

Date of Hearing: April 14, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON WATER, PARKS, AND WILDLIFE

Diane Papan, Chair

AB 2590 (Jeff Gonzalez) – As Amended March 26, 2026

SUBJECT: Resource conservation: sentinel landscapes

SUMMARY: Establishes the California Sentinel Landscape Act. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires the Natural Resources Agency (CNRA) to designate a Sentinel Landscapes Program Manager to coordinate state participation in the federal Sentinel Landscapes Partnership. Further, requires the Program Manager to:
 - a) Support identification of candidate sentinel landscapes in California for designation as federal sentinel landscapes and assist in the preparation of applications or proposals to the federal Sentinel Landscapes Partnership;
 - b) Coordinate with the United States Department of Defense (DOD), United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), United States Department of the Interior (DOI), other federal departments and agencies as appropriate, and the Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation regarding military installation compatibility planning to align federal and state conservation investments within federally designated or candidate sentinel landscapes;
 - c) Work with state agencies that have conservation grant or easement authority, including the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB), Department of Conservation, State Coastal Conservancy, Sierra Nevada Conservancy, Department of Fish and Wildlife, and other relevant agencies or conservancies to identify opportunities to align funding strategies consistent with federal sentinel landscape objectives and each agency's statutory mission;
 - d) Facilitate communication and coordination among state agencies, federal partners, local governments, federally recognized Indian tribes, land trusts, nonprofit conservation organizations, and other stakeholders involved in the federal Sentinel Landscapes Partnership; and
 - e) Prepare, on a biennial basis, a summary of opportunities, collaborative projects, leveraged funding, and outcomes relating to federal sentinel landscape designations in California.
- 2) Requires that state agencies that have conservation grant or easement authority, to the extent feasible and consistent with their existing statutory authority, to cooperate with the Sentinel Landscapes Program Manager in implementing #2, above.
- 3) Permits WCB to:
 - a) Provide grants for habitat protection, restoration, and enhancement projects that are located within, are adjacent to, or contribute to the ecological connectivity and conservation objectives of a federally designated sentinel landscape; and

- b) Acquire real property or any interest in real property, including conservation easements, in connection with a project connected to a sentinel landscape.
- 4) Requires projects connected to a sentinel landscape to independently further WCB's statutory purposes relating to wildlife habitat conservation, ecological connectivity, working lands habitat conservation, or wildlife-oriented public access, and to meet applicable eligibility criteria of the relevant WCB program.
- 5) Authorizes WCB to coordinate with federal departments and agencies participating in the federal Sentinel Landscapes Partnership and other entities to align conservation investments within and adjacent to federally designated sentinel landscapes and to leverage federal funds, technical assistance, or matching grants.
- 6) Clarifies that projects supported pursuant #3a, above, will remain voluntary and will not impose regulatory requirements beyond those otherwise applicable under state or federal law.
- 7) Establishes The California Sentinel Landscapes Fund (Fund) in the State Treasury.
- 8) Permits WCB to accept for deposit into the Fund, federal funds, grants, and gifts and donations, including interest earned, that are designated and required by the donor to be used exclusively for the purposes of projects connected to sentinel landscape. Continuously appropriates moneys in the Fund to WCB.
- 9) Allows the Department of Conservation and the Strategic Growth Council to give priority consideration to projects that are located within, are adjacent to, or contribute to the objectives of a federally designated sentinel landscape, provided that the project meets all other eligibility requirements of the Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Program.
- 10) Allows the State Coastal Conservancy, to the extent not in conflict with those programs, to give priority consideration to projects that are located within, are adjacent to, or contribute to the ecological connectivity and conservation objectives of a federally designated sentinel landscape, provided that those projects are consistent with the statutory mission and purposes of the State Coastal Conservancy. Requires funds allocated by the State Coastal Conservancy to be available for acquisition, restoration, and enhancement of land and water resources.
- 11) Allows the Sierra Nevada Conservancy, to the extent not in conflict with those programs, to give priority consideration to projects that are located within, are adjacent to, or contribute to the ecological connectivity and conservation objectives of a federally designated sentinel landscape, provided those projects are consistent with the statutory mission and purposes of the Sierra Nevada Conservancy.
- 12) Requires CNRA, in collaboration with the Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation, Department of Conservation, WCB, State Coastal Conservancy, Sierra Nevada Conservancy, Department of Fish and Wildlife, and other relevant state entities, to regularly consult on how to align conservation opportunities with state and federal landscape protection goals.
- 13) States that implementation of this bill, is contingent upon the availability of federal funds, grants, gifts, donations, or other non-General Fund resources available.

