

Date of Hearing: June 30, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON WATER, PARKS, AND WILDLIFE

Diane Papan, Chair

SB 1305 (Richardson) – As Amended May 14, 2026

SENATE VOTE: 29-9

SUBJECT: Wildlife: bears

SUMMARY: Establishes the California Grizzly Recovery Assessment Act, which requires, upon appropriation, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) to develop a roadmap to evaluate under what conditions the reintroduction of the grizzly bear in the state is feasible and advisable. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) States legislative intent to determine whether reintroduction of the grizzly bear is biologically feasible and whether areas of the state exist where long-term coexistence and stewardship can be achieved, and that CDFW evaluate whether the ecological functions once provided by the grizzly bear may be restored, including through reintroduction.
- 2) Requires CDFW to develop a roadmap that evaluates whether, and under what conditions, reintroduction of the grizzly bear is feasible and advisable, and the extent to which the ecological functions, once provided by the grizzly bear, may be restored through human-mediated landscape restoration.
- 3) Requires the roadmap to include, but not be limited to:
 - a) Scientific assessments and evaluations, based on the best available science and data, including, of the grizzly bear's historical distribution, and an assessment of the ecosystem functions, ecological processes affected by the grizzly bear's extirpation and that may benefit from restoration of the grizzly bear, and an evaluation of potential reintroduction areas.
 - b) Consultation, review, and framework development, including consultation with California Native American Tribes, independent peer review of the scientific assessments and evaluations, and development of a framework for incorporating the cultural, spiritual, and ecological values of California Native American tribes.
 - c) Management, implementation, cost, and regulatory measures, including development of management procedures, including monitoring and conflict prevention, an estimate of implementation costs and agency capacity needs, and proposed statutes, if any, and regulations governing the taking and management of grizzly bears.
- 4) Requires CDFW to submit the roadmap to the relevant budget and policy committees of the Legislature, the Legislative Analyst's Office, and the Fish and Game Commission (Commission) by June 30, 2030. Requires the roadmap to be publicly available on the CDFW website.
- 5) Authorizes CDFW to contract with outside specialists to develop and complete the roadmap.

- 6) Prohibits the reintroduction of the grizzly bear in California until all of the following occur:
 - a) Completion of the roadmap;
 - b) Determinations, based on the best available science, that establishment of a self-sustaining grizzly bear population in the state is biologically viable;
 - c) Identification of particular areas suitable for reintroduction;
 - d) Consultation with California Native American tribes, and engagement with communities in or near proposed reintroduction areas;
 - e) Adoption of a framework incorporating the cultural, spiritual, and ecological values of California Native American tribes into grizzly bear reintroduction planning, management, coexistence, and long-term stewardship;
 - f) Adoption of long-term stewardship standards and procedures for proposed reintroduction areas;
 - g) Adoption of procedures that minimize the risk of conflict with human life and property;
 - h) Adoption of procedures that promote the welfare of grizzly bears involved in restoration efforts; and
 - i) Adoption of regulations that set for the circumstances under which the taking of grizzly bears may be authorized.
- 7) States legislative intent that CDFW and the Commission be provided with sustainable funding sufficient to develop the roadmap and resulting obligations.
- 8) Makes the development of the road map and any reintroduction planning contingent upon an appropriation, except for funds CDFW may accept from public or private sources.
- 9) Provides that nothing in the roadmap or reintroduction planning, limits the authority of the Commission or CDFW pursuant to the California Endangered Species Act.
- 10) Specifically excludes the grizzly bear from multiple sections of existing code applicable to bears, including the prohibition on the use of iron or steel-jawed traps to take bear and exclusion from the list of game mammals.
- 11) Makes legislative findings and declarations regarding the cultural, historical, ecological, and symbolic significance of grizzly bears to the state.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Establishes the Bear Flag as the State Flag of California and the California Grizzly Bear as the state animal (Government Code §§ 420 and 425).

