
SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES AND WATER

Senator Josh Becker, Chair

2025 - 2026 Regular

Bill No: SB 1397 **Hearing Date:** April 14, 2026
Author: Alvarado-Gil
Version: February 20, 2026 Introduced
Urgency: No **Fiscal:** Yes
Consultant: Katharine Moore

Subject: Mountain Lions: human-mountain lion conflicts program: scientific research

SUMMARY

This bill would require the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (department) to maintain, enhance, and expand its human-mountain lion conflicts program statewide to protect public health and safety, and require the department to continue and expand its scientific research effort to develop and evaluate methods to deter mountain lions from entering communities and to prevent habituation to humans, as provided, among other provisions.

BACKGROUND AND EXISTING LAW

Mountain lions (puma concolor).

Most of California is mountain lion habitat. Mountain lions inhabit diverse habitat types across the state including foothills, mountains, coastal chaparral, and forested lands. Mountain lions are carnivorous predators, although known to sometimes eat grasses and berries. Large carnivores are key stabilizing components of ecosystems. Adult mountain lions are generally solitary, although there is emerging evidence of mountain lion populations in an area having a more complex social structure than previously thought. Mountain lions are active yearlong, and mostly at twilight or at night. The home ranges of males are about 15 square miles and males usually occupy distinct areas. Seasonal movement may occur due to prey movement, such as mule deer migration. Young adults establish home ranges as vacancies – such as by the death of an older mountain lion – occur. Statewide population estimates are thought to be stable in aggregate.¹

The department receives hundreds of mountain lion sighting reports annually in locations throughout the state. In January of this year, a juvenile mountain lion was observed in and relocated from San Francisco. According to the department, increased sightings and reports of mountain lions are likely due to increased use of home security cameras, social media, and personal trail cameras. Mountain lion attacks on humans are rare, but, unfortunately, occur. There have been four human fatalities attributed to mountain lion attacks in California from 1986 through August 2025 out of 29 total verified attacks according to data obtained from the department. Tragically, one of the fatal attacks was of a young man in El Dorado County in 2024. The department's website also states that "Since 1890, there have been less than 50 verified mountain

¹ In southern California and the Central Coast as a result of human population growth and barriers that restrict connectivity with other mountain lion populations, mountain lion populations are in decline. Mountain lions in these areas recently were designated as "threatened" under the California Endangered Species Act.

lion attacks on humans in California; of that, six have been fatal.” These attacks occurred throughout the state from San Diego to Trinity County.

Proposition 117 – The Wildlife Protection Act of 1990.

Mountain lions have not been hunted in California since 1972 when declining populations raised concerns. Subsequently, Proposition 117 – The Wildlife Protection Act of 1990 – designated mountain lions as a “specially protected” species in California, and made it illegal to take, injure, possess, transport, import, or sell a mountain lion or a product of a mountain lion with certain exceptions such as an imminent threat to public health and safety (see Fish and Game Code (FGC) §§4800 *et seq.*). Changes to the state’s mountain lion laws added by Proposition 117 are required to further the intent of The Wildlife Protection Act of 1990 and receive a 4/5s vote in the Legislature.

The department’s mountain lion depredation policies.

Currently, the department has implemented a “3 strikes” policy in the Santa Monica and Santa Ana mountains and the locations with the recently-listed populations. A nonlethal depredation permit was issued for the first confirmed depredation event where livestock or domestic animals were killed by a mountain lion. Along with the nonlethal permit, education is provided to the owner of methods to better protect their livestock or domestic animals and reduce mountain lion attraction to the site. If a 3rd strike occurred, the owner could obtain a lethal depredation permit. Mountain lions that threaten public safety can be immediately killed. The department is required to respond within 48 hours to a depredation report.

According to the department, during the stepwise process, recommended measures may include removing the carcass and carcass parts, installing or repairing exclusion fencing to keep the mountain lion out, implementing more robust animal husbandry practices, deploying temporary deterrent systems, deploying livestock protection dogs, hazing via bean bag shots or similar, and taking measures to monitor movement and behavior. Recent research found that there is no consensus on what the best tools and techniques are to minimize human/mountain lion conflict, and under what circumstances they work.²

In 2025, the department received 518 reports of mountain lion depredation and issued 220 mountain lion depredation permits of which 72% were for non-lethal take. Nineteen or twenty³ mountain lions were killed under a lethal take depredation permit.

The Sierra Nevada Foothills Mountain Lion Study.

