

According to CDFW, in fiscal year 2024-25, Type A and B waterfowl reservation applications and daily and season long entry passes generated just under \$3 million. The department reports that, for the most part, this funding goes back to the areas where it was generated and is frequently used as a cost-share or match for Wildlife Restoration Act grants that fund the majority of O&M activities on these properties. While the language in this bill explicitly requires that all of these funds be used on Type A or B wildlife areas, CDFW notes this change is not a significant deviation from the department's existing practice.

The bill also requires revenues from agricultural leases of department-managed lands to be used to support those same lands. CDFW reports it currently has just under \$3 million in agricultural and grazing lease agreements on department-managed lands and that the revenue generated from these agreements is already going back to support the management of department-managed lands. Therefore, in the department's view, the bill does not create a significant policy or funding shift from how these funds are currently used.

COMMENTS:

1) **Purpose.** 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.** As detailed in the Assembly Water, Parks, and Wildlife Committee's analysis of this bill, 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 and are distinguished by differences in reservation requirements and opening dates. Management expenses also vary 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.

Based on preliminary data provided by CDFW, current funding going to Type A and B wildlife areas for staffing and O&M is just under \$20 million. The primary source is federal Wildlife Restoration Act funding, followed by program income (reservation application fees, hunter pass sales, and agricultural lease agreements), Fish and Game Preservation Fund, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation reimbursable agreements, Proposition 99, Environmental License Plate Fund, and mitigation funds. Both federal funding and funding from Proposition 99 are declining.

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) to win a reservation. In addition to reservations, hunters must purchase passes: 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 (like hunting), some wildlife areas require fees for nonconsumptive uses (like hiking and wildlife viewing). An annual Lands Pass for nonconsumptive uses costs \$33.48. Where these fees are collected (and where practical for CDFW), current law requires 35% of the revenue from these fees to be provided to the department-managed lands where the use occurred.

A recent service-based budgeting analysis shows that CDFW's Lands Program is currently funded at approximately one-third of what is needed to manage wildlife areas and ecological reserves as intended at the time of acquisition.

Writing in support of this bill, a coalition of organizations notes that Type A and Type B state wildlife areas are facing major challenges related to reduced staff and often insufficient O&M budgets. For example, some wildlife areas in Northeast California have only one or two full-time staff to manage thousands of acres of lands: "Because of this, wildlife habitat can be degraded, flooding of wetlands delayed and public use negatively impacted." The coalition further contends that water pumping, mosquito abatement, noxious weed control and other annual wetland maintenance expenses continue to become more costly every year. Supporters note this bill helps ensure a more stable, reliable source of funding for the management of Type A and Type B state wildlife areas.

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