- 2) Provides CDFW the jurisdiction over the conservation, protection, and management of fish, wildlife, native plants, and habitat necessary for biologically sustainable populations of those species [Fish and Game Code (FGC) § 1802].
- 3) Declares that it is a policy of the state to encourage the preservation, conservation, and maintenance of wildlife resources under the jurisdiction and influence of the state (FGC § 1801). This policy should meet the following objectives:
 - a) To maintain sufficient populations of all species of wildlife and the habitat necessary to achieve the objectives stated in subdivisions (b), (c), and (d).
 - b) To provide for the beneficial use and enjoyment of wildlife by all citizens of the state.
 - c) To perpetuate all species of wildlife for their intrinsic and ecological values, as well as for their direct benefits to all persons.
 - d) To provide for aesthetic, educational, and nonappropriative uses of the various wildlife species.
 - e) To maintain diversified recreational uses of wildlife, including the sport of hunting, as proper uses of certain designated species of wildlife, subject to regulations consistent with the maintenance of healthy, viable wildlife resources, public safety, and a quality outdoor experience.
 - f) To provide for economic contributions to the citizens of the state, through the recognition that wildlife is a renewable resource of the land by which economic return can accrue to the citizens of the state, individually and collectively, through regulated management. Such management shall be consistent with the maintenance of healthy and thriving wildlife resources and the public ownership status of the wildlife resources.
 - g) To alleviate economic losses or public health or safety problems caused by wildlife to the people of the state either individually or collectively. Such resolution shall be in a manner designed to bring the problem within tolerable limits consistent with economic and public health considerations and the objectives stated in (a), (b) and (c).
- 4) Makes it unlawful to take a bird, mammal, fish, reptile, or amphibian except as provided in the Fish and Game Code or in a regulation (FGC § 2000).
- 5) Authorizes the hunting of bear (FGC § 4750 *et seq.*).
- 6) Permits a landowner or tenant of property that is being damaged or destroyed or in danger of being damaged or destroyed by certain animals, to apply to CDFW for a permit to kill the animal, subject to certain limitations (FGC § 4181 and 14 California Code of Regulations § 401).

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown. This bill is keyed fiscal.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **Purpose of this bill.** According to the author, “The California Grizzly has been synonymous with the Golden State and continues to be our official state animal. Unfortunately, California’s subspecies of grizzly were eliminated in 1924. The loss of grizzly bears from California marks one of the most significant species losses in the state’s history. Once present in nearly every ecosystem, grizzlies were eliminated within a single human lifetime, removing a keystone species whose ecological roles were critical natural processes such as seed dispersal, vegetation management, and balancing the food web. The loss of grizzlies also severed enduring relationships between the species and many California Native American tribes, for whom the grizzly remains a vital and honored relative. [This bill] simply asks the state to study the possibility of the grizzly’s reintroduction and will include the best available science and data, consultation with a myriad of stakeholder groups, and a thoughtfully crafted plan on management procedures and implementation if reintroduction was found to be feasible.”
- 2) **Background.** Brown bears are found in North America, Europe, and Asia. The collection of brown bears found in the inland region of North America are referred to as grizzly bears. Until 1924, California was home to its own population of grizzly bears. According to the Capitol Museum website, “[Grizzly bears] lived 20–30 years, were 4.5 feet at the shoulder, and were 8 feet tall when standing. Females weighed about 400 pounds while males weighed 1,000 pounds. They could run 35 miles per hour for short distances, had a humped shoulder, and were brown-golden in color.”

The California grizzly bear had become a part of the identity of California’s first people and settlers. In 1846, when a small group of American settlers in California rebelled against Mexican authorities, they chose the grizzly bear as their symbol, which was featured on their flag. This flag was the inspiration for the official state flag of California. But long before this, California’s native people had been living with grizzly bears for millennia and developed rich and complex relationships with them. According to the California Grizzly Alliance website, “for Indigenous Californians, grizzlies were friends, neighbors, resources, healers, and kin.”

