
SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES AND WATER

Senator Josh Becker, Chair

2025 - 2026 Regular

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Author:	Blakespear		
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Urgency:	No	Fiscal:	Yes
Consultant:	Katharine Moore		

Subject: California Wildlife Coexistence Act

SUMMARY

This bill would establish the California Wildlife Coexistence Act, establish state policy requiring an emphasis on the coexistence of humans and wildlife in the management of wildlife, and require the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, upon appropriation, to establish a Wildlife Coexistence Program, the Wolf-Livestock Coexistence and Compensation Program, and the Wildlife Coexistence Technical Advisory Committee to perform certain duties to support coexistence, as provided, among other provisions.

BACKGROUND AND EXISTING LAW

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (department). The department is the state's trustee agency for the state's fish and wildlife. The department'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, the department implements and enforces the regulations set by the California Fish and Game Commission (commission), as well as providing biological data and expertise to inform the commission's decision-making process.

Successful wildlife conservation of native species depends upon sustainable ecosystem functions and processes which themselves depend upon ecological conditions, and are all constantly in flux. Adaptive management in the context of conservation takes advantage of new data to reinforce what methods work and respond when a method is not working. One of the department's conservation challenges is to seek ways to balance the needs of the state's large human population with conservation of wildlife and maintaining habitat and ecosystem function. Increasingly, humans and wildlife live in close vicinity to each other, and do not always co-exist successfully for multiple reasons which are often exacerbated by limited department resources (discussed further below).

Recent Assembly Water, Parks, and Wildlife Committee informational hearing on human-wildlife conflict. On January 27, 2026, the Assembly Water, Parks, and Wildlife Committee convened an informational hearing on Human-Wildlife Conflict (AWPW hearing). The AWPW hearing addressed recent increases in and high profile examples of human-wildlife conflict, and explored methods to reduce the conflict.

California is a biodiversity hotspot, and millions of acres in the state are ideal habitat for wildlife. Wildlife often share this habitat with humans, livestock, and other domestic animals. Increasing habitat fragmentation, the impacts of climate change (including

drought, extreme heat, and wildfire), increasing human population in wildlife habitat, and, in some instances, changes in wildlife species and population in wildlife habitat, are all factors in observations of increased conflict, particularly with predators. Predators are fundamental to ecosystem health. Predators will seek prey, and if wildlife prey decreases in abundance for whatever reason, their focus may shift to readily-available and un- or lightly-protected livestock or domestic animal prey.

The department has developed online reporting tools to assist those impacted by wildlife. There are online resources providing information about coexisting with wildlife. Data from the department's Wildlife Incident Report (WIR) online tool show the top five species reported from 2017 – 2025 are bears, mountain lions, wild pigs, coyotes, and bobcats.¹ Of these WIR reports, about 53% are depredation reports and 17% represent potential human conflict. In 2020, the department received 4,300 reports in WIR concerning human-wildlife conflict. This increased to 6,500 in 2025, and that number is believed to be only a fraction of the true number of incidents that occurred. Reports of human-wildlife conflict are increasing over time. Hotspots of conflict are not always rural locations: Los Angeles, San Diego, Contra Costa, and Santa Clara counties were 4 of the top 5 counties for incidents (El Dorado County was second).² Appropriate conflict reduction methods may vary considerably by species and circumstances.

Multiple panelists at the AWPW hearing noted that relatively simple steps – such as garbage management in Lake Tahoe to reduce bear interaction with humans – can substantially reduce conflicts. They also noted how important scientific research is, for example, to developing and evaluating non-lethal wildlife hazing techniques, and the best methods to perform public outreach and education and to build trust and awareness in the community. Proactive steps, such as improved husbandry or the use of guardian dogs, to prevent habituation by a predator when it is investigating livestock are essential. Successful conflict prevention needs resources, including dedicated personnel in the community, time, adaptive management to meet local needs, and a variety of both technical and social tools to facilitate it. The department's inconsistent and fluctuating funding has undermined the progress it had made in being responsive to community incident reports, participating in community outreach, and developing trust in the community.

