

SENATE THIRD READING
SB 1135 (Blakespear)
As Amended August 13, 2026
Majority vote

SUMMARY

Establishes the California Wildlife Coexistence Act.

Major Provisions

- 1) Establishes the state policy that the management of wildlife shall include an emphasis on the safe coexistence of humans and wildlife through California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW)-led efforts to reduce, minimize, and mitigate conflicts. Requires that these efforts also align with the state's conservation and other goals and be accomplished through coordination and cooperation between CDFW and wildlife coexistence partners. Authorizes CDFW to adopt regulations to minimize human-wildlife conflict (HWC) and implement this bill.
- 2) Requires CDFW, 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 from the Wolf-Livestock Compensation Pilot Program) (compensation program) to provide resources to eligible participants; and
 - c) The Wildlife Coexistence Technical Advisory Committee (advisory committee) to provide technical guidance, public input and programmatic recommendations related to CDFW's wildlife coexistence efforts.
- 3) Requires the coexistence program to conduct activities such as managing, tracking, and responding to wildlife conflict and health issues; avoiding, minimizing, and mitigating conflicts with effective, feasible, and appropriate measures; investigating and analyzing conflicts, maintaining a conflict reporting tool, supporting community-based efforts and providing assistance and resources; and conducting public outreach and education.
- 4) Requires the compensation program to provide resources to eligible participants for providing equipment, information, and resources on practices used to proactively and nonlethally deter wolf attacks on livestock (scales the appropriation for this purpose based on the balance for the fund); compensation for confirmed or probable losses of livestock verified by CDFW to have been caused by wolves; and compensation for indirect impacts on livestock from the presence of wolves.
 - a) Requires a participant in the compensation program to have adopted, implemented, and documented, as practicable, proper and ongoing deployment of proactive nonlethal conflict reduction measures in a CDFW-defined area of wolf activity or pack territory to be eligible for compensation for livestock loss or indirect impacts. Authorizes participants outside an area of wolf activity or pack territory to be eligible for compensation for two losses per 12-month period.

- b) Requires CDFW to consider all relevant factors in evaluating eligibility for compensation program participation.
- 5) Requires the advisory committee to provide technical guidance, programmatic analysis, scientific and Indigenous knowledge, public input, coordination, and programmatic suggestions for CDFW's coexistence efforts.
- a) Requires the advisory committee to consist of 11 to 15 members, appointed by the director of CDFW, representing expertise or experience in one or more areas (e.g., public safety, wildlife biology or ecology, agricultural interests, land management, urban communities) with no more than two members from each category.
 - b) Requires members of the advisory committee to serve three-year terms and to serve without compensation.
 - c) Requires the advisory committee to meet at least twice per year.
 - d) Requires CDFW to consider, but not necessarily adopt, recommendations made by the advisory committee.
- 6) Requires CDFW to include on a publicly accessible location on its internet website all of the following information on or before July 1, 2028, and update annually thereafter:
- a) The annual number, general locations, and species involved in reported human-wildlife conflicts and CDFW responses pursuant to the coexistence program;
 - b) An inventory of known types of proactive wildlife coexistence activities available to CDFW 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, damage type, and regions; and
 - e) The outcomes of the compensation program including a list of any resources funded by activity, county, and wolf pack.
- 7) Authorizes CDFW, 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.
- 8) Defines "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.
- 9) Allows livestock and crop guardian dogs to pursue wolves if the dog remains in reasonable proximity to the livestock or crops.

COMMENTS

HWC is a growing concern and is most prevalent in regions where human activities have significantly altered the natural landscape. In California, one of the most ecologically diverse states in the U.S., this issue is amplified by a substantial human population, which has more than doubled since 1972. Human encroachment on wildlife habitats for purposes such as resource extraction, energy development, housing development, and recreation ultimately reduces habitat quality, increases sensory pollution, and creates resource competition. It is likely not coincidental that human animals come into the most conflict with other large predators, such as wolves, mountain lions, bears, and coyotes, due to competition over similar resources (e.g., land, water). As humans continue to expand their own range, the competition over finite resources will escalate. The conflict between humans and predators is a state- and species-wide phenomenon, with incidents ranging from black bears breaking into cabins in Lake Tahoe to mountain lions wandering into suburban backyards in Los Angeles. Now that gray wolves have returned to the state, ranchers are facing decades-old battles to protect cattle from the powerful pack hunters.

