

SCB Selects Initial Policy Priorities for 2007

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John M. Fitzgerald

Policy Director

Society for Conservation Biology

The Board of Governors of the Society for Conservation Biology selected the following issue areas as initial areas of emphasis for 2007 at the Board Meeting 25 February 2007. These are intended to be mutually supporting, rather than simply separate, parallel tracks. Our involvement in them may grow at different rates, depending in part on the timing and demands of decision-makers and the resources of the SCB.

The Strategic plan and the Board of Governors anticipate that each Section will submit to the Policy Committee and Policy Director a proposed policy plan by May 15th, 2007. In light of its policy meeting May 24th, the North America Section will submit its draft plan on June 15th. This schedule will allow the Section and overall SCB policy plans to compliment each other as the revised SCB plan is presented to the Board meeting in Port Elizabeth, South Africa (SCB Annual Meeting 2007).

Members of SCB are encouraged to contact John Fitzgerald, Policy Director, to offer their time, ideas, papers, and other support:

jfitzgerald@conbio.org

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A) Climate Change -- State, Federal and International energy and greenhouse gas policies can reduce the forces driving climate change and provide massive funding for biological research and conservation and for the restoration of ecosystems. SCB and its allies will recommend that the U.S. and other governments ask the full range of questions and consider the available data and options for action across the relevant disciplines while formulating policies on climate change and include conservation biology throughout the range of responses to climate change.

Timing:

Cities and states in the United States are making commitments to reduce greenhouse gases. Committees in Congress have begun holding hearings and are proceeding with the intention of approving bills in Committees in the House by June of 2007.

In addition to a tighter cap and trade system, the EU is considering increased GHG taxes and import tariffs to reflect costs avoided by exporters without comparable controls.

The Secretary General of the UNFCCC and the UK Government are pressing for a May 2007 meeting of the G8+5 to adopt the outline for a post-Kyoto, post-2012 regime of cap and trade provisions. The Conference of the Parties does not meet until late in 2007 and may not make decisions on post Kyoto plans until after that.

Issues:

How to fully incorporate biological functions and restoration into the climate change control legal and economic program:

a) How to ensure that the risks, costs, and benefits of energy and agricultural demand and supply options most beneficial to conservation of living natural resources are well considered by major decision-makers. For example, to what extent could pollution taxes and tariffs discourage waste and pollution and fund restorative work in conservation biology to complement caps? How can we best estimate or verify GHG and ecosystem baselines and changes in them for GHG credits or support via spending or tax incentives?

b) How to highlight and set examples to create the best process for informing government and non-government decision-makers going forward and ensure the best adaptive management regimes are implemented.

B) Re-enforcing the sciences in the Federal decision-making and environmental assessment processes. The past six years have seen much disregard for science and so much abuse of scientific and conservation whistleblowers. Oversight committees have begun reviewing these abuses and considering changes to correct them. SCB has opportunities to pursue remedies that affect more than one agency by continuing its current interest in the Endangered Species Act and the Marine Mammal Protection Act, and other laws built around the science of conservation biology and environmental assessment requirements. This will be done through the Endangered Species Coalition, and other formal and informal coalitions, or directly.

Timing:

The US Congress is in the midst of a series of hearings on the suppression of science. These are likely to last well into the spring with legislation following early on, as in the Whistle-blower Protection Act amendments in House Government Oversight and Reform Committee. Similar Senate legislation is narrower. Conference committee on that issue may be this summer or fall.

Corporate whistleblower protection and risk disclosure standards, often required by securities law, are less mature but evolving and the potential is large in the area of requirements to assess and disclose environmental risks.

Treaty, UN and Multilateral Development Bank environmental assessment and disclosure procedures are less robust in practice than U.S. and European standards.

Issues:

The range of general new remedies is fairly well set while natural resource law- specific remedies are less well developed.

1) How to improve and expand whistleblower protection and remedies for decisions determined to be undermined by the suppression of science in Federally funded operations and research; and

2) How to better prioritize, fund, protect and integrate research, analysis and assessments in natural resource and environmental regulatory decisions.

