

Date of Hearing: April 6, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

Isaac G. Bryan, Chair

AB 2254 (Addis) – As Amended March 16, 2026

SUBJECT: Coastal resources: local coastal program: monarch butterfly habitat

SUMMARY: Requires, on and after July 1, 2027, a local government with a monarch butterfly overwintering habitat site located within its jurisdiction and the coastal zone, upon the next amendment to its local coastal plan (LCP), to include monarch butterfly overwintering habitat site protection policies, developed by the California Coastal Commission (Commission).

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Prohibits the take or possession of wildlife for scientific research, education, or propagation purposes without a valid Scientific Collection Permit issued by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW). (Fish and Game Code (FGC) 1002)
- 2) Authorizes CDFW to take feasible actions to conserve monarch butterflies and the unique habitats they depend upon for successful migration. These actions may include, but are not limited to, habitat restoration on department lands, education programs, and voluntary agreements with private landowners. Authorizes CDFW to partner with federal agencies, nonprofit organizations, academic programs, private landowners, and other entities that undertake actions to conserve monarch butterflies and aid their successful migration, including the Monarch Joint Venture. (FGC 1021)
- 3) Establishes the Monarch Butterfly and Pollinator Rescue Program to recover and sustain populations of monarch butterflies and other pollinators and to be administered by the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB). (FGC 1374)
- 4) Pursuant to the Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024, makes \$870 million available to WCB for grant programs to protect and enhance fish and wildlife resources and habitat and achieve the state's biodiversity, public access, and conservation goals, including Monarch butterfly and pollinator rescue, among other things. (Public Resources Code (PRC) 93010)
- 5) Pursuant to the California Coastal Act of 1976 (Coastal Act), establishes the Commission, and prescribes the membership and duties of the Commission. (PRC 30301)
- 6) Finds and declares that the California coastal zone is a distinct and valuable natural resource of vital and enduring interest to all the people and exists as a delicately balanced ecosystem, and that the permanent protection of the state's natural and scenic resources is a paramount concern to present and future residents of the state and nation. (PRC 30001)
- 7) Requires each local government lying, in whole or in part, within the coastal zone to prepare a LCP for that portion of the coastal zone within its jurisdiction. (PRC 30500)

- 8) Requires the Commission to adopt, after public hearing, procedures for the preparation, submission, approval, appeal, certification, and amendment of a LCP, as provided. (PRC 30501)

THIS BILL:

- 1) Requires, on or before July 1, 2027, the Commission to develop and provide guidance on model policies to be used by a local government for the protection of monarch butterfly overwintering habitat.
- 2) Requires, on and after July 1, 2027, a local government with a monarch butterfly overwintering habitat site located within its jurisdiction and the coastal zone, upon the next amendment to its LCP, to include monarch butterfly overwintering habitat site protection policies, developed by the Commission.
- 3) Provides that the location of a monarch butterfly overwintering habitat site is determined using the “Monarch Overwintering Areas, Areas of Conservation Emphasis” dataset established by CDFW.
- 4) Requires, if the Commission on State Mandates determines that this bill contains costs mandated by the state, reimbursement to local agencies and school districts for those costs shall be made.

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS:**1) Author’s statement:**

Monarch butterflies, like many people, travel to California’s coast every year to rest and enjoy the mild climate. However, human development has seriously damaged or even removed their fragile overwintering habitats, which they need to survive harsh winter conditions. Loss of these sites, combined with the constant threat of climate change, has led to a 95% decline in the western monarch butterfly population since the 1980s. As a result, this population is at a serious risk of collapse. As stewards of our natural world, we need to ensure that these sites remain safe and available for the monarchs so that they can have a chance at recovering.

- 2) **Monarch butterflies.** Monarchs (*Danaus plexippus*) are a milkweed butterfly. In North America, monarchs migrate both north and south on an annual basis, making long-distance journeys. Since most of these butterflies only live 2 to 5 weeks, this is a multi-generational migration, with individual monarchs only making part of the full journey. Monarchs travel between 1,200 and 2,800 miles or more from Canada, with Central California as a stop-over on the way to the mountain forests in central Mexico, where they find the right climate conditions to hibernate from the beginning of November to mid-March.

In February 2015, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (US FWS) reported on a study that showed that nearly a billion monarchs had vanished from the butterfly's overwintering sites since 1990. The agency attributed the monarch's decline to the loss and degradation of its breeding, migratory, and overwintering habitats, exposure to insecticides, and the growing impacts of climate change.



Climate change and habitat loss have significantly altered the monarch butterfly's migration behavior. Rising temperatures and the widespread loss of milkweed, the primary host plant for monarch larvae, have disrupted breeding and migratory patterns across North America, contributing to population declines over the past two decades

According to Xerces Society, sponsor of this bill, the monarch population in California decreased by 86% in 2018, going from millions to tens of thousands of butterflies. The society's annual 2020–2021 winter count showed a further significant decline in the California population. One Pacific Grove site had no monarch butterflies. A primary explanation for this was the destruction of the butterfly's milkweed habitats. This particular population is believed to comprise less than 2,000 individuals as of 2022.

