

Date of Hearing: June 30, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON WATER, PARKS, AND WILDLIFE

Diane Papan, Chair

SB 1397 (Alvarado-Gil) – As Amended May 14, 2026

SENATE VOTE: 39-0

SUBJECT: Mountain Lions: human-mountain lion conflicts program: scientific research

SUMMARY: Requires the Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) to establish a human-mountain lion conflicts program in the CDFW region most impacted by human-mountain lion conflict. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires CDFW, contingent upon appropriation by the Legislature, to maintain, enhance, and expand a human-mountain lion conflicts program in order to protect public health and safety.
- 2) Provides the human-mountain lion conflicts program must:
 - a) Be located in the CDFW region that has been most impacted by human-mountain lion conflict, as identified by CDFW based on depredation reports, reported mountain lion incidents, or other relevant factors;
 - b) Include CDFW exercising its authority to protect mountain lions or the public by authorizing nonlethal procedures to remove or take mountain lions that are not designated as imminent threats to public health or safety;
 - c) Include public education and outreach regarding methods to minimize conflict, including methods to protect livestock and domestic animals; and
 - d) Include 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 human-mountain lion conflicts.
- 4) Requires CDFW to consult with the Department of Parks and Recreation and local agencies to ensure that CDFW and CDFW-supported research activities conform to law and regulation.
- 5) States that it is the intent of the Legislature that CDFW work closely with the community and local leaders in the region identified pursuant to #2a 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 to appear annually until 2034 at a hearing of the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Water or the Assembly Committee on Water, Parks, and Wildlife 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.
- 8) Provides that all 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) States that the Legislature finds and declares that this bill is consistent with, and furthers the purposes of, the California Wildlife Protection Act of 1990.
- 10) Makes various findings and declarations relating to the impact of human-mountain lion conflict, especially in El Dorado County; the consequences of funding challenges facing CDFW on human-wildlife conflict programs; and the need for broad consensus to amend the state's mountain lion laws.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Establishes CDFW to manage California's diverse fish, wildlife, and plant resources, and the habitats upon which they depend, for their ecological values and for their use and enjoyment of the public [Fish and Game Code (FGC) § 712.1].
- 2) Provides that it is the policy of the state both to perpetuate all species of wildlife for their intrinsic and ecological values and to alleviate economic losses or public health or safety problems caused by wildlife (FGC § 1801).
- 3) Defines "take" to mean to hunt, pursue, catch, capture, or kill, or attempt to hunt, pursue, catch, capture, or kill (FGC § 86).
- 4) Provides that the mountain lion is a specially protected mammal under state law, and provides that it is unlawful to take, injure, possess, transport, import, or sell a mountain lion or a product of a mountain lion, except as provided (FGC § 4800).
- 5) Authorizes CDFW to remove or take any mountain lion, or authorize a local public safety agency to remove or take any mountain lion, that is an imminent threat to public health, safety, or the survival of any threatened, endangered, candidate, or fully protected sheep species (FGC § 4801).
- 6) Permits CDFW to authorize qualified individuals, educational institutions, governmental agencies, or nongovernmental organizations to use nonlethal procedures to remove or take any mountain lion that is not an imminent threat to public health or safety, if CDFW determines that the nonlethal procedures are necessary to protect mountain lions or the public (FGC § 4801.5).
- 7) Requires CDFW to promptly issue a depredation permit to take a mountain lion upon confirmation of a report of injury to property or livestock; authorizes the owner of livestock or domestic animals to immediately take a mountain lion in the act of pursuing, injuring, or killing livestock or domestic animals; and requires the take of the mountain lion to be reported to CDFW and the carcass surrendered (FGC §§ 4802–4807).
- 8) Authorizes CDFW to issue scientific collecting permits for scientific research projects involving mountain lions (FGC § 4810).

- 9) Provides that mountain lions are game mammals, but that notwithstanding that provision or any other provision of the FGC, mountain lions may not be listed as, or considered to be, a game mammal by CDFW or the Fish and Game Commission (Commission) (FGC §§ 3950–3950.1).
- 10) Provides that amendments to the Wildlife Conservation Act of 1990 must be consistent with, and further the purposes of, that Act and can only be made by a four-fifths vote of the Legislature [Proposition 117 (1990) § 8].