After the Gold Rush, the state’s grizzly population plummeted due to loss of habitat and over-hunting. The last credible sighting of a California grizzly bear was in Sequoia National Park in 1924. Still, in 1953, the California grizzly earned its indelible spot in state symbology by becoming the official State Animal.

Human-wildlife conflict. California is a biodiversity hotspot. However, increasing habitat fragmentation, climate change (including drought, extreme heat, and wildfire), increasing human population in wildlife habitat, and, in some instances, increasing wildlife populations are factors driving increased human-wildlife conflict, particularly with predators. CDFW has developed online reporting tools to assist those impacted, but inconsistent and fluctuating funding has impacted its ability to respond and take proactive steps to support communities in minimizing conflict.

Grizzly bears are opportunistic feeders and may find themselves in conflict situations similar to those of black bears and wolves. In recent years, interactions between black bears and

people have been increasing across California, particularly in foothill suburbs and recreational areas where human development overlaps with bear habitat. The vast majority of human-black bear conflict involves the intersection of black bears and attractants, such as food, garbage, and livestock. Key predictors of bear conflict include the availability of both natural foods and anthropogenic foods, proximity of black bear habitat to humans, and black bear abundance and density. These issues have required active education and coordination efforts. Preventing human-bear conflict is top of mind for many in Tahoe and has led to the development of the Tahoe Interagency Bear Team (TIBT). TIBT is a collective of bear experts across federal, state and local agencies who study and understand bears and have devoted much of their professional lives to ensure the health and well-being of the Lake Tahoe Basin's black bears. TIBT provides proven and scientifically backed information about the real issues and solutions for living and recreating in bear country, helping Tahoe become "Bearwise," on its website, tahoebears.org.

Wolves have also been a focus of recent human-wildlife conflict conversations since they began returning to the state. Livestock losses attributed to wolves have recently increased substantially. One of the most high-profile cases involved the Beyem Seyo pack, which was responsible for killing at least 64 calves between July and October 2025 and more than 90 livestock animals since late May. Despite deploying the first ever "Strike Team" to utilize nonlethal strategies, including 24/7 human presence, diversionary feeding, and hazing, the wolves were not deterred. In response, CDFW ultimately euthanized four members of the pack. Estimates are that CDFW's response cost in excess of \$2 million, while a more proactive approach could have saved money, livestock, and wolves.

A recent *Nature* article evaluated the social tolerance of the risks associated with human-grizzly encounters.¹ The article notes that "the success of predator recovery hinges on effectively managing human-wildlife conflict in communities reoccupied by native species. Social tolerance [...] plays an important role in managing human-wildlife conflicts. By 2070, human-wildlife overlap is expected to increase in over 55% of terrestrial lands, increasing the chances for human-wildlife conflict," but social tolerance is often overlooked. This research indicates that social tolerance is higher than management guidelines indicate, but that social tolerance is highly localized.

Reintroduction. Committee staff are unaware of examples of CDFW reintroducing any species that has been fully extirpated from the entire state. While recovery efforts for populations of threatened or endangered species are ongoing (e.g., California condors through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; salmon), or species reintroduction after locally extirpated (e.g., Owens pupfish), a statewide reintroduction of a species of this magnitude has not been performed by CDFW. Gray wolves began their natural return to California in 2011 and were not intentionally reintroduced.