In California, monarchs are not listed under the California Endangered Species Act (CESA). They are included on CDFW's Terrestrial and Vernal Pool Invertebrates of Conservation Priority list and identified as a Species of Greatest Conservation Need in California's State Wildlife Action Plan.

In 2014, monarchs were petitioned to be listed under the federal Endangered Species Act. In December 2020, the US FWS found that listing was warranted but precluded by other listing actions on its National Priority List. On December 12, 2024, the Service proposed listing the monarch as threatened with a 4(d) rule and designated critical habitat in California in the western population's overwintering range.

- 3) **Habitat need.** The western monarch population in California overwinters along the coast, where they cluster in forested groves, which provide essential shelter from the elements. Overwintering sites are critical for the survival of the monarchs as they require specific micro-climate conditions to live.

CDFW identifies key monarch overwintering areas, particularly along the coast from Mendocino County to Baja, California, for protection and restoration as part of its Areas of Conservation Emphasis program. These sites are critical for monarch survival, providing winter shelter for the declining western population. This dataset, "Monarch Overwintering Areas, Areas of Conservation Emphasis," includes spatial information on more than 400 known monarch overwintering sites to support non-regulatory conservation, land-use planning, and identifying priority habitats. Protection focuses on coastal groves (eucalyptus, Monterey pine, cypress) that offer necessary microclimates, protecting them from

development and degradation. In partnership with organizations like the Xerces Society CDFW is enhancing 1,500 acres of habitat and improving management strategies on state-owned overwintering sites.

- 4) **Local Coastal Plans.** The Commission administers the Coastal Act and regulates proposed development along the coast and in nearby areas in the coastal zone. Generally, any development activity in the coastal zone requires a coastal development permit (CDP) from the Commission or local government with a certified LCP. About 88% of the coastal zone is governed by a certified LCP. There are 14 jurisdictions (out of 15 counties and 61 cities) without LCPs – also known as “uncertified” jurisdictions – where the Commission is still the permitting authority for CDPs.

This bill requires the Commission to develop and provide guidance on model policies to be used by a local government for the protection of monarch butterfly overwintering habitat, and requires a local government with a monarch butterfly overwintering habitat site located within its jurisdiction and the coastal zone to include monarch butterfly overwintering habitat site protection policies upon the next amendment to its LCP.

Updating an LCP is no small feat; the document is complex and requires significant staff time and resources to complete.

The League of California Cities, California State Association of Counties, and the Rural County Representatives of California express concerns that LCPs are not site-specific plans – they are long-range land use planning documents intended to guide decision-making and permitting in the coastal zone. If there are overwintering specific sites that need greater protection, the development of habitat management plans would be the most appropriate planning mechanism to provide specific protection or mitigations for such sites. There are already local governments that have existing habitat management plans for monarch butterflies and their overwintering sites, which is a more appropriate planning tool to address site specific issues.

To address those concerns, the bill could direct CDFW and the Commission to first identify the monarch butterfly overwintering habitat sites in the coastal zone and then develop guidance on model policies that can be used by a local government for the protection of monarch butterfly overwintering habitat. The state could solicit data sets from local governments, organizations focused on conservation of invertebrates and their habitats, and other relevant and reliable entities to inform their guidance development.

The author may wish to consider working with local governments to further address their concerns about mandating LCP updates.

- 5) **Monarch Butterfly and Pollinator Rescue Program.** The Monarch Butterfly and Pollinator Rescue Program (Program) was created by AB 2421 (Stone), Chapter 760, Statutes of 2018, for the purpose of recovering and sustaining populations of monarch butterflies and other pollinators. Under the Program, WCB provides grants to private landowners, nonprofits, resource conservation districts, and public agencies. To date, more than \$14.4 million has been awarded across 14 grants (from various funding sources).

Proposition 4 authorizes \$870 million for WCB to provide grants for programs to protect and enhance fish and wildlife resources and habitat and achieve the state's biodiversity, public access, and conservation goals, including Monarch butterfly and pollinator rescue. The Program does not have a dedicated funding source, so Proposition 4 funds will be used to support those grants. WCB recently granted \$3.4 million grant to Xerces Society to restore habitat for several at-risk butterflies and identify opportunities for additional restoration across 10 counties along the central coast.

- 6) **Double referral.** This bill is also referred to the Assembly Water, Parks and Wildlife Committee.
- 7) **Committee amendments.** The *committee may wish to consider* amending this bill to:
- a) Require CDFW and the Commission to coordinate to develop monarch overwintering habitat protection guidance for local governments in the coastal zone; and,
 - b) Encourage local governments with updated LCPs for Monarch habitat protections to apply for grants under the Program.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

American Bird Conservancy
 California State Parks Foundation
 Center for Biological Diversity
 Center for Food Safety
 Central Coast State Parks Association
 Defenders of Wildlife
 Monarch Joint Venture
 National Wildlife Federation
 Natural Resources Defense Council
 Pacific Grove Museum of Natural History
 Planning and Conservation League
 Rainforest Rising, INC.
 River Partners
 San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance
 Santa Barbara Zoo
 Social Compassion in Legislation
 The Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation
 Valley Eco
 Wild Farm Alliance

Opposition

California State Association of Counties
 League of California Cities
 Rural County Representatives of California

Analysis Prepared by: Paige Brokaw / NAT. RES. /