

Date of Hearing: August 5, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

SB 1305 (Richardson) – As Amended July 2, 2026

Policy Committee: Water, Parks and Wildlife

Vote: 8 - 2

Urgency: No

State Mandated Local Program: No

Reimbursable: No

SUMMARY:

This bill requires the California 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.

Specifically, this bill, among other things:

- 1) Requires 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.
- 2) Requires the roadmap to include specified information, including various scientific assessments and evaluations; consultation with California Native American Tribes and other entities; development of a framework for incorporating the cultural, spiritual, and ecological values of California Native American tribes; and specified management, implementation, cost, and regulatory measures.
- 3) Requires CDFW to submit the roadmap to the relevant budget and policy committees of the Legislature, the Legislative Analyst's Office, and the Fish and Game Commission (Commission) by June 30, 2030; requires the roadmap to be publicly available on CDFW's website; and authorizes CDFW to contract with outside specialists to develop and complete the roadmap.
- 4) Prohibits the reintroduction of the grizzly bear in California until numerous specified conditions are met.
- 5) States legislative intent that CDFW and the Commission be provided with sustainable funding sufficient to fully implement this bill and resulting obligations.
- 6) Makes implementation of this bill contingent upon appropriation and authorizes CDFW to accept and, subject to an appropriation for this purpose, expend funds from any public or private sources to administer this bill, as specified.

FISCAL EFFECT:

CDFW estimates costs of approximately \$5.2 million (General Fund or special fund) in fiscal year (FY) 2027-28 and \$4.4 million in FY 2028-29 and ongoing for 15 permanent positions

(environmental scientists, supervisors, information officers, analysts, research data specialists, attorneys, lieutenant specialists, and environmental services interns), 10 vehicles, an agricultural compensation framework (for livestock and crop loss), and equipment purchases (such as Global Positioning System collars, grizzly bear traps, lure, bait, capture equipment, camera traps, batteries, high-frequency tracking equipment, and adverse conditioning equipment). CDFW contends this bill necessitates significant fieldwork (including habitat assessments and 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 – and that each of these tasks is labor- and resource-intensive. Finally, CDFW notes it would require significant additional, ongoing resources should it implement the roadmap in the future.

It is not clear if (1) some of the CDFW's identified cost drivers (such as compensation for livestock and crop loss or equipment such as bear traps) should be attributed to this bill and (2) whether the department's costs should be ongoing. The bill requires the department to develop a roadmap to evaluate whether, and under what conditions, reintroduction of the grizzly bear is feasible and advisable, but the bill does not require the department to proceed with reintroduction efforts. In fact, the bill requires CDFW, as part of the roadmap, to include an estimate of implementation costs and agency capacity needs, including relocation, monitoring, staffing, equipment, community engagement, coexistence infrastructure, tribal stewardship, education, attractant mitigation, and conflict mitigation. The bill does, however, include legislative intent language that CDFW and the Commission be provided with "sustainable funding sufficient to fully implement this section and the *resulting obligations*" [emphasis added]. As noted in the summary, implementation of the bill is contingent upon appropriation of funding by the Legislature, although the bill authorizes the department to accept funds from any public or private source to develop the roadmap.

CDFW has experienced longstanding budget challenges despite repeated efforts over many years to address them. The department's service-based budgeting (SBB) analysis for FY 2023-24 indicates the department 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. In addition, until recently, the department maintained a human-wildlife conflict 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 FY 2026-27 budget includes \$1 million in one-time funding (Fish and Game Preservation Fund) to allow CDFW to use existing Environmental License Plate Fund resources to fund temporary resources to support its Coexisting with Wildlife Initiative.

COMMENTS:

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

The California Grizzly has been synonymous with the Golden State and continues to be our official state animal. Unfortunately, California's subspecies of grizzly were eliminated in 1924. The loss of grizzly bears from California marks one of the most significant species losses in the state's history...[This bill] simply asks the state to study the possibility of the grizzly's reintroduction and will include the best

available science and data, consultation with a myriad of stakeholder groups, and a thoughtfully crafted plan on management procedures and implementation if reintroduction was found to be feasible.

- 2) **Background.** Until 1924, California was home to its own population of grizzly bears. After the Gold Rush, the state's grizzly population plummeted due to loss of habitat and over-hunting. The last credible sighting of a California grizzly bear was in Sequoia National Park in 1924. Still, in 1953, the California grizzly earned its indelible spot in state symbology by becoming the official state animal.

The Assembly Water, Parks, and Wildlife (WPW) Committee analysis of this bill notes that while recovery efforts for populations of threatened or endangered species are ongoing, they are unaware of examples of CDFW reintroducing any species that has been fully extirpated from the entire state. Gray wolves, for example, began their natural return to California in 2011 but were not intentionally reintroduced. The analysis further discusses why species reintroduction may be risky and why its effectiveness is debated. And while the National Park Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced in April 2024 a decision to "actively restore grizzly bears to the North Cascades of Washington, where the animals once roamed," this plan has since stalled.

This bill is sponsored by the Tejon Indian Tribe and the Yurok Tribe, who write that their and other tribes have coexisted with the grizzly bear for thousands of years, forming longstanding ecological and cultural relationships. The Yurok tribe writes that the "deliberate extermination of Neekwech from California following the Gold Rush caused lasting harm not only to our ecosystems, but to Tribal nations' abilities to sustain cultural relationships and uphold traditional stewardship responsibilities." Also writing in support, a coalition of environmental organizations argues this bill "takes a responsible, transparent, and forward-looking approach. It builds on the state's leadership in wildlife conservation and successful recovery efforts for other iconic species." The coalition contends the bill does not require immediate action; "instead, it initiates a collaborative, transparent, and evidence-based process to assess and plan for grizzly recovery."

Writing in opposition, a coalition of wildlife conservation organizations, among others, argue the proposed roadmap is "not a neutral exercise but instead establishes institutional momentum toward reintroduction before critical feasibility, cost, and conflict issues have been resolved." The coalition further asserts that the state is already experiencing increasing human-wildlife conflicts and faces limited management flexibility, conditions that would only be exacerbated by the addition of grizzly bears – particularly on rural communities, working landscapes, and heavily used recreation areas. The organizations write, "Given these realities, scarce conservation resources would be better directed toward habitat restoration, recovery of declining ungulate populations, and meeting the state's existing wildlife management obligations."

The California Cattlemen's Association and the California Farm Bureau, writing in opposition, reference CDFW's SBB effort and note that the department's ability to conduct species assessments and management planning has been hindered by budget constraints. For example, the groups assert that while CDFW finalized a new black bear management plan last year, that planning process was long-delayed, resulting in the department and stakeholders operating under a 1998 black bear management plan well after it was outdated.

Similarly, a recently initiated deer management plan has also been long-delayed. In light of budget constraints, the groups note, the Legislature in 2017 modified CDFW's statutory requirement to conduct five-year status reviews of species listed as threatened and endangered under the California Endangered Species Act, providing that such reviews must be completed only if funds are specifically appropriated for that purpose.

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