

Date of Hearing: August 5, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

SB 1397 (Alvarado-Gil) – As Amended July 1, 2026

Policy Committee: Water, Parks and Wildlife

Vote: 11 - 0

Urgency: No

State Mandated Local Program: No

Reimbursable: No

SUMMARY:

This bill requires the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) to maintain, enhance, and expand its human-mountain lion conflicts program.

Specifically, this bill, among other things:

- 1) Requires CDFW, upon appropriation, to maintain, enhance, and expand its human-mountain lion conflicts program in the region most impacted by human-mountain lion conflict, as identified by CDFW, to protect public health and safety.
- 2) Requires the 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) Requires CDFW 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, including improving understanding of the factors contributing to human-mountain lion conflicts.
- 4) Requires CDFW to consult with the Department of Parks and Recreation (State Parks) and local agencies to ensure CDFW and CDFW-supported research activities pursuant to this bill conform to law and regulation.
- 5) States it is the intent of the Legislature that CDFW work closely with the community and local leaders in the region CDWF identifies as the most impacted by human-mountain lion conflict (see item 1, above) and requires CDFW to attend public meetings of local governments in the region to provide updates on the human-mountain lion conflicts program, research activities, and depredation permitting.
- 6) Requires the director of CDFW, when requested, to appear before the appropriate policy or budget committees of the Assembly and Senate to provide updates on the human-mountain lion conflict program and research activities.
- 7) Requires CDFW to submit a report to the Legislature on or before October 1, 2031, describing the programs developed pursuant to this bill, as specified.
- 8) Provides that the provisions of this bill sunset on January 1, 2033, except the provisions relating to reporting to the Legislature, which sunset on January 1, 2036.

- 9) Includes a finding stating this bill is consistent with, and furthers the purposes of, the California Wildlife Protection Act of 1990 (accordingly, the bill requires a four-fifths vote).

FISCAL EFFECT:

Ongoing annual costs to CDFW for wildlife incident response, depredation investigations, conflict mitigation, law enforcement, scientific research, data collection, forensic analyses, wildlife health and disease surveillance, and public education and outreach.

For its part, CDFW estimates costs of approximately \$3.9 million in fiscal year (FY) 2027-28 and \$3.2 million in FY 2028-29 and ongoing for 10 permanent positions (environmental scientists, fish and game lieutenant specialists, research scientists, and interpreters), four limited-term fish and wildlife scientific aids, seven vehicles, and equipment (such trailers, live traps, animal transport crates, wildlife health and disease surveillance supplies, and diagnostic testing).

The author of this bill has requested \$15 million in one-time funding (General Fund) in the FY 2026-27 budget to support CDFW's human-mountain lion conflict efforts.

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 temporarily support its Coexisting with Wildlife Initiative, which the department 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. 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.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **Purpose.** 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 brother seriously injured by a mountain lion. We need to do more to protect the public. [This bill] seeks to build upon [CDFW]'s Human-Mountain Lion Conflicts Program by requiring them to enhance and expand their program to protect public health and safety.

- 2) **Background. *Mountain Lions in California.*** According to CDFW, mountain lions are native to California and the second largest felid in North and South America. They have the largest range of any carnivore in North America and inhabit diverse habitat types throughout the state. They are reclusive and solitary animals, mostly avoiding people when possible. CDFW estimates there are just over 4,000 mountain lions in California today. Habitat loss and fragmentation (including by roadways) are among the greatest threats to mountain lion populations. Continued encroachment by humans into mountain lion habitat increasingly drives conflict between the species. Mountain lion attacks on humans are extremely rare, but

there is a long history of such conflict in California. As noted by the author, the most recent fatal attack occurred on March 23, 2024, in El Dorado County.

A property owner whose livestock or pets have been injured or killed by a mountain lion (depredation) may request a depredation permit to “take” the offending animal. CDFW prioritizes non-lethal approaches (using a “three strikes” strategy), as feasible. The total number of depredations has increased over time, with a large increase in the proportion of depredation events involving pets and poultry. The evolving and conflicting views of Californians about mountain lions are evident from the unique management history of the species. For a detailed discussion of this management history – including the passage of Proposition 117 (the Wildlife Protection Act of 1990), CDFW’s Mountain Lion Conservation Program, and a recent listing of mountain lion populations in parts of southern California and the central coast as a threatened species under the California Endangered Species Act – please see the Assembly Water, Parks, and Wildlife Committee’s analysis of this bill.

Human-Wildlife Conflict Program. CDFW is responsible for managing human-wildlife conflict at the state level, with a variety of tools, programs, and activities to prevent and mitigate human-wildlife conflict. 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 act; however, most of the limited-term positions created for the program were eliminated in 2024. CDFW has received additional related funding over the years for, among other things, its wolf compensation program and other conflict management efforts.

- 3) **Related Legislation.** SB 1135 (Blakespear) of the current legislative session requires CDFW to establish the Wildlife Coexistence Program to manage and promote wildlife coexistence. SB 1135 is pending in this committee.

Analysis Prepared by: Nikita Koraddi / APPR. / (916) 319-2081