

Date of Hearing: April 14, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON WATER, PARKS, AND WILDLIFE

Diane Papan, Chair

AB 2254 (Addis) – As Amended April 8, 2026

SUBJECT: Coastal resources: local coastal program: monarch butterfly habitat

SUMMARY: Requires that local agencies include protection policies for monarch butterfly overwintering habitat sites in local coastal programs. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires the Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), in consultation with the California Coastal Commission (Coastal Commission), to identify the monarch butterfly overwintering habitat sites in the coastal zone and identify the habitat management plans or policies that are currently in place by local governments to protect those overwintering habitats by January 1, 2028.
- 2) Requires CDFW, in consultation with the Coastal Commission, to develop and provide guidance on model policies to be used by a local government for the protection of monarch butterfly overwintering habitat. Model policies can include, but are not limited to, habitat management plans, local coastal program updates, or any other local policy for protecting monarch butterflies.
- 3) Requires a local government with a monarch butterfly overwintering habitat site located within their coastal zone to include monarch butterfly overwintering habitat site protection policies in the next amendment to their local coastal program.
- 4) Encourages a local government with a local coastal program that includes monarch butterfly overwintering habitat site protection policies to apply for pollinator rescue grants from the Wildlife Conservation Board.
- 5) Provides that if the Commission on State Mandates determines that this act contains costs mandated by the state, reimbursement to local agencies and school districts for those costs shall be made (pursuant to Government Code § 17500 *et seq.*).

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Defines the coastal zone as the land and water area of the State of California from the Oregon border to the Mexico border, extending seaward to the state's outer limit of jurisdiction, including all offshore islands, and extending inland generally 1,000 yards from the mean high tide line of the sea, as shown on the maps in Section 17 of Chapter 1330 of the Statutes of 1976 [Public Resources Code (PRC) § 30103].
- 2) Establishes the Coastal Commission and charges it with planning and management of the coastal zone (PRC § 30300 *et seq.*).
- 3) Requires local governments that are, in whole or in part, within the coastal zone to prepare a local coastal program, subject to certification by the Coastal Commission (PRC § 30500 *et seq.*).

- 4) Authorizes local governments to amend their local coastal programs, subject to certification by the Coastal Commission (PRC § 30514).
- 5) Protects environmentally sensitive habitat areas in the coastal zone from any significant disruption of habitat values (PRC § 30240).
- 6) Authorizes CDFW to take feasible actions to conserve monarch butterflies and the unique habitats they depend upon for successful migration [Fish and Game Code (FGC) § 1021].

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown. This bill is keyed fiscal.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **Purpose of this bill.** According to the author, “Monarch butterflies, like many people, travel to California’s coast every year to rest and enjoy the mild climate. However, human development has seriously damaged or even removed their fragile overwintering habitats, which they need to survive harsh winter conditions. Loss of these sites, combined with the constant threat of climate change, has led to a 95% decline in the western monarch butterfly population since the 1980s. As a result, this population is at a serious risk of collapse. As stewards of our natural world, we need to ensure that these sites remain safe and available for the monarchs so that they can have a chance at recovering.”
- 2) **Background.** The western monarch butterfly, the population of monarchs found west of the Rocky Mountains, is a migratory butterfly that breeds in the inland West and migrates to the California coast for winter. There has been a long-term decline in western monarch populations, with current population numbers less than 5% of those reported in the 1980s. In a 2020 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) species status assessment, the western monarch was found to have a probability of extinction of 60–68% by 2030 and 99% by 2080. One recent study suggests that land use change is the dominant driver of monarch decline, exacerbated by climate change.¹

Monarch overwintering. Monarch butterflies cannot survive freezing temperatures, so they migrate to warmer areas for the winter. Overwintering monarchs roost in groves of trees and shrubs and remain mostly inactive, consume little food, and enter reproductive diapause, halting their sexual development and not reproducing until spring. The delicate balance of low-energy activity and native plants is important for monarch survival: when faced with nonnative plants, including nonnative milkweed, monarchs can continue to mate and lay eggs through the winter. Winter breeding can cause population loss as massed monarchs overwhelm a small amount of food and is also associated with increased rates of infection with *Ophryocystis elektroscirrha*, a debilitating parasite that can result in large numbers of butterflies failing to complete their migration.

