SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Sabrina Cervantes, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

AB 1987 (Aguiar-Curry) - Department-managed lands: wildlife areas: hunting

Version: June 11, 2026
Urgency: No
Hearing Date: June 22, 2026

Policy Vote: N.R. & W. 7 - 0
Mandate: No
Consultant: Ashley Ames

Bill 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 appropriated by the Legislature 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.

Fiscal Impact:

- Unknown but potentially significant costs, likely over $150,000 (General Fund or Fish and Game Preservation Fund [FGPF]) for the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) to prepare and submit a report to the appropriate policy and budget committees of the Legislature, as specified, among other things.

Background:

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. 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 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. 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 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 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.

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 appropriated by the Legislature 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) Require CDFW to, on or before October 1, 2033, prepare and submit a report to the appropriate policy and budget committees of the Legislature, as specified.

8) Make additional minor and technical changes.

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.

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.

Staff Comments: 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.

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