

Date of Hearing: July 1, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON WATER, PARKS, AND WILDLIFE

Diane Papan, Chair

SB 427 (Blakespear) – As Amended May 23, 2025

SENATE VOTE: 38-0

SUBJECT: Habitat Conservation Fund

SUMMARY: Extends the sunset of the Habitat Conservation Fund (HCF) from 2030 to 2035.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Declares, under the Wildlife Conservation Law of 1947, that the preservation, protection, and restoration of wildlife is necessary to provide for recreation and the public welfare and calls for a coordinated program to acquire and restore habitat lands. Establishes the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) and a number of programs within WCB to realize these goals [Fish and Game Code (FGC) §§ 1320 *et seq.*].
- 2) Establishes the California Wildlife Protection Act of 1990 (FGC §§ 2780 *et seq.*). Among other provisions, the California Wildlife Protection Act:
 - a) Creates the HCF, and specifies its uses, including the acquisition, enhancement, or restoration of certain habitats (FGC § 2786).
 - b) Requires the Controller to annually transfer \$30 million to the HCF from the General Fund less any monies provided from other sources such as the California Environmental License Plate Fund, and the Unallocated Account in the Cigarette and Tobacco Products Surtax Fund, among others (FGC § 2795 and § 2796).
 - c) Continuously appropriates money in the HCF to the Department of Parks and Recreation (State Parks; \$4.5 million annually for specified purposes); State Coastal Conservancy (\$4 million annually); Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy (\$5 million annually for 10 years, as provided); California Tahoe Conservancy (\$500,000 annually); and the balance to WCB (FGC § 2787).
 - d) Places certain conditions upon expenditures from the HCF, including that funds appropriated to WCB are expended approximately equally between Northern and Southern California (FGC § 2791).
 - e) Makes various findings and declarations related to habitat and wildlife conservation, open space preservation, and their appreciation by the public (FGC § 2780 and § 2781).
 - f) Sunsets the HCF on July 1, 2030 unless a later enacted statute deletes or extends that date (FGC § 2787).
 - g) Prohibits the Legislature from changing the expenditure and transfer provisions, and reallocating any of the appropriated monies [Proposition 117 (1990), § 8].

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown. This bill is keyed fiscal.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **Purpose of this bill.** According to the author, “While the HCF annual allocation is relatively small in comparison to resource related bond acts that have passed over the life of Proposition 117, it has provided a necessary, consistent, and reliable revenue source for conservation efforts in California—helping to attract and secure other public and private funding critical to complete major acquisitions, restoration, and wildlife connectivity projects.

[This bill] will extend the sunset for this funding to 2035 to protect a necessary, consistent, and reliable revenue source for conservation efforts that benefit California’s diverse communities and biodiversity.”

- 2) **Background.** On June 5, 1990, voters approved Proposition 117: The California Wildlife Protection Act. Proposition 117 created the HCF and requires \$30 million to be annually transferred from existing environmental funds and the General Fund to the HCF to support the acquisition, enhancement, or restoration of certain lands for wildlife or open space purposes. Originally, Proposition 117 included a sunset for the HCF in 2020, but language in Proposition 117 allowed the legislature to extend the sunset without a four-fifths vote. SB 85 (Chapter 31, Statutes of 2019) later extended the sunset to 2030. This bill would further extend the sunset to 2035.

HCF. HCF monies are to be expended on the acquisition of habitat, including native oak woodlands, for the protection of deer and mountain lions; the acquisition of habitat to protect rare, endangered, threatened, or fully protected species; the acquisition of habitat for significant natural areas; the acquisition, enhancement, or restoration of wetlands; the acquisition, restoration, or enhancement of aquatic habitat for anadromous salmonids and trout resources; and the acquisition, restoration, or enhancement of riparian habitat. Since 1990, over \$1 billion has been transferred into the HCF. Three state entities use their HCF allotment for public grants.

State entities and projects. Created by the Wildlife Conservation Law of 1947, WCB is a state grant-making agency within the Department of Fish and Wildlife, dedicated to safeguarding California’s spectacular biological diversity and wild spaces by working in partnership with tribes, conservation organizations, and government agencies to acquire lands and design and implement habitat restoration and public access projects statewide through a variety of programs. One such program is the Habitat Enhancement and Restoration Program which is funded primarily through HCF and provides for coastal, wetland, and grassland habitat restoration, wildlife corridors, and fisheries enhancements. Some projects include:

- The Green Oak Wetland and Riparian Restoration Project (\$1,124,485) in San Mateo County to restore hydrologic function for a property in Año Nuevo State Park;
- The Mattley Meadow and Riparian Restoration Project (\$538,314) in Calaveras County to restore hydrologic function and improve riparian habitat;
- The Allensworth Ecological Reserve (\$38,071) in Tulare County for acquisitions.

- The Imperial Wildlife Area Wetland Restoration (\$2,400,000) in Imperial County for the restoration and enhancement of migratory bird habitat;
- The Agoura Hills, Santa Monica Mountains Gateway (\$2,300,000) in Los Angeles for acquisitions to preserve endangered species; and
- The East Contra Costa County Habitat Conservation Plan (\$229,868) in Contra Costa for acquisitions to preserve endangered species.

