

## *The California Nature Conservancy California Watch Program*

“We believe in the power of information,” a leader of The California Nature Conservancy wrote in a letter explaining the Conservancy’s *California Watch* program. Committed to preserving biodiversity in California, The Nature Conservancy was uniquely positioned to act as an intermediary among government agencies, businesses and interest groups when it first approached FowlerHoffman. But The Conservancy needed creative strategies and hands-on assistance to implement its vision of engaging state and local decision makers in a dialogue aimed at protecting biodiversity.

FowlerHoffman developed a unique plan for The Nature Conservancy. It was designed not only to help The Conservancy disseminate its message, but also to build bridges of mutual interest among traditional rivals and to establish a climate for change. The *California Watch* program was designed to create an informal community of interest with The Conservancy at the center.

FowlerHoffman researched and developed an exhaustive database — of individual business and agriculture leaders, policy analysts, elected and appointed officials, environmental advocates, academics and members of the media — which formed the core of *California Watch*. An ongoing series of mailings would build a common knowledge base among participants and form the infrastructure of the communications network.

Early mailings used reports and background materials by respected authorities to introduce the concept of biodiversity and the potential compatibility between environmental preservation and meeting human needs. To assure that *California Watch* truly served its audience as well as its sponsor, FowlerHoffman conducted a phone survey after the first few mailings, asking participants what they wanted and needed from the program. Participants responded, “Examples of effective strategies on which we can model our own action.”

FowlerHoffman suggested that The Nature Conservancy expand the *California Watch* program to become a statewide information exchange. By reporting on preservation programs across the



state, the *California Watch Information Exchange* program not only exposed decision makers to the concept of biodiversity, it helped overcome the isolation and information gaps between groups whose activities affect not only the environment but, often, each other.

FowlerHoffman launched the program's second year by introducing the new *Exchange* in mailings that highlighted successful Conservancy projects and asked recipients for reports on their own successful preservation projects. Providing material that later became the centerpiece of two extensive brochures, respondents described more than 50 projects, ranging from small

Single-species preservation efforts to multi-county, long-term habitat protection programs. Equally important, these mailings established the practice of ongoing information sharing among *Exchange* participants.

As meticulously planned as the strategy and as carefully managed as the database, the *California Watch Information Exchange* mailings were handsomely executed on recycled papers illustrated with striking, evocative renderings of endangered or threatened native California animals and habitats. Each mailing provided critical information, compelling examples and valuable resources.

The *California Watch* program established the value of FowlerHoffman's concept of a two-way VIP communications program. State and municipal officials turned to The California Nature Conservancy—and each other—for information and direction about preserving biodiversity. Across the state, many more leaders now assess policies with an eye toward their impact on biodiversity and with more sophisticated understanding. Among participants in the *California Watch* program, the question is no longer whether to preserve biodiversity in California, but how.