

ASSEMBLY THIRD READING
AB 1987 (Aguiar-Curry and Hadwick)
As Amended March 25, 2026
Majority vote

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.

Major Provisions

- 1) Specifies that the 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 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.
 - 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.

COMMENTS

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 Fish and Game Code (FGC) does not provide much statutory guidance on wildlife areas, except to provide the Fish and Game Commission (Commission) with the authority to make regulations for hunting and entry. These regulations are found in Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations, where the Commission has defined three classes of wildlife areas. 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.

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."

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."

Arguments in Opposition

None on file.

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee:

Costs to CDFW are likely minor and absorbable.

This bill requires all revenues from the sale of waterfowl hunting reservation applications and daily and season-long entry passes be used solely for operation and maintenance (O&M) of Type A and B wildlife areas. 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. CDFW 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 CDFW's view, the bill does not create a significant policy or funding shift from how these funds are currently used.

VOTES

ASM WATER, PARKS, AND WILDLIFE: 12-0-1

YES: Papan, Jeff Gonzalez, Alanis, Alvarez, Bains, Bennett, Boerner, Caloza, Gallagher, Hart, Ward, Rogers

ABS, ABST OR NV: Ávila Farías

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 14-0-1

YES: Wicks, Hoover, Arambula, Caloza, Dixon, Fong, Mark González, Krell, Muratsuchi, Pacheco, Pellerin, Solache, Ta, Tangipa

ABS, ABST OR NV: Calderon

UPDATED

VERSION: March 25, 2026

CONSULTANT: Sean Clair / W., P., & W. / (916) 319-2096

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