

California State Wildlife Action Plan

Implementation Evaluation 2005–2014

Executive Summary

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SWAP 2005 Background and SWAP 2015 Update Process

SWAP 2005 Background

In 2000, Congress enacted the State Wildlife Grant (SWG) program to support State government programs that broadly benefit wildlife and habitats, and more specifically species of greatest conservation need (SGCN).¹ As a trustee agency focused on safeguarding natural resources in California, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) manages funding from the SWG program and led the development of the 2005 California State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP 2005). The SWAP 2005 recommended conservation actions at the statewide scale and nine regional scales.²

1 The CDFW defines the SGCN list as identifying “those species that are deemed most rare, imperiled, and in need of conservation actions.” For more information on SGCN please visit the CDFW’s website “State Wildlife Action Plan: Species of Greatest Conservation Need” at <http://www.dfg.ca.gov/SWAP/SGCN/>.

2 Bunn, D., A. Mummert, M. Hoshovsky, K. Gilardi, and S. Shanks. California Wildlife Conservation Challenges: California’s Wildlife Action Plan. Rep. Sacramento: University of California, Davis Wildlife Health Center, and California Department of Fish and Wildlife, 2005.

SWAP 2015 Update

The SWAP must be updated at least every 10 years and address eight required elements (described in more detail in the full report).³ To address one of the required elements, Blue Earth Consultants, LLC (Blue Earth) performed a third party independent evaluation of the State government’s effectiveness implementing the SWG and SWAP. See the *Evaluation Audience* box at right for a description of the evaluation audience.

3 The term SWAP 2005 or SWAP 2005 planning document refers to the document titled “California Wildlife Conservation Challenges: California’s Wildlife Action Plan,” which was developed to fulfill requirements for accessing USFWS SWG program funding. SWAP 2005 implementation refers to implementation of SWAP 2005 recommended conservation actions and implementation of SWG funded conservation grants to meet the recommended conservation actions outlined in the SWAP 2005. For more information on the California SWAP and the SWAP 2015, please see “State Wildlife Action Plan: A Plan For Conserving California’s Wildlife Resources while Responding to Environmental Challenges” at <http://www.dfg.ca.gov/SWAP/>.

Evaluation Audience

Blue Earth developed this report for multiple audiences, including those audiences with and without jurisdictional authority for implementing the SWAP 2005 and SWAP 2015. These audiences include the CDFW leadership team and staff, Fish and Game Commission, cooperating State, Federal, and local government agencies and organizations, tribal governments and communities, and partners (such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and academic or research institutions).



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“The first State Wildlife Action Plan helped make CDFW more focused on key monitoring needs to inform planning. Without the first SWAP, the regional monitoring project I have been running would not have been sustained nor would we be expanding this project statewide.”

—CDFW Staff

Evaluation Purpose and Methodology

This report shares findings from an evaluation of SWAP implementation from 2005 to 2014.

Evaluation outcomes include:

1. **Progress and results** of the SWAP 2005 implementation from 2005–2014.
2. **Analysis of SWG portfolio spending** between 2005–2014 by region, taxa, and conservation action category.
3. **Assess the State government's effectiveness** in implementing SWAP 2005 actions, including the human and financial capacity, ability to leverage additional human and financial resources, efficiency, strengths, opportunities for improvement, and gaps and obstacles for effective implementation.
4. **Describe overarching SWAP 2005 implementation challenges** and identify areas where improvement could be made.
5. **Provide recommendations** for the SWAP 2015 update and steps forward.



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Blue Earth undertook five primary activities to inform the evaluation:

- Convened an evaluation steering committee;
- Reviewed SWG documents for 81 grants;
- Conducted 51 interviews (representing the following sectors: CDFW, NGO, non-CDFW government, non-CDFW proposal partners, SWAP evaluation steering committee, private funders, and tribal governments and communities);
- Conducted additional web-based research and document review; and
- Synthesized and analyzed gathered information.

“There is always room for improvement, and this evaluation will help us improve and increase our effectiveness, by directing our limited number of staff to specific conservation priorities and activities.”

—CDFW Staff



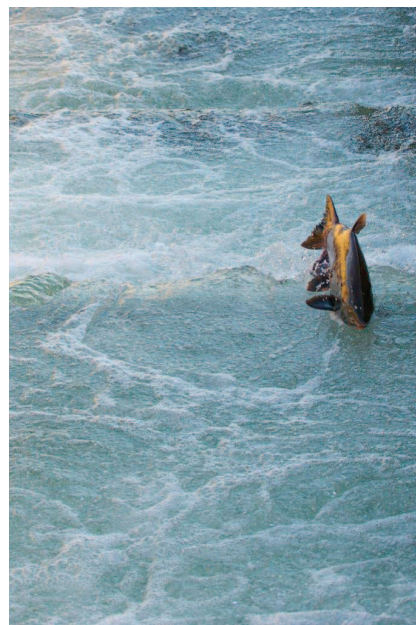
SWAP 2005 Evaluation Results

The following results draw upon all of the data sources collected and analyzed.⁴ During implementation of the SWAP 2005, SWG funded grants amounted to nearly \$37 million dollars and were matched with approximately \$19 million in State government funds. [Figure 1](#) shows the SWG and State government match funding allocation by SWAP 2005 region.

