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# SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Sabrina Cervantes, Chair  
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

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## SB 1397 (Alvarado-Gil) - Mountain Lions: human-mountain lion conflicts program: scientific research

**Version:** February 20, 2026  
**Urgency:** No  
**Hearing Date:** April 27, 2026

**Policy Vote:** N.R. & W. 7 - 0  
**Mandate:** No  
**Consultant:** Ashley Ames

**Bill Summary:** This bill would require the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) 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.

### **Fiscal Impact:**

- CDFW estimates ongoing costs of about \$8.1 million in the first year and \$6.7 million annually thereafter (General Fund) for 23 positions to oversee all provisions of the bill statewide that would include, but not be limited to, public education and outreach; enforcing laws and regulations; data collection and analysis; health and disease surveillance; forensic interpretation of samples; and the evaluation of measurable performance objectives with an emphasis on human-mountain lion conflict, as well as to provide technical assistance, consultation, and support to administer, implement, and enforce the programs.

**Background:** 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.

CDFW 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 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.

*CDFW 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 3<sup>rd</sup> 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.

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 twenty mountain lions were killed under a lethal take depredation permit.

*The Sierra Nevada Foothills Mountain Lion Study.* CDFW 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.

**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.

**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.

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.

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 this committee.*)

**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 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%).

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