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CONTACTS: Emily Rooney, Ag Council of California (916) 443-4887 x12
Vanessa Martin, The Nature Conservancy (916) 233-6722

Farm and Environmental Groups Find Common Purpose in Improving Regulatory Implementation
California Alliance Issues Joint Recommendations to Agencies

An important collaboration of 25 farm groups, environmental organizations and labor representatives in California have released a joint white paper calling for a set of changes to improve the implementation of environmental permitting processes for voluntary on-farm restoration efforts.

Farmers and ranchers across California voluntarily initiate or participate in environmental conservation, restoration and enhancement projects on their land such as stream bank repairs, riparian and wetland habitat restoration, and many other practices that require permits. Yet farmers, ranchers, and project proponents face a range of challenges in securing permits for these projects, often from multiple agencies. According to a survey conducted by the California Rangeland Conservation Coalition, permitting challenges have caused two thirds of voluntary environmental conservation projects on California farmland to be downsized or cancelled. As a result, California is missing important opportunities to improve private land for the benefit of wildlife habitat, air and water quality, soil health and other positive outcomes.

The white paper, published by the California Roundtable on Agriculture and the Environment (CRAE), is entitled *Permitting Restoration: Helping Agricultural Land Stewards Succeed in Meeting California Regulatory Requirements for Environmental Restoration Projects*. The paper outlines the challenges with obtaining permits for voluntary conservation practices and identifies solutions to the challenges, many of which, at root, are about improving communication among the agencies and between agencies and other stakeholders.

“Farmers and ranchers undertake many projects to improve habitat and restore our land, air and water. They could and would do even more, but lack of communication and sometimes contradictory requirements for environmental restoration projects often stand in the way of completing them.” says Emily Rooney, President of the Agricultural Council of California.

According to Kim Delfino, California Program Director of Defenders of Wildlife, “Restoration of lands and waterways is a win-win-win proposition – benefitting fish and wildlife, the public, and the landowner. These recommendations are not about weakening our basic environmental protection laws. They are about making it easier for landowners to do voluntary projects that go above and beyond what is required by law.”

Interest in solving challenges of regulatory implementation is rising: other ongoing efforts include the work of several county-level Food System Alliances, the State Board of Food and Agriculture’s Ag Vision 2030 process, Sustainable Conservation’s Partners in Restoration Assessment, and the Pacific Organic Residuals Symposium.

CRAE is a broad alliance of farm, labor, and environmental organizations, plus advisors from state and federal agriculture and environmental agencies, that has been working since 2004 to build consensus among agricultural and environmental interests on key issues impacting the food system. *Permitting Restoration* is available online at http://foodsystemalliance.org/crae/category/environmental_regulation/.

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