

December 19, 2025

Wade Crowfoot, Secretary
California Natural Resources Agency
715 P Street, 20th Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Secretary Wade Crowfoot,

In accordance with the State Leadership Accountability Act (Leadership Accountability), the Department of Fish and Wildlife submits this report on the review of our internal control and monitoring systems for the biennial period ending December 31, 2025.

Should you have any questions please contact Aaron Robertson, Deputy Director, Administration, at (916) 279-8600, aaron.robertson@wildlife.ca.gov.

GOVERNANCE

Mission and Strategic Plan

The Mission of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) is to manage California's diverse fish, wildlife, and plant resources, and the habitats upon which they depend, for their ecological values and for their use and enjoyment by the public.

The CDFW is guided by the Seven Strategic Initiatives listed below:

1. Enhance communications, education, and outreach,
2. Develop statewide land stewardship based upon resource needs,
3. Develop strong water resource management program,
4. Develop/enhance partnerships,
5. Improve regulatory programs,
6. Enhance organizational vitality by focusing on employees and internal systems, and
7. Expand scientific capacity.

The California Fish and Wildlife Strategic Vision is designed to provide the organization with direction and focus to protect the public trust, preserve nature, and make recreation available to the residents of California.

Control Environment

CDFW establishes an effective control environment through strong leadership practices. The California Fish and Wildlife Strategic Vision identifies integrity among its core values. Foundational strategies identified in the Vision include transparent decision making, which develops trust and ensures accountability.

CDFW Leadership models and expects the actions of the Department and its staff to act with integrity in carrying out the mission and operations of the Department while embracing accountability to reinforce these expectations. These expectations are further reinforced through policies and procedures in the Department Operations Manual, Directors Bulletins, and administrative memos.

The Executive Review Committee (ERC) meets weekly to provide oversight on significant operational decisions. The ERC provides careful review and ensures consistency and appropriateness in decision making to support the Department's strategic initiatives and priorities.

The Department is also connected with the Fish and Game Commission and the Wildlife Conservation Board. Both are individual entities that act independently and work collaboratively with the Department and share similar missions to protect and enhance California's unique biodiversity for all Californians.

The Executive Risk Group (ERG) meets quarterly to discuss risks and controls identified in the SLAA report, as well as any new risks that are identified. ERG acts as an advisory panel for risk mitigation and provides guidance to SLAA workgroups tasked with developing risks and controls identified in the SLAA report.

The following internal programmatic efforts provide organizational structure to ensure appropriate oversight and risk control, and maintain documentation of the control systems:

Audits: CDFW's operations are subject to internal review by the Audits Branch (AB). Through internal audits, the AB identifies areas of potential operational risk and makes recommendations to management on mitigating those risks. The AB identifies risk concepts, collects relevant data through the audits, and makes viable recommendations to mitigate the risks. AB follows industry standards provided by the Institute of Internal Auditors that require a minimum level of documentation and analysis to support their conclusions. Recommendations are made based on the findings that address what should have been done by management to mitigate identified risks.

Strategic Engagement, Equity and Partnership: CDFW created the Office of Strategic Engagement, Equity, and Partnerships (SEEP) to build on what was formerly the Office of Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. The Office will work on supporting CDFW in meaningful community and Tribal engagement, build partnerships with various government entities and

philanthropy, and advance internal equity efforts by creating a welcoming workspace where staff of all backgrounds can thrive.

Data and Technology: The Department's Data and Technology Division monitors and controls risk through continuous oversight of data systems and infrastructure. Risk is mitigated through regular system audits, multi-factor authentication procedures, routine software updates, and compliance with external control agency compliance standards, such as California Department of Technology (CDT). In addition, the division conducts an annual scientific data governance review to promote sound data management practices and promote data centralization.