Species reintroduction is risky and its effectiveness is debated. With the passage of Public Law 116–260 in December 2020, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service studied the feasibility

¹ Hubbard, C., Fletcher, I.M., Cherry, T.L. *et al.* The public overestimates and prefers greater tolerance for grizzly bear encounters than defined by the United States management guidelines. *Commun Earth Environ* 6, 1022 (2025). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s43247-025-02969-9>

and cost of reestablishing sea otters on the Pacific Coast of the contiguous United States. This assessment relied upon the International Union for the Conservation of Nature guidelines for evaluating conservation reintroductions. These guidelines call for clear objectives for a reintroduction; an assessment of whether the reintroduction will result in a net conservation benefit to the species and its ecosystem; an evaluation of feasibility from a biological, socioeconomic, and legal perspectives; and an evaluation of the risks to ecological, social, and economic interests associated with the reintroduction. The study concluded that there would be multiple substantial benefits to sea otter reintroduction to their historical range in northern California and Oregon. The reintroduction was deemed feasible, but not without challenges, and was expected to cost \$26–43 million dollars over a 10-year period to perform habitat evaluation, acquisition and release of sea otters, and habitat and population monitoring.

The National Park Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced in April 2024 a decision to “actively restore grizzly bears to the North Cascades of Washington, where the animals once roamed.”² This decision came after the completion of an Environmental Impact Statement. The agencies planned to move three to seven grizzly bears per year for a period of five to ten years to establish an initial population of 25 bears. The bears were planned to be relocated to an area approximately 9,800 square miles in size (roughly the size of Inyo County) that contained some of the most intact wildlands of the contiguous U.S. The plan was to designate this population of grizzly bears as a “nonessential experimental population” to allow authorities and land managers additional management flexibility. This plan has since stalled.

Mandates and money. This bill is contingent upon appropriation by the Legislature, so in future budget years, the state would need to provide funding to CDFW to develop this roadmap. CDFW is currently only funded to complete 38% of its mission, so it would be unable to absorb the demand this roadmap would have on staff time and resources. Additional funding would be necessary to provide resources to CDFW if grizzly bear reintroduction was found to be both feasible and advisable. This bill also authorizes CDFW to accept funds from any public or private source to develop the roadmap and prepare for reintroduction.

- 3) **Proposed committee amendments.** This bill proposes a framework for CDFW to consider the conditions under which grizzly bear reintroduction is feasible (whether it *can* be done) and if such reintroduction is advisable (whether it *should* be done). The requirement that reintroduction be advisable is not included in the operative language of the bill (amendment #1). This framework includes the development of a road map that requires CDFW list statutes and regulations that govern the management of grizzly bears. Without a determination from CDFW that reintroduction is feasible and advisable, and without the list of relevant code sections required by this bill, it is premature to amend the law (amendment #2). Finally, moving language from the intent section [§ 4775 (e)] of this bill to the findings and declarations will improve clarity (amendment #3). *The Committee may wish the author to accept the following amendments to address these issues:*

² <https://www.nps.gov/noca/learn/news/agencies-announce-decision-to-restore-grizzly-bears-to-north-cascades.htm>

Amendment 1: require CDFW determine that grizzly bear reintroduction is advisable [FGC § (d)]:

(2) Determinations, based on the best available science, that establishment of a self-sustaining grizzly population in the state is *advisable and* biologically viable.

Amendment 2: remove sections 3–8 of the bill

Amendment 3: Move language from § 4755 (e)(1) into findings and declarations:

Findings and Declarations: (h) Development and implementation of the roadmap, assessments, consultations, and coexistence and stewardship frameworks, including assessment of the grizzly bear’s historical ecology and ecological roles in California and evaluation of the extent to which the ecological functions once provided by the grizzly bear may be restored through human-mediated landscape restoration, may also benefit habitat restoration, species recovery, and human-wildlife coexistence initiatives within and surrounding reintroduction areas evaluated, regardless of whether reintroduction is ultimately undertaken.