Protection efforts. In 2020, USFWS announced a 12-month finding on a petition to list the monarch butterfly as threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act (16 United States Code § 1531 *et seq.*), finding that the listing was warranted but precluded by higher priority actions. USFWS issued a proposed rule in 2024 that would list the monarch butterfly as

¹ Elizabeth Crone, *et al.*, “Why are Monarch Butterflies Declining in the West? Understanding the Importance of Multiple Correlated Drivers,” *Ecological Applications* 29, no. 7 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1002/eap.1975>.

threatened and designate critical habitat for the butterfly; the comment period closed in May 2025. In California, monarch butterflies are listed on CDFW's Terrestrial and Vernal Pool Invertebrates of Conservation Priority List and are identified as a Species of Greatest Conservation Need. The monarch butterfly is not currently listed or a candidate species under the California Endangered Species Act (FGC § 2050 *et seq.*).

Local coastal programs. The Coastal Act sets coastal resources planning and management policies for public access, recreation, marine environment, land resources, development, industrial development, and sea level rise (PRC §§ 30200–30270). The actual implementation of these policies is left to local governments, which must produce local coastal programs that are in compliance with the state's policies (see Existing Law #3). Protection of environmentally sensitive habitat areas is one required component of a compliant local coastal program. Occasionally, the state requires local governments to update their local coastal programs and/or requires the Coastal Commission to provide guidance to address a specific issue—recent examples include accessory dwelling unit permitting (2024) and sea level rise planning (2023).

- 3) **Arguments in support.** The Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation writes for a coalition of conservation groups, “Where millions of butterflies once gathered along the coast each winter, recent monitoring has documented only a small fraction of those historic numbers. . . . [This bill] would take a thoughtful and collaborative approach to this challenge. The bill directs the development of model policies to guide the protection of monarch overwintering habitat and ensures that coastal jurisdictions incorporate those policies into their local coastal programs during future updates. By integrating habitat protection into existing coastal planning processes, the bill provides local governments with tools and guidance to help safeguard these important sites while maintaining flexibility in local implementation.”
- 4) **Arguments in opposition.** The League of California Cities writes for a coalition of local government groups, “[Local coastal programs] are critically important planning tools that serve as long-term land use plans that contain high level policies for how to balance coastal resources, community development, and public access. . . . [local coastal program] updates are a challenging and time intensive process for local governments to gain [Coastal Commission] certification and approval to retain local permitting authority in the coastal zone.” Writing about the requirement to engage in updates to local coastal programs without the process involved with species listing under the California Endangered Species Act, the League of California Cities continues, “Without these scientific analyses, mandating local governments to update [local coastal programs] with specific policies is unjustifiable.”
- 5) **Dual referral.** This bill was also referred to the Assembly Natural Resources Committee, where it passed by a vote of 10-3 on April 6, 2026.
- 6) **Related legislation.** SB 1214 (Ochoa Bogh) of the current legislative session designates the western monarch butterfly as the official State Butterfly. SB 1214 is pending in the Senate Governmental Organization Committee.

SB 1077 (Blakespear), Chapter 454, Statutes of 2024, requires the Coastal Commission to develop and provide guidance for local governments to facilitate the preparation of

amendments to a local coastal program to clarify and simplify the permitting process for accessory dwelling units and junior accessory dwelling units.

SB 867 (Allen), Chapter 83, Statutes of 2024, approved in Proposition 4 (2024), authorizes \$870 million for the Wildlife Conservation Board for, among other purposes, monarch butterfly and pollinator rescue.

SB 272 (Laird), Chapter 384, Statutes of 2023, requires the Coastal Commission to establish guidelines for the preparation of a sea level rise plan and requires local governments lying within the coastal zone to adopt a sea level rise plan as part of their local coastal program by January 1, 2034.

AB 2421 (Mark Stone), Chapter 760, Statutes of 2018, establishes the Monarch Butterfly and Pollinator Rescue Program, administered by the Wildlife Conservation Board.

AB 559 (Lopez), Chapter 478, Statutes of 2015, authorizes CDFW to take feasible actions to conserve monarch butterflies and the unique habitats they depend upon for successful migration.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

The Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation (sponsor)

American Bird Conservancy

Audubon California

California State Parks Foundation

Center for Biological Diversity

Center for Food Safety

Central Coast State Parks Association

Defenders of Wildlife

Monarch Joint Venture

National Audubon Society

National Wildlife Federation

Natural Resources Defense Council

Pacific Grove Museum of Natural History

Planning and Conservation League

Rainforest Rising, Inc.

River Partners

San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance

Santa Barbara Zoo

Social Compassion in Legislation

Valley Eco

Wild Farm Alliance

Oppose unless amended

California State Association of Counties

League of California Cities

Rural County Representatives of California

Opposition

None on file

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