
SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Sabrina Cervantes, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

SB 1305 (Richardson) - Wildlife: bears

Version: April 16, 2026

Urgency: No

Hearing Date: May 4, 2026

Policy Vote: N.R. & W. 5 - 2

Mandate: No

Consultant: Ashley Ames

Bill Summary: This bill would require the Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) to develop a roadmap that evaluates whether, and under what conditions, reintroduction of the grizzly bear is feasible and advisable, and the extent to which the ecological functions once provided by the grizzly bear may be restored through human-mediated landscape restoration, including through reintroduction of the species.

Fiscal Impact:

- CDFW did not have a fiscal estimate for the most recent amended version of this bill at the time of this analysis. For the bill as introduced, CDFW estimates ongoing costs of \$4.8 million in the first year and \$4.2 million annually thereafter (General Fund) for 15 positions to conduct significant fieldwork (e.g. habitat assessments, identifying relocation areas), consultation with tribes, and the development of conflict mitigation protocols and proposed regulations as part of the roadmap and its associated activities. CDFW notes that these are all labor-intensive tasks. Staff expects CDFW costs for this bill with recent amendments would remain substantially similar.
- Unknown but potentially significant ongoing cost pressures (General Fund and other various funds) in future years in order to provide funding for implementation of the roadmap (i.e. introducing grizzlies) developed as a result of this bill.

Background: The California grizzly bear is the state animal and is a centerpiece of the state's flag and other state symbols. Around the time of the California Gold Rush, there was an estimated population of approximately 10,000 grizzly bears in California. By 1924, grizzly bears were extirpated in California due to a deliberate effort to do so. As an apex predator and keystone species, the loss of the grizzly bear population caused cascading ecological changes to the many California ecoregions the bears inhabited. These included altered composition of species, reduced resiliency, and diminished biodiversity.

California Native American tribes have a long-standing cultural and spiritual relationship with the grizzly bear. For many tribes, the grizzly bear is a vital and honored relative. The absence of grizzly bears has impacted tribal cultures, ceremonies, and spiritual practices. The importance of the grizzly bear is reflected in oral histories, traditional practices, and tribal stewardship of the land. The extirpation of the grizzly bear caused lasting harm to these practices, according to the Yurok Tribe.

The Senate proclaimed that 2024 was the Year of the California Grizzly Bear on the 100th anniversary of its extirpation from the state.

Proposed Law: This bill would:

1. Exclude grizzly bear from provisions of existing law that classifying “black and brown or cinnamon bears (genus *Euarctos*)” as a game mammal for purposes of managing, taking, or hunting that species, as specified.
2. Require CDFW to develop a roadmap that evaluates whether, and under what conditions, reintroduction of the grizzly bear is feasible and advisable, and the extent to which the ecological functions once provided by the grizzly bear may be restored through human-mediated landscape restoration, including through reintroduction of the species.
 - a. Require that CDFW make the roadmap publicly available.
 - b. Require CDFW, by June 30, 2030, to submit the roadmap document to the relevant budget and policy committees of the Legislature, the Legislative Analyst’s Office, and the Fish and Game Commission.
3. Prohibit reintroduction of the grizzly bear in the state until CDFW or others have carried out various actions, including, among other things, completion of the roadmap, determinations, based on the best available science, that establishment of a self-sustaining grizzly population in the state is biologically viable, and a consultation with California Native American tribes and engagement with communities, as specified.

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 1135 (Blakespear, 2026), the California Wildlife Coexistence Act, would establish a Wildlife Coexistence Program at the department to manage and promote wildlife coexistence, as provided, among other provisions.

SR 75 (Laird, 2024) proclaimed 2024 as the Year of the California Grizzly Bear on the 100 year anniversary of its extirpation in the state. (This Senate Resolution was enrolled on April 10, 2024.)

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

Staff Comments: CDFW 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 that 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 grizzly bear reintroduction 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 duties.

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%).

To the extent any new mandate at the department is unfunded or does not generate revenue, it will contribute to the long-standing and continuing fiscal challenges at the department. There are multiple legislative intent sections in the Fish and Game Code indicating the need to identify or obtain adequate funding sources for the department (see, for example, FGC §§710.5, 710.7, and 711, among others).

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