Operations Manual: The Department is currently updating its Operations Manual which consists of more than 500 policies covering a wide variety of subject matter, reflective of the Department's diverse operations. This risk-control project is designed to enhance the accuracy and understandability of each policy, as well as ensure compliance with any standards. Efforts are being made to make the policies more user-friendly and accessible, thereby improving efficiency and consistency.

Training and Development: CDFW maintains an Office of Training and Development (OTD) that oversees the Learning Management System (LMS) for the Department. Through management of the LMS and coordination with CDFW leadership, OTD provides training reminders, assists managers with identifying required training, and tracks completion of mandated training requirements. OTD will notify both the employee and their supervisor if scheduled or mandatory training is not completed.

Information and Communication

Communication is a foundational strategy outlined in the Strategic Vision for CDFW. The Director regularly engages with external stakeholders at various meetings and through media releases.

The Executive Leadership team meets weekly, and the Operations Committee meets monthly to address regional and administrative needs across the Department. The entire leadership team (Joint Leadership Team) meets twice a year to dive deeper into issues and challenges, as well as share information. CDFW regularly convenes working groups with appropriate levels of staff and managers, including subject matter experts to evaluate and respond to issues or challenges as they occur.

With the end of the pandemic and the transition to a hybrid work environment, the Department has renewed focus on the regular meetings described above, including in-person attendance, when and where possible, and it will continue to utilize Live Broadcast Meetings as necessary.

The Department has engaged employees and External Stakeholders in the Service Based Budget (SBB) process and continues to share the progress and outcomes. SBB is intended to increase the Department's transparency regarding how its resources are utilized toward meeting the mission of the Department and measures the gap between the current service levels and mission level of service. The SBB process has been operationalized in the Department and is designed to inform priorities and align decision making with the Department's mission and goals, while ensuring transparency with our stakeholders.

MONITORING

The information included here discusses the entity-wide, continuous process to ensure internal control systems are working as intended. The role of the executive monitoring sponsor includes facilitating and verifying that the Department of Fish and Wildlife monitoring practices are implemented and functioning. The responsibilities as the executive monitoring sponsor(s) have been given to: Chad Dibble, Deputy Director, Wildlife and Fisheries Division.

The CDFW Executive Risk Group (ERG) has performed a key role in ensuring the effectiveness of internal control systems. The ERG acts as an ongoing monitoring advisory group with representatives from across the Department and is facilitated by the Risk and Operations Management Unit (ROM) and the Executive Monitoring Sponsor. During the 2023-2025 period, the ERG met on a quarterly basis. Throughout the two-year period, ROM with each subject matter oversight monitor for updates and to track significant changes to controls, implementation delays, or challenges in implementation. Subject matter oversight monitors also used the ERG meetings to provide input, gather assistance in the development and implementation of controls, and report progress throughout the two-year period. The ROM provided monthly updates to the Executive Monitoring Sponsor regarding SLAA control monitoring actions and risk-related efforts. ROM tracks any identified risks in the two-year cycle to monitor progress and for consideration in future SLAA reports.

Additionally, CDFW has various controls in place to facilitate consistent monitoring and oversight of our operations and to mitigate risks. This includes multi-phase/level approval processes to ensure appropriateness of requests and actions, and persons of appropriate level of responsibility who authorize the request or action. Monitoring and oversight is further supported through documented procedures, including reconciliation, which highlight inconsistencies or errors resulting in a more critical review.

CDFW will continue to evaluate its internal control systems for improvement during the 2025-2027 SLAA cycle, with an emphasis on establishing and tracking key indicators, engagement with appropriate review processes, and comparing results with expectations.

In addition, the Service Based Budget (SBB) process identifies the gaps between the Department's current state of operations and the mission level of operations. The Department is currently operationalizing SBB, and although it was not designed for use as an internal control the process collects data, measures gaps, and yields information which, at a high level, could inform the Department of areas of potential risk and the impact of controls.

RISK ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The following personnel were involved in the Department of Fish and Wildlife risk assessment process: executive management, middle management, front line management, and staff.

