

Date of Hearing: May 7, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

AB 1426 (Kalra) – As Amended April 10, 2025

Policy Committee:	Water, Parks and Wildlife	Vote:	10 - 2
	Natural Resources		12 - 1

Urgency: No State Mandated Local Program: No Reimbursable: No

SUMMARY:

This bill establishes the Diablo Range Conservation Program Act to protect, preserve, and restore the Diablo Range's natural, cultural, and physical resources through the acquisition, restoration, and management of lands.

Specifically, this bill, among other things:

- 1) Requires the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) to establish and administer, through the Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW), the Diablo Canyon Conservation Program (Program) with specified purposes and goals.
- 2) Requires WCB to approve projects to acquire, preserve, restore, and enhance habitat within the Diablo Range, consistent with conservation strategies approved by DFW, and to coordinate its activities undertaken pursuant to the Program with the resource protection activities of WCB and other state agencies.
- 3) Requires that the preservation and restoration of the Diablo Range landscape habitat be a primary concern of WCB and DFW, and of all state agencies whose activities impact habitat within the Diablo Range.
- 4) Authorizes WCB to provide grants to local public agencies, nonprofit organizations, and California Native American tribes for specified purposes.
- 5) Requires WCB, to the extent feasible, to give preference to projects that use the services of the California Conservation Corps or Community Conservation Corps, as specified.
- 6) Establishes the Diablo Canyon Conservation Fund (Fund) in the State Treasury to receive proceeds from bonds or other appropriations made in the annual Budget Act or other statutes for the benefit of the Diablo Range and related lands. Requires that moneys in the Fund be available, upon appropriation, for purposes of this bill. Requires that moneys received by WCB pursuant to this bill be deposited in the Fund, unless otherwise provided by the State General Obligation Bond Law. Requires WCB to administer the moneys appropriated to it for purposes of the Program and authorizes WCB to expend those moneys for capital improvements, land acquisition, support for the Program's operations, and other purposes consistent with this bill. Provides that the Fund is continuously appropriated.

- 7) Authorizes WCB to accept money, grants, goods, or services contributed to it by a public agency or a private entity or person. Requires that these moneys be deposited in the Donation Account, which the bill establishes in the Fund.
- 8) Authorizes WCB, upon receipt of goods and services, to use those goods and services for purposes of this bill.

FISCAL EFFECT:

- 1) DFW estimates ongoing staffing and operational costs to WCB of approximately \$500,000 annually to establish and administer the Program (General Fund, special fund, or bond funds). DFW anticipates workload to establish a new program within WCB similar in scope to WCB's other conservation programs. Staff would be responsible for soliciting, selecting, managing, and maintaining projects that meet the requirements of the bill.
- 2) Ongoing cost pressures of an unknown but significant amount, potentially in the tens of millions of dollars annually (General Fund, special fund, or bond funds), for WCB to fund habitat acquisition, preservation, restoration, and enhancement projects under the Program.

While the bill creates the Diablo Canyon Conservation Fund in the State Treasury, it does not identify a source of funding for the Fund or for the Program.

WCB notes, to date, it has directed over \$100 million in funding to projects in the Diablo Range through existing programs, and WCB's existing conservation programs provide opportunities to conserve habitat within the range. Further, once appropriated, funds allocated to WCB in the Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness, and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024 (Proposition 4) may be used to address conservation priorities within the Diablo Range. Proposition 4 authorizes \$870 million to WCB for grant programs to protect and enhance fish and wildlife resources and habitat and achieve the state's biodiversity, public access, and conservation goals. Eligible activities include land acquisition and habitat enhancement and restoration – which may be aligned with the goals of this bill.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **Purpose.** According to the author:

The Diablo Mountain Range is one of California's most precious ecological treasures, providing access to pristine natural land to hundreds of rare and culturally important species and millions of Californians that live in nearby towns and urban centers....Yet, despite its innumerable benefits, we have only afforded protections to approximately a quarter of the Range, leaving the other three quarters at risk of irreversible damage. AB 1426 will help to address this shortfall by establishing the Diablo Range Conservation Program within the Wildlife Conservation Board, giving the Board the ability to approve and provide grants for projects that preserve and enhance the Range.

- 2) **Background.** The Diablo Range spans over 200 miles from Contra Costa to Kern Counties, covering over 3.5 million acres of some of the state's most diverse lands and landscapes. Writing in support of the bill, Save Mount Diablo notes the Diablo Range is rich in biodiversity, home to hundreds of rare and endangered species, and features a significant wildlife corridor with important wildlife migratory patterns. The organization contends that this bill will establish a program similar to the California Desert Conservation Program, established by AB 1183 (Ramos), Chapter 380, Statutes of 2021. According to Save Mount Diablo, the conservation program created by this bill is intended to "elevate the biological and recreation importance of the [Diablo Range] in meeting the goals of 30x30, "Outdoors for All," and associated fire risk reduction efforts advancing in the state."

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