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# Assembly California Legislature



**JARED HUFFMAN**  
ASSEMBLYMEMBER, SIXTH DISTRICT

**COMMITTEES**  
CHAIR, ENVIRONMENTAL  
SAFETY AND TOXIC MATERIALS  
APPROPRIATIONS  
UTILITIES AND COMMERCE  
WATER, PARKS AND WILDLIFE

May 7, 2007

Honorable Ira Ruskin, Chair  
Budget Subcommittee 3  
State Capitol, Room 3123  
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Allocations for funds for DFG game warden recruitment, retention and compensation

Dear Assemblymember Ruskin:

We are writing to express our strong support for increased compensation for Game Wardens employed by the Department of Fish and Game (DFG). Specifically we are asking Assembly Budget Sub-committee Three to address the long standing and deepening salary disparity between Game Wardens and other deserving state law enforcement officers. DFG wardens are highly educated and trained law enforcement officers who focus their efforts on illegal activities that adversely affect the state's wildlife and natural resources.

Over 1,100 miles of coast, 220,000 square miles of Ocean, and 159,000 square miles of California land mass are safeguarded by a mere 200 field Game Wardens. As an example of other states' priority on preservation and protection of natural resources; Florida has 750 and Texas has 500 Game Wardens.

Specific to our districts are issues dealing with coastal waters and the preservation of marine life and ecosystems along California's world renowned beaches. Underground trade in wildlife flourishes in California; specifically abalone and sturgeon are illegally captured and sold without ever leaving California borders. In June 2006 DFG Wardens operated two vehicle checkpoints on Highway 128 in Mendocino County and Highway 1 in Sonoma County inspecting a total of 552 vehicles. Wardens issued a total of 107 citations, and confiscated 144 illegal abalone. More recently, on April 22, 2007, DFG conducted another abalone checkpoint on Highway 20 in Sonoma County. Despite wide publicity in the days prior to the operation, compliance was dismal. Of 145 vehicles inspected, 43 citations were issued and 160 illegal abalone were seized. Imagine if our perpetually unstaffed DFG ocean vessels had been out on patrol instead of sitting in port?

Game Wardens are so few and far between that they must drive hundreds of miles to assist each other, leaving their own areas unprotected against poachers.



A problem that spans the entire force of DFG Wardens is particularly poignant along California's coast; low wages and the high cost of living make it difficult for DFG to recruit or keep marine Wardens. As a result, when Wardens board a vessel, they mostly do so with a single boarding officer who must go alone on the fishing boat to check holds and compartments. These Wardens must board boats, in often rough waters – with an unknown compliment of weapons on the potentially offending boat (handguns, rifles, gaffs, knives) with fisherman who may be confrontational at the prospect of being cited for illegal activities (i.e., shooting at sea lions, illegal abalone poaching, drug running).

How can we, as legislators and residents of California ask these men and women to protect our marine environment, investigate illegal commercial fishing activities and address homeland security issues at the peril of their own lives? The severely inadequate wages offered to these sworn peace officers is creating inherently dangerous situations in addition to undermining the effectiveness of DFG progress of enforcement activities.

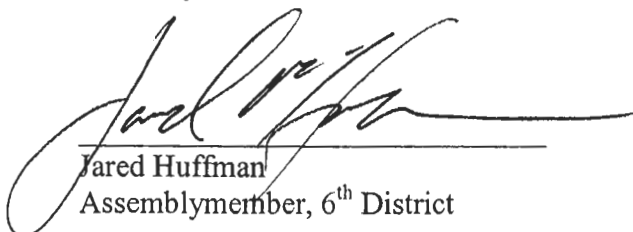
California has long been a leader in environmental and resource protection. An illustration of this is the recent adoption of 29 new Marine Protected Areas (MPA), representing approximately 204 square miles (or approximately 18 percent) of state waters with 85 square miles designated as no-take state marine reserves.

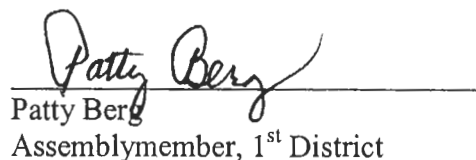
California is asking a lot from DFG. It is, among other things, the lead agency charged with managing the state's marine resources, and will soon be responsible for implementing the Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA) program, including all enforcement and research and monitoring activities. These 29 new MPAs represent productive, biologically diverse marine environments. Habitats range from the muddy bottom seafloor to deep marine canyons and rocky nearshore reefs to estuarine eelgrass beds, open waters and sandy beaches. Coho salmon, steelhead, sea otters, sea lions, seals, kelp, Dungeness crab, lingcod and other groundfish, nearshore rockfish, squid, gray whales, common murre, cormorants, and brown pelicans calls this ecosystem home.

The state must have the resources to effectively recruit, retain and compensate the DFG Wardens necessary to implement this new MLPA program. For nearly 15 years DFG has sought to bring the salaries of its law enforcement officers into parity with salaries for comparable law enforcement positions. It's time to fix this longstanding problem.

California's reduced Game Warden force has had a direct negative impact upon our fisheries, wildlife, water quality, public safety, and a healthy outdoor heritage. For these reasons, we strongly urge you to devote the budget monies necessary to resolve the issues of Game Warden retention, recruitment and compensation.

Sincerely,

  
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Jared Huffman  
Assemblymember, 6<sup>th</sup> District

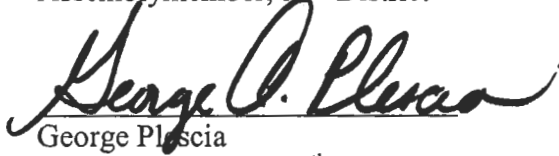
  
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Patty Berg  
Assemblymember, 1<sup>st</sup> District




Fiona Ma  
Assemblymember, 12<sup>th</sup> District



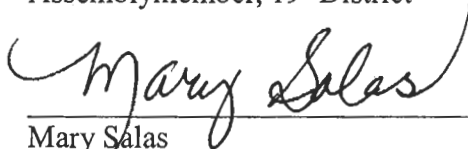
Ted Lieu  
Assemblymember, 53<sup>rd</sup> District



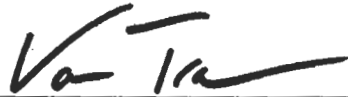
George Plecia  
Assemblymember, 75<sup>th</sup> District



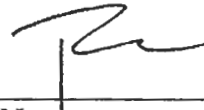
Gene Mullin  
Assemblymember, 19<sup>th</sup> District



Mary Salas  
Assemblymember, 79<sup>th</sup> District



Van Tran  
Assemblymember, 68<sup>th</sup> District



Pedro Nava  
Assemblymember, 35<sup>th</sup> District



Betty Karnette  
Assemblymember, 54<sup>th</sup> District



Mimi Walters  
Assemblymember, 73<sup>rd</sup> District



Lori Saldaña  
Assemblymember, 76<sup>th</sup> District

cc: Assemblymember Sam Blakeslee  
Assemblymember Julia Brownley  
Assemblymember Noreen Evans  
Assemblymember Dave Jones  
Assemblymember Jim Silva