The following methods were used to identify risks: brainstorming meetings, ongoing monitoring activities, audit/review results, other/prior risk assessments, questionnaires, consideration of potential fraud, performance metrics, and other.

The following criteria were used to rank risks: likelihood of occurrence, potential impact to mission/goals/objectives, timing of potential event, potential impact of remediation efforts, and tolerance level for the type of risk.

CDFW began the 2025 risk assessment process with an overview of SLAA's purpose and requirements, presented by the Department's Risk and Operations Management Unit (ROM) to the Executive Risk Group (ERG). The overview included a summary of risks reported in the 2023 SLAA report and a review of the SLAA process. The ROM then conducted an electronic survey of senior leadership (Deputy Directors, Regional Managers, and Branch Chiefs) and SLAA Workgroups to gather their input on risks facing the Department. ROM also conducted individual program meetings with relevant Programs for further in-depth information gathering. The senior leadership group solicited input from their managers, supervisors, and staff to inform final survey submissions. The ROM presented the SLAA survey results to the senior leadership team for feedback and final risk recommendations. The ERG met to review and evaluate the items reported as risks in the survey to determine which risks would be included in the SLAA report. The ERG evaluated the risks against criteria, which included the potential to impact CDFW's ability to achieve its mission, the scope of the risk, and available controls to mitigate the risks. ROM also worked with SLAA Workgroups, committees of Subject Matter Experts (SMEs), to create risk statements and develop controls to work towards mitigation or elimination of the risks in the new SLAA cycle.

RISKS AND CONTROLS

Risk: Aged Infrastructure and Deferred Maintenance on CDFW Properties and Lands

CDFW faces significant risks due to its aging infrastructure, repair, and deferred maintenance needs. Deferred maintenance on both buildings and infrastructure puts CDFW at risk of reduced mission capacity as maintenance, demolition, and capital outlay are cost prohibitive in some cases. Compounding deferred maintenance increases the likelihood of emergency contracts and higher long-term costs.

CDFW will have less capacity to adequately manage regional properties, lands meant to serve as functional wildlife habitats, and have insufficient resources to maintain existing housing for employees who are required to live on site, resulting in increased risk and exposure to hazards.

Control: Funding

Utilize remaining funding and seek opportunities for additional funding and resources to address the Department's ongoing deferred maintenance and capital outlay needs.

Control: Strategic Partnerships

Explore options and coordinate with other state agencies to determine ways to reduce costs and streamline processes.

Risk: Reduced Funding and Participation

CDFW has historically relied on dedicated funding sources to help support statewide management of fish, wildlife, and plant resources; however, the growing scope of Departmental work exceeds what traditional funding sources can support. The continued reduction in the public participation of hunting, angling, and shooting sports impacts funding to the Department for law enforcement, research, and other fish and wildlife conservation work. There is a risk that management and recovery of natural resources will be limited if future funding sources are not diversified.

Control: Agency Engagement

Explore opportunities with external partners (including State, Federal, Local, and Tribal governments, non-profit organizations, and community groups) to meaningfully engage all Californians about the resources and programs CDFW has to offer. These efforts also include increasing internal capacity to engage with the public and tribes. Examine current long-term lands management funding strategies that may help positively impact conservation efforts and diversify funding sources.

Control: Community Engagement

CDFW continues to expand its efforts to meaningfully engage the public through enhanced marketing and community outreach that supports hunting, fishing, foraging, shooting sports, and interpretive services. These efforts are part of the Recruit, Retain, Reactivate (R3) initiative, which uses data-driven insights to better understand and address the barriers Californians face when trying to participate in outdoor activities. By focusing on informed decision-making, CDFW is working to evolve outreach strategies, improve access, and better understand the challenges that limit participation.

