

Date of Hearing: March 24, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON WATER, PARKS, AND WILDLIFE

Diane Papan, Chair

AB 1987 (Aguilar-Curry) – As Amended March 2, 2026

**SUBJECT:** Department-managed lands: wildlife areas: hunting

**SUMMARY:** Requires that revenues from Type A and Type B wildlife areas be used for the operation, maintenance, and reasonable administrative costs of Type A and Type B wildlife areas. Specifically, **this bill**:

- 1) Specifies that Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) may enter into contracts for the management and operation of department-managed lands with nonprofit conservation groups and resource conservation districts for purposes that include administrating hunting or other public use programs.
- 2) Requires that revenues from agricultural leases of department-managed lands be used to support the management, maintenance, restoration, and operations of department-managed lands.
- 3) Requires that the required annual opportunity for hunters to consult with CDFW regarding habitat conditions in Type A and Type B wildlife areas (see Existing Law #7) also include anticipated wetland floodup.
- 4) Establishes the Waterfowl Management Areas Operations and Maintenance Account (Account) within the Fish and Game Preservation Fund.
  - a) Requires that all revenues from the sale of waterfowl hunting reservation applications and entry passes for Type A and Type B wildlife areas be deposited into the Account;
  - b) Requires that moneys in the Account be continuously appropriated for the purposes of operation and maintenance of Type A and Type B wildlife areas and reasonable administrative costs directly related to the public hunting programs for Type A and Type B wildlife areas; and
  - c) Requires that the funds in the Account augment and not replace current spending levels for the operation and maintenance of Type A and Type B wildlife areas.
- 5) Makes technical and conforming changes.

**EXISTING LAW:**

- 1) Establishes CDFW to manage California's diverse fish, wildlife, and plant resources, and the habitats upon which they depend, for their ecological values and for their use and enjoyment of the public [Fish and Game Code (FGC) § 712.1].
- 2) Establishes the Fish and Game Preservation Fund in the State Treasury for all money collected relating to the protection and preservation of birds, mammals, fish, reptiles, or amphibia, and creates various accounts and subaccounts within the fund (FGC § 13000 *et seq.*).

- 3) Makes the money in the Fish and Game Preservation Fund available, upon appropriation by the Legislature, to CDFW for expenditure related to the FGC or other laws for the protection and preservation of birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and fish (FGC § 13220).
- 4) Provides that it is the intent of the Legislature that the costs of hunting and sportfishing programs shall be provided out of hunting and sportfishing revenues and reimbursements and federal funds received for hunting and sportfishing programs, and other funds appropriated by the Legislature, and that these funds shall not be used to support commercial fishing programs, free hunting and fishing license programs, or nongame fish and wildlife programs (FGC § 711).
- 5) Defines “department-managed lands” to include lands, or lands and water, acquired for public shooting grounds, state marine (estuarine) recreational management areas, ecological reserves, and wildlife management areas.
  - a) Requires that department-managed lands be operated on a nonprofit basis;
  - b) Authorizes CDFW to enter into contracts or other agreements for the management and operation of department-managed lands with nonprofit conservation groups or resource conservation districts;
  - c) Requires CDFW to require the purchase of an entry permit for nonconsumptive use on department-managed lands if CDFW finds that it is practical and cost effective to require entry permit fees;
  - d) Requires that revenue from entry permit fees be deposited in the Native Species Conservation and Enhancement Account within the Fish and Game Preservation Fund; and
  - e) Requires that, to the extent that CDFW is able to identify the source of the revenue, CDFW provide no less than 35% of the funds generated from nonconsumptive entry permits to the department-managed lands from which the fee revenues were collected (FGC § 1745).
- 6) Authorizes CDFW to lease department-managed lands for agricultural activities and provides that the revenue from agricultural leases be deposited into the Wildlife Restoration Fund or the Fish and Game Preservation Fund and may be used to support the management, maintenance, restoration, and operations of department-managed lands (FGC § 1745.1).
- 7) Defines the following types of wildlife areas:
  - a) “Type A” wildlife areas as wildlife areas which have restricted hunter access during waterfowl season and require a hunting pass to be purchased in advance and exchanged for an entry permit at the wildlife area. Reservations are available. Species open for hunting are waterfowl, coots, moorhens, snipe, pheasant, and dove, unless otherwise specified, and shoot days are Saturdays, Sundays, and Wednesdays during waterfowl season, youth waterfowl hunt days, and daily during the September dove season. Type A wildlife areas are closed to hunting on Christmas Day.

