
SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Sabrina Cervantes, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

SB 1135 (Blakespear) - California Wildlife Coexistence Act

Version: March 23, 2026
Urgency: No
Hearing Date: April 27, 2026

Policy Vote: N.R. & W. 5 - 1
Mandate: No
Consultant: Ashley Ames

Bill 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 (CDFW), 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.

Fiscal Impact:

- CDFW estimates ongoing costs of about \$28.2 million in the first year and \$23.2 million annually thereafter (General Fund) for 83 positions to provide wildlife incident responses, subject matter expertise, technical assistance, development and use of innovate tools to reduce human-wildlife conflict, investigations and enforcement, issuance of grants, research, evaluation of measurable performance objectives, and otherwise implement the provisions of this bill.

Background: 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.

CDFW 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. 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). Appropriate conflict reduction methods may vary considerably by species and circumstances.

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.
 - 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.

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.

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.

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 this committee.*)

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

Staff Comments:

CDFW cost estimate. In order to implement this bill, CDFW estimates it would need 83 positions and \$28,159,000 General Fund in FY 2027-28 and \$23,198,000 in FY 2028-29 ongoing, including: 32 Environmental Scientists, four Senior Environmental Specialists, six Senior Environmental Scientist Supervisors, one Fish and Wildlife Technician, one Supervising Laboratory Assistant, one Veterinarian (General), one Supervising Veterinarian (General), 15 Fish and Game Wardens, three Fish and Game Lieutenant Supervisors, one Warden Pilot, eight Research Scientist Staff, one Attorney IV, two Attorney III, one Information Officer I (Specialist), one Interpreter II, one Information Technology Supervisor I, one Analyst I, one Analyst II, one Associate Accounting Analyst, one Personnel Specialist, and 14 Fish and Wildlife Scientific Aid positions (temporary help), 46 vehicles and the purchase of equipment (e.g., live traps, animal transport crates, wildlife health and disease surveillance supplies, diagnostic testing).

CDFW notes that Section 2966 of this bill would require the department to provide equipment to deter wolf-livestock conflict and compensation for wolf-livestock conflict to eligible livestock producers. Ongoing funds to CDFW would be necessary for it to provide that equipment and compensation; those funds are not specifically identified in the department's cost analysis.

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.

CDFW fiscal challenges. 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.

Potential benefits and some cost savings could come from having stable program funding. 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.

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