Risk: Zero Emission Vehicle Compliance

The Department is currently projecting incoming electric vehicles over the next five to ten years and is working with the Department of General Services (DGS) to purchase and install electric vehicle (EV) infrastructure accordingly. There is a risk that the Department will not be able to use our electric fleet due to lack of EV infrastructure. Furthermore, California is banning the sales of fuel-based vehicles effective 2035, thus the Department will need infrastructure to charge all electric vehicles after this date.

In particular, inadequate EV infrastructure in remote areas limits the Department's ability to comply with ZEV mandates. Maintenance issues with existing EV chargers reduce fleet availability and increase reliance on gas-powered vehicles. ZEV mandates complicate alignment with operational needs in some areas of fieldwork, creating safety and efficiency risks.

Control: Infrastructure Planning for Electric Vehicles

Continued focus on five-to-ten-year infrastructure plan for EV. This plan outlines all CDFW sites, the number of electric vehicles per site, and therefore the number of chargers needed per site. The Department reports this plan to the DGS Office of Sustainability (OS) every year via the OS-1 report.

Control: BMB Sustainability Unit

The Business Management Branch (BMB) proposes building a team comprised of three AGPAs and converting the SSMI specialist to a supervisor position. This effort also requires one-time funding for EV Supply Equipment (SE). Costs are currently approximately \$15 million, and are expected to increase each year. The team is currently responsible for completing ten annual compliance reports, with one dedicated position.

Risk: Administrative Staffing and Classification Review

Reductions and vacancy rates in Regional and HQ administrative functions put CDFW at risk of reduced knowledge transfer, overburdening remaining positions, loss of efficiency, and reduced morale. Historic slow growth of administrative positions not keeping pace with other Program growth has overtaxed many administrative units.

Control: Workload Analysis

CDFW will analyze the administrative workload and training to determine what level of support is needed and appropriate. Focus of the analysis will be to:

- Develop appropriate formulas for future program and admin growth.
- Examine retention and backfill data in administrative programs.
- Build BCPs for future years out of the resulting analysis, as-needed.

Control: Operations Manual

CDFW will update Human Resource policy sections to increase Department-wide transparency and consistency. Subject matter experts will collaborate as a workgroup to identify the oldest and most critical policy sections that need review and update, and begin to update and publish high-impact policies.

Control: CDFW Position Classification Review

Identify and review CDFW-specific job classifications for workforce analysis. Prioritize classification revision recommendations to bring CDFW classifications up to industry standards to assist with recruitment and retention of CDFW positions.

Risk: Data and Technology Infrastructure

There is a risk that the CDFW's ability to deliver timely and accurate data-driven insights in multiple program areas will be compromised due to aging data infrastructure, insufficient processing power for advanced data modeling, uncertainty around the growing impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI), and limited bandwidth at some Regional locations. This may lead to reduced operational efficiency, and increased vulnerability to system failures or data loss, particularly as data demands grow.

Control: Identify Processing Power Needs

Determine overall scope of resources needed to address processing power gaps to identify funding and capacity for future areas of work. Analyze program needs with goal of seeking future BCPs to support cloud-based server access, increased processing power, and support large data upgrades.

Control: Workgroup Project Management

Engage with DTD and Program workgroups to manage and push forward large projects to address aging data infrastructure concerns, and evaluate AI opportunities and impacts. Examples may include a State Lands Database, Vehicle Tracking System, and Asset Tracking.

Control: Bandwidth Upgrades

Continue Department-wide bandwidth upgrades to support long-term data and technology initiatives in Regional offices and remote locations.

CONCLUSION

The Department of Fish and Wildlife strives to reduce the risks inherent in our work and accepts the responsibility to continuously improve by addressing newly recognized risks and revising risk mitigation strategies as appropriate. I certify our internal control and monitoring systems are adequate to identify and address current and potential risks facing the organization.

Charlton Bonham, Director

CC: California Legislature [Senate, Assembly]
California State Auditor
California State Library
California State Controller
Director of California Department of Finance
Secretary of California Government Operations Agency