The department is a direct collaborator in the Sierra Nevada Foothills Mountain Lion Study which has been in development since 2018. This study will investigate the efficacy of several non-lethal deterrents on mountain lions. This will include pursuit by hounds, visual barriers, radio or motion activated scare devices, and turbo fladry.⁴

² Vickers, TW and F Najera (2023). Summary Report of Mountain Lion Hazing/Deterrent Devices Testing aimed at reducing livestock predation and associated Mountain Lion Depredation Permits. UC Davis Wildlife Health Center under contract to SANDAG

³ The department’s annual report to the California Fish and Game Commission on the necroscopies of mountain lions taken under depredation permits reports both 19 and 20 killed.

⁴ Fladry are a line of brightly colored flags evenly spaced and hung around an area where livestock gather and have had some success deterring other predators, such as wolves.

Existing law:

- 1) Establishes the department. 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. (FGC §712.1)
- 2) Establishes the mountain lion as a specially protected mammal under the laws of this state. (FGC §4800)
 - a) Makes it illegal to take, injure, possess, transport, import, or sell a mountain lion or a product of a mountain lion, except as specifically provided for. (FGC §4800)
 - b) Defines "take" to mean hunt, pursue, catch, capture, or kill, or attempt to hunt, pursue, catch, capture, or kill. (FGC §86)
- 3) Authorizes the department to remove or take any mountain lion, or authorize an appropriate local agency with public safety responsibility to remove or take any mountain lion that is perceived to be an imminent threat to public health or safety. (FGC §4801)
- 4) Requires nonlethal procedures to be used when removing or taking any mountain lion that has not been designated as an imminent threat to public health or safety. (FGC §4801.5)
 - a) Defines nonlethal procedures to mean procedures that include capturing, pursuing, anesthetizing, temporarily possessing, temporarily injuring, marking, attaching to or surgically implanting monitoring or recognition devices, providing veterinary care, transporting, hazing, rehabilitating, releasing, or taking no action. (FGC §4801.5)
 - b) Authorizes the department to authorize qualified individuals, educational institutions, governmental agencies, or nongovernmental organizations to implement nonlethal procedures on a mountain lion, as provided. (FGC §4801.5)
- 5) Authorizes any person or employee or agent whose livestock or other property is being or has been injured, damaged, or destroyed by a mountain lion to report that to the department and request a permit to take the mountain lion. (FGC §4802)
 - a) Requires the department to immediately take the action necessary to confirm that there has been depredation by a mountain lion as quickly as possible, but in no event later than 48 hours after receiving the report. Requires the department to promptly issue a permit to take the depredating mountain lion if satisfied of depredation by the mountain lion. (FGC §4803)
- 6) Requires that the department condition the depredation permit to expire within 10 days of issuance, for the pursuit to start within one mile of the depredation site, and limit the pursuit to within a 10 mile radius of the depredation site in order to ensure that only the depredating mountain lion will be taken. (FGC §4804)

- 7) Authorizes the immediate take of a mountain lion pursuing, injuring, or killing livestock or domestic animals by the owner thereof, as provided, and requires departmental notification within 72 hours. Requires the department to investigate, as specified. (FGC §4807)
- 8) Authorizes the department to authorize certain entities to conduct scientific research involving mountain lions. (FGC §4810)

PROPOSED LAW

This bill would:

- 1) Require the department to maintain, enhance, and expand its human-mountain lion conflicts program in order to protect public health and safety.
- 2) Require the conflicts program to include public education and outreach regarding methods to minimize conflict including methods to protect livestock and domestic animals and the development of best practices to minimize conflicts.
- 3) Require the department to continue and expand its scientific research effort to develop and evaluate methods to deter mountain lions from entering communities and to prevent habituation to humans, as provided.
- 4) Require the department to consult with the Department of Parks and Recreation and local agencies to ensure that department and department-supported activities conform to law and regulation.
- 5) State legislative intent that the department work closely with the community and local leaders in implementing (1) – (4). Require the department to regularly attend public meetings of local government entities in applicable counties to provide updates on the implementation of (1) – (4), and updates on depredation permitting, as provided.
- 6) Require the department director to appear at a hearing of this Committee and the Assembly Water, Parks, and Wildlife Committee annually to provide an update on (1) – (4) until the 2034 calendar year.
- 7) Require the department on or by October 1, 2031 to prepare and submit a legislative report to relevant committees describing the programs developed pursuant to (1) – (4) including results, the number of department personnel involved, and recommendations to further improve the programs to protect human health and safety, as provided.
- 8) Set a five year sunset to January 1, 2033 for (1) – (5), and sunset the legislative report requirement on January 1, 2036.
- 9) Make a legislative finding and declaration that these provisions are consistent with and further the purposes of the California Wildlife Protection Act of 1990.
- 10) Make numerous additional relevant legislative findings and declarations including:
 - a) The County of El Dorado is a “hot spot” for human-mountain lion conflicts.

