

Date of Hearing: March 24, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON WATER, PARKS, AND WILDLIFE

Diane Papan, Chair

AB 1673 (Hadwick) – As Amended March 4, 2026

SUBJECT: County fish and wildlife propagation fund: expenditure

SUMMARY: Allows a county to use moneys in its fish and wildlife propagation fund (Fund) to be used for two additional purposes. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Permits counties to expend moneys from their Fund for:
 - a) Costs incurred by a county sheriff for investigating, issuing citations, or making arrests for a civil or criminal violation of the Fish and Game Code (FGC); and
 - b) Wildlife coexistence programs to prevent human-wildlife conflict, including education, public outreach, engagement, and nonlethal measures.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Requires that moneys paid to a county pursuant to #2 and #3, below, be deposited in a Fund and be expended for the protection, conservation, propagation, and preservation of fish and wildlife, under the direction of the board of supervisors. Further, requires that the expenditures from the Fund be reviewed first at a regular meeting of the county board of supervisors or its designated county fish and game commission to ensure compliance with #4 (FGC § 13100).
- 2) Requires that one-half of the money collected from any fine or forfeiture related to the taking of abalone to be deposited in the Fund of the county in which the violation occurred (FGC § 12009).
- 3) Unless provided by another law, requires that one-half of the fines and forfeitures imposed or collected in a court for violation of the FGC be deposited in the Fund of the county in which the violation occurred (FGC § 13003).
- 4) Limits the expenditures from a counties Fund for only certain purposes, including:
 - a) Public education relating to the scientific principles of fish and wildlife conservation;
 - b) Improvement of fish and wildlife habitat;
 - c) Construction, maintenance, and operation of public hatchery facilities;
 - d) Costs incurred by the district attorney or city attorney in investigating and prosecuting civil and criminal actions for violations of this code, as approved by the Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW); and
 - e) Costs incurred by a county counsel in investigating and prosecuting an action for civil penalties, injunctive relief, or civil penalties and injunctive relief resulting from unlicensed cannabis cultivation (FGC § 13103).

- 5) Allows CDFW to audit, or require the county to audit, expenditures from the county's Fund, to determine compliance with #4. If expenditures are noncompliant, CDFW may require that all expenditures be suspended or seek reimbursement of the funds (FGC § 13104).

FISCAL EFFECT: None. This bill is keyed non-fiscal.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **Purpose of this bill.** According to the author, "County sheriffs are often the first to respond to poaching, illegal cannabis cultivation, and other violations of the [FGC], particularly in large rural counties with limited wildlife enforcement presence. Yet current law allows counties to reimburse prosecutors for these cases, while providing no mechanism to cover the enforcement work performed by sheriffs.

[This bill] supports sheriffs by allowing counties to use their fish and wildlife propagation funds to reimburse sheriff's offices for enforcement activities. This bill ensures counties can reinvest enforcement revenue into protecting their natural resources and their rural communities that depend on them."

- 2) **Background.** The FGC requires that all fines and forfeitures from violations of the FGC be split equally between CDFW and the county in which the violation occurred. At least once a month that money is split between the state Fish and Game Preservation Fund (i.e., to CDFW) and the county's Fund. Expenditures from the county Fund must be used for the purposes outlined in FGC § 13103 (#4 under Existing Law)—any other uses are prohibited. CDFW has the authority to audit or require the county to audit expenditures from its Fund. Evidence of noncompliant expenditure could result in CDFW freezing the county's Fund or requiring the county to reimburse the Fund.

Existing law limits the eligible expenditures of Fund dollars. Each new eligible expenditure increases the flexibility of the money, but also dilutes the likelihood that the money will be spent on the existing purposes. This bill proposes two new categories of expenditure from a county's fund: for wildlife coexistence programs and for the costs incurred by a county sheriff for investigating, citing, or making arrests for violations of the FGC. The efforts to prevent human-wildlife conflict proposed in this bill (education, public outreach, engagement, and nonlethal measures) are in line with other allowed uses of the Fund. This bill would also permit counties to use the Fund to cover costs incurred by a sheriff, which is similar to existing allowed uses such as covering the costs incurred by district or city attorneys for investigating violations of the FGC or by a county counsel in investigating and prosecuting violations from unlicensed cannabis cultivation.

- 3) **Related legislation.** AB 195 (Committee on Budget) Chapter 56, Statutes of 2022, permits the use of the Fund to cover costs incurred by a county counsel in investigating and prosecuting an action for civil penalties, injunctive relief, or civil penalties and injunctive relief resulting from unlicensed cannabis cultivation.

SB 1249 (Wolk), Chapter 597, Statutes of 2012, among other things, required that expenditures from a counties Fund be reviewed first at a regular meeting of the county board of supervisors or its designated county fish and game commission to ensure compliant expenditures. This provision was originally included in AB 2421 (Blanca Rubio) of 2022.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

None on file

Opposition

None on file

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