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# SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES AND WATER

Senator Josh Becker, Chair

2025 - 2026 Regular

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**Bill No:** AB 1987 **Hearing Date:** June 9, 2026  
**Author:** Aguiar-Curry  
**Version:** March 25, 2026 Amended  
**Urgency:** No **Fiscal:** Yes  
**Consultant:** Katharine Moore

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

## SUMMARY

This bill would create the Waterfowl Management Areas Operations and Management Account in the Fish and Game Preservation Fund and require moneys in the account to be continuously appropriated to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife for the operation and maintenance of certain wildlife areas, require all revenues generated from the sale of waterfowl hunting reservation applications and certain wildlife area entry passes to be deposited in the created account, and require account funds to be used to augment and not replace current spending levels for the operation and maintenance of Type A and Type B wildlife areas.

## BACKGROUND AND EXISTING LAW

***The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (department).*** The department is the state's trustee agency for the state's fish and wildlife. The department's mission statement is "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 by the public." In general, the department implements and enforces the regulations set by the California Fish and Game Commission (commission), as well as providing biological data and expertise to inform the commission's decision-making process.

***Department-managed lands.*** According to the department, it is responsible for management of over 1.1 million acres of fish and wildlife habitat spanning over 700 properties statewide. These properties provide habitat for a rich diversity of fish, wildlife, and plant species and comprise habitats from every major ecosystem in the state. Most of these properties may be used by the public for consumptive (i.e. hunting) and/or nonconsumptive (e.g. wildlife viewing) recreational purposes. The department is required to annually provide an opportunity for licensed hunters to comment on public hunting programs and habitat conditions on certain department-managed lands. The habitat conditions may include wetland "floodup" plans determined by the department to support the wellbeing of the wildlife.

There are three types of wildlife areas defined in regulation by the commission. Type A and Type B wildlife areas are used by hunters primarily for waterfowl hunting, while Type C wildlife areas are used by hunters to hunt all legal species, with upland game a particular focus. Type A and Type B wildlife areas – which are typically on managed wetlands, require more active management than Type C wildlife areas. Wetland areas may require water pumping, mosquito abatement, and other operations and maintenance activities. Wetlands in the Central Valley are part of the Pacific Flyway for

migratory birds and provide critical habitat for those and other species. Estimates are 90% of the state's historic inland wetlands have been lost. State policy provides that there be no net loss and long-term gain in the quantity, quality, and permanence of wetlands acreage and values in California (AB 2875 (Friedman, Chapter 579, Statutes of 2024)).

**Funding for wildlife area management.** The department receives funding for wildlife areas from multiple sources. The largest single funding source is grants from the US Fish and Wildlife Service under the federal Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act.<sup>1</sup> Pittman-Robertson grants may be used for up to 75% of the cost of eligible projects. Additional sources of funds for wildlife areas include program income (such as reservation applications, fees, hunter pass sales, and agricultural lease agreements), Proposition 99 (1988, tobacco products surtax) funding, upland game bird validations, California duck stamps, and environmental license plate funds. Available moneys from these sources vary from year-to-year. For example, recently, Pittman-Robertson funding 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 is also decreasing, with tobacco products tax revenues declining from approximately \$152 million in FY 2023-24 to a projected \$138 million in FY 2025-26. Data obtained from the department for a recent fiscal year show a mix of these sources of revenue as well as General Fund to support department-managed lands. As discussed in greater detail below, the department does not receive the resources, including financial resources, necessary to achieve its mission.

User fee income for wildlife areas varies. Type A wildlife areas require both reservations and hunting passes (@ \$27.00, \$43.25, and \$203.00<sup>2</sup> for 1 day, 2 day, and the season, respectively), while Type B wildlife areas require hunting passes (@ \$68.25 each per season) and reservations only for the opening weekend. No hunting pass purchase is required for Type C wildlife areas. Reservations can be difficult to obtain when they are required. A hunter seeking a reservation may need to enter multiple drawings (@ \$1.25 each) in order to win a reservation. Success rates for reservations vary from less than 1% to almost 60% depending upon the hunt.

Fifteen wildlife areas and four ecological areas require user fees for nonconsumptive uses, such as hiking, and wildlife viewing, among others. A one-day and annual Lands Pass for nonconsumptive use are \$5.50 and \$31.00, respectively.<sup>3</sup> Where these fees are collected, thirty-five percent of the revenue must be provided to the department-managed lands where the use occurred. Nonconsumptive user fees are deposited in the Native Species Conservation and Enhancement Account within the Fish and Game Preservation Fund (FGPF), which is designated for the support of nongame and native plant species conservation and enhancement programs.

Agricultural leases on certain department-managed lands provide an additional source of revenue. The department enters into leases for grazing and wildlife-friendly agriculture. The moneys raised are available for the operation and maintenance of

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<sup>1</sup> Pittman-Robertson funding is collected from an excise tax on firearms, ammunition, and archery equipment.

<sup>2</sup> Fees quoted do not include the 5% processing fee. Hunting-related fees are for the 2025 hunting season.

<sup>3</sup> 2026 calendar year.

wildlife areas and ecological reserves in the department region where the lease is located.

