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California’s New Budget Takes Aim at Extinction to Protect California Biodiversity

July 8, 2019, Sacramento, CA – In the wake of May’s alarming United Nations (UN) report on global extinction, California’s new budget provides important funding to protect the state’s biological diversity against loss by extinction. With Gov. Gavin Newsom’s signature, the 2019-20 state budget allocates more than \$18 million to advance biodiversity-focused projects like seed-banking rare plants and conservation genomics, effective July 1.

“California will not stand by and just watch our world grow more ecologically impoverished by the moment,” said California Secretary for Natural Resources Wade Crowfoot. “California is one of the most diverse places on Earth. We have both the choice and the ability to preserve that legacy.”

Conservation International ranks California as one of the world’s global biodiversity hotspots. With more than 6,500 types of plants native to the state, California has more species of plants than any other state in the U.S., and many of those plants are found nowhere else on Earth. From the coast redwoods to the desert wildflowers, native plants provide habitat, clean air, and food for wildlife and humans alike.

The California Native Plant Society (CNPS), the nation’s largest native plant organization, applauded the Newsom administration’s actions, and thanked Asm. Member Ash Kalra for advancing funding for seed banking California’s rarest plants. CNPS scientists are involved in the California Plant Rescue (CaPR), a consortium of California universities and conservation organizations, working to seed-bank all of the state’s rare and endangered plants. The new budget will help fund CaPR’s efforts going forward.

“We’re racing the clock to save our most imperiled species,” said CNPS Executive Director Dan Gluesenkamp. “We’re inspired by the administration’s vision in advancing these solutions, and we’re ready to get to work.”

The California Department of Food and Agriculture will oversee funds allocated for seed-banking, invasive species management, and other biodiversity projects.

“More than \$3 million of this new budget will go to universities and non-profits around California who are diligently working to save our rare plants,” said CDFA Secretary Karen Ross. “By preserving the seeds of sustenance for tomorrow, we protect both biodiversity and our working lands for all humankind.”

Seed banking is a practical insurance policy against extinction. By collecting and storing the seeds of trees, wildflowers, succulents, and other plants, scientists and policy makers can work together to ensure rare species avoid extinction. Here’s how it works: Scientists conduct expeditions to wild areas

throughout California—sometimes in the most remote corners of the state—to find the rarest plants. They carefully collect seeds, using scientific protocols for wild populations. They clean and properly record the seeds, then send them for cold storage safe-keeping in seed banks located in California and in the federal facility in Colorado. The process is arduous but straightforward. Thus far, the CaPR has secured more than 50 percent of the state’s rare plants.

Now, California aims to reach an important immediate goal: seed-bank 75 percent of the state’s rare plants by end of 2020, a target that aligns with the UN Global Conservation Strategy for Plants and the UN Convention on Biological Diversity.

“While some countries are struggling to meet the goals of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, California will be showing the world that it can be done,” added Asm. Ash Kalra (D-San Jose), who advocated to expand the administration’s seed banking proposal.

Seed banking is an ancient tool for saving life, while conservation genomics is a 21st century approach to understanding how threatened plant and animal populations respond to changes in climate and their habitats. The budget supports the scientists and students involved in the UC Conservation Genomics Consortium, who are collecting, mapping, and analyzing the very DNA of California’s biodiversity. Now, they will be able to create a publicly available landscape genomics database that quantifies the spatial distribution of genetic diversity, and analyze maps for numerous threatened and endangered to ensure we have the understanding to most effectively sustain California’s biodiversity. Importantly, conservation genomics funding will also employ climate modeling to consider how climate change may shape the future of California’s diverse life.

“Seed-banking and conservation genomics are two powerful conservation tools, one ancient and one ultra-modern, that allow a new generation of Californians to save the living diversity of this wonderful state” added Gluesenkamp.

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About the California Native Plant Society:

The California Native Plant Society is a statewide organization that advances the understanding, appreciation, and protection of California’s native plants and habitats through science, education, horticulture, and conservation. CNPS has more than 50,000 fans and supporters, and 35 chapters promoting its mission throughout California and Baja, California.