

Date of Hearing: April 13, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

Isaac G. Bryan, Chair

AB 2627 (Hart) – As Introduced February 20, 2026

**SUBJECT:** California Rangeland, Grazing Land, and Grassland Protection Program

**SUMMARY:** Requires bond funding to be appropriated to the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) for conservation easement grants to accredited entities.

**EXISTING LAW:**

- 1) Establishes the WCB and requires the WCB to authorize the acquisition of real property, rights in real property, water, or water rights as may be necessary to carry out the purposes of the Wildlife Conservation Law of 1947. (Fish and Game Code 1320 *et seq.*)
- 2) Authorizes funds to be expended by WCB for the acquisition of conservation easements over qualified property. Authorizes WCB to make grants of funds to a state agency, local public agency, or nonprofit organization for the acquisition of conservation easements over qualified property. (Public Resources Code (PRC) 10334)
- 3) Establishes the California Rangeland, Grazing Land, and Grassland Protection Program to protect California’s rangeland, grazing land, and grasslands through the use of conservation easements. (PRC 10331)
- 4) Authorizes, pursuant to the Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness, and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024 (Proposition 4), \$870 million, upon appropriation by the Legislature, to be appropriated 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. (PRC 93010)

**THIS BILL:**

- 1) For purposes of this bill, defines “eligible entity” as an entity that meets all of the following criteria:
  - a) Has received accreditation from the Land Trust Accreditation Commission at the time of applying for a grant;
  - b) Demonstrates the capacity to acquire a conservation easement within 18 months of the award of a grant; and,
  - c) Demonstrates the financial capacity to comply with perpetual stewardship and monitoring requirements associated with accreditation, or is a tribe, band, nation, or other organized group or community eligible for special programs and services provided by the United States or the State of California to Native Americans because of their status as Native Americans.
- 2) Requires \$90 million from Proposition 4 to be appropriated to WCB.

- 3) Requires WCB to award these funds as grants to eligible entities through the California Rangeland, Grazing Land, and Grassland Protection Program to acquire conservation easements on privately owned qualified property that supports food and fiber production and ecosystem services, including wildfire fuel reduction, groundwater recharge, wildlife habitat, and scenic open space.
- 4) Provides that a grant may include:
  - a) Up to 100% of the appraised value of a conservation easement, as approved by the Department of General Services; or
  - b) Up to \$75,000 for applicant expenses related to processing the conservation easement.
- 5) Requires, on or before June 30, 2029, a grantee to expend the grant funds and record the conservation easement.
- 6) Authorizes WCB to partner with and receive funds from land trusts certified by the United States Department of Agriculture under the federal Agricultural Conservation Easement Program.
- 7) Requires priority to be given to projects that leverage federal or private funding, but does not require matching funds.

**FISCAL EFFECT:** Unknown

**COMMENTS:**

1) **Author's statement:**

Conservation easements are a critical, cost-effective tool to help California achieve its 30x30 goals. These easements protect working rangelands, while maintaining their economic viability and agricultural production. By incentivizing voluntary conservation on rangelands, the State can advance its climate goals, while delivering numerous public benefits. AB 2627 will help expand conservation on working lands, support wildfire fuel reduction, enhance groundwater recharge, protect wildlife habitat, and preserve open space.

- 2) **Proposition 4.** The Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness, and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024, approved by the voters as Proposition 4 in 2024, authorizes \$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.
- 3) **California Rangeland, Grazing Land, and Grassland Protection Program.** California is home to 38 million acres of rangeland that provides open space, watersheds, carbon storage, food, fiber and habitat for diverse plants and wildlife. On average, approximately 50,000 acres of farmland and rangeland are lost per year; of that, 21,000 acres per year are lost to urbanization. According to a 2016 American Farmland Trust report on the status of farmland

across the nation, California is on track to lose 500,000 acres of rangeland and pastureland by 2040. Over the last two centuries, 75% of the state's native vegetation and more than 90% of wetlands have been altered, reducing biodiversity and ecological resilience. Conversion of rangeland to urban uses may increase greenhouse gas emissions up to 100-fold. The state's 2019 Draft *California 2030 Natural and Working Lands Climate Change Implementation Plan* notes that, to achieve conservation and carbon sequestration goals on rangelands, the 2030 goal includes increasing fivefold the acres of cultivated lands and rangelands under state-funded soil conservation practices.

According to the author, investing in rangeland conservation protects important ecosystem services or environmental benefits that all Californians depend upon. For example, conserving rangelands protects watersheds, as more than two-thirds of surface waters used for municipal and crop production in California are derived from rangeland watersheds.

- 4) **Land Trust Accreditation.** The Land Trust Accreditation Commission was established as an independent program of the Land Trust Alliance in 2006. Accreditation by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission affords entities automatic eligibility to hold easements with California's Sustainable Agricultural Land Conservation Program (supported by the state's Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund). Today there are 132 land trusts in California, 52 of which are accredited.

In order to be eligible for a grant under this bill, an eligible entity needs to have received accreditation; demonstrate the capacity to acquire a conservation easement within 18 months of the award of a grant; and, demonstrate the financial capacity to comply with perpetual stewardship and monitoring requirements associated with accreditation, or is a tribe.

- 5) **Policy bill budgeting.** Appropriations for state funds are adopted through the annual State Budget Act. The Legislative Budget Committees are currently considering Proposition 4 allocations for the fiscal year 2026-27 Budget. The author may wish to work with the Assembly Appropriations and Budget Committees on proposed priorities for Proposition 4 funding for the Rangeland, Grazing Land, and Grassland Protection Program.
- 6) **Related legislation.** AB 1311 (Hart) proposed appropriating \$400 million from Proposition 4 for the WCB to award grants to eligible entities to acquire conservation easements on qualified property that is privately owned and supports the production of food and fiber and ecosystem services, including, but not limited to, wildfire fuel reduction, groundwater recharge, wildlife habitat, and open vistas. This bill was held in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.
- 7) **Double referral.** This bill is also referred to the Assembly Water, Parks and Wildlife Committee.

## REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

### Support

American Farmland Trust  
California Cattlemen's Association  
California Farm Bureau Federation  
California Rangeland Trust

**Opposition**

None on file

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