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown. This bill is keyed fiscal.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **Purpose of this bill.** 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.** The North American mountain lion (*Puma concolor cougar*) is the second largest cat species in North America; also known as the cougar, puma, catamount, or panther, its historic range extends from southern Canada to the slopes of the Andes Mountains, including all of the contiguous United States. While the eastern population has been largely extirpated (with the exception of the Florida panther), the overall western population is stable.¹ 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-human conflict. Mountain lion attacks on humans are extremely rare, but there is a long history of such conflict in California, perhaps dating as far back as 1890, when seven-year-old Arthur Dangle of Siskiyou County became the first recorded victim of a fatal mountain lion attack. CDFW has recorded 29 confirmed mountain lion attacks on people in the 136 years since, including five fatalities.² The most recent fatal attack occurred on March 23, 2024, in El Dorado County. Two brothers were shed hunting when they were attacked by a mountain lion; one man died and the mountain lion was euthanized.³

Mountain lion depredation of livestock and domestic animals is far more common, with 7,719 verified depredation events from 1972–2019. The total number of depredations has increased over time, with a large increase in the proportion of depredation events involving

¹ The mountain lion is classified as “Least Concern” by the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources and “Secure” by NatureServe. However, some subpopulations may be at greater risk: at its February 11-12, 2026, meeting, the Commission unanimously voted to list the Southern California/Central Coast distinct population segment of mountain lion as threatened under the California Endangered Species Act.

² “Verified Mountain Lion-Human Attacks”, CDFW, <https://wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Mammals/Mountain-Lion/Attacks>.

³ Grace Toohey, “Victims of California Mountain Lion Attack Were Brothers, Avid Sportsmen,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 25, 2024.

pets and poultry.⁴ Despite the increase in the proportion of depredation events involving pets and poultry, most depredations continue to be of small hoofstock (Table 1). According to CDFW's annual report to the Commission on mountain lion depredation permits,⁵ CDFW received 518 reports of mountain lion depredation in 2025. Goats and sheep accounted for 73.8% of depredation permits issued, while goat and chicken were the most commonly identified materials in stomach contents evaluated during mountain lion necropsies.

Table 1. Domestic animal depredation events 1972–2019 (Dellinger, *et al.* 2021).

Category	Species	Depredation Events	Proportion of Events
Pets and Poultry	Dogs, cats, chickens, ducks, and turkeys	802	10.4%
Small Hoofstock	Pigs, goats*, llamas, and sheep*	4,718	61.1%
Large Hoofstock	Cattle and horses	1,013	13.1%
Unknown	Unknown	1,186	15.4%

* Sheep and goats accounted for 97.3% of small hoofstock depredated.

In some areas of the state, conflict between mountain lions and humans is a major concern for local residents. The Legislature has also shown interest—this Committee's January 27, 2026, informational hearing on human-wildlife conflict included testimony on mountain lion conflict, concerns, and potential solutions. Controversy can emerge in the tension between coexistence in mountain lion habitat and proactive protection of property. This tension was seen in recent weeks: on May 13, Lassen County Sheriff John McGarva declared that mountain lions in the Gold Run area were an imminent threat to public safety, and criticized CDFW's approach as too reactive, relying on mountain lions to strike first.⁶ Sheriff McGarva's declaration was disputed by CDFW, with a spokesperson commenting, "It's just mountain lions in mountain lion habitat. There haven't been any depredations, no pets taken, no livestock taken. Our folks have determined that no threat existed." The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service also found no evidence of immediate danger.⁷

Management and conservation of mountain lions. The evolving and conflicting views of Californians about mountain lions are evident from the management history of the species. From 1907–1963, CDFW paid bounties on mountain lions, resulting in the take of 12,580 individuals. From 1964–1969, the bounty program ended, but mountain lions were classified as a nuisance or vermin species that could be taken without a license and without limit. From 1969–1972, mountain lions were classed as a game species that could be hunted by licensed hunters. A moratorium on hunting mountain lions was in effect from 1972–1986, during

⁴ Justin A. Dellinger, *et al.*, "Temporal Trends and Drivers of Mountain Lion Depredation in California, USA," *Human-Wildlife Interactions* 15, no. 1 (2021), 162–177.

⁵ CDFW Wildlife Health Laboratory, "Report to the Fish and Game Commission Regarding Findings of Necropsies on Mountain Lions Taken Under Depredation Permits in 2025," *CDFW* (2026).

⁶ Sharon Bernstein, "Are Mountain Lions a Threat in California? How to Weigh the Latest Warnings," *Sacramento Bee*, May 24, 2026.