- 14) State that nothing in this bill limits or replaces the existing statutory missions, authorities, or responsibilities of any state agency.
- 15) Expands the California Farmland Conservancy Program to allow for the acquisition of agricultural conservation easements or fee title, to include projects that align with landscape-scale conservation objectives identified in a federally designated sentinel landscape.
- 16) Defines candidate sentinel landscape, conservation easement, federally designated sentinel landscape, and working lands, for the purposes of this bill.
- 17) Makes findings and declarations regarding the benefits of natural and working lands and the value of voluntary conservation efforts, such as the Sentinel Landscapes Partnership.
- 18) States that it is the intent of the Legislature to:
 - a) Clarify that state conservation programs may support voluntary land conservation activities consistent with federal sentinel landscape objectives; and
 - b) Establish a coordinated state function to support designation and implementation of federal sentinel landscapes in California.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Establishes the Sentinel Landscape Program (10 U.S. Code § 2693).
 - a) Grants the Secretary of Defense, in coordination with the Secretary of Agriculture, the Secretary of the Interior, and the heads of other Federal departments and agencies that elect to become full partners in the program (Partners), the authority to establish and carry out a program to preserve and restore sentinel landscapes. Names this program the “Sentinel Landscapes Partnership.” Further:
 - i) Authorizes the Partners to collectively designate one or more sentinel landscapes;
 - ii) Allows the Partners to coordinate actions between their departments and agencies and with other Federal, State, interstate, and local agencies, Indian Tribes, and private entities to more efficiently work together for the mutual benefit of conservation, resilience, working lands, and national defense, and to encourage owners and managers of land to engage in voluntary land management, resilience, and conservation activities that contribute to the sustainment of military installations, state-owned National Guard installations, and associated airspace;
 - iii) Grants the Partners the authority to give any eligible owner or manager of land within a designated sentinel landscape priority consideration for participation in any easement, grant, or assistance program administered by that Partner. Clarifies that participation by an eligible owner or manager of land in any such program shall be voluntary; and

- iv) Encourages other Federal agencies with programs addressing conservation or resilience to (1) participate in the activities of the Sentinel Landscapes Partnership and (2) become full partners in the Sentinel Landscapes Partnership.
- b) Clarifies that nothing in Existing Law #1 shall be construed to require an owner or manager of land, including a private landowner or agricultural producer, to participate in any land management, resilience, or conservation activity under this section.
- c) Defines a sentinel landscape as a landscape-scale area encompassing:
 - i) One or more military installations or state-owned National Guard installations and associated airspace; and
 - ii) The publicly and privately owned lands that serve to protect and support the rural economy, the natural environment, outdoor recreation, and the national defense missions of a military installation or state-owned National Guard installation.
- d) Defines “resilience” as the capability to avoid, prepare for, minimize the effect of, adapt to, and recover from extreme weather events, flooding, wildfire, or other anticipated or unanticipated changes in environmental conditions.
- e) Defines “military installation” and “state-owned National Guard installation.”

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown. This bill is keyed fiscal.

