

Committee Staff Summary for May 15, 2025 WRC

5. Department Updates**Today's Item**Information Action

The Department will highlight items of note since the last committee meeting.

Summary of Previous/Future Actions (N/A)**Background**

This is a standing agenda item for the Department to provide updates on activities of interest related to wildlife and inland fisheries. Verbal updates are expected from:

- (A) Wildlife Branch
- (B) Fisheries Branch
- (C) Law Enforcement Division

Links have been provided for three news releases of potential interest:

1. An update on the Department's beaver restoration