- b) “Type B” wildlife areas as wildlife areas which have restricted hunter access during waterfowl season and require a Type A or Type B season hunting pass to be purchased in advance and presented for an entry permit at the wildlife area. Reservations are required for opening weekend. Species open for hunting include waterfowl, coots, moorhens, snipe, pheasant, and dove, unless otherwise specified, and shoot days are Saturdays, Sundays, and Wednesdays during waterfowl season and daily during the September dove season. Some Type B wildlife areas are open to hunting on Christmas Day.
  - c) “Type C” wildlife areas as wildlife areas that are open daily for hunting all legal species and do not require the purchase of a hunting pass for entry [14 California Code of Regulations (CCR) § 551].
- 8) Provides that except in accordance with the regulations of the Fish and Game Commission (Commission), it is unlawful to enter any department-managed wildlife area or public shooting ground (FGC § 1530).
  - 9) Requires that CDFW provide an annual opportunity for licensed hunters to comment and make recommendations on public hunting programs, including anticipated habitat conditions in the hunting areas on Type A and Type B wildlife areas (FGC § 1758).

**FISCAL EFFECT:** Unknown. This bill is keyed fiscal.

**COMMENTS:**

- 1) **Purpose of this bill.** According to the author, “State Wildlife Areas play a vital role in protecting California’s wetlands and waterfowl while also providing opportunities for outdoor recreation such as hunting, fishing, and wildlife viewing. However, many of these lands face growing maintenance challenges due to limited staff and declining traditional funding sources...[This bill] will ensure that revenues generated by these areas are reinvested directly into their operation and management so they can continue to serve both conservation and public access for years to come.”
- 2) **Background.** In 2024, the Legislature passed AB 2875 (Friedman), Chapter 579, Statutes of 2024, finding that over 90% of California’s wetlands have been lost and setting the policy of the state to ensure no net loss and long-term gain in the quantity, quality, and permanence of wetlands acreage and values in California. The state has also set a 30x30 goal to conserve 30% of California’s lands and coastal waters by 2030, codified at Public Resources Code §§ 71450 *et seq.* Conserving and improving habitat and access to wetlands on CDFW wildlife areas serves these goals while increasing access to outdoor recreation.

*Types of Wildlife Areas.* The FGC does not provide much statutory guidance on wildlife areas, except to provide the Commission with the authority to make regulations for hunting and entry. These regulations are found in Title 14 of the CCR, where the Commission has defined three classes of wildlife areas (see Existing Law #7). Type A and Type B wildlife areas are primarily for waterfowl hunting, while Type C wildlife areas are open for all legal species and are primarily for upland game. Type A and Type B areas are similar to one another and are distinguished by differences in reservation requirements and opening dates.

Management expenses are also varied across wildlife area types, with Type A and Type B wildlife areas, which are generally on managed wetlands, requiring more active management

than Type C wildlife areas. Wetland areas may require water pumping, mosquito abatement, and other costly operations and maintenance activities.

*Wildlife area funding.* CDFW receives funding for wildlife areas from a variety of sources. The largest single funding source is grants issued by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service under the federal Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act (16 United States Code § 669 *et seq.*). Pittman-Robertson grants may be used for up to 75% of the cost of eligible projects. Other sources of funds for wildlife areas include program income (reservation application fees, hunter pass sales, and agricultural lease agreements), Proposition 99 (1988) funding, upland game bird validations, California duck stamps, and environmental license plate funds. Federal Pittman-Robertson funding (collected from an excise tax on firearms, ammunition, and archery equipment) has declined from a peak of nearly \$39 million in fiscal year (FY) 2022–23 to just over \$29 million in FY 2024–25. Proposition 99 funding, from a surtax on tobacco products, is also decreasing, with cigarette tax revenues declining from approximately \$152 million in FY 2023–24 to a projected \$138 million in FY 2025–26. These revenue declines compound ongoing budget issues for CDFW, which estimates that only 35% of funding needs for lands and facilities are met within the FY 2024–25 budget.

*User fees in wildlife areas.* Fees for the different classes of wildlife areas are significantly different. Type A wildlife areas require both reservations and hunting passes, while Type B wildlife areas require hunting passes (and reservations on opening weekend only). Type C wildlife areas do not require the purchase of a hunting pass for entry. Where reservations are required, hunters may need to enter many drawings (at a cost of \$1.34 per entry) in order to win a reservation, as 2024–2025 regular season waterfowl application success rates ranged from 0.74% to 57.8%, depending on choice of hunt. In addition to reservations, hunting passes are required: season passes for Type A and Type B wildlife areas are \$213.84 and \$71.85, respectively.

In addition to fees required for consumptive uses (i.e., hunting), some wildlife areas require fees for nonconsumptive uses (e.g., hiking, wildlife viewing, etc.). An annual Lands Pass for nonconsumptive uses costs \$33.48. Where these fees are collected (and where practical for CDFW), 35% of the revenue from these fees must be provided to the department-managed lands where the use occurred. Additionally, unlike hunting revenue which is deposited into the Fish and Game Preservation Fund generally, nonconsumptive user fees are deposited into the Native Species Conservation and Enhancement Account within the Fish and Game Preservation Fund, which is designated for the support of nongame and native plant species conservation and enhancement programs.