For context, about 1 million reservation applications, about 11,000 each of 1-day and 2-day Type A wildlife area passes, 4817 seasonal Type A wildlife area passes, and 817 Type B seasonal wildlife area passes yielded almost \$3 million during the 2025 hunting season. Lands pass purchases raised about \$77,000, and upland game validations<sup>4</sup> yielded about \$2.9 million.

Information obtained from the department indicates that revenues from agricultural leases were used to support management, maintenance, restoration, and operations of department-managed lands, as required. Revenues from Type A or B wildlife area passes also were used were spent on the wildlife areas they were generated from.

***Existing law:***

- 1) Establishes the department in the California Natural Resources Agency. States that the department's mission "is to manage California's diverse fish, wildlife, and plant resources, and the habitats upon which they depend, for their ecological value and for their use and enjoyment by the public," and provides that its core programs include biodiversity conservation, enforcement, and hunting, fishing, and public use, among others. (Fish and Game Code (FGC) §712.1)
- 2) States legislative intent that the costs of hunting and sportfishing programs be provided out of hunting and sportfishing revenues and reimbursements and federal fund received for hunting and sportfishing programs, and other funds appropriated by the Legislature, and that these funds not be used to support commercial fishing programs, free hunting and fishing license programs, or nongame fish and wildlife programs, as provided. (FGC §711)
- 3) Establishes the FGPF 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 FGPF. (FGC §§13000 *et seq.*)
  - a) Makes the money in the FGPF available, upon appropriation by the Legislature, to the department for expenditure for the protection and preservation of birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and fish, as specified. (FGC §13220)
- 4) Defines "department-managed lands" to include lands, or lands and water, acquitted 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 by the department.
  - b) Authorizes the department to enter into contracts or other agreements for the management and operation of department-managed lands with nonprofit conservation groups or resource conservation districts.

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<sup>4</sup> About 125,000 at \$23.50 each.

- c) Requires the department to require the purchase of an entry permit for nonconsumptive use on department-managed lands if the department finds that it is practical and cost effective to require entry permit fees.
  - d) Provides that multiple recreational use of department-managed lands is desirable and that use shall be encouraged by the commission.
  - e) Requires that revenue from entry permit fees be deposited in the Native Species Conservation and Enhancement Account within the FGPF.
  - f) Requires that, to the extent that the department is able to identify the source of revenue, the department provides no less than 35% of the funds generated from nonconsumptive entry permits to department-managed lands from which the fee revenues were collected. (FGC §1745)
- 5) Authorizes the department 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 FGPF and authorizes its use to support the management, maintenance, restoration, and operations of department-managed lands. (FGC §1745.1)
- 6) Provides that, except in accordance with commission regulations, it is unlawful to enter any department-managed wildlife area or public shooting ground. (FGC §1530)
- 7) Requires the department to 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)

***Existing regulation:***

- 1) Defines the following types of wildlife areas:
- a) "Type A" Wildlife Areas are 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 areas. Makes available reservations. 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 are wildlife areas which have restricted hunted access during waterfowl season and require a Type A or Type B season hunting pass to be purchased in advanced and presented for an entry permit at the wildlife area. Requires reservations 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 are wildlife areas that are open daily for hunting all legal species and do not require the purchase of a hunting pass for entry. (Title 14, California Code of Regulations, 551)

### **PROPOSED LAW**

This bill would:

- 1) Create the Waterfowl Management Areas Operations and Management Account (account) within the FGPF, as provided.
  - a) Require moneys in the account to be continuously appropriated to the department for:
    - i) Operation and maintenance of Type A and Type B Wildlife Areas.
    - ii) Reasonable administration costs directly related to public hunting programs for Type A and Type B Wildlife Areas.
- 2) Require 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 to be deposited in the account.
- 3) Require funds in the account to augment and not replace current spending levels for the operation and maintenance of Type A and Type B Wildlife Areas.
- 4) Specifies that the contracts or other agreements for the management and operation of department-managed lands with nonprofit conservation groups includes for purposes of administering hunting or other public use programs.
- 5) Require, rather than authorize, moneys in the Wildlife Restoration Fund or the FGPF from agricultural leases on department-managed lands to be used to support the management, maintenance, restoration, and operations of department-managed lands.
- 6) Add anticipated wetland floodup to conditions in the hunting areas on Type A and Tube B Wildlife Areas that licensed hunters are provided an annual opportunity to comment on to the department, as provided.
- 7) Make additional minor and technical changes.

### **ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT**

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. Yolo, Lake, Colusa, and Napa Counties all include several wildlife areas, making their long-term stewardship especially important to communities and wildlife in my district. AB 1987 will ensure that revenues generated by these areas are reinvested directly into their operation and management so they can continue to service both conservation and public access for years to come."

**ARGUMENTS IN OPPOSITION**

None received

**COMMENTS**

**Legislative oversight through the budget process.** One of the more effective ways the Legislature exercises oversight over executive agencies is through annual appropriations in the budget process. Providing for a continuous appropriation undermines the ability of the Legislature to provide oversight through the budget process.

