

Date of Hearing: April 29, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

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

Policy Committee:	Natural Resources	Vote:	14 - 0
	Water, Parks and Wildlife		12 - 0

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

SUMMARY:

This bill appropriates \$90 million from funds allocated to the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) in the Proposition 4 climate bond to the California Rangeland, Grazing Land, and Grassland Protection Program (Rangeland Program) administered by WCB.

Specifically, this bill, among other things:

- 1) Appropriates \$90 million from funds allocated to WCB in Proposition 4 for grants to eligible entities through the Rangeland Program to acquire conservation easements on privately owned qualified property, as specified, and authorizes a grant to include (a) up to 100% of the appraised value of a conservation easement, as approved by the Department of General Services (DGS) and (b) up to \$75,000 for applicant expenses related to processing the easement.
- 2) Requires a grantee receiving funds pursuant to this bill to expend grant funds and record its conservation easement no later than June 30, 2029.
- 3) 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 for purposes of implementing this bill and requires WCB to give priority to projects that leverage federal or private funding – but prohibits WCB from requiring matching funds.
- 4) Defines “eligible entity” for purposes of receiving funding from the Rangeland Program as an entity that (a) has received accreditation from the Land Trust Accreditation Commission, (b) demonstrates the capacity to acquire a conservation easement within 18 months of a grant award, 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.
- 5) Defines “tribe” for purposes of the Rangeland Program as a federally recognized Native American tribe or a nonfederally recognized Native American tribe listed on the California Tribal Consultation list maintained by the Native American Heritage Commission.
- 6) Makes technical and conforming changes and modifies various other definitions in law.

FISCAL EFFECT:

- 1) This bill earmarks \$90 million of the \$870 million allocation to WCB in Proposition 4 for WCB's Rangeland Program. Of the \$870 million, the fiscal year (FY) 2025-26 budget appropriated \$297 million to WCB, and the Governor's budget for FY 2026-27 proposes an additional \$153 million for WCB for projects related to fish and wildlife resources and habitats, wildlife crossing and corridors, the San Andreas Corridor Program, and the Southern Ballona Creek Watershed.

In February 2026, WCB awarded \$30 million across several high priority projects, including planning for wildlife crossings on interstate 15 and state route 62, habitat restoration for pollinators across multiple coastal counties, spring habitat for migratory birds, and meaningful access to nature for Watsonville. WCB also provided \$600,000 from the Habitat Conservation Fund to acquire a conservation easement across 315 acres of grassland in Contra Costa County. WCB is currently processing 15 acquisitions for grassland habitats across 13 counties and, if approved, these projects will result in grant awards of nearly \$68 million this year. WCB expects to fund many more grassland projects over the life of Proposition 4.

WCB has invested over \$200 million in the acquisition of grasslands and grazing over the last decade from the Habitat Conservation Fund, General Fund, Proposition 50, Proposition 68, and the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund. WCB notes that the previously mentioned San Andreas Corridor Program is generally understood to be used in the area bounded by Henry Coe Park to the north and the Carrizo Plain to the south – which is almost entirely in grassland and grazing land ecosystems. The \$80 million allocated for this program in Proposition 4 is expected to protect rangeland, grazing land, and grasslands.

- 2) Administrative and staffing costs of an unknown amount for WCB and DGS to implement this bill (bond funds). Conservation easement projects are some of the most challenging transactions that WCB executes. Methodologies for conservation easement appraisals are complex, and reviews and approvals for these transactions require specialized expertise and considerable staff time by WCB and DGS. At minimum, this bill will likely result in a significant redistribution of WCB's workload and funding priorities.

Proposition 4 provides that 7% of the funds allocated for a grant program may be used to pay for the administrative costs of that program.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **Purpose.** According to the author:

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) **Background.** Proposition 4 authorized \$10 billion in general obligation bonds for a variety of climate resilience, water, and natural resource management projects and programs. The

bond allocated \$870 million 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. Eligible programs, according to the bond language, include land acquisition; habitat enhancement and restoration; rangeland, grazing land, and grassland protection; inland wetland conservation; ecosystem restoration on agricultural lands; climate adaptation and resiliency; monarch butterfly and pollinator rescue; desert conservation; and oak woodland conservation.

According to WCB, the purpose of its Rangeland Program is to protect rangelands, grazing lands, and grasslands through the use of conservation easements and prevent their conversion to nonagricultural uses, protect the long-term sustainability of livestock grazing, and ensure continued wildlife, water quality, watershed, and open space benefits to the state from livestock grazing.

According to the California Cattlemen's Association and California Farm Bureau, voluntary conservation easements on ranchlands are "one of the most effective and cost-efficient tools available to help California meet its statewide conservation targets." The organizations note that conservation easements "are more affordable than fee acquisition (often costing about one-third as much) and they also keep properties on the tax rolls while being maintained by private landowners, minimizing public stewardship burdens." Further, the organizations contend that private rangelands "provide multiple environmental benefits, including water supply protection, wildfire fuel reduction, wildlife habitat, carbon storage, food production, and open space."

- 3) **Related Legislation.** AB 1311 (Hart) of the current legislative session appropriates \$400 million from Proposition 4 for WCB to award grants to eligible entities to acquire conservation easements. AB 1311 was held on this committee's suspense file.

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