

threatened or endangered species from restoration project activities, including project-specific considerations.

The Legislative Analyst's Office recently warned of General Fund structural deficits of around \$35 billion per year in the 2027-28 fiscal year and ongoing.

COMMENTS:

1) **Purpose.** According to the author:

Conservation groups who are on the ground preserving our ecosystems deserve an avenue in which they can operate free of regulatory burdens. Without an expedited pathway, California's progress towards reaching its environmental sustainability goals will slow down. [This bill] will protect California's biodiversity across our coasts and forests by ensuring these projects can continue in a timely manner.

2) **Background.** The HREA established a permitting process with CDFW for landowners, state and local governments, and conservation organizations seeking to implement small-scale, voluntary habitat restoration projects in the state. Restoration and enhancement projects approved by CDFW, pursuant to HREA, do not require additional permits from CDFW, such as an LSAA or CESA permit. As of October 1, 2025, CDFW had approved a total of 236 HREA projects since the start of the program.

To qualify, HREA projects must (a) meet the eligibility requirements for the State Water Resources Control Board's "Order for Clean Water Act Section 401 General Water Quality Certification for Small Habitat Restoration Projects," which includes not exceeding a maximum project size of five acres or a cumulative 500 linear feet; (b) have the primary purpose of improving fish and wildlife habitat; and (c) avoid or minimize any incidental impacts.

CDFW's 2025 report to the Legislature on HREA implementation makes several recommendations for legislative changes to the program.

Writing in support of this bill, a coalition of organizations notes that projects approved under the HREA "support 30x30 Conservation Initiative goals, implementation of the California Salmon Strategy, recovery of species like fish, birds, and plants, and contribute to climate resilience and healthier watersheds," and, "if the HREA sunsets at the end of this year, California is at risk of losing an effective pathway to promote expedient implementation of essential restoration projects."

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