(e) (1) It is the intent of the Legislature that the department and the commission be provided with sustainable funding sufficient to fully implement this section and the resulting obligations. ~~The grizzly bear is an umbrella species whose conservation supports a broad range of ecological and wildlife management objectives. Development and implementation of the roadmap, assessments, consultations, and coexistence and stewardship frameworks, as required by this section, including assessment of the grizzly bear’s historical ecology and ecological roles in California and evaluation of the extent to which the ecological functions once provided by the grizzly bear may be restored through human-mediated landscape restoration, may also benefit habitat restoration, species recovery, and human-wildlife coexistence initiatives within and surrounding reintroduction areas evaluated pursuant to this section, regardless of whether reintroduction is ultimately undertaken.~~

- 4) **Arguments in support.** The co-sponsors of this bill, the Tejon and Yurok Tribes, support the deliberate, science- and consultation-based process that this bill proposes to ensure responsible evaluation of grizzly bear reintroduction. The Tejon Tribe writes that the grizzly bear (hunaot) is both a relative and a central part of their cultural, spiritual, and ecological traditions, which further grounds their reverence for and stewardship of the land. The Yurok Tribe writes with a similar sentiment, stating that the grizzly bear (Neekwech) holds remarkable cultural and ceremonial significance and that the extermination of the grizzly bear resulted in lasting harm to both the ecosystem and their cultural relationships. Both tribes write that they “recognize that [this bill] does not authorize reintroduction,” but rather calls for a determination of whether reintroduction is possible and what it would take to do it right.

The California Grizzly Alliance also writes in support, noting that “the grizzly bear is not only an ecological keystone, but a defining symbol of the state itself” and that “studying and planning for possible restoration is good policy for California’s ecosystems, communities, and heritage.”

- 5) **Arguments in opposition.** A collection of hunting, agriculture/livestock, and local government organizations are concerned with the ecological feasibility, public safety, wildlife management priorities, and long-term fiscal responsibility associated with grizzly bear reintroduction. They write that this bill presumes ecological and management benefits from grizzly bear reintroduction but note that the impacts of such reintroduction “would fall disproportionately on rural communities, working landscapes, and heavily used recreation areas.” They point out that the state’s deer herds—a critical ecological prey base for many predators—are already struggling and that introducing grizzly bears would intensify current pressures and complicate deer management and recovery. They also argue that, in Montana, a state with roughly 1.1 million people, grizzly bear conflicts have been increasing. Considering the existing struggles in the state to manage human-wildlife conflict, they believe grizzly bear reintroduction would pose “an unacceptable risk for public safety and [would place] extraordinary demands on already strained wildlife management systems. Finally, these groups note that CDFW does not have the resources to meet its current mandates, so assigning new, ongoing responsibilities to CDFW is ill-advised.

For specific concerns, the California Cattlemen’s Association (CCA), California Farm Bureau (CFB), and California State Beekeepers Association (CSBA) are apprehensive about whether grizzly bears could be managed in a way that would not significantly conflict with current agricultural land use. CSBA writes that conflict with bears is not a hypothetical issue as black bears already can cause severe damage to apiaries, which are critical for pollinating the agricultural commodities of the state. CCA and CFB note that the framework established by this bill would not adequately anticipate the on-the-ground management realities. CCA and CFB cite the example of CDFW’s gray wolf management plan, which did not accurately predict wolf dispersal, indicating that grizzly bears would likewise identify their own suitable habitat.

Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC) and California State Association of Counties (CSAC) also write in opposition. RCRC shares that their membership contains more than 80% of the state’s national forest lands, which would likely be considered for reintroduction. Further, RCRC and CSA share that their members are currently struggling to manage gray wolves and mountain lions and the resulting depredation events.

- 6) **Related legislation.** SB 1135 (Blakespear) of the current legislative session would establish a Wildlife Coexistence Program at CDFW to manage and promote wildlife coexistence. SB 1135 is set for hearing in this Committee.

SB 1397 (Alvarado-Gil) of the current legislative session would require CDFW to maintain, enhance, and expand its human-mountain lion conflicts program in order to protect public health and safety, among other provisions. SB 1397 is set for hearing in this Committee.