- b) Multiple factors have been suggested as the cause of the increased human-mountain lion conflict, and it may be that there is no single dominant cause.
- c) The department expanded its efforts to work on wildlife response management, including by proactively addressing human-wildlife conflicts and improving wildlife incident response; to support safe human-wildlife interactions, and to increase understanding, awareness, and appreciation of wildlife. Due to funding challenges, the proactive program has not been maintained statewide.
- d) Due to Proposition 117, broad consensus is needed to amend the mountain lion statutes; and
- e) Existing department resources are inadequate to maintain service at a sufficient level. In order to protect public safety, it is critically important to ensure the department's efforts to reduce human-mountain lion conflicts across the state are maintained, enhanced, and expanded upon.

ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT

According to the author, "Human-mountain lion encounters have been increasing across the state in the past few years putting the public at serious risk of harm. A young man was killed in my district in 2024 and his sibling seriously injured by a mountain lion. This can't keep happening, we need to do more to protect the public. SB 1397 seeks to build upon the Department of Fish and Wildlife's human-mountain lion conflicts program by requiring them to enhance and expand their program to protect public health and safety."

ARGUMENTS IN OPPOSITION

None received

COMMENTS

Comparison to SB 818 (Alvarado-Gil, 2025). This bill is very similar to the author's SB 818 after it was amended by and voted out of this Committee last year. The proposed human-mountain lion conflict and scientific research programs apply statewide, not just in El Dorado County, the five year sunset date is updated, the proposed grant program is removed, and the legislative findings and declarations are reasonably revised and updated, among other provisions.

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

California is a biodiversity hotspot, and millions of acres in the state are ideal habitat for wildlife, although it may be shared with humans and livestock. Increasing habitat fragmentation, the impacts of climate change (including drought, extreme heat, and wildfire), increasing human population in wildlife habitat, and, in some instances, increasing wildlife populations and decreasing wild prey populations, are all factors in observations of increased conflict, particularly with predators. The department has developed online reporting tools to assist those impacted. Data from the department's Wildlife Incident Report (WIR) online tool show the top five species reported from 2017

– 2025 in decreasing order are bears, mountain lions, wild pigs, coyotes, and bobcats. Of these WIR reports, about 53% are depredation reports and 17% represent potential human conflict. For 2020 – 2025, there were 4,300 – 6,500 human-wildlife conflict reports received in WIR which is believed to be only a fraction of the true number of incidents that occurred. Reported human-wildlife conflicts are increasing over time, and the department, unfortunately, was unable to respond to each reported incident. Of note, Los Angeles (urban) and El Dorado (rural) are the two counties with the most reported incidents. Human-wildlife conflict is not limited to rural counties.

Multiple panelists 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 research was – for example, in developing and evaluating non-lethal hazing techniques, in learning 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 is 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 \$2M. 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.

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

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 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 wildlife reintroduction and conservation 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%).

Recent related legislation

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 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. (*This bill is pending before this Committee.*)

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

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.*)

SUGGESTED AMENDMENTS: none

SUPPORT

California Rifle and Pistol Association
 Inyo-Mono County Cattlewomen
 Mzuri Safari Club
 National Wild Turkey Federation – California State Chapter
 Riverside County Sheriff's Office
 San Diego County Wildlife Federation
 The Black Brant Group
 The Honorable Autumn Andahl, Supervisor, District 2, County of Calaveras
 The Honorable Caroline Schirato, Angels Camp Mayor, City of Angels
 The Honorable David Griffith, Supervisor, District 5, County of Alpine
 The Honorable Gary W. Redman, Sheriff-Coroner, Amador County Sheriff's Office
 The Honorable Jennifer Roeser, Supervisor, District 4, County of Inyo
 The Honorable John McGarva, Coroner-Sheriff, Lassen County Sheriff's Department
 The Honorable Patrick Crew, Supervisor, Board Chair, County of Amador
 The Honorable Scott E. Marcellin, Supervisor, District 3, County of Inyo
 The Honorable Trina Orrill, Supervisor, District 1, County of Inyo
 The Honorable Will Wadelton, Supervisor, District 5, County of Inyo

Several individuals

OPPOSITION

None received

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