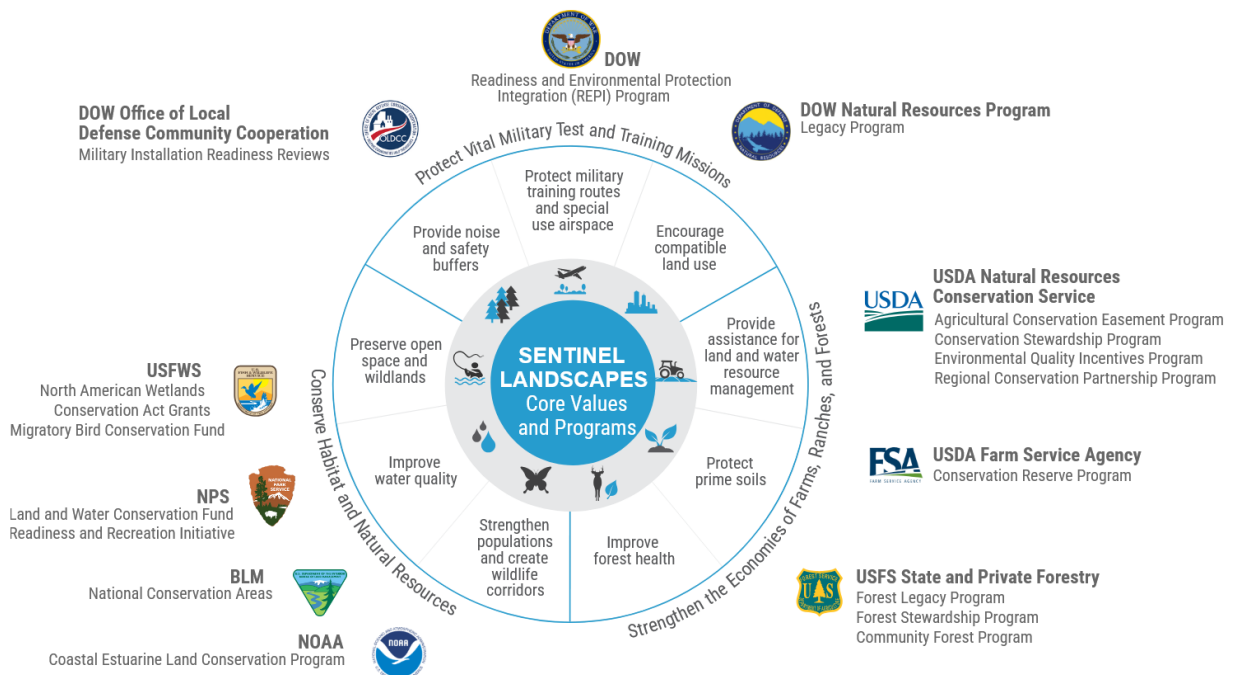
COMMENTS:

- 1) **Purpose of this bill.** Federally designated sentinel landscapes provide an opportunity to bring together partners across agriculture, conservation, and defense to protect working lands, prevent incompatible development, and sustain vital ecosystems. According to the author, “This bill addresses that need by establishing a statewide Sentinel Landscapes Manager who would help coordinate efforts to get more landscape designations. With a dedicated manager, California can more effectively compete for federal resources, support additional landscape designations, and ensure that existing efforts are strategically guided and sustained.”
- 2) **Background.** Established in 2013 and authorized under 10 U.S.C §2693, the Sentinel Landscapes Partnership is a coalition of Federal agencies, state and local governments, and non-governmental organizations that work with willing landowners and land managers to advance sustainable land use practices around military installations and ranges. The mission of the Partnership is to strengthen military readiness, support agricultural productivity, preserve natural resources, increase access to recreation, advance sustainable land management, and promote landscape resilience.

Natural areas and working lands minimize conflicts around defense facilities and protect against encroachment concerns such as light pollution, electromagnetic spectrum interference, overflights/airspace restrictions, and artillery noise that may impact surrounding communities. According to information on the sentinel landscapes website, DOD requires

undeveloped natural landscapes such as forests, grasslands, deserts, and coasts to conduct realistic live-fire training, weapons system testing, and essential operations. “These landscapes are crucial for preparing a more lethal and resilient force for combat,” according to the website.

