments implement NCCP plans, and \$1.1 million will provide the Department of Fish and Game with permanent NCCP staff support.

The Governor's proposed environmental infrastructure bond contains \$95 million to acquire and protect wetlands, riparian areas, and critical wildlife habitat, consistent with resource management efforts such as NCCP, conservation banking, and other habitat conservation programs.

NCCP projects are underway or being implemented in San Diego, western Riverside, Orange, and Los Angeles counties.

Ocean and Coastal Protection

California's ocean and coast are among its most magnificent resources, generating an estimated \$17 billion from major ocean-dependent industries and providing more

April 17, 1997. California's coastal resources depend upon maintaining a high level of protection. In 1997, the Governor signed an Executive Order directing more efficient coastal resource planning, proposed a \$170 million Coastal Initiative, and signed into law 15 coastal and ocean management improvement bills.

This year, Wilson proposed \$128.2 million in additional budget and capital funding for programs such as improving public access, additional acquisitions, and conserving and restoring degraded resources.

Funding includes:

- \$6.3 million for the interagency Southern California Wetlands Clearinghouse to acquire, restore, and enhance coastal wetlands through a comprehensive science-based program.

An additional \$109,000 would help the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission promote mitigation banking.

- \$105.7 million to the State Coastal Conservancy to plan, design, construct, and maintain public accessways along the coast, including \$100 million from the proposed environmental infrastructure bond and \$5.7 million in the budget. The bond also would provide \$10 million for coastal land acquisition, restoration, and management by the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy.

- \$3.6 million for marine management, including \$1 million for the Department of Fish and Game's newly established Marine Region to better protect living marine resources and manage marine habitat, create artificial reefs, increase inspection, and bolster enforcement. The remaining \$2.6 million would expand understanding of nearshore and reef species and create a nearshore database.

- \$1.3 million to the State Water Resources Control Board to improve coastal water quality, including \$1 million to deal with nonpoint source pollution from



To help protect Lake Tahoe, Governor Wilson has provided funding in his budget to acquire and restore sensitive lands, enhance key wildlife habitat, control soil erosion, and improve public recreational opportunities and access.

agricultural and urban runoff and \$800,000 to expand coastal water monitoring, assess fish contamination, and survey regional impacts of land-based pollution on marine life.

Improving Parks and Recreation

California State Parks will come in for some long-needed capital improvements this year, thanks to a healthier economy that promises more funding than was affordable during the lean years of the earlier 1990s, when operational needs were paramount.

Former State Parks Director Donald Murphy says California's great parks are suffering from a backlog of deferred maintenance often not visible to visitors.

"As taxpayers we have all made a tremendous investment in our park system," Murphy wrote in *Cal-Tax Digest*. "To ensure that our children and grandchildren benefit from this investment, we must provide the necessary tax dollars to maintain this investment for future generations."

The budget provides \$24.9 million to rehabilitate public facilities at state parks, beaches and campgrounds. The environmental protection bond would provide another \$310 million to tackle the parks infrastructure backlog.

Preserving Farmland

Recognizing that farmland loss reduces California's crop production and threatens its \$22 billion agricultural economy, the Governor boosted funding for farmland protection 35 percent to \$3.7 million, which will enable the Department of Conservation to double Agricultural Land Stewardship Program acquisition of easements that preserve farmland.

"The time is right for California to put the benefits of its booming economy back to work rebuilding the natural resources infrastructure and stabilizing it for the future," Director Larry Goldzband of the Department of Conservation said. "We have the nation's No. 1 farm economy contributing 10 percent of the nation's agricultural export, and farming is the No. 1 contributor to the economy of our state."

Farmland conservation is of particular concern in the crop-rich Central Valley, where population growth is expected to threaten the farmland base.

"Historically, we know an improved strong California economy also means an increase in development, and the time to plan for that growth is now," said Clifton Whitehead, president of the Great Valley Center in Modesto. ♦