

Date of Hearing: May 6, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
Buffy Wicks, Chair
AB 2590 (Jeff Gonzalez) – As Amended April 16, 2026

Policy Committee: Water, Parks and Wildlife Vote: 13 - 0

Urgency: No State Mandated Local Program: No Reimbursable: No

SUMMARY:

This bill requires the California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA) to designate a Sentinel Landscapes Program Manager (Manager) to coordinate state participation in the federal Sentinel Landscapes Partnership (SLP) and authorizes various state agencies, in evaluating applications for grants, to give priority consideration to projects located within a federally designated sentinel landscape.

Specifically, this bill:

- 1) Requires CNRA to designate a Manager to coordinate state participation in the federal SLP and specifies numerous requirements for the Manager, including that the Manager work with various state agencies that have conservation grant or easement authority to identify opportunities to align funding strategies consistent with federal sentinel landscape objectives and each agency's statutory mission, and requires the Manager to prepare, once every two years, a summary of opportunities, collaborative projects, leveraged funding, and outcomes relating to federal sentinel landscape designations in California.
- 2) Authorizes the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) to (a) provide grants for habitat protection, restoration, and enhancement projects that are located within a federally designated sentinel landscape, as specified, and (b) coordinate with federal departments and agencies participating in the federal SLP and other entities to align conservation investments within federally designated sentinel landscapes and to leverage federal funds, technical assistance, or matching grants.
- 3) Creates the California Sentinel Landscapes Fund in the State Treasury, authorizes WCB to accept for deposit into the fund federal funds, grants, and gifts and donations, including interest earned, designated and required by the donor to be used exclusively for specified projects, and continuously appropriates monies in the fund to WCB to implement specified projects.
- 4) Authorizes the Department of Conservation (DOC) and the Strategic Growth Council (SGC), in evaluating applications for grants pursuant to the Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation (SALC) program, to the extent not in conflict with the programs, to give priority consideration to projects located within a federally designated sentinel landscape.
- 5) Authorizes the State Coastal Conservancy (SCC) and the Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC), in evaluating applications for grants under each conservancy's respective programs, to the

extent not in conflict with those programs, to give priority consideration to projects located within a federally designated sentinel landscape, provided those projects are consistent with the statutory mission and purposes of each conservancy.

- 6) Requires CNRA, in collaboration with the Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation (LCI), DOC, WCB, SCC, SNC, California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), and other relevant state entities, to regularly consult on how to align conservation opportunities with state and federal landscape protection goals.
- 7) Authorizes DOC, when evaluating applications as part of its California Farmland Conservancy Program (CFCP), to give priority consideration to projects that are located within federally designated sentinel landscape.
- 8) Makes implementation of this bill contingent upon the availability of federal funds, grants, gifts, donations, or other non-General Fund resources available to support the purposes of this bill.

FISCAL EFFECT:

While the bill states its implementation is contingent on the availability of non-General Fund resources, this bill nonetheless creates ongoing annual cost pressures of an unknown amount, likely in the hundreds of thousands to low millions of dollars in the aggregate, on various state agencies for administrative costs as well as on the various grant programs (such as SALC and CFCP) referenced in the bill (General Fund, special funds, or bond funds).

- 1) CNRA estimates ongoing annual costs of approximately \$330,000 for 1.5 new positions (General Fund, special fund, or bond funds) to designate a Manager to coordinate state participation in the federal SLP as well as to provide consultation and coordination among numerous entities. The Manager would lead interagency coordination, support federal designation efforts, prepare biennial reports, gather data, and support the alignment of conservation investments across multiple state agencies and federal partners.
- 2) SNC notes that should this bill result in the inclusion of additional military installations in the sentinel landscape or candidate landscape designations that fall within SNC's service area, SNC would require about \$300,000 annually ongoing for two positions to support coordination with the Manager and project development that aligns with the goals of the SLP. Additionally, SLC estimates it would require implementation funds at approximately \$3,000 per acre to advance conservation and landscape resilience projects within federally designated sentinel landscapes (General Fund, special fund, or bond funds).
- 3) WCB estimates \$200,000 in ongoing annual costs for one environmental scientist. WCB notes that because it cannot currently accept federal grants, the board would require one new position to manage federal grants and implement this bill (General Fund, special fund, or bond funds.) To the extent WCB is able to accept federal funds, grants, gifts, and donations for deposit into the California Sentinel Landscapes Fund, the board could use these dollars to implement projects.
- 4) SGC estimates one-time costs of approximately \$257,000 for one year (General Fund, special fund, or bond funds) for one limited-term analyst to provide consultation and administrative guidance to SGC leadership and coordinate with the DOC SALC implementation team to

develop processes around project assessment in accordance with federal landscape objectives and to coordinate with WCB regarding the newly established Fund.

- 5) SCC and DOC anticipate minor and absorbable administrative costs.

According to a 2024 joint federal agency report, from the SLP's founding through fiscal year (FY) 2023, projects in sentinel landscapes have received funding in the amounts of \$381 million from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), \$283 million from the Department of War (DOW), and \$117 million from the Department of the Interior (DOI). SLP has also received \$446 million in state funds, \$51 million in local funds, and \$166 million in private funds.

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

COMMENTS:

- 1) **Purpose.** According to the author, this bill establishes a statewide Manager to help “coordinate efforts to get more landscape designations. With a dedicated manager, California can more effectively compete for federal resources, support additional landscape designations, and ensure that existing efforts are strategically guided and sustained.”
- 2) **Background.** According to USDA, a “sentinel landscape” is an area “where conservation, working lands, and national defense interests converge.” These areas are anchored by at least one military installation or range and contain high priority lands for USDA, DOW, and DOI. The SLP is a coalition of federal agencies, state and local governments, and private organizations that work with willing landowners and land managers to advance sustainable land use practices around military installations and ranges. Founded in 2013 and codified in statute in 2024, the SLP aligns the objectives of USDA, DOW, and DOI to strengthen military readiness, conserve natural resources, bolster agricultural and forestry economies, increase public access to outdoor recreation, and enhance landscape resilience.

There is one sentinel landscape in California: the Mojave Desert. The Mojave Desert Sentinel Landscape covers 3.5 million acres of the western Mojave Desert and is home to five military installations. According to USDA, this region is increasingly challenged by development pressures that pose significant threats to military operations, including airspace congestion, limited access to training routes, unauthorized off-road vehicle use, and energy development. To address these challenges, the Mojave Desert Sentinel Landscape brings together a diverse group of state, local, federal, tribal, and private partners focused on reducing land use conflicts that impact military readiness.

Writing in support, the Department of the Navy asserts that through coordination, sentinel landscapes help sustain working lands, protect wildlife habitat, reduce wildfire risk, and support climate resilience. The Navy notes the program operates “solely through willing landowners, relying on voluntary partnerships and incentives rather than mandates,” and that “California’s participation would advance the state’s conservation priorities while leveraging significant federal resources and investment.”