⁴ Because the information below reflects themes gleaned from interviewees and documents, it does not necessarily reflect the opinions of the CDFW and may reflect interviewees' lack of awareness about actual SWAP 2005 implementation progress to date. Below we provide findings based on each of the evaluation outcomes.

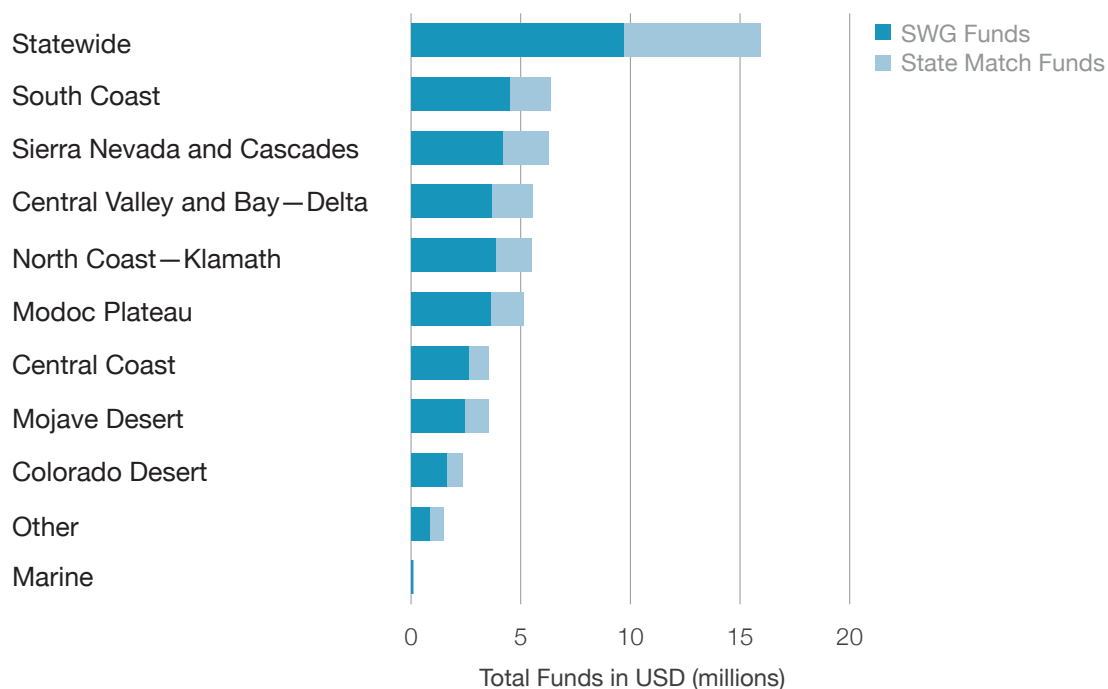
Other key findings on the grant-making portfolio include:

- Few grants supported the SWAP 2005 Marine region, which differs from the CDFW Marine region jurisdictional boundary;
- Thirty-one percent of the SWG funded grants had a statewide focus and received 41% of the total SWG funds; and
- Most grants (57%) were multi-species focused, meaning they addressed more than one focal species per grant.



PhotographyPerspectives

Figure 1: SWG and State Match Funding by SWAP 2005 Region



Evaluation Outcome 1

Summary: SWAP Implementation Progress and Results

Key findings shared in this section primarily draw upon interviews and SWG document review. The collected data showed some SWAP 2005 implementation progress and results. Yet, a majority of statewide and a minority of regional interviewees indicated SWAP implementation is making a positive overall impact. Unfortunately, the evaluator's ability to identify strong linkages between SWAP implementation, progress, and results between 2005 and 2014 was weakened by limiting factors, such as a lack of SWAP 2005 prioritized goals, objectives, and metrics to measure progress by; interviewees' challenges differentiating between implementation of SWAP 2005 recommended conservation actions and CDFW's day-to-day actions; and incomplete SWG proposal and reporting documentation.