In view of this, the Committee may wish to remove the continuous appropriation language. [Amendment #1]

**Proof of required augmentation.** This bill explicitly requires that the dedicated moneys generated by the bill be used to augment – rather than replace – existing expenditures. The bill does not provide a mechanism to help ensure augmentation in fact occurs. It is unclear how readily-available this information is to the public. Particularly in view of the long-standing funding shortfalls at the department (described below), a public accounting to provide information on expenditures at applicable locations both before and after this bill goes into effect appears warranted.

In view of this, the Committee may wish to provide for a one-time legislative report containing relevant information on department spending, including from the account, for operations and maintenance of department-managed lands for FY 2026-2027 through FY 2031-2032. [Amendment #2]

The impact of the dedication of the generated revenues by this bill is unclear, as the department reports that said revenues are already being used for the required activities.

**Author-proposed amendment.** After the Committee's amendment submission deadline, the author provided an amendment to the Committee containing language explicitly stating that this bill does not affect existing memorandums of understanding, contracts, or similar between the department and nonprofit organizations or related entities for various purposes on department-managed lands. This bill would apply prospectively should the bill be signed into law.

In view of the author's request, the Committee may wish to accept the author's proposed amendment. [Amendment #3]

**Underfunded and overmandated.** The department has longstanding budget concerns which have persisted despite repeated efforts over multiple decades to address them. When the state has significant fiscal concerns – as it does now – ensuring consistent and sustained funding for the department is particularly challenging. Recently, at legislative direction, the department undertook a “service-based” budgeting effort to identify the personnel needed to perform the services required by its mandates. The department's services were separated into eight general programs for analysis. In 2021, the initial results of this effort were released and revealed that the department's funding was inadequate to meet its “mission” service level. Overall, the department receives roughly 1/3 of the resources needed to fulfill its mandate. In response, the Newsom Administration proposed, and the Legislature approved, significant one-time

General Fund moneys to support the department's activities in the near-term. Some progress in addressing the gaps in service was subsequently made, although this was offset, at least in part, by new mandates.

Unfortunately, a recent update (for fiscal year 2024/2025) shows that the Public Use & Enjoyment program resources remain at about 34% overall, with a 5-year average of about 32%. This does not show significant improvement. Hunting continues to receive significant General Fund and non-dedicated FGPF support (in other words – these activities are not self-supporting from fees). In addition, Hunting and Fishing Enforcement is by far the largest category under the General Fund and non-dedicated FGPF expenditures by the department.

It is unclear to what extent the dedication of moneys required by this bill will impact the long-standing and continuing fiscal challenges at the department. As noted in one of the support letters, however, having resources to maintain the wetlands that are part of the Pacific Flyway is critically important, and consistent with multiple state policies.

### ***Recent related legislation***

AB 2787 (Assembly Water, Parks, and Wildlife Committee), the AWPW omnibus bill, would remove the requirement to pay prevailing wage for contracts to manage department-managed lands, among other provisions. (*This bill is pending before this Committee.*)

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

SB 1249 (Wolk, Chapter 597, Statutes of 2012) required the department to require the purchase of an entry permit for nonconsumptive uses of department-managed lands if the department finds it practical and cost-effective.

## **SUGGESTED AMENDMENTS**

### **AMENDMENT 1**

In proposed FGC §1528.5(a): replace the last sentence with:  
 “Upon appropriation, moneys in the account shall be used by the department for both of the following purposes:”

### **AMENDMENT 2**

Add FGC §1528.5(c), as follows:

“(c) (1) On or before October 1, 2033, the department shall prepare and submit a report to the relevant legislative policy and budget committees in both houses of the Legislature. The report shall include, but is not limited to, detailed information on annual department expenditure on the operations and maintenance and administration of or other hunting or public use program related activities on department-managed lands for fiscal year 2026 – 2027 through fiscal year 2031 2032, including detailed revenue sources for and expenditures from the Waterfowl Areas Operations and Management Account, as applicable, and any

other sources, including agricultural leases. Expenditures shall be provided by location.

(2) For purposes of the report described in paragraph (1), data collection efforts shall avoid duplication and data collected for other purposes shall be used to the extent feasible.

(3) A report submitted pursuant to paragraph (1) shall be submitted in compliance with Section 9795 of the Government Code.”

**AMENDMENT 3**

Add Section 5 as follows:

SEC. 5. Nothing in this act shall be construed to invalidate, impair, or require the rebidding of any memorandum of understanding, cooperative agreements, or partnership agreements entered into before January 1, 2027 between the Department of Fish and Wildlife and a nonprofit organization or other qualified entity for the provision of interpretive, educational, restoration, or public access programming on department-managed lands.

**SUPPORT**

California Waterfowl Association (sponsor)  
Audubon California  
Backcountry Hunters & Anglers  
Cal-Ore Wetlands and Waterfowl Council  
California Rice Commission  
California Rifle and Pistol Association  
Delta Waterfowl  
Ducks Unlimited  
Grassland Water District  
Northern California Water Association  
Suisun Resource Conservation District  
The Black Brant Group  
The Nature Conservancy  
Tulare Basin Wetlands Association

**OPPOSITION**

None received

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