

Scientific Collecting Permits

A Scientific Collecting Permit (SCP) issued by the Department of Fish and Game (DFG) is required to take, collect, capture, mark or salvage mammals, birds (and their nests and eggs), reptiles, amphibians, fish and invertebrates for scientific, educational and non-commercial propagation purposes. Most SCP applicants are academics, aquariums, schools and individuals from consulting or scientific collecting companies that submit more than 1,000 SCPs each year. Many of the applications are incomplete, lacking critical information staff must have to thoroughly review and appropriately approve or deny the application. The potential for commercialization of SCPs has been an ongoing concern.

Currently, it takes an average of seven months to complete the review and approval process. This is not due solely to the volume and incompleteness of applications. The lack of staffing resources and an integrated database contribute greatly to the lengthy review process. At this time, the fee for an SCP is not adequate to reimburse or support the staff time necessary for permit review, and the development and maintenance of a database. Additionally, SCPs are required for all marine species collection, including those species in marine protected areas (MPAs). MPAs are discrete geographic marine or estuarine areas established to protect or conserve marine life and habitat. Because the state is currently in the process of redesigning its MPAs, formal guidelines have yet to be developed to identify the species and define the scientific qualifications for SCPs within these areas. Also, DFG game wardens are experiencing increasing law enforcement demands from contacts with scientific collectors. Investigations into permit compliance are challenging and time consuming.

It has been suggested that the amount and diversity of scientific collection occurring in California has become the equivalent of another commercial fishery, and should be treated as such. Many permit holders have turned the collection of species for scientific purposes into a money-making enterprise justifying the monitoring of collection activities and enforcement of the parameters of each permit. It also is believed the criteria for receiving a permit should be tightened resulting in fewer approved applications.

On the other hand, the delays in and already restrictive nature of obtaining a SCP are bemoaned by the academic community as an impediment to timely scientific study, and the businesses that profit from scientific collection indicate a loss of income. Both groups call for a more streamlined review process and fewer constraints for permit approval.

DFG is committed to improving the SCP process. Web-based application packages are now available and an internal study of its SCP process has resulted in the consideration of establishing a single point of contact to conduct the initial review of all SCPs. This contact would allow for the immediate rejection of applications that are not complete, and potential regulation amendments to ensure the fees and restrictions imposed for obtaining a SCP are consistent with staffing needs and the high demand for these permits is consistent with resource protection work.