CDFW manages several initiatives to inform HWC prevention and mitigation, including maintaining a Wildlife Incident Reporting database as a tool for reporting HWC; maintaining a Wildlife Health Laboratory to investigate, monitor, and manage wildlife population health issues; and updating the State Wildlife Action Plan, which serves as a blueprint for preserving the state's wildlife by examining the health of wildlife and prescribing actions for conservation while addressing the needs of a growing human population. Until recently, CDFW maintained an HWC program. The program was staffed using one-time funds (\$5 million) from a 2022–23 Drought Resilience and Response Budget Change Proposal to respond to increases in HWC due to the drought. The program functioned as "first responder" for helping communities develop tools and providing state-wide support for HWC management. Most of the positions for the HWC program were limited term and, under budget constraints, were lost in 2024—further straining CDFW. The previous year, CDFW received \$7 million for HWC response equipment such as fence flagging to protect livestock from wolves and wildlife traps.

Once extirpated from California, gray wolves have returned to California and are estimated to be 50–70 in number. Livestock depredation has been a central source of conflict as wolves recolonize rural areas. Over the past decade, California has investigated 274 reported wolf-livestock incidents, of which 128 were confirmed as wolf depredation. To address rancher concerns, the state has implemented a variety of conflict-mitigation and compensation efforts. In 2021, CDFW launched a three-pronged pilot program that reimbursed ranchers for livestock killed by wolves, compensated them for indirect losses such as reduced pregnancy rates and weight loss in herds, and paid for nonlethal deterrents like fencing, range riders, and alarm systems. CDFW currently compensates only for confirmed direct livestock losses due to the high demand for compensation. The wolf compensation program has been funded as follows: \$3 million in fiscal year (FY) 2021–22, \$0.6 million in FY2024–25, and \$2 million in FY2025–26. In May 2025, Shasta County joined several other Northern California counties in declaring local states of emergency related to wolf impacts on ranching communities. More recently, in June 2025, CDFW launched a new pilot program focused on reducing wolf-livestock conflict in Siskiyou County and the Sierra Valley—areas with relatively high depredation rates.

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. [This bill] 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 Support

A coalition of supporters write in support of this bill to "reinstate and expand the state's successful [HWC] program." They note that proactive coexistence strategies are more important and needed now more than ever considering the 31% increase in HWC reports and a 58% increase in field contacts over the last five years, without CDFW staffing to meet the need. They note that the compensation program will ensure "that impacted communities will receive important non-lethal deterrence and financial support as wolves continue their successful return to California." Further, they note that the coexistence program will restore crucial specialists "to serve as trusted messengers to de-escalate community concerns, provide accurate behavior-based information, and guide landowners through practical solutions such as secure enclosures, attractant management, or non-lethal mitigation tools." Finally, they note the value of having all these resources under one program, which will provide a centralized location for resources and lower the cost for the public and the state.

Arguments in Opposition

Among others in opposition, the Shasta County Board of Supervisors states that while the goals of the bill are well-intentioned, "the bill creates substantial statewide responsibilities and makes them entirely dependent on future funding." The county argues that many rural counties are already experiencing growing wildlife-related challenges, particularly involving wolves and other large predators, and "this bill offers no guaranteed or sustainable funding to meet the requirements it imposes or the increased expectations of reporting and coordination."

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee, this bill has the following fiscal impact:

CDFW estimates costs of approximately \$28.1 million in FY 2027–28 and \$23.2 million in FY 2028–29 and ongoing for 83 permanent positions (environmental scientists and specialists, fish and wildlife technicians, supervising laboratory assistants, veterinarians, fish and game wardens, fish and game lieutenant supervisors, warden pilots, research scientists, attorneys, information officers, interpreters, information technology supervisors, various analysts, and personnel specialists), 14 limited-term fish and wildlife scientific aid positions, 46 vehicles, and equipment (such as live traps, animal transport crates, wildlife health and disease surveillance supplies, and diagnostic testing).