AB 1024 (Harabedian) of 2025 would have required CDFW to develop a regional plan to address issues related to bears and would have required CDFW to tag and track any bear that entered a residential neighborhood in the San Gabriel Valley. AB 1024 was held in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

AB 1038 (Hadwick) of 2025 would have required the Fish and Game Commission (Commission) to establish a pursuit season during which a person could allow dogs to pursue

a bear and authorizes the Commission to establish a bear hunting season during which a person may allow dogs to pursue a bear. AB 1038 was held in this Committee.

SB 818 (Alvarado-Gil) of 2025 would have authorized a pilot program in El Dorado County to allow a mountain lion pursuit season with dogs; however, this version of AB 818 failed passage in the Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee. SB 818 was subsequently amended to increase CDFW assistance in El Dorado County to reduce mountain lion-human conflict. SB 818 was held in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

AB 2196 (Connolly), Chapter 705, Statutes of 2024, codifies the beaver restoration program at CDFW.

AB 2722 (Friedman) of 2024 would have authorized CDFW to assess the feasibility of population reintroduction or supplementation program with the goal of restoring a viable population of wolverines to the state. AB 2722 was held in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

ACR 145 (Patterson), Chapter 32, Resolutions of 2024, declared 2024 as the year to Coexist with Wildlife, California.

SR 75 (Laird), proclaimed 2024 as the Year of the California Grizzly Bear on the 100 year anniversary of its extirpation in the state. This Senate Resolution was enrolled on April 10, 2024.

AB 2344 (Friedman), Chapter 964, Statutes of 2022, requires the California Department of Transportation, in consultation with CDFW, to take actions to address wildlife connectivity needs related to the state highway system such as identify areas with high collision rates and implement projects to improve connectivity.

SB 170 (Skinner), Chapter 240, Statutes of 2021, appropriated \$3 million for a wolf conflict compensation program to allocate funds to pay for the deterrence of wolf presence near livestock, the impacts of wolf presence on livestock, and for verified loss of livestock for participating ranchers.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

Tejon Indian Tribe (Co-Sponsor)
Yurok Tribe (Co-Sponsor)
Altasea
Arroyos & Foothills Conservancy
California Grizzly Alliance
California Institute for Biodiversity
California Land Watch
California Native Plant Society
Center for Biological Diversity
Channel Islands Restoration

Cleanearth4kids.org
Climate Reality Project, Los Angeles Chapter
Climate Reality Project, San Fernando Valley Chapter
Endangered Habitats League
Environmental Protection Information Center
Forests Forever
Grizzly Bear Foundation
Keep the Sespe Wild Committee
Klamath Forest Alliance
Los Padres Forestwatch
Mount Shasta Bioregional Ecology Center
National Parks Conservation Association
Native American Land Conservancy
Native Coast Action Network
Oswit Land Trust
Outward Bound Adventures
Pelecanus, INC
Raptors are the Solution
Santa Barbara Wildlife Care Network
Sierra Club California
Socal 350 Climate Action
Social Compassion in Legislation
The River Otter Ecology Project
The Wildlands Conservancy
Tompkins Conservation
Turtle Island Restoration Network
Voters for Animal Rights
Women for Wolves

Opposition

American Bear Foundation, California Chapter
Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, California Chapter
Black Brant Group
California Bowmen Hunters/State Archery Association
California Cattlemen's Association
California Deer Association
California Farm Bureau Federation
California Hawking Club
California Houndsmen for Conservation
California Rifle and Pistol Association
California State Association of Counties
California State Beekeepers Association
California State Sheriffs' Association
Delta Waterfowl
Howl for Wildlife
Mule Deer Foundation

Mzuri Safari Club
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
Rural County Representatives of California
Sacramento Safari Club International
Safari Club International, Golden Gate Chapter
Safari Club International, San Francisco Bay Area Chapter
San Diego County Wildlife Federation
SCI California Coalition
The Origins Foundation
Tulare Basin Wetlands Association
Wild Sheep Foundation, California Chapter

Analysis Prepared by: Stephanie Mitchell / W., P., & W. / (916) 319-2096