
SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES AND WATER

Senator Josh Becker, Chair

2025 - 2026 Regular

Bill No: AB 2254 **Hearing Date:** June 23, 2026
Author: Addis
Version: May 18, 2026 Amended
Urgency: No **Fiscal:** Yes
Consultant: Katharine Moore

Subject: Coastal resources: monarch butterfly habitat

SUMMARY

This bill would require the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, in consultation with the California Coastal Commission, to identify monarch butterfly overwintering habitat in the coastal zone, and to develop model policies for the protection of monarch butterfly overwintering habitat in the coastal zone. This bill would further direct a local government with monarch butterfly overwintering habitat in the coastal zone to develop and implement enforceable monarch butterfly overwintering habitat site protection policies, as provided, among other provisions.

BACKGROUND AND EXISTING LAW

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife's (CDFW'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, CDFW implements and enforces the regulations set by the California Fish and Game Commission, as well as providing biological data and expertise to inform their decision-making process.

CDFW is a contributor to the California Multi-Agency Monarch & Pollinator Collaborative, a federal and state agency partnership, which recently released the report "Conservation Priorities for Western Monarchs in California." The report notes that "many of California's native invertebrate pollinator species are at risk due to a multitude of threats including habitat loss, pesticide use, unpredictable weather conditions and disease." Priority recommendations include improving the availability of native plant material, tracking the implementation and success of habitat projects and making information more accessible. The report notes that the populations of the western monarch butterfly have fallen to the lowest on record in the last five years. The monarch butterfly is considered an ideal "umbrella" species due to its broad distribution. Improving its conservation will benefit other pollinators that face similar threats. Protecting and restoring the monarch butterfly overwintering habitat is crucial to the species' recovery, but significant knowledge gaps remain which have hindered conservation efforts.

Monarch butterflies

Monarch butterflies (*danaus plexippus plexippus*) are a milkweed butterfly. In North America, monarch butterflies migrate both north and south on an annual basis traveling between 1,200 – 2,800 miles or more from Canada to the mountain forests of central Mexico. Central California is a stop-over on the way where they overwinter from

November to mid-March. Since most monarch butterflies only live 2 – 5 weeks, this journey takes multiple generations.

Monarch butterfly populations have decreased dramatically in recent years – western monarch butterfly overwintering populations have declined by more than 90% since the 1980s from millions to tens of thousands. The Xerces Society’s annual winter count in 2020 – 2021 showed another significant decline in the state’s population of overwintering monarch butterflies. A primary explanation for this was the destruction of the monarch butterfly’s milkweed habitat, although severe weather and high temperatures may also play a role in the significant population fluctuations recently observed. Climate change and habitat loss have significantly altered the monarch butterfly’s migration behavior.

Monarch butterflies are included on CDFW’s Terrestrial and Vernal Pool Invertebrates of Conservation Priority list and identified as a Species of Greatest Conservation Need in the state’s Wildlife Action Plan. The monarch butterfly is not a listed or candidate species protected under the California Endangered Species Act, but has listing pending under the federal Endangered Species Act.

The western monarch butterfly population in California overwinters largely along the coast where they cluster in forested groves which provide essential shelter from the elements and the necessary conditions for them to survive. Habitat protection has focused on coastal groves (including eucalyptus, Monterey pine, and cypress) that offer the necessary microclimates for the monarch butterfly’s survival. While thirty-five percent of overwintering sites are outside the coastal zone, most of the sites with the highest numbers of overwintering monarch butterflies in recent years are in the coastal zone. Monarch butterfly overwintering habitat occurs in seventeen counties in California, and of those, four have sites only within the coastal zone, including Mendocino County, the most northern county occurring in the monarch butterflies overwintering range

The California Coastal Commission

The California Coastal Commission (Coastal Commission) was established by voter initiative in 1972. The Legislature later made the Coastal Commission permanent through the adoption of the California Coastal Act of 1976 (Coastal Act) (Public Resources Code (PRC) §§30000 *et seq.*). The Coastal Commission plans for and regulates the use of land and water in the coastal zone (which excludes the San Francisco Bay).

The Coastal Commission is an independent, quasi-judicial state agency, and its mission statement states that it “is committed to protecting and enhancing California’s coast and ocean for present and future generations.” The Coastal Commission does so “through careful planning and regulation of environmentally sustainable development, rigorous use of science, strong public participation, education, and effective intergovernmental coordination.”

