

California Rangeland Conservation Coalition

Safe Harbor Agreement / Voluntary Local Program

Safe Harbor Agreement:

Landowners can obtain a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service safe harbor agreements by agreeing to enhance or restore habitat for threatened or endangered species. A safe harbor agreement guarantees landowners they won't incur any new restrictions if their actions result in new listed species inhabiting their property. *Very few of these agreements exist in California, but the program has been tremendously successful in other states, specifically Texas.*

Voluntary Local Program:

The California Department of Fish and Game has the ability to authorize voluntary local programs for routine agricultural activities on farms or ranches. This program provides incentives to landowners who create habitat for candidate, threatened or endangered species and wildlife in general under. *This program is the state's closest match to the federal Safe Harbor Agreement and has yet to be used.*

Purposes:

1. To promote ecosystem restoration through the voluntary restoration, enhancement and management of habitat for listed species and species of special concern.
2. To provide regulatory assurances to landowners participating in restoration, enhancement and management activities.
3. To improve habitat for sensitive species while not negatively affecting or compromising the economics of agricultural operations.

Location:

This specific program is available on non-federal property in portions of Butte, Glenn, Shasta and Tehama counties.

Duration:

Landowners will sign-up for an agreement of 10 years with the option to renew. At any point in time, landowners may opt out of the program without penalties or disincentives for withdrawing participation:

Species:

Landowners are eligible for assurances for the following species, based upon the particular practices they implement.

- Valley Elderberry Longhorn Beetle
- California Red-Legged Frog
- Giant Garter Snake
- Swainson's Hawk
- Vernal Pool Crustaceans and Plants (*Conservancy fairy shrimp, vernal pool fairy shrimp, vernal pool tadpole shrimp, Hoover's spurge, slender Orcutt grass, hairy Orcutt grass, Greene's tuctoria, Butte County meadowfoam, and Boggs Lake hedge-hyssop*)
- Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo
- Burrowing Owl
- Tricolored Blackbird
- Indian Valley Brodiaea

Practices:

The everyday management practices and enhancement projects ranchers undertake have the potential to attract listed species. These programs provide assurances to landowners whose practices provide a conservation benefit to the species listed above. Practices include:

- Fencing Riparian Areas
- Creating or Maintaining Stockponds
- Practicing Managed Grazing
- Cross Fencing
- Controlling or Eradicating Invasive Species
- Developing Offsite Watering Sources

There is a wide array of possible restoration and/or enhancement activities available to landowners. Most projects undertaken with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Partners Program, Resource Conservation Districts, California Department of Fish and Game Landowner Incentive Program and conservation organizations (e.g. Audubon) would make landowners eligible for the program.

Administrator:

In order to ensure landowner confidentiality, the California Cattlemen's Association will hold the master permits for the program. Landowners will sign up and communicate with the California Cattlemen's Association. All landowner information will be condensed into a single report before it is submitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the California Department of Fish and Game.

Documentation:

Landowners must allow collection of baseline information on the property to be enrolled under the program. Landowners must work with approved individuals to develop management practices that will benefit covered species. Annually, a short report with photos must be submitted to the California Cattlemen's Association. Every three years a landowner must have an approved individual provide documentation that the agreed to practices and management activities are being fulfilled.

Adjacent landowners:

Adjacent landowners may be covered under this program for their routine and ongoing agricultural activities, without the need for habitat enhancement. If they choose to participate, a baseline determination will be required.

Status:

At this time, the program is under development and comments are solicited from stakeholders on the program and California Department of Fish and Game environmental assessment.

Written Comments:

Mail written comments on the program documentation and the preparation of the California Department of Fish and Game Environmental Assessment to:

California Department of Fish and Game
Habitat Conservation Branch
1416 Ninth Street, Suite 1280
Sacramento, CA 95814.

For further information contact Jennifer Hogan at (916) 651-8711.