

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

**Amidst Heavy Population Declines, California Still Lacks Burrowing Owl Conservation Strategy**

Burrowing Owl Conservation Network organizes petition to highlight statewide burrowing owl population declines and urges California to develop a comprehensive strategy that is 15 years overdue.

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**Brentwood, CA (December 9, 2010)** – The Western Burrowing Owl has been declining since the 1940s and over the last 3 decades has been witnessing steep declines in California primarily due to habitat loss and control of ground excavating mammals such as squirrels. In 1995, the California Department of Fish and Game released the Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation and officially recognized the need for a range-wide conservation strategy. However, the State of California and the Department of Fish and Game have failed to produce a Comprehensive Conservation Strategy as recommended by their own scientists and biologists, and as requested by conservation organizations, environmental scientists and concerned individuals throughout North America.

Unfortunately, during the last 15 years the population has continued to plummet in the San Francisco Bay Area and more recently in the Imperial Valley where 70-percent of California's burrowing owls reside and the population was considered invulnerable. New surveys have shown a 27-percent drop in the number of breeding burrowing owls in the Imperial Valley, and a 28-percent drop in the San Francisco Bay Area. These declines ride on the heels of a more than 50-percent burrowing owl population decline in the San Francisco Bay Area and parts of Central California between 1983 and 1993.

In a 2003 report by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, breeding Burrowing Owls were extirpated during the last 10-15 years from multiple areas in California, including Napa, Marin, San Francisco, Santa Cruz, and Ventura counties, and coastal San Luis Obispo county and Coachella Valley. Few individuals were observed in Santa Barbara, Orange, coastal Monterey, and San Mateo counties, while the last reported breeding pair in Sonoma occurred in 1986.

"Burrowing owls are a state, federal and internationally protected species, a component of naturally functioning ecosystems, a resource that belongs to the People of California and the United States, and is obliged for protections both legally and morally," said Scott Artis, Founding Director of the Burrowing Owl Conservation Network. "It's critical that we get the word out in California and North America to help ensure protections for burrowing owls across historic habitats and provide safeguards to local, regional, and statewide populations before they disappear from even more counties."

The Burrowing Owl Conservation Network is spearheading this petition for the immediate development, release for public comment and implementation of a Comprehensive Conservation Strategy for Burrowing Owls that will facilitate the maintenance of viable burrowing owl populations in California, help prevent the further elimination of breeding pairs and population declines across the state, and

form a solid foundation by which regional and statewide population recovery and habitat protection can be achieved.

Conservation organizations, birding groups, and institutions are encouraged to sign on at the organizational level, provide assistance in promoting the need for a burrowing owl conservation strategy in California and gather signatures from their constituents. An official letter with all signatures will be hand-delivered to state officials in Sacramento, CA.

The petition and applicable information can be found at  
<http://burrowingowlconservation.org/CAPetition.html> or signed online via Facebook at  
<http://www.causes.com/causes/529014>

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*Burrowing Owl Conservation Network is a national non-profit charitable organization that advocates for the protection and restoration of the Western Burrowing Owl and promotes the preservation and careful management of habitat to prevent loss, foster healthy populations, and maintain intact natural communities for an ecologically sound future. For information visit: [www.burrowingowlconservation.org](http://www.burrowingowlconservation.org).*