Leadership from the Partners and the Federal Emergency Management Agency coordinate the partnership at the national level through the Federal Coordinating Committee (FCC). The FCC collaborates with state, municipal, and tribal governments, private organizations, landowners, and land managers to develop and implement projects on the ground within the sentinel landscapes. The FCC also designates sentinel landscapes that hold onsite benefits for the FCC member agencies to collaborate. This enables the Sentinel Landscapes Partnership to consider each individual sentinel landscape's unique geography, economic drivers, cultural heritage, natural resource challenges, and military readiness needs. Once sentinel landscapes are designated, the FCC works to connect landowners and land managers in these areas with voluntary federal and state assistance programs that support the adoption and maintenance of sustainable land management practices.



Benefits of designation. The sentinel landscape website claims that the Partner agencies use taxpayer dollars more efficiently by aligning their efforts in sentinel landscapes to accelerate work on the ground with fewer resources. The website has not been updated since 2023, but indicates that projects across sentinel landscapes have attracted approximately \$381 million in USDA funds, \$283 million in DOD funds, \$117 million in DOI funds, \$446 million in state funds, \$51 million in local funds, and \$166 million in private funds. These contributions have permanently protected 751,000 acres of land through FY 2023 and enrolled over 2.5 million acres of land in financial and technical assistance programs in FY 2023 alone. Other benefits include:

- Federal and state Partners are encouraged to give priority consideration in existing funding to landowners and land managers within the sentinel landscapes.
- The local sentinel landscape partnership is eligible to receive funding from the FCC to hire a sentinel landscape coordinator (coordinator). This individual serves as a liaison between local partners and agency headquarters. The coordinator's principal duty is to facilitate and coordinate the activities of the local sentinel landscape partnership to achieve objectives and key results.
- Improved communication, coordination, and collaboration among government agencies, private organizations, and local communities within the sentinel landscape.

In California. There are 19 Sentinel Landscape locations, encompassing more than 60 military installations. There is one Sentinel Landscape in California: the Mojave Desert. Established in 2024, the Mojave Desert Sentinel Landscape covers 3.5 million acres of the western Mojave Desert and includes five military installations: the Edwards Air Force Base, Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center, Marine Corps Logistics Base Barstow, National Training Center Fort Irwin, and Naval Air Weapons Station China Lake. It encompasses multi-mission public lands and over 40 protected species, including the Mojave desert tortoise and western Joshua tree. The landscape goals are to increase habitat connectivity and reduce vehicle strikes that kill protected species, restore priority habitats, mitigate impacts from illegal activities like unauthorized off-highway vehicle usage and illegal cannabis grows, develop sustainable and climate resilient agricultural practices, and provide community outreach.

These installations require off-base land and airspace to test and train current and next-generation capabilities. However, this region is increasingly challenged by incompatible development, including airspace congestion, limited access to training routes, unauthorized off-road vehicle use, and energy development. These challenges pose significant threats to military operations. This sentinel landscape brings together state and local governments, federal, tribal, and private partners focused on reducing land-use conflicts that impact military readiness. Partners are reclaiming and rehabilitating up to 50,000 acres of priority habitats while mitigating wildfire impacts. Protecting priority habitats decreases the regulatory burden on military testing and training, and improves installation resilience by supporting natural landscapes that are more drought- and fire-resilient.

Key state partners include California Department of Fish and Wildlife, the California Natural Resource Agency, the California Department of Parks and Recreation, the California Department of Transportation, the State Lands Commission, and WCB. Local, private, and academic partners include San Bernardino County, the Desert Tortoise Council, Eastern Kern County Resource Conservation District, Mojave Desert Land Trust, Mojave Desert Resources Conservation District, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Preservation Ranch, Transition Habitat Conservancy, Trust for Public Land, University of California–Los Angeles, and University of California–Riverside.

There is a Partnership Coordinator for the Mojave Desert Sentinel Landscape to facilitate the collaboration between local, state, and national government agencies, private organizations, tribes, and local communities.