In contrast to the successful efforts in the Lake Tahoe area to reduce human-bear conflict, the reintroduction of gray wolves into the state has resulted in a less positive outcome thus far. There were increasing livestock losses as the packs disbursed across the state. Due in part to the absence of wild prey, the Beyem Seyo pack became habituated to livestock depredation. The department's reactive and ultimately unsuccessful response to break the wolves' habit was estimated to cost in excess of two million dollars. Four wolves in the pack were eventually killed. A more proactive approach could have saved money, livestock, and wolves, and resulted in human-wildlife coexistence, rather than conflict.

Wolf Conflict Compensation Pilot Program.

In 2021, the Legislature appropriated three million dollars to the department for a wolf conflict compensation pilot program as the wolf population in the state increased. From

¹ Listed in decreasing order with bears #1 and bobcats #5.

² 2017 – 2025 data

late 2021 through early 2024, approximately 64% of the moneys were used to fund non-lethal deterrence measures via grants, 32% were used for “pay for presence,” and 4% for direct losses.³ In 2024, after these monies were exhausted, an additional \$600,000 was appropriate for direct losses only. In 2025, an additional two million dollars was appropriated, and the department initiated an evaluation of the existing program with stakeholders in February 2026 to assess whether any changes were warranted. Of note, the bulk of the moneys in the first appropriation was used to help fund proactive deterrence and direct loss payments were relatively small.

Existing law:

- 1) Establishes the department in the California Natural Resources Agency. States that the department’s mission “is to manage California’s diverse fish, wildlife, and plant resources, and the habitats upon which they depend, for their ecological value and for their use and enjoyment by the public,” and provides that its core programs include biodiversity conservation, enforcement, and hunting, fishing, and public use, among others. (Fish and Game Code (FGC) §712.1).
- 2) Authorizes the department to take for scientific, propagation, public health or safety, the prevention or relief of suffering, or law enforcement purposes, fish, amphibians, reptiles, mammals, birds, or any other plant or animal, as specified (FGC §1001).
- 3) Makes it unlawful to take a bird, mammal, fish, reptile, or amphibian except as provided in the Fish and Game Code or in a regulation adopted pursuant to the code, as provided (FGC §2000).
- 4) Requires the department in certain circumstances to issue permits to take particular animals due to depredation, as provided (FGC §§4150 *et seq.*).

PROPOSED LAW

This bill would:

- 1) Establish the California Wildlife Coexistence Act (act).
- 2) Establish the state policy that the management of wildlife shall include an emphasis on the coexistence of humans and wildlife through department-led efforts to reduce, minimize, and mitigate conflicts. Require these efforts to also seek to align with the state’s conservation and other goals, and to be accomplished through coordination and cooperation between the department and wildlife coexistence partners, as provided.
- 3) Require the department, upon appropriation by the Legislature, to establish:
 - a) the Wildlife Coexistence Program (coexistence program) to manage and promote wildlife coexistence.

³ \$1,919,825; \$945,130; and \$135,043; respectively.

- b) the Wolf-Livestock Coexistence and Compensation Program (renamed California Wolf-Livestock Compensation Pilot Program) (compensation program) to provide resources to eligible participants.
 - c) the Wildlife Coexistence Technical Advisory Committee (advisory committee) to provide technical guidance, public input and programmatic recommendations related to the department's wildlife coexistence efforts.
- 4) Require the coexistence program to conduct all of the following:
- a) Managing, tracking, and responding to wildlife conflict calls, reports, and incident responses.
 - b) Avoiding, minimizing, and mitigating conflicts between humans and wildlife by proactively and continuously implementing best practices that emphasize effective and ecologically appropriate nonlethal conflict resolution solutions developed using best available science and indigenous knowledge.
 - c) Investigating, documenting, and analyzing reported human-wildlife incidents, including, but not limited to, depredation, perceived or actual human-wildlife conflicts, and wildlife health issues.
 - d) Maintaining a statewide wildlife incident reporting tool.
 - e) Supporting community-based efforts in coordination with wildlife coexistence partners and providing technical assistance, resources, and recommendations, as provided.
 - f) Conducting ongoing public outreach and education and implementing the act.
- 5) Require the compensation program to provide resources to eligible participants for all of the following, including the cost for implementation:
- a) Providing equipment and information on practices used to proactively and nonlethally deter wolf attacks on livestock. Require at least 50% of appropriate funds to be used for this purpose, as provided.
 - b) Compensation for confirmed or provable losses of livestock verified by the department to have been caused by wolves.
 - c) Compensation for indirect impacts on livestock from the presence of wolves.
 - d) Eligibility for any program resources for (b) and (c) require a participant to have adopted, implemented, and documented proper and ongoing deployment of proactive, nonlethal conflict reduction measures, as provided.
- 6) Authorize the department, upon appropriation by the Legislature, to provide resources to wildlife coexistence partners to support efforts required for the coexistence program and the compensation program including the costs of implementation.
- 7) Require the advisory committee to advise the department on all of the following:

- a) Best available science, indigenous knowledge, and management practices for reducing human-wildlife conflict; development, implementation, and evaluation of coexistence programs; program metrics, data collection standards, and reporting practices; equity and geographic balance in program design and funding distribution; and opportunities for coordination with wildlife coexistence partners.
- 8) Require the advisory committee to consist of between 11 and 15 members, appointed by the department director, representing expertise or experience in one or more of the following areas, with no more than two people from each category:
 - a) Wildlife biology or ecology; human-wildlife conflict mitigation or coexistence practices; Tribal natural resource management; conservation or environmental science; rural community or agricultural interests; animal behavior or veterinary science; land management; and urban community.
 - 9) Require members of the advisory committee to serve three-year terms, authorize reappointments and that initial appointments may include shorter terms to ensure staggering of terms. Require members of the advisory committee to serve without compensation, and to meet at least twice per year, as provided. Require the department to consider, but not adopt, recommendations made by the advisory committee.
 - 10) Define “wildlife coexistence partners” to mean local, state, and federal agencies, nonprofit organizations, federally recognized tribes, non-federally recognized California Native American tribes included on the contact list maintained by the Native American Heritage Commission, other entities, and academic programs.
 - 11) Require the department to include on a publicly accessible location on its internet website all of the following on or before July 1, 2028:
 - a) The annual number, general locations, and species involved in reported human-wildlife conflicts and department responses pursuant to the coexistence program.
 - b) An inventory of known types of proactive wildlife coexistence activities within each region and statewide, including community-based and tribal efforts.
 - c) Descriptions of resources provided pursuant to the compensation program, including recipients, regions, and dollar amounts.
 - d) Depredation permits issued by species and regions.
 - e) The outcomes of the compensation program including a list of any resources funded by activity, county, and wolf pack.

ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT

According to the author, “Californians are seeing more wildlife entering our communities in search of food, water and habitat. These encounters can threaten public safety, damage property and physically harm both people and wildlife. We know that proactive, non-lethal strategies, such as increasing public education and improving waste management, can prevent or temper these encounters. SB 1135 takes a practical, science-based approach by establishing a statewide Wildlife Coexistence Program that

gives communities the tools they need to help prevent conflict before it happens. This bill will protect residents, support our agricultural communities and ensure California leads with smart, humane wildlife management.”

ARGUMENTS IN OPPOSITION

The California Farm Bureau, taking an “oppose unless amended” position, seeks changes to the makeup of the proposed Technical Advisory Committee to have increased rural representation, and multiple changes to the Wolf-Livestock Coexistence and Compensation Program, including the prioritization of direct loss compensation if funding is limited, improved wolf tracking and location information availability, and additional non-lethal (i.e. hazing) options for wolves.

The California Cattlemen’s Association, also taking an “oppose unless amended” position, also seeks similar changes focused on the Wolf-Livestock Coexistence and Compensation Program and an appropriate role for non-lethal deterrence measures, including the practicality of those requirements.

The California Farm Bureau further writes “SB 1135 offers a real change to codify critically needed guardrails and changes to wolf management in California. We remain encouraged that the author will continue to work with us to find a solution.”

COMMENTS

Appropriate framework. This bill seeks to create an appropriate framework for the department to promote human wildlife coexistence by creating a program to address the root causes (so far as possible), creating a program to provide compensation for wolf depredation if efforts are undertaken to minimize those events, and creating a technical advisory committee of experts to help guide the department to develop evidence-based programs. Importantly, this collective effort, if consistent and sustained, may help to promote communication and interaction to develop and build the relationships to more effectively and efficiently address the human side of coexistence. Multiple panelists at the AWPW human-wildlife conflict hearing noted the importance of this component.