*Agricultural leases on department-managed lands.* An additional source of revenue on department-managed lands is agricultural leases. CDFW enters into agricultural leases on some department-managed lands for grazing and wildlife-friendly agriculture. There are currently approximately \$3 million in agricultural leases on CDFW lands. This money is available for the operation and maintenance of wildlife areas and ecological reserves, generally in the CDFW region in which it is generated, though statute does not place any controls on expenditure.

*Hunter consultation on wetland operations.* Hunters are a key constituency for CDFW wildlife areas, and consultation is required by law with hunters on public hunting programs and habitat conditions in the hunting areas on Type A and Type B wildlife areas (FGC § 1745.1). This outreach and consultation includes proposed wetland flood-up schedules. The primary

consideration for CDFW in making wetland flood-up decisions is the wellbeing of the wildlife that the areas were acquired for, and in addition to hunter input, CDFW considers nonconsumptive uses and mosquito abatement requirements.

- 3) **Proposed technical amendment.** This bill impacts state wildlife management areas and creates a new account within the Fish and Game Preservation Fund. The language creating the new account is located in a code section dealing with a different account within the Fish and Game Preservation Fund. *The committee may wish to consider the following amendments that move the proposed FGC § 1758(b) to a new FGC § 1528.5:*

**1758.** ~~(a)~~ The department shall annually provide an opportunity for licensed hunters to comment and make recommendations on the public hunting programs, including anticipated wetland floodup and habitat conditions in the hunting areas on Type A and Type B Wildlife Areas, as defined under the commission's regulations, through public meetings or other public outreach. In complying with this section, the department may hold regional meetings on its hunting programs for several different wildlife areas.

~~(b) (1) All revenues generated from the sale of waterfowl hunting reservation applications and daily and season long entry passes from Type A and Type B Wildlife Areas shall be deposited into the Waterfowl Management Areas Operations and Maintenance Account that is hereby created in the Fish and Game Preservation Fund to permit separate accountability. Notwithstanding Section 13340 of the Government Code, moneys in the account shall be continuously appropriated without regard to fiscal year to the department for both of the following purposes:~~

~~—(A) Operation and maintenance of Type A and Type B Wildlife Areas.~~

~~(B) Reasonable administrative costs directly related to the public hunting programs for Type A and Type B Wildlife Areas.~~

~~(2) The funds in the Waterfowl Management Areas Operations and Maintenance Account shall augment, and shall not replace, current spending levels for the operation and maintenance of Type A and Type B Wildlife Areas.~~

**1528.5. (a) All revenues generated from the sale of waterfowl hunting reservation applications and daily and season long entry passes from Type A and Type B Wildlife Areas, as defined under the commission's regulations, shall be deposited into the Waterfowl Management Areas Operations and Maintenance Account that is hereby created in the Fish and Game Preservation Fund to permit separate accountability. Notwithstanding Section 13340 of the Government Code, moneys in the account shall be continuously appropriated without regard to fiscal year to the department for both of the following purposes:**

**(1) Operation and maintenance of Type A and Type B Wildlife Areas.**

**(2) Reasonable administrative costs directly related to the public hunting programs for Type A and Type B Wildlife Areas.**

***(b) The funds in the Waterfowl Management Areas Operations and Maintenance Account shall augment, and shall not replace, current spending levels for the operation and maintenance of Type A and Type B Wildlife Areas.***

- 4) **Arguments in support.** The California Waterfowl Association writes: “Currently, Type A and B State Wildlife Areas are facing major challenges related to reduced staff and often insufficient [operations and maintenance] budgets. . . . Water pumping, mosquito abatement, noxious weed control and other annual wetland maintenance expenses continue to become more costly every year.” The California Waterfowl Association continues: “[this] bill would ensure that hunter-generated user fee revenues (about \$3 million annually) from Type A and Type B Wildlife Areas (a.k.a. Waterfowl Management Areas) are used solely for the operations and maintenance of those lands.”
- 5) **Related legislation.** SB 1249 (Wolk), Chapter 597, Statutes of 2012, requires CDFW to require the purchase of an entry permit for nonconsumptive uses of department-managed lands if CDFW finds it practical and cost effective.

SB 749 (Wolk), Chapter 387, Statutes of 2013, authorizes CDFW to lease department-managed lands for agricultural activities and requires CDFW to annually provide an opportunity for licensed hunters to comment and make recommendations on public hunting programs.

#### **REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**

##### **Support**

California Waterfowl Association (sponsor)  
Black Brant Group  
California Rice Commission  
Cal-Ore Wetlands and Waterfowl Council  
Delta Waterfowl  
Northern California Water Association  
Suisun Resource Conservation District  
Tulare Basin Wetlands Association

##### **Opposition**

None on file

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