- 3) **Proposed committee amendments.** *Should this bill pass this Committee, the author may wish to continue to evaluate the necessity of establishing a position in statute and the establishment of a new fund to support those goals.* Until then, the committee may wish the author to take the following amendments that better align the role of the proposed Program Manager with the existing coordinator role, remove the requirement that WCB acquire land (which it only does on behalf of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife), and make the grant provisions consistent throughout the bill.

Chapter 2, Proposed PRC § 9980

(a) The Natural Resources Agency shall designate a Sentinel Landscapes Program Manager to coordinate state participation in the federal Sentinel Landscapes Partnership.

(b) The Sentinel Landscapes Program Manager shall do all of the following:

(1) Support identification of candidate sentinel landscapes in California for designation as federal sentinel landscapes and assist in the preparation of applications or proposals to the federal Sentinel Landscapes Partnership. ***This includes, facilitating communication and coordination among state agencies, federal partners, local governments, federally recognized Indian tribes, land trusts, nonprofit conservation organizations, and other stakeholders for those purposes.***

(2) Coordinate with the United States Department of Defense, United States Department of Agriculture, United States Department of the Interior, other federal departments and agencies as appropriate, and ~~the Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation~~ ***relevant state agencies*** regarding military installation compatibility planning to align federal and state conservation investments within federally designated or candidate sentinel landscapes.

(3) Work with state agencies that have conservation grant or easement authority, including the Wildlife Conservation Board, Department of Conservation, State Coastal Conservancy, Sierra Nevada Conservancy, Department of Fish and Wildlife, and other relevant agencies or conservancies to identify opportunities to align funding strategies consistent with federal sentinel landscape objectives and each agency's statutory mission.

~~(4) Facilitate communication and coordination among state agencies, federal partners, local governments, federally recognized Indian tribes, land trusts, nonprofit conservation organizations, and other stakeholders involved in the federal Sentinel Landscapes Partnership.~~

~~(5)~~ (4) Prepare, on a biennial basis, a summary of opportunities, collaborative projects, leveraged funding, and outcomes relating to federal sentinel landscape designations in California. This summary may be incorporated into existing natural resources or climate adaptation reports.

(c) State agencies that have conservation grant or easement authority shall, to the extent feasible and consistent with their existing statutory authority, cooperate with the Sentinel Landscapes Program Manager in implementing this section.

Chapter 2, Proposed PRC § 9981

(a) In addition to the purposes otherwise authorized by law, the Wildlife Conservation Board may ~~do both of the following:~~

~~(1) Provide~~ **provide** grants for habitat protection, restoration, and enhancement projects that are located within, ~~are adjacent to, or contribute to~~ the ecological connectivity and conservation objectives of a federally designated sentinel landscape.

~~(2) Acquire real property or any interest in real property, including conservation easements, in connection with a project described in paragraph (1).~~

(b) Projects funded pursuant to ~~paragraph (1) of~~ subdivision (a) shall independently further the Wildlife Conservation Board's statutory purposes relating to wildlife habitat conservation, ecological connectivity, working lands habitat conservation, or wildlife-oriented public access, and shall meet applicable eligibility criteria of the relevant Wildlife Conservation Board program.

(c) The Wildlife Conservation Board may coordinate with federal departments and agencies participating in the federal Sentinel Landscapes Partnership and other entities to align conservation investments within ~~and adjacent to~~ federally designated sentinel landscapes and to leverage federal funds, technical assistance, or matching grants.

(d) Projects supported pursuant to ~~paragraph (1) of~~ subdivision (a) shall remain voluntary and shall not impose regulatory requirements beyond those otherwise applicable under state or federal law.

(e) (1) The California Sentinel Landscapes Fund is hereby created in the State Treasury.

(2) The Wildlife Conservation Board may accept for deposit into the fund federal funds, grants, and gifts and donations, including interest earned, that are designated and required by the donor to be used exclusively for the purposes of projects under ~~paragraph (1) of~~ subdivision (a). Notwithstanding Section 13340 of the Government Code, moneys in the fund are hereby continuously appropriated to the Wildlife Conservation Board to implement projects under ~~paragraph (1) of~~ subdivision (a).