The mission of State Parks is to protect, maintain, and provide access to some of California's most valued natural and cultural resources. State Parks funds various projects with HCF such as land acquisition for habitat, wetlands, and trails and also funds educational and interpretive activities. In just the last two years, State Parks announced \$9.5 million in grants from HCF to 31 local projects. This includes grants to:

- The City of Carpinteria (\$183,438) for the construction of a new portion of trail to extend the Carpinteria Coastal Vista Trail;
- The City of Eureka's Camp Cooper Environmental Education Camp (\$126,257) to provide an eight-week summer camp on stewardship, wildlife habitats, conservation and interpretation for youth ages five through 12;
- The Kern County Park and Recreation Department (\$74,809) to provide a four-week outdoor education program for underserved communities in Bakersfield; and
- The City of San Fernando's Nature Adventure and Discovery Camp Program (\$42,895) to coordinate educational, interpretive, and recreational activities through University of California—Los Angeles and the North Valley Family YMCA.

The State Coastal Conservancy implements statewide and regional plans to protect, restore, and provide access to California's coast. The State Coastal Conservancy makes grants available to fund coastal projects through the support of HCF, General Fund, and bond funds, including:

- A total of \$7,137,633 for acquisitions in the City of Oxnard for the Ormond Beach Wetlands; and
- A total of \$629,545 for the study, acquisition, and restoration of the Tijuana Estuary.

- 3) **Arguments in support.** A coalition of environmental groups write in strong support of this bill. These groups celebrate the more than \$1 billion in HCF funds, which have protected over 1.2 million acres of wildlife habitat across California and have supported more than 350 local and regional park projects, since 1990. They also note the urgency of signaling commitment to the HCF, because "in the five years since the Legislature and Governor extended the HCF through 2030, the Department of Finance has proposed (through the May Revision process) to sweep the HCF twice and proposed in 2024 to terminate it altogether." The Legislature has rejected these efforts.

- 4) **Related legislation.** Proposition 117 created the HCF and guaranteed it funding of \$30 million per year for 30 years. Proposition 117 is a voter initiated measure that was placed on the ballot on June 5, 1990.

SB 85 (Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review), Chapter 31, Statutes of 2019, among other things, extends the sunset of the HCF from 2020 to 2030.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

Audubon California (Co-sponsor)
 National Wildlife Federation (Co-sponsor)
 Alianza Coachella Valley
 Alta Peak Chapter, California Native Plant Society
 American River Conservancy
 Backcountry Hunters & Anglers
 Ban Single Use Plastic
 Big Sur Land Trust
 Bolsa Chica Land Trust
 Cactustocloud Institute
 California Association of Resource Conservation Districts
 California Bowmen Hunters/State Archery Association
 California Chapter of the Wild Sheep Foundation
 California Coastal Protection Network
 California Council of Land Trusts
 California Houndsmen for Conservation
 California Institute for Biodiversity
 California State Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation
 California State Parks Foundation
 California Trout
 California Waterfowl Association
 CalWild
 Center for Biological Diversity
 Coastal Corridor Alliance
 Coastal Ranches Conservancy
 Defenders of Wildlife
 Delta Waterfowl
 Endangered Habitats League
 Environmental Center of San Diego
 Environmental Protection Information Center
 Feather River Trout Unlimited
 Forests Forever
 Friends Committee on Legislation of California
 Friends of the Inyo
 Grassland Water District
 Green Foothills
 Greenbelt Alliance
 Hills for Everyone

Hispanic Access Foundation
In Defense of Animals
Karmic Action Retribution Management Agency
Land Trust of Santa Cruz County
Los Angeles Climate Reality Project
Los Angeles Neighborhood Land Trust
Los Padres Forestwatch
Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District
Mojave Desert Land Trust
Mount Shasta Bioregional Ecology Center
Mountain Lion Foundation
National Parks Conservation Association
Nature for All
Oswit Land Trust
Pacific Forest Trust
Planning and Conservation League
Prosperity California
Resource Renewal Institute
River Partners
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
San Diego Bird Alliance
San Diego County Wildlife Federation
San Diego Humane Society - Project Wildlife
Sea and Sage Audubon Society
Sempervirens Fund
Sequoia Riverlands Trust
Shasta Land Trust
Sierra Business Council
Sierra Club California
Sierra Nevada Alliance
Sierra State Parks Foundation
Social Compassion in Legislation
Sonoma Land Trust
Sonoma Mountain Preservation
South Yuba River Citizens League
Surfrider Foundation
The Climate Reality Project Orange County Chapter
The Climate Reality Project, California State Coalition
The Climate Reality Project, Los Angeles Chapter
The Climate Reality Project, San Diego Chapter
The Climate Reality Project, San Fernando Valley CA Chapter
The League to Save Lake Tahoe
The Nature Conservancy
The River Project
The Wildlands Conservancy
Trout Unlimited
Trust for Public Land
Tulare Basin Wetlands Association
Tuolumne River Trust

Van Gelder Biological
Western Nebraska Resources Council
Wholly H2O
Wildfutures
Wildlands Network

Opposition

None on file

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