⁷ Kurtis Alexander, "A California Sheriff Said Mountain Lions Were an 'Imminent Threat.' State Officials Said There Never was One," *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 21, 2026.

which time mountain lions were classified as non-game mammals; though mountain lions were once again classified as game mammals in 1986, no further mountain lions were harvested. Since the passage of Proposition 117 in 1990, mountain lions have been classified as a specially protected mammal species, with take, possession, transport, import, or sale allowed only in certain limited circumstances. In 2026, a population of mountain lions (the Southern California/Central Coast distinct population segment) was listed as threatened under the California Endangered Species Act because of concerns about loss of genetic diversity due to habitat fragmentation.

Conservation activities since 1964 have resulted in a resurgence of the species' population.⁸ From an estimated 600 mountain lions in California in 1954, CDFW estimates that there are approximately 4,172 mountain lions in California today; nearly half of these mountain lions are believed to be in the North Coast and Western Sierra Nevada populations. However, humans continue to pose the greatest threat to mountain lions: management killing and vehicle strikes are the leading causes of death for mountain lions, exceeding all natural causes (poaching, rodenticide poisoning, and human-caused wildfires are also significant drivers of mortality).⁹ Among management killings, 75% were following livestock depredation, 23% were following bighorn sheep depredation, and 2% were for public safety. Underscoring the impact of human-mountain lion interactions, all-cause mountain lion mortality is highest in areas of intermediate human population density, and local attitudes towards mountain lions seem to matter as well: mortality risk from intentional killings (i.e., management killings and poaching) is lower in areas with higher proportions of voters supporting environmental ballot propositions.¹⁰

Following designation as a specially protected mammal (and thus the permanent end of hunting), management of mountain lions has occurred primarily as a response to depredation or imminent public safety threats.¹¹ Management take can be lethal (e.g., shooting or capturing and euthanizing) or nonlethal (e.g., hazing or capturing and relocating). The mountain lion-related provisions of Proposition 117 (FGC § 4800 *et seq.*) provide four pathways for the management take of a mountain lion:

- A mountain lion posing an imminent threat to public health and safety (or protected sheep) may be taken lethally or nonlethally by CDFW or a local public safety agency;
- A mountain lion that is not an imminent threat to public safety may be taken nonlethally if take is necessary to protect mountain lions or the public;
- A mountain lion that has attacked or killed livestock or domestic animals may be taken nonlethally or sometimes lethally under a depredation permit issued by CDFW; and

⁸ “Report to the Fish and Game Commission: A Status Review of the Petitioned Southern California/Central Coast Evolutionarily Significant Unit (ESU) of Mountain Lion (*Puma concolor cougar*) in California,” CDFW (2025).

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ John Benson et al., “The Ecology of Human-Caused Mortality for a Protected Large Carnivore,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 120, no. 13 (2023).

¹¹ While Proposition 117 allows for the proactive take of conflict mountain lions that are not imminent public safety threats, it is not clear to this Committee how often that authority is utilized.

- A mountain lion that is in the act of pursuing, injuring, or killing livestock or domestic animals may be taken lethally or nonlethally without advance authorization by CDFW.

In all cases, CDFW is working to reduce the lethal take of mountain lions for management reasons; in recent years, CDFW research has shown that lethal removal of mountain lions increases mountain lion conflict the following year (potentially due to immigration of subadult males, which are at high risk for conflict).¹² In 2013, CDFW specified that only a single mountain lion could be taken under a single depredation permit. In 2017, CDFW began to prioritize nonlethal measures for mountain lions in the Santa Monica Mountains; this approach was expanded across the entire state in 2020. Under CDFW's nonlethal prioritization, or "three-strikes," strategy, the first depredation permit issued for a mountain lion is nonlethal, and nonlethal take is the default for the second permit as well. According to CDFW's 2026 report to the Commission, CDFW issued 220 depredation permits in response to 518 reports in 2025. Of these, 158 (71.8%) were for nonlethal take. The 62 permits authorizing lethal take resulted in 19 mountain lions killed.