Chapter 2, Proposed PRC § 9982

In evaluating applications for grants pursuant to the Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Program, the Department of Conservation and the Strategic Growth Council may, **to the extent not in conflict with the programs**, give priority consideration to projects that are located ~~within, are adjacent to, or contribute to the objectives of~~ **within** a federally designated sentinel landscape, ~~provided that the project meets all other eligibility requirements of the Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Program.~~ **landscape.**

Chapter 2, Proposed PRC § 9983

In ~~awarding~~ **evaluating applications for** grants ~~or approving projects~~ under State Coastal Conservancy programs, the State Coastal Conservancy may, to the extent not in conflict with those programs, give priority consideration to projects that are located ~~within, are adjacent to, or contribute to the objectives of~~ ecological connectivity and conservation objectives of **within** a federally designated sentinel landscape, provided that those projects are consistent with the statutory mission and purposes of the State Coastal Conservancy. ~~These funds~~

~~allocated by the State Coastal Conservancy shall be available for acquisition, restoration, and enhancement of land and water resources.~~

Chapter 2, Proposed PRC § 9984

~~In awarding~~ ***evaluating applications for*** grants ~~or approving projects~~ under Sierra Nevada Conservancy programs, the Sierra Nevada Conservancy may, to the extent not in conflict with those programs, give priority consideration to projects that are located ~~within, are adjacent to, or contribute to the ecological connectivity and conservation objectives of~~ ***within*** a federally designated sentinel landscape, provided those projects are consistent with the statutory mission and purposes of the Sierra Nevada Conservancy.

Section 3, PRC § 10230.2

(a) The California Farmland Conservancy Program is hereby established in the department.

(b) The program may offer financial assistance, including grants or contracts, for projects and activities on agricultural lands that support agricultural conservation and sustainable land management, including, but not limited to, any of the following:

(1) Acquisition of agricultural conservation easements or fee title to protect the land's agricultural use or capacity, ~~including projects that align with landscape-scale conservation objectives identified in a federally designated sentinel landscape,~~ that meets the following requirements:

(A) The primary purpose for which the easement or fee title is being sought is consistent with continuing agricultural use of the property.

(B) The easement or fee title does not, and will not, substantially prevent agricultural uses on the property.

(C) Any nonagricultural qualities that will be protected by the easement or fee title, if applicable, are inherent to the property.

(2) Improvements to land protected by a conservation easement, deed restriction, or similar long-term agreement as determined by the director.

(3) Plans to protect and conserve agricultural lands and plans to protect, conserve, restore, or enhance resources or values located on, or adjacent to, agricultural lands or that were historically present on agricultural lands. These may include, but are not limited to, either of the following:

(A) An agricultural land component or element of a general plan developed pursuant to Section 65565 of the Government Code.

(B) Land conservation strategies and plans to identify and develop potential projects.

(4) Technical assistance to develop projects, prepare applications, and implement projects.

(5) Administrative costs incurred by the department to administer the program.

(6) Any other purposes approved by the Legislature in a funding appropriation for the program.

(c) When evaluating applications, priority consideration may be given to projects that are located within federally designated landscapes.

- 4) **Arguments in support.** The military services in California write to express support for this bill. They note the value of California’s military installations and training ranges in providing irreplaceable national security value, supporting operational readiness for forces from every service. Further, they share that “the military manages more than 25 million acres nationwide and provides habitat for hundreds of threatened and endangered species – often more than are found on lands managed by any other federal agency. In California, military installations actively conserve sensitive species and ecosystems while successfully maintaining high operational readiness. This longstanding commitment demonstrates that national security and environmental conservation are complementary goals.” They write that the Sentinel Landscape Program offers a proven model to strengthen this balance and sustain working lands, protect wildlife habitat, reduce wildfire risk, and support climate resilience through incentives and voluntary partnerships.

- 5) **Related legislation.** None

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

Military Services in California

Opposition

None on file

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