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Key findings include:

- More regional interviewees indicated familiarity with the SWAP 2005 and its recommended conservation actions than statewide interviewees.
- Interviewees indicated and evaluators found limited overall progress towards conservation action categories.
- Both statewide and regional interviewees specified progress made towards three categories in particular: Habitat Conservation and Restoration; Coordination, Collaboration, and Stakeholder Engagement; and Increasing Knowledge to Implement SWAP 2005.
- Forty-five percent of CDFW and non-CDFW interviewees highlighted progress towards enabling conditions.
- The most common stressor addressed under the SWAP 2005 was climate change followed by growth and land development.
- CDFW staff indicated more progress made in all 13 categories (excluding Enforcement) than non-CDFW staff, with the most progress made in the following three categories: Conservation Planning/Plans; Coordination, Collaboration, and Stakeholder Engagement; and, Habitat Conservation and Restoration.
- Most SWAP 2005 recommended conservation actions related to the category Addressing Conservation Priorities and Stressors in the SWAP 2005. However, only 44% of CDFW staff and 17% of non-CDFW staff indicated progress made for this category.

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Jason Mintzer

Evaluation Outcome 2

Summary: Statewide and Regional State Wildlife Grant Implementation

Results shared in this section focus on implementation of 81 statewide and regional SWG funded projects. Information primarily draws upon analysis of progress based on documentation CDFW provided.

Key findings include:

- The State government match amount remained relatively consistent across years and grants, despite changes in total SWG funds.

Grant Analysis by Region:

- The Statewide or Headquarters CDFW region received consistent funding and grants throughout all regional analysis.
- Aside from Statewide grants, the Northern CDFW region (Sierra Nevada and Cascade SWAP 2005 region) received

the most grants from 2001–2013, while the South Coast and North Central CDFW regions received the most funding.

- The Marine region (both CDFW and SWAP 2005) received the least amount of funding and number of grants.

Grant Analysis by Ecosystem:

Grassland and Wet Meadow habitats received the most funding, totaling \$5.3 million, while a variety of habitat types received approximately \$5 million in funding, including Wetland, Forest Wood, Montane-Subalpine/Mid-elevation, Riparian, and Fresh Water.

Grant Analysis by Taxa:

The majority of grants focused on mammals and birds, while invertebrates received the least focus. Figure 2 shows the SWG and State government match funding allocation by taxa.

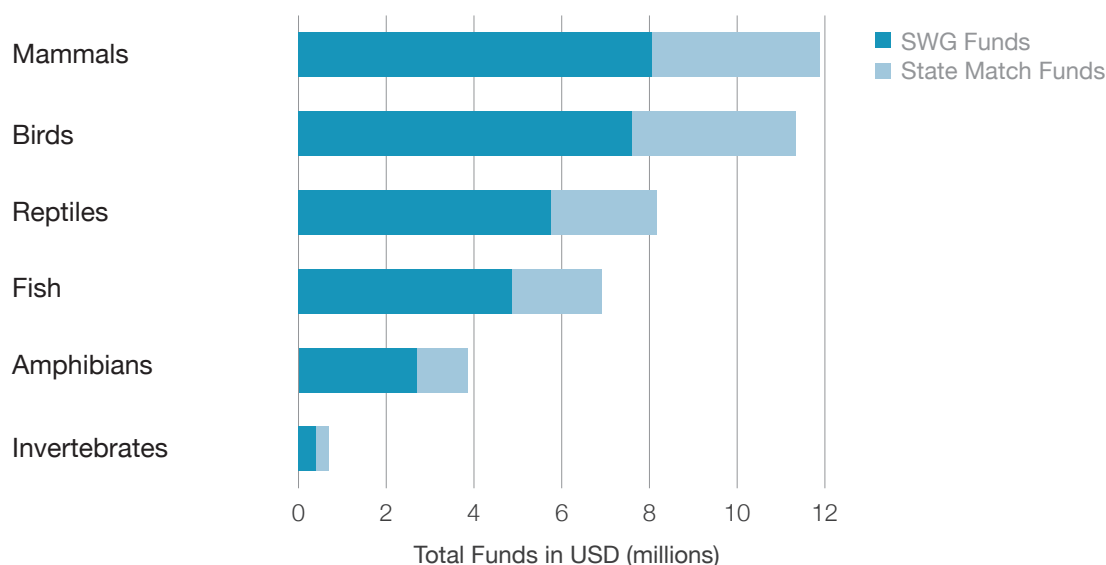
Grant Analysis by Conservation Actions:

- Strong correlation was identified between activities related to the conservation action categories: Wildlife Resource Assessment, Increasing Knowledge to Implement SWAP 2005, and Conservation Planning/Plans. These topics also received the most grants and funding.
- Activities related to the category Adaptive Management received the least funding and number of grants.
- Weak correlation was found between conservation actions addressed in SWG objectives and conservation actions mentioned in the SWAP 2005.

Grant Analysis by Amendments:

The most common amendments included time extensions and incomplete or altered objectives.

Figure 2: SWG and State Match Funding by Taxa



Evaluation Outcome 3 and 4 Summary: *SWAP Implementation Effectiveness, Strengths, and Areas for Improvement*

Key findings for these two evaluation outcomes focus on how effective and successful interviewees perceived the State government was in implementing SWAP 2005 recommended conservation actions, including its human and financial capacity, ability to leverage additional human and financial resources, efficiency, strengths, areas for improvement, opportunities, gaps for effective implementation, and obstacles for implementation. Information was primarily drawn from interviews with CDFW and non-CDFW staff.

Key findings include:

- Interviewees identified collaboration with external partners as both a strength of the SWAP 2005 implementation, as well as an opportunity and area of improvement for the SWAP 2015.
- State government's lack of sufficient staff to support SWAP implementation strongly correlated to a lack of overall funding to support the CDFW and SWAP activities.
- SWAP 2005 had limited utility for day-to-day work and for guiding long-term regional actions.
- Regional interviewees emphasized more difficulties with the grant process than statewide interviewees did; specifically they mentioned a need for a clearer grant application process and feedback on rejected grants.
- Identified challenges to successful implementation of the SWAP 2015 included insufficient human and financial resources, political opposition, policy reform, adverse environmental changes outside the control of CDFW (e.g., climate change), and potential interagency conflicts.
- Additional education and outreach to applicants and partners about the grant process, along with standardized applications, and increased administrative support could improve the grant-making process overall.
- Government agencies were identified as the sector most likely to fund related projects or provide match funding in support of SWAP projects, while NGOs comprised almost half of the potential implementation partners mentioned.

Interviewee Lessons Learned

1. **Clear and prioritized implementation strategies and actions** are key to successful implementation.
2. **Clearly articulating goals, objectives, and metrics** to measure progress could help improve and support State government's ability to regularly evaluate and assess progress.
3. **Accountable, transparent, consistent, and effective grant administration processes** improve overall grant success and implementation.
4. **Increased integration of SWAP** with other statewide and regional plans fosters uptake and successful implementation.
5. **Increased awareness, buy-in, and engagement** of partners and stakeholders increases successful implementation.



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Recommendations and Paths Forward

Recommendations for improving SWAP implementation are organized into three categories:

SWAP 2015 Update

1. **Articulate the SWAP 2015 vision**, conservation goals, objectives, and metrics to measure progress that will guide future implementation.

State Government Operations and SWAP Implementation

2. **Increase, balance, and/or leverage State government human and financial resources** to achieve SWAP goals and objectives.
3. **Develop a SWAP strategic work plan**, identify a program home, and assign staff to champion implementation of SWAP strategies.
4. **Monitor and evaluate changes in ecosystem health and stressors**, as well as progress and effectiveness of SWAP implementation, integration with wildlife conservation efforts throughout the State, and adaptive management.
5. **Strengthen grant administration, application, and reporting processes** to improve grant implementation effectiveness.

Awareness Building, Coordination, and Collaboration

6. **Improve SWAP recognition** to increase buy-in, support, and implementation success.
7. **Increase and leverage human and financial capacity** by fostering coordination and collaboration among agencies and with partners to implement the SWAP.



Dreamstime/Adam Thorn

Next Steps and Path Forward

The most pressing next steps include completing the SWAP 2015 update process, developing SWAP 2015 sector-specific companion plans, and integrating recommendations and findings from this SWAP 2005–2014 evaluation into the planning processes and implementation. Uptake of recommendations from the evaluation is occurring at this time. Internally, the CDFW may integrate recommendations outlined here and elsewhere into its guiding vision document, which will be developed in 2015. Externally, the CDFW has begun engaging other agencies and partners to ensure the SWAP 2015 is complimentary to other planning documents and strategic activities, such as the environmental stewardship priority actions outlined in the Governor's Water Action Plan and activities of the California Biodiversity Council. In addition, the companion plans are a solution CDFW

designed based on CDFW staff and partner feedback, which go beyond the requirements of the 2005 and 2015 SWAPs and will strengthen implementation of the SWAP 2015. The companion plan process and resulting plans will identify and align common priorities, recognize opportunities to leverage human and financial resources, and ultimately map out agreed upon conservation actions to implement with partners. These plans will serve as a way to coordinate and collaborate among agencies and partners, by setting the context and strategic direction for habitat and wildlife conservation and restoration efforts more broadly. The SWAP 2015 and associated companion plans will help inform investments such as Proposition 1 Water Bond funds (2014 Water Bond), Wildlife Conservation Board, and other sources of funding, thus increasing capacity and improving implementation success.