

SECRETARIAL MEMORANDUM

TO: Leaders of the Agencies' Conservancies, Departments, Divisions, and Boards

FROM: Wade Crowfoot, Secretary, Natural Resources Agency
Yana Garcia, Secretary, California Environmental Protection Agency

SUBJECT: Institutionalizing Cutting Green Tape Improvements

DATE: February 27, 2026

Thank you for your groundbreaking work over the last five years accelerating environmental restoration and conservation across California. Together we've blazed a new path, transforming how we engage, permit, and fund environmental projects to better combat the twin threats of biodiversity loss and climate change. Thanks to your work, hundreds of important projects are now helping nature thrive across our state. And now, there is more we can do.

Our Progress

Five years ago, Governor Newsom issued a [Nature Based Solutions Executive Order](#) to "increase the pace and scale of environmental restoration and land management efforts by streamlining the State's process to approve and facilitate these projects." Shortly after, a report called [Cutting Green Tape: Regulatory Efficiencies for a Resilient Environment](#) identified specific ways to deliver restoration and stewardship projects more efficiently and cost effectively. In response Departments, Conservancies, Commissions, and Boards transformed their processes.

Successful Cutting Green Tape improvements are all around us:

- The State Legislature passed a Statutory Exemption for Restoration Projects (SERP), which the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) operationalized to expedite compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for 83 habitat restoration or enhancement projects as of January 2026. Another state law now consolidates five permits at CDFW into one Restoration Management Permit – reducing processing time to an average of less than 3 months.
- The State Water Resources Control Board issued a Statewide Restoration General Order (SRGO) to streamline compliance for large restoration projects. The SRGO enables sediment removal, fish passage, water conservation, and riparian restoration—removing over 100,000 cubic yards of sediment each year and delivering broad environmental benefits. In 2025, it saved applicants an average of \$25,730 and reduced processing time by 5.5 months per project.

- The Coastal Commission created Public Works Plans (PWP) to streamline permitting for large, phased, or multi-jurisdictional public projects—providing an alternative to project-by-project review and saving time and money. As of January 2026, completed PWPs covering more than 350,000 acres of wildfire resilience and forest restoration, tailored to local communities and habitats. In 2025, the Commission also waived coastal permit requirements for 84 acres of restoration projects across eight counties.
- The Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB), State Coastal Conservancy (SCC), and CDFW now offer a rolling application process for project applicants at any time of year and enable a simple pre-application before requiring longer, more detailed project applications. Just this past calendar year, WCB awarded over \$207m for 70 projects, leveraging an additional \$131m in cost share under these improvements. In that same timeframe, SCC authorized over \$55m in new grants to over 50 projects to protect and restore our coast, improve climate resilience, prevent catastrophic wildfires, and expand public access. CDFW implemented a simplified, ongoing application process in 2023 and to date has awarded approximately \$315m in statewide restoration funding to 177 projects.

Cutting the Green Tape’s effectiveness is compelling. These improvements are saving valuable time to deliver projects and limiting costs that can be redeployed to expand environmental restoration and enhancement. CDFW’s new and improved permitting and environmental review processes, for example, have supported the enhancement of approximately 320,000 acres enhanced, connected roughly 8.5 million acres, and enhanced 740 miles of streams, saving those projects an estimated \$12.5 million that can be invested in more projects. These are remarkable outcomes.

The Path Forward

Cutting Green Tape’s importance has never been clearer. As we confront worsening climate change impacts and mounting environmental challenges, it is crucial to deliver environmental protection and restoration as effectively as possible. Doing so enables us to safeguard California’s extraordinary biodiversity, protect our communities from climate impacts, and restore and maintain the health of our natural systems, which is essential to our state’s prosperity and future.

Now it is time to embed the work of Cutting Green Tape into all facets of our organizations. To do so, we provide the following direction to our Agencies’ boards, commissions, conservancies:

1. **Make existing Cutting Green Tape improvements permanent standard practice.** Entities will embed Cutting Green Tape principles into standard workflows to simplify processes, eliminate redundancies, improve coordination, and accelerate delivery of beneficial projects. These improved processes will be institutionalized broadly across divisions within each organization, as well as geographically across the state in all regions and districts. All entities within the Natural Resources Agency will establish these improvements to habitat restoration permitting and funding processes, which often were introduced as pilots, as standard practices across their organizations.
2. **Continue to simplify funding pathways.** All entities within CNRA that allocate state funding for restoration, conservation and stewardship will implement requirements and recommended practices identified in the agency guidance document [“Delivering a Successful Climate Bond.”](#) These improvements enable our external partners to more efficiently and effectively access and

utilize state funding to achieve environmental priorities. While these practices are identified for climate bond programs, they apply across environmental funding programs and should be implemented into all funding programs to the extent possible. The State Water Board's funding guidelines, which are established through a Board hearing and adoption process, include many of the same practices recommended by CNRA. The Board shall continue its simplified funding process which allows applicants to submit a single application for access to all applicable State and federal funding programs the State Water Board administers.

