
SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Sabrina Cervantes, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

AB 2207 (Hadwick) - Hunting tags: transfer: youth and disabled veteran participation programs

Version: June 25, 2026

Urgency: No

Hearing Date: August 3, 2026

Policy Vote: N.R. & W. 7 - 0

Mandate: No

Consultant: Ashley Ames

Bill Summary: This bill would require the Fish and Game Commission (commission) to establish a hunting tag transfer program for pronghorn antelope, elk, deer, bear, or bighorn sheep tags from a parent, grandparent, or legal guardian to a youth, and would require the commission to establish a hunting tag transfer program for those tags that would authorize certain nonprofit organizations to facilitate the tag transfer in order to provide a hunting opportunity for a youth with a life-threatening illness or permanent physical disability, or a disabled veteran, as provided.

Fiscal Impact:

- The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) estimates one-time costs of \$150,000 in fiscal year (FY) 2027-28 (General Fund) for developing, submitting, and establishing the regulations and systems to enact the proposed legislation. CDFW notes that additional ongoing work would be dependent on the number of tags transferred. CDFW anticipates that the work created by implementing this bill would be absorbed. Additionally, the Commission would be required to provide staffing hours, as the Commission holds regulatory authority for these changes.
- CDFW notes that this bill could potentially result in minor additional revenue to the Big Game Management Account if hunters continue to enter the hunt drawing past the time that they can realistically hunt. To be entered into the drawing, hunters must have a valid license, so the department would continue to collect license fees when, otherwise, the hunter may have ceased to purchase an annual hunting license.

Background: With the exception of free hunting days, a valid hunting license is required to hunt in California for those 16 years of age or older. A junior hunting license is required for those under 16 years of age at the time of licensing. Completion of a hunter safety education course is generally also required to obtain a hunting license. In addition, to legally take certain species, an individual may be required to also purchase applicable stamps, validations, report cards, or tags and, in some instances, a pass for access to the hunt location. For example, an individual wishing to hunt for bear would be required to purchase both a hunting license and a bear tag. To hunt for certain big game species – wild pig, deer, elk, and pronghorn antelope – a hunter must be at least 12 years of age. A hunter must be 16 years of age to hunt for a bighorn sheep.

For hunting, certain participants are eligible for reduced price licenses – such as disabled veterans and recovering service members. Hunters with certain disabilities may also be able to receive accommodations, such as the use of a motor vehicle and the authorization to shoot from the vehicle while hunting, or the authorization to use different or modified equipment to take a species, than otherwise allowed.

Some hunts – particularly for certain big game species, such as elk, pronghorn antelope, bighorn sheep, and certain deer populations – have considerably more demand from hunters than animals available. In these instances, a lottery, the Big Game Drawing (drawing), has been established by regulation to distribute tags. Licensed hunters may file one drawing application between April 15 and June 2 of each year for forthcoming hunts. Each application may apply for up to two hunts for "premium" deer, and one each for elk, pronghorn antelope, and bighorn sheep. The exact method of choosing successful applications can vary between hunts – in some instances hunters who have accumulated preference points may be advantaged compared to others, while other hunt draws are random. The odds of obtaining a premium (or non-premium) deer tag in any year can be pretty good, particularly if the applicant is flexible on the location of the hunt. However, it is not unusual for there to be 100 or more applicants for every pronghorn antelope, elk, or bighorn sheep tag available. Bear tags are readily available, but bear may only be hunted until the limit of 1,700 animals killed is reached. In addition, a limited number of big game tags are made available to nonprofit organizations to auction for fundraising purposes. A tag, once obtained, cannot be transferred to another hunter for use. Additionally, so few bighorn sheep tags are available through the drawing and demand is so high that these are "once in a lifetime" hunts and winners of the tags are subsequently ineligible to obtain another through the drawing.

Hunting opportunities for seriously ill youth. In the last two decades, there have been efforts to facilitate the ability of seriously ill youth to access hunting and fishing opportunities in several states. For example, successful legislation in Mississippi in 2010 and in Wisconsin in 2018 modified or authorized the modification of applicable hunting and fishing requirements for youth with life-threatening or terminal illness. These laws are not uniform and establish varying eligibility requirements (e.g. 18 or 21 years of age maximum, and description of illness) and approaches to facilitate hunting and fishing opportunities (e.g. fee waiver or reduction, and special permitting, among other provisions). In at least some instances, the participation of nonprofit organizations to facilitate these opportunities is specifically acknowledged such as through sponsoring participants and providing the support for the opportunities. In Maine, for example, up to 5 moose hunting permits annually may be issued to nonprofit organizations that provide hunting and fishing adventures to children with life threatening, critical, or terminal illnesses, among other provisions (see Public Law Chapter 526 of 2024). Multiple nonprofit organizations specialize in organizing and hosting seriously ill or special needs youth for hunting and fishing activities. These organizations anecdotally report sustained interest in the opportunities they help to provide for eligible youth annually, and hundreds may participate nationwide where there are opportunities to do so. Detailed application materials to participate in one of the available programs found online illustrate the commitment to providing the logistical support necessary to provide successful trips for eligible youth.

In addition, as noted above, the state offers reduced fee hunting licenses for disabled veterans, and can provide certain accommodations for those with physical disabilities. Other states have hunts specifically for disabled hunters.