Tasks include, among other things, conducting wildlife incident responses; developing and providing subject matter expertise, technical assistance, and consultation; developing and using tools to reduce human–wildlife conflict; and conducting investigations, enforcement actions, public education, outreach, research, data management, health and disease surveillance, genetic and forensic interpretation of samples, validation of scientifically defensible results, and evaluation of measurable performance objectives.

CDFW notes its estimate does not include additional costs associated with providing eligible participants (through the [compensation program]) with equipment and information on practices used to proactively and nonlethally deter wolf attacks on livestock, compensation for confirmed or provable losses of livestock verified by CDFW to have been caused by wolves, and compensation for indirect impacts on livestock from the presence of wolves. The Appropriations Committee notes CDFW's existing [compensation program] – which this bill codifies – received \$3 million in FY 2021–22, \$600,00 in FY 2024–25, and \$2 million in FY 2025–26.

CDFW further notes its current wildlife health lab facility is over 50 years old, lacks adequate space to perform the lab's functions, and limits the CDFW's capacity to provide wildlife care. Utilizing one-time funding provided in FY 2022–23, CDFW has started evaluating existing and ongoing needs. However, CDFW has not yet finalized the costs associated with upgrading or establishing an appropriate wildlife care facility – which may be necessary should this bill go into effect.

Until recently, the CDFW maintained a [HWC] program, which helped communities develop tools and provided statewide support for human-wildlife conflict management. The program received one-time funding in the 2021 budget; however, most of the limited-term positions created for the program were eliminated in 2024. The author of this bill, along with dozens of organizations, have submitted a request for \$48.8 million in FY 2026–27 to establish and sustain a Wildlife Coexistence Program and fund a comprehensive Wolf-Livestock Coexistence and Compensation Program at CDFW. However, the FY 2026–27 budget includes only \$1 million in one-time funding (Fish and Game Preservation Fund) to allow CDFW to use existing Environmental License Plate Fund moneys to fund temporary resources to support its Coexisting with Wildlife Initiative, which CDFW argues will allow for proactive mitigation of human-wildlife conflict and foster safe coexistence with native wildlife in California.

CDFW has experienced longstanding budget challenges despite repeated efforts over many years to address them. CDFW's service-based budgeting (SBB) analysis for FY 2023–24 indicates CDFW (including its species and habitat conservation program, where most of the tasks associated with human-wildlife coexistence are likely to be located) is funded for only one-third of its mandated program work. The SBB effort highlights the degree to which CDFW operates with significant gaps between what is required to achieve its mandated mission and the level at which it is currently funded.

VOTES

SENATE FLOOR: 29-2-9

YES: Archuleta, Arreguín, Ashby, Blakespear, Cabaldon, Caballero, Cervantes, Cortese, Dahle, Durazo, Gonzalez, Grayson, Jones, Laird, Limón, McGuire, McNerney, Menjivar, Ochoa Bogh, Pérez, Reyes, Richardson, Rubio, Smallwood-Cuevas, Umberg, Valladares, Wahab, Weber Pierson, Wiener

NO: Seyarto, Strickland

ABS, ABST OR NV: Allen, Alvarado-Gil, Becker, Choi, Grove, Hurtado, Niello, Padilla, Stern

ASM WATER, PARKS, AND WILDLIFE: 8-2-3

YES: Papan, Alvarez, Ávila Farías, Bennett, Boerner, Caloza, Hart, Rogers

NO: Alanis, Hadwick

ABS, ABST OR NV: Jeff Gonzalez, Bains, Celeste Rodriguez

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 11-4-0

YES: Wicks, Arambula, Calderon, Caloza, Fong, Mark González, Krell, Pacheco, Pellerin, Sharp-Collins, Solache

NO: Hoover, Dixon, Ta, Tangipa

UPDATED

VERSION: August 13, 2026

CONSULTANT: Stephanie Mitchell / W., P., & W. / (916) 319-2096

FN: 0003643