Multiple bills highlight the importance of this topic. This bill is one of at least three bills seeking to proactively address human-wildlife conflict this legislative year.

Recent budget letters. The author submitted a budget letter earlier this year to establish and sustain a Wildlife Coexistence Program and fund a comprehensive Wolf-Livestock Coexistence and Compensation Program at the department. The budget letter sought \$48.8 million in this effort. A companion budget letter submitted by thirty advocacy organizations made the same request. These budget letter submittals are a complementary effort to this legislation. Collectively they demonstrate substantial support for addressing human-wildlife coexistence. These letters recognize and seek to address and mitigate for the department’s fiscal challenges (discussed below).

Underfunded and overmandated. The department 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 the department is particularly challenging. Recently, at legislative direction, the department undertook a “service-based” budgeting effort to identify the personnel needed to perform the services required by its mandates. The

department's services were separated into eight general programs for analysis. In 2021, the initial results of this effort were released and revealed that the department's funding was inadequate to meet its "mission" service level. The "Species & Habitat Conservation" program – where most of the tasks associated with human wildlife coexistence are likely to be located – only had about 1/3 of the mission service level resources. The Newsom Administration proposed, and the Legislature approved, significant one-time General Fund moneys to support the department'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 mandates.

Unfortunately, a recent update (for fiscal year 2024/2025) shows that the Species & Habitat Conservation program resources remain at about 35% overall, with a 5-year average of about 33%, although the trend is positive from fiscal year 2020/2021 (27%).

This highlights the importance of ensuring to the extent possible that the department receives ongoing and sustained funding for the program proposed by this bill where, again, multiple panelists at the AWPW hearing emphasized the importance of consistent efforts to address human wildlife coexistence. The budget letters submitted earlier and noted above seek to provide foundational funding for the proposed programs. Further, there is an ongoing role for legislative oversight to ensure that the programs are maintained. Human wildlife coexistence, given development patterns in the state, will likely continue to require the department's attention into the future.

Recent related legislation

SB 1397 (Alvarado-Gil, 2026) would require the department to maintain, enhance, and expand its human-mountain lion conflicts program in order to protect public health and safety, among other provisions. (*This bill is pending before this Committee.*)

SB 1305 (Richardson, 2026) would require the department to develop a roadmap for the possible reintroduction of grizzly bear into the state based upon specified considerations, among other provisions. (*This bill is pending before the Senate Appropriations Committee.*)

SB 818 (Alvarado-Gil, 2025) would have required the department to maintain, enhance, and expand its human-mountain lion conflicts program in El Dorado County and required the department to continue and expand its scientific research efforts to evaluate how to deter mountain lions, as provided, among other provisions. (*This bill was held on the suspense file in the Senate Appropriations Committee.*)

ACR 145 (Patterson, Chapter 32, Resolutions of 2024) declared 2024 as the year to Coexist with Wildlife, California.

SUGGESTED AMENDMENTS: none

SUPPORT

Defenders of Wildlife (co-sponsor)
National Wildlife Federation (co-sponsor)
American River Conservancy
Animal Legal Defense Fund

Audubon California
California Association of Zoos and Aquariums
California Native Plant Society, Alta Bates Chapter
California State Association of Counties
California Wolf Foundation
Center for Biological Diversity
Center for Environmental Health
Citizens for Los Angeles Wildlife (CLAW)
CleanEarth4Kids.org
Endangered Habitats League
Environmental Center of San Diego
Environmental Protection Information Center
Friends of Rose Creek
Humane World for Animals
In Defense of Animals
Los Cerritos Wetlands Land Trust
Los Padres ForestWatch
Mountain Lion Foundation
National Parks Conservation Association
Natural Resources Defense Council
Oswit Land Trust
Project Coyote
Resource Renewal Institute
San Diego Humane Society/ Project Wildlife
The Wildlife Crossing Fund
Western Watersheds Project
Wholly H₂O
WildFutures
Wildlife Conservation Network
Women for Wolves

OPPOSITION

California Cattlemen's Association (unless amended)
California Farm Bureau (unless amended)

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