Proposed Law: This bill would:

1. Require the commission to establish a hunting tag transfer program that authorizes a person to transfer a tag subject to the following conditions:
 - a. Require the person to transfer a tag issued to be for pronghorn antelope, elk, deer, bear, or bighorn sheep, as provided.
 - b. Require the person to be the parent, legal guardian, or grandparent of the person to whom the tag is transferred.
 - c. Require the transferee is 17 years of age or younger, possesses a valid hunting license, and is otherwise eligible to obtain the applicable tag on the date of the transfer.
 - d. Require the transferee to be accompanied during the take authorized by the tag by their parent, legal guardian, or grandparent, or any combination of those persons.
 - e. Require that a transferee not lose any preference points for the particular species as a result of the transfer of the tag if the tag was obtained through a modified-preference point drawing, as provided.
 - f. Provide that, for a tag for a particular species that may only be drawn once, a person may transfer that tag to a transferee, and that the ineligibility to draw another tag for that species would apply to the transferor and not the transferee.
2. Require the department to collect a fee from the transferor to cover the reasonable cost of transferring a tag and require the department to deposit the revenues into the Big Game Management Account, as provided.
3. Require the commission to establish a hunting tag transfer program that authorizes an organization to facilitate the transfer of a pronghorn, elk, bear, deer, and bighorn sheep tag in accordance with the following requirements:
 - a. Require an eligible organization to be a nonprofit organization with goals and objectives directly related to the management and conservation of big game, upland game, and migratory game species, primarily represents the interests of licensed hunters, and provides hunting opportunities to youth with life-threatening illnesses or permanent physical disabilities or to disabled veterans.
 - b. Require the eligible organization to have a documented history of providing hunting opportunities to youth with life-threatening illnesses or permanent physical disabilities or to disabled veterans. Require the eligible organization to meet any other eligibility criteria established by the commission.
 - c. Require the commission to authorize an organization that meets the eligibility criteria to register with the department for the purposes of the hunting tag transfer program.
 - d. Require a person to be eligible to receive a tag if they are either:
 - i. A youth with a life-threatening illness or permanent physical disability who is 17 years of age or younger and who possesses

- a valid hunting license and is otherwise eligible to obtain the tag, as provided.
 - ii. A disabled veteran who possesses a valid hunting license and is otherwise eligible to obtain the tag.
- e. Require a registered organization to submit a request to the department to transfer a tag from a donor tag holder to an eligible recipient. Require the request to contain all of the following:
- i. A signed, written statement from the tag holder stating they are voluntarily donating the tag to an eligible recipient, as provided.
 - ii. Proof that the recipient meets the eligibility criteria to receive a donated tag.
 - iii. The unused tag.
 - iv. A description of the hunting opportunity to be provided by the organization following tag transfer.
- f. Require the department to transfer the tag to the person identified by the organization if the applicable criteria are met.
- g. Require the organization to provide a hunting opportunity to the tag recipient that allows the tag holder to take the animal authorized by the tag. Require a parent, legal guardian, or grandparent, or any combination of those persons and a person from the organization to accompany a child during the take if the tag recipient is a child.
- h. Require that a transferee not lose any preference points for the particular species as a result of the tag transfer if the tag was obtained through a modified-preference point drawing, as provided. Require that the transferor not receive any reinstatement of preference points lost as a result of drawing a tag.
- i. Require the department to collect a fee from the organization to cover the reasonable cost of registering the organization pursuant to this section, and a fee to cover the reasonable cost of processing a request to transfer a tag, as provided. Require the department to deposit any fee revenues into the Big Game Management Account.
- j. Require the commission to adopt regulations to implement the program.
4. Require the department, on or before January 1, 2032, to submit a report to the relevant legislative policy and budget committees in both houses on the number and types of opportunities provided to youth with life-threatening illnesses and the number of youth who participated, the dates and the assisting nonprofit organization for each opportunity, recommendations to improve the program, and all department and commission costs in developing and implementing the program along with any associated revenues. Require data collection efforts to avoid duplication and use data collected for other purposes to the extent feasible.
5. Define disabled veteran and physical disability, and make conforming changes to statute consistent with authorizing the transfer and use of hunting tags.

6. Sunset the tag transfer authority and the related exception to the prohibition on transferring licenses and tags on January 1, 2033, and restore the current prohibition without exception as of that date.

Related Legislation:

SB 1021 (Choi, 2026) would require the commission to establish a program to increase opportunities to fish and hunt for youth with life-threatening illness, as provided.

SB 718 (Dahle, 2025) would have expanded the eligibility for certain reduced-price hunting and sport fishing licenses to persons receiving public benefits from specified programs, as provided. The bill died in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

AB 2523 (Gray, 2020) would have required the commission to establish a program to increase hunting opportunities for youths who are terminally ill or have lost a parent in service to the state or country, as specified. The bill died in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

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 that revealed that the department’s funding was inadequate to meet its “mission” service level. The “Public Use & Enjoyment” program – where most of the tasks associated with sport fishing and hunting are located – only had about 1/3 of the mission service level resources. 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 were subsequently made, although this was offset, at least in part, by new duties.

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. Sport fishing and hunting continue to receive significant General Fund and non-dedicated Fish and Game Preservation Fund 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 Fish and Game Preservation Fund expenditures by the department.

To the extent any new hunting program is unfunded or does not generate revenue, it will contribute to the long-standing and continuing fiscal challenges at the department.

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