C) Empowering Key International Treaties such as the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species. The CITES COP occurs in June 2007 and may consider strengthening the scientific and legal standards for export permits. IMOSEB is a related proposal for an independent source of scientific information. CBD ratification could be considered again.

SCB's initial emphasis will be on the positions taken by the North American delegations and problems affecting North America but is expected to expand from there.

CITES: (www.cites.org/eng/cop/14/raw_docs.shtml)

Timetable:

COP 14, The Hague (Netherlands), 3-15 June 2007

Issues - As is often the case in international conventions, a key tension is between achieving the near consensus needed to take action together and the loss at rapid rates of individual species numbers and habitat in the meantime. There is some progress being made at identifying nations without legislation to enforce and cutting off trade with them in listed species, but less being made concerning those failing to enforce existing domestic laws. Among the issues that will be addressed at the COP are proposals on overall enforcement assistance, and

- by Mexico and Canada for a process to improve the standards for making the Non-Detriment Findings necessary to trade in listed species;
- by the E.U. on how to inspect and identify listed wood species from in imports and exports; and
- from Indonesia on how to dispose of confiscated items.

The pace of CITES work on listing and enforcing controls on such species as Mahogany, Ramin and others leaves considerable work to be done in the major final markets such as U.S., EU, and Japan and re-exporters such as China and Malaysia (see Biological Security, below).

CBD - <https://biodiv.org/convention/cops.shtml>

Next COP – June, 2008, Bonn, Germany

Issues -- As always, the COP will consider are many issues under the shadow of the realization that many nations have not completed the steps required of them by the CBD and that it is not integrated with the forces reducing biological diversity let alone controlling them.

D) Biological Security – Controlling the importation of invasive species and illegally harvested plants and animals. This issue is given traction by the impending June deadline for fast-track consideration of free trade agreements. The International Conservation Caucus in Congress has made improving control over illegal logging and trade in its products one of its priorities. Combining inspection and certification improvements for illegally harvested wood and invasive species will enhance efficiency as well.

Issues:

What new environmental elements, if any, will be included in Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) and “Fast Track” Legislation (requiring up or down votes on FTAs without amendments)?

How can we effectively halt the importation of illegally harvested plants (G8 & GLOBE issue #2, after climate and before Millennium Ecosystem Assessment)? Several conservation groups and Members of Congress are working on this issue actively now¹).

How to use help recently reorganized agencies and customs agents play a stronger role in controlling invasive species.

Timetable:

U.S.: Current Fast Track authority expires at the end of June. Ways and Means and Finance Committee need workable language for environmental elements well before then. The second and third issues could be addressed in a package renewing and conditioning fast track authority.

Global: G8 to consider importation of illegally harvested wood in June or July.

E) Leveraging Investments and Spending – Controlling our Environmental Footprint. SCB could follow its carbon offset precedent and its strategic policy plan by working with its subgroups, foundation partners and others such as the UNEP-Finance Initiative and UN Principles for Responsible Investment to make conservation science more accessible to makers of investment and procurement policies and decisions.

Issues:

- 1) What are the most accessible and effective conservation-enhancing investment and spending options for those groups, jurisdictions, and individuals?
- 2) How best can SCB inform those making investment decisions concerning the impacts on biodiversity of their spending and investment choices?
- 3) How can environmentally conscious investors affect the policy process more effectively?
- 4) How can employees, both public and private, be given more environmentally friendly retirement investment options?

Timing: (In this section, timing depends more on the venue or group.)

Venues/organizations:

UNEP-FI Biodiversity work stream

There are a number of other non-profit associations and organizations active in this area.

Other Issues

The Board confirmed that sections and other groups within SCB can pursue additional issues as well as helping with these, as long as they check in advance concerning new policy initiatives with the Policy Director and Policy Committee of the Board.

Capacity Building

The Policy Director will work to build the capacity of SCB groups and members to engage in the policy arena in general. He will host two policy sessions at the annual meeting in South Africa in the summer of 2007 and co-direct a policy training session for the Smith Fellows in January 2008 in Washington, D.C. with Smith Program Director, Dr. Michael Dombeck, former Chief of the U.S. Forest Service.