3. **Find new ways to improve our regulatory processes.** All entities within the Agency should continue to improve their processes, learning from what's working elsewhere, clarifying processes, applying standard templates, and aligning with the streamlined processes used by other agencies. Bay Conservation and Development Commission, Coastal Commission, CAL FIRE, CDFW, and the Water Boards will continue to expand and enhance existing Cutting Green Tape pathways. CNRA commits to work with Central Valley Flood Protection Board and State Historic Preservation Office to help improve processes that these entities oversee to expedite delivery of environmental improvement projects.
4. **Move projects forward while managing risk and temporary impacts:** Amidst intensifying environmental threats, inaction is not an option. We must deliver environmental restoration and stewardship across our landscapes and ecosystems faster and more effectively. Agency decisionmakers and staff are directed to move restoration forward as quickly as possible and appropriate, while managing risks to the extent possible.
 - Cutting Green Tape improvements provide clear, science-based pathways to advance important restoration projects with appropriate safeguards. We cannot let limited information gaps or the existence of some amount of risk prevent us from moving forward on important projects.
 - Projects should focus on the durable, lasting environmental benefits and should not be delayed, burdened, or denied because of temporary impacts or to guard against every possible long-term uncertainty.
5. **Uphold early, often, and meaningful tribal consultation.** All entities within the Natural Resources Agency and the California Environmental Protection Agency will execute early, often, and meaningful tribal consultation as outlined in the [CNRA Tribal Consultation Policy](#) and the [CalEPA Tribal Consultation Policy](#), respectively, for environmental restoration and stewardship projects. These consultations and engagements should respect tribal sovereignty and ensure tribes have the opportunity to fully participate in and shape projects. Simply put, making our processes more efficient cannot come at the expense of meaningful consultation with our tribal partners. Our offices commit to providing support, guidance, and examples on how to implement this important work.
6. **Assess opportunities to create dedicated restoration teams.** CDFW (Cutting Green Tape team) and NOAA (Restoration Center) have created internal teams within each organization to accelerate restoration projects. These units serve as in-house experts to train agency staff and external partners on ways to improve project delivery and can serve as "one-stop shop" for permitting. Other entities should explore if and how developing internal expertise similar to these models could benefit their organizations, as resources allow. However, dedicated restoration teams

cannot diminish institutionalizing improvements across the breadth of each organization. Rather, restoration teams can help to institutionalize new practices for agency wide use.

7. **Utilize Cutting Green Tape improvements in mitigation projects.** Effective environmental mitigation is an important dimension of environmental restoration and stewardship. Delivering high-quality mitigation projects enables important environmental restoration that addresses unavoidable impacts from housing, clean energy projects, and other needed infrastructure across the state. California Department of Fish and Wildlife will utilize Cutting Green Tape pathways to advance mitigation projects if those projects provide net uplift beyond baseline, consistent with each pathway's applicable legal authorities. These projects can provide additional multiple benefits including implementing nature-based solutions, climate resilience and infrastructure.
8. **Improve coordination with other entities that have overlapping regulatory oversight or program delivery.** Across our agencies, we have coordinated across regulatory entities to avoid duplication and conflicting requirements, sync permitting timelines, and improve communication among staff permitting the same project. We are also utilizing the Climate Bond to coordinate similar or complementary funding programs to enable project applicants to utilize different funding programs. We must build on this progress to institutionalize more efficient coordination across our entities.

Your leadership is critical to achieving these goals. Please submit a progress report on your department's implementation of these actions no later than September 1, 2026. Madeline Drake, Assistant Secretary for Biodiversity and Habitat, will serve as the lead point of contact and will work directly with your teams to ensure timely and effective execution. CNRA will actively track outcomes and assess how these changes accelerate restoration delivery, making adjustments as needed to strengthen outcomes.

Thank you for driving this work forward. Your continued commitment to protecting and restoring California's ecosystems has never been more important. We are proud of our progress with more important work ahead. Together, we will institutionalize these practices and deliver restoration at the pace and scale our state urgently needs.