Development activities in the coastal zone generally require a coastal development permit (CDP) issued by the Coastal Commission or by a local government with a local coastal program (LCP) certified by the Coastal Commission. Coastal Act policies are

the standards the Coastal Commission uses to determine the permissibility of proposed developments subject to its jurisdiction.

Monarch Butterfly and Pollinator Rescue Program

The Monarch Butterfly and Pollinator Rescue 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. The Wildlife Conservation Board, located at CDFW, under this program, provides grants to private landowners, nonprofit organizations, resource conservation districts and public agencies. To date, more than \$14.4 million has been awarded as part of 14 grants.

Existing law:

- 1) 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. (Fish and Game Code (FGC) §1021)
- 2) 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. (FGC §1374)
- 3) Pursuant to the Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024 (Proposition 4), makes \$870 million available to the Wildlife Conservation Board 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 others. (Public Resources Code (PRC) §93010)
- 4) Pursuant to the Coastal Act, establishes the Coastal Commission in the California Natural Resources Agency.
 - a) Includes legislative findings and declarations that:
 - i) The coastal zone is a distinct and valuable natural resource of vital and enduring interest to all the people, the permanent protection of the state's natural and scenic resources is a paramount concern to present and future residents, and existing uses and future developments that are carefully planned and developed consistent with the Coastal Act are essential to the economic and social well-being of the people of the state (PRC §30001).
 - ii) The basic goals of the state for the coastal zone include to:
 - (1) Protect, maintain, and, where feasible, enhance and restore the overall quality of the coastal zone environment and its natural and artificial resources,
 - (2) Ensure orderly, balanced utilization and conservation of coastal zone resources taking into account the social and economic needs of the people of the state, and

- (3) Maximize public access to and along the coast and maximize public recreational opportunities in the coastal zone consistent with sound resources conservation principles and constitutionally protected rights of private property owners, among other things (PRC §30001.5).
- b) Provides for the planning and regulation of development within the coastal zone, as defined.
 - i) A person planning to perform or undertake any development in the coastal zone is required to obtain a CDP from the Coastal Commission or local government enforcing a certified LCP (PRC §30600).
 - (1) Development means, among other things, the placement or erection of any solid material or structure on land or in water. Structure means any building, road, pipe, flume, conduit, and electrical power transmission and distribution line, among other things (PRC §30106).
 - (2) The coastal zone means the coastal land and waters of California, and includes the lands that extend inland generally 1,000 yards from the mean high tide line, as specified, with various exceptions, including the San Francisco Bay (PRC §30103).
- c) Requires a local government in the coastal zone to prepare a LCP. Requires the precise content of the LCP to be determined by the local government in full consultation with the Coastal Commission and with full public participation (PRC §30500). Provides for LCPs to be amended by the local government, but the amendment does not take effect until certified by the Coastal Commission (PRC §30514).

PROPOSED LAW

This bill would:

- 1) Require CDFW, on or before January 1, 2028, in coordination with the Coastal Commission, to identify both of the following:
 - a) Monarch butterfly overwintering habitat sites in the coastal zone.
 - b) Current local government monarch butterfly overwintering habitat management plans or policies.
- 2) Require CDFW, on or before July 1, 2028, in coordination with the Coastal Commission, to develop and provide guidance on model policies that can be used by a local government for the protection of monarch butterfly overwintering habitat, as provided.
 - a) Authorize the model policies developed to include, but not be limited to, enforceable habitat management plans with measurable outcomes, local coastal program updates, and other local policies, such as ordinances, for protecting monarch butterflies that are local enforceable with measurable outcomes.
 - b) Authorize CDFW and the Coastal Commission in developing the guidance to use existing datasets produced by local governments, certain organizations, and other relevant entities, as provided.

- c) Require CDFW and the Coastal Commission to post the developed guidance on their internet websites, including the information about current local government plans or policies and monarch butterfly overwintering habitat sites in the coastal zone.
- 3) After the guidance on model policies is developed, require a local government with a monarch butterfly overwintering habitat site in the coastal zone in their jurisdiction to develop and implement enforceable monarch butterfly overwintering habitat site protection policies consistent with those developed by CDFW, as provided.
- 4) Encourage a local government to apply for grants administered under the Monarch Butterfly and Pollinator Rescue Program, as provided.
- 5) Require reimbursement to local agencies and school districts for state-mandated costs, if applicable, as provided.

ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT

According to the author, "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."

ARGUMENTS IN OPPOSITION

None received

COMMENTS

This bill is double-referred. This bill was referred to both this Committee and the Senate Local Government Committee. This Committee is the committee of first referral. Elements of this bill under the jurisdiction of the Senate Local Government Committee are included here for context and completeness only and will be discussed before that Committee.

Do monarch butterflies stop at the coastal zone boundary? The coastal zone boundary is established in law and is a political boundary, not a scientific one. The coastal zone boundary is generally not an ecosystem boundary, a microclimate boundary, or an overwintering habitat boundary. While most popular monarch butterfly overwintering habitat is located in the coastal zone, there are additional overwintering habitat locations located inland of the coastal zone. Any recommendations or policies to protect overwintering habitat sites would be specific to the local geography and conditions, but it may well be that the recommendations for the coastal zone also would apply some distance inland of the coastal zone.

Deadlines. While there is a wealth of data to draw on, it may be difficult, given state budgeting practices and funding challenges, for CDFW in coordination with the Coastal Commission to accomplish the identification and model policy objectives within 18 months of enactment. In addition, a deadline for a local government with monarch butterfly overwintering habitat in its jurisdiction to implement enforceable monarch

butterfly overwintering habitat site protection policies would help to accelerate compliance with those policies in the near-term given the risks the butterflies face.

In view of this, the Committee may wish to extend the deadline for the identification and model policies development by one year, and provide two years after that deadline for the enforceable policies to be implemented. [Amendment #1]

What does “enforceable” mean in the coastal zone? Under existing law, an enforceable development action in the coastal zone by a local government would typically be through a certified LCP. A CDP for a specific project – which could include a new local ordinance for the protection of monarch butterfly overwintering habitat – would be required in the absence of an applicable certified LCP.

Model policy development. There are instances, such as for defensible space requirements for protection against wildfire by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, where a state agency with issue area expertise is charged with developing model policies within their area of expertise. As proposed herein, CDFW is charged with developing model policies that have the potential to impact local land use and zoning in order to protect monarch butterfly overwintering habitat sites.

Underfunded and overmandated. CDFW 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 CDFW is particularly challenging. Recently, at legislative direction, CDFW undertook a “service-based” budgeting effort to identify the personnel needed to perform the services required by its mandates. CDFW’s services were separated into eight general programs for analysis. In 2021, the initial results of this effort were released that revealed that CDFW’s funding was inadequate to meet its “mission” service level. The “Species and Habitat Conservation” program – where most of the tasks associated with the conservation of monarch butterflies are located – only had about 27% of the mission service level resources. The Newsom Administration proposed, and the Legislature approved, significant one-time General Fund moneys to support CDFW’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 Species and Habitat Conservation resources remain at about 35% overall. There has been some improvement, although significant challenges remain. In the near term, Proposition 4 funding may help to offset certain implementation costs associated with the protection of monarch butterfly overwintering habitat.

Recent related legislation

AB 2421 (Stone, Chapter 760, Statutes of 2018) establishes the Monarch Butterfly and Pollinator Rescue Program at the Wildlife Conservation Board.

Legislative deadlines and Committee amendments. Due to the legislative calendar and the time required to process amendments, the amendments committed to by the author in this Committee will be formally taken in the Senate Local Government Committee.

SUGGESTED AMENDMENTS

AMENDMENT 1

On page 2, line 3: replace “2028,” with “2029,”

On page 3, line 1: replace “2028,” with “2029,”

On page 3, line 40: amend the line to read:

“(b) of Section 1021.5 of the Fish and Game Code by July 1, 2131.”

SUPPORT

Xerces Society of Invertebrate Conservation (sponsor)

American Bird Conservancy

Audubon California

California Central Coast Caucus

California State Parks Foundation

Center for Biological Diversity

Center for Food Safety

Central Coast State Parks Association

City of Livermore

City of Pacific Grove

City of Ventura

Defenders of Wildlife

Midpeninsula Open Space District

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

Sempervirens Fund

Sierra Club

Social Compassion in Legislation

The Honorable Joe LaCava, City Council President, City of San Diego

The Honorable Scott Donaldson, Mayor, City of Del Rey Oaks

Valley Eco

Wild Farm Alliance

OPPOSITION

None received

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