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. These include the Wildlife Incident Reporting (WIR) System, which tracks sightings, depredations, nuisances, and potential human conflicts for dozens of species (including 10,344 reports for mountain lions). WIR reports requiring a response are investigated by CDFW wildlife biologists or wildlife officers (e.g., sick wildlife or depredation). To assist in investigations, CDFW operates a Wildlife Health Laboratory and Wildlife Forensic Laboratory for disease surveillance and public safety investigations, respectively. CDFW also, until recently, maintained a human-wildlife conflict program, which helped communities develop tools and provided statewide support for human-wildlife conflict management. The human-wildlife conflict program was funded in the 2022–23 Budget with \$5 million in one-time Drought Resilience and Response funds. Most of the (limited term) positions created for the human-wildlife conflict program were eliminated in 2024. This bill would require CDFW to develop a human-mountain lion conflict program in one of its regions.¹³

Note on Proposition 117. This bill requires a four-fifths vote of the Legislature for passage because it amends Proposition 117. Amendments to Proposition 117 require a four-fifths vote and must be consistent with and in furtherance of the purposes of the initiative.

- 3) **Proposed committee amendments.** The requirement that the director of CDFW appear before legislative policy committees annually may place pressure on future legislative agendas without efficiently providing timely information. Instead, the director could be required to appear before the Legislature when requested, providing flexibility for committees. *The Committee may wish to consider the following amendments:*

FGC § 4811.6 (a). ~~The director shall appear at a hearing of the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Water or the Assembly Committee on Water, Parks, and Wildlife~~

¹² Dellinger, *et al.* 2021.

¹³ CDFW divides the state into seven regions: Northern, North Central, Bay Delta, Central, South Coast, Inland Deserts, and Marine.

~~annually until the 2034 calendar year to provide a status update on the programs developed pursuant to Sections 4811 and 4811.2.~~

The director shall, when requested, appear before the appropriate policy or budget committees in the Assembly and Senate to provide a status update on the programs developed pursuant to Sections 4811 and 4811.2.

- 4) **Arguments in support.** The Black Brant Group, writing in support, states that “California’s mountain lions are a specially protected species under Proposition 117. However, increasing reports of human-wildlife conflicts—particularly in El Dorado County and other foothill regions of the Sierra Nevada—underscore the need for science-based, proactive, and nonlethal approaches to coexistence. . . . As California continues to face increasing pressures from development, wildfire, and climate change, forward-looking policies like those proposed in [this bill] are critical to ensuring both public safety and the long-term conservation of important species like the mountain lion.”
- 5) **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 also set for hearing in this Committee on June 30, 2026.

AB 1673 (Hadwick) of the current legislative session, among other provisions, authorizes expenditures from county fish and wildlife propagation funds to be used for wildlife coexistence programs to prevent human-wildlife conflict. AB 1673 is pending in the Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee.

SB 818 (Alvarado-Gil) of 2025 originally would have established a pilot program authorizing private houndspersons to proactively haze mountain lions. SB 818 was amended to be substantially similar to this bill. SB 818 was held in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

SB 132 (Hill), Chapter 208, Statutes of 2013, requires nonlethal procedures to be used when removing or taking any mountain lion that has not been designated as an imminent threat to public safety.

AB 1784 (Monning), Chapter 115, Statutes of 2012, authorizes CDFW to issue scientific collecting permits for mountain lions to qualified individuals.

SB 769 (Fuller), Chapter 388, Statutes of 2011, authorizes the possession of mountain lion carcasses for educational display.

AB 2273 (Maze) of 2006 would have allowed any person injured by a mountain lion, or a spouse or dependent child of a person killed by a mountain lion, to apply to the Victim Compensation and Government Claims Board for reasonable medical, physical, and psychological costs incurred by the injured person. AB 2273 was held in the Assembly Business and Professions Committee.

AB 24 (Maze) of 2005 would have required CDFW to contract with the University of California to conduct a study on the mountain lion population of the state and establish a clearinghouse of information on mountain lion attacks. AB 24 was held in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

AB 560 (Oller), Chapter 435, Statutes of 1999, authorizes CDFW to take a mountain lion that is perceived to be an imminent threat to a protected sheep species.

Proposition 117 (1990), a voter initiative statute, among other provisions, designates mountain lions as a specially protected mammal and prohibits the take, injury, possession, transportation, importation, or sale of any mountain lion or mountain lion part except as specified.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**Support**

Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, California Chapter
Black Brant Group, the
California Rifle and Pistol Association
California State Chapter - National Wild Turkey Federation
California Democratic Party Rural Caucus
Mzuri Safari Club
San Diego County Wildlife Federation
San Francisco Bay Area Chapter - Safari Club International
Tulare Basin Wetlands Association

Opposition

One individual

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