Natural Systems & Climate Change: Strategies for Our Future
Background and Discussion Questions for Attendees
May 20, 2013

Background
The conservation and management of California’s natural resources have a direct impact on climate change and present significant greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction opportunities for state investment. Forests, wetlands, grasslands and agricultural lands, among other resources, are critical to California’s climate solutions, both short-term and long-term. For example, California’s 2008 Scoping Plan to implement the Global Warming Solutions Act (AB 32) identifies a GHG target for forests – to maintain and increase the current carbon sequestration benefits of California’s forests. As the state continues to implement and design new strategies to address climate change, there is opportunity to expand the role of natural resources as a solution to climate change. Doing so would not only help the state reduce GHG emissions, but also help communities become more resilient to the unavoidable impacts of climate change, by protecting air and water quality, fish and wildlife habitat, and many other important benefits.

The day’s program will consist of a series of panel presentations featuring policy makers, educators, stakeholders/landowners, academics and representatives from local governments. Our goal is to increase the knowledge and awareness of key decision makers, agency staff and other stakeholders in California about the important role of natural resource protection as a key component in reducing both greenhouse gases and the risks posed by a changing climate.

Panel One
Making It Real: Climate Action Case Studies
What do climate change actions look like on the ground?

This panel will highlight a number of tangible and innovative case studies across California’s landscape that reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions while also cleaning California’s air and water, supporting local jobs, building resilience to climate change, and many other benefits.
Activities like these can be replicated across the state, in many different land types and scale, illustrating the broader opportunity for communities to address climate change through the conservation and stewardship of our resources.

Discussion Questions:

- How have you integrated considerations of climate change into your operations or work? How might that affect conditions on the land?
- What are the primary drivers/motivations for including conservation actions that address climate change in your management practices? Are there particular incentives?
- What are some of the obstacles you have overcome or continue to face in this regard? Are there technical or research hurdles?
- What existing policies are the most relevant to your efforts? Do you have suggestions about how they could be modified to be more useful? Do you have recommendations for new policies or incentives?
- Are you revising your plans and strategies in light of projected changes in the climate? If so, how and what changes has that produced or are you anticipating? If not, do you have plans to?

Panel Two

Leveraging Nature as a Climate Change Remedy: Opportunities and Needs: Perspectives from advocates and implementers

This panel will discuss how we can effectively incorporate nature to address climate change on a practical level. The conversation will focus on policies opportunities and research and technical needs. It will build on the morning case studies panel and address policy opportunities arising from AB 32 cap and auction proceeds, implementation of SB 375 and the nexus of transportation, land use and climate action. Other issues the panel will address include research and GHG accounting needs and land use planning.

Discussion Questions:

- What are the opportunities within the AB 32 auction proceeds investment plan and other related climate policies to support nature as a mechanism to address climate change? What are information needs associated with these plans to assure we have a robust approach?
- What are some policies, planning processes and programs that address climate change by integrating agriculture and natural resources with transportation and land use?
What are the biggest obstacles in implementing these programs to maximize climate benefits? How do we overcome them?

- How should the state address the need to reduce emissions and simultaneously build greater climate resilience and reduce risk from extreme events in its policies? Should we have an approach to climate change that is similar to the health-in-all-policies facilitated by the Strategic Growth Council?
- Besides the allocation of AB 32 auction proceeds, what new policies or funding might be available for natural resource protection activities to help the state meet its climate change goals?

Panel Three

Leveraging Nature as a Climate Change Remedy: Perspective and responses from elected officials regarding climate change policy and the role of natural resources

This panel of distinguished state legislators will provide their perspectives about the political backdrop and realities of advancing climate policies in the state legislature, as well as their thoughts on the role of natural resource protection to address climate change. The group will explore public policy opportunities and strategies that would help the state meet its emission reduction goals and provide other benefits, including the reduction of climate risks to Californians.

Discussion Questions:

- How has the legislature addressed the intersection of natural resource conservation and climate change?
- What action might you recommend to raise the profile and understanding about the need to incorporate natural resources in climate policies? Where are the greatest opportunities? What are the biggest obstacles?
- How has the arrival of so many new members in the legislature since 2006 when AB 32 was passed affected the current discourse over climate change and the role of natural systems as a mechanism to address the problem?
- When the Public Goods Charge ended, the state lost its world-renowned climate change research program. What action can, should or may be taken in the legislature or in the administration to ensure that California decision makers and planners have the best, most up-to-date scientific to inform their plans and expenditures?
- What is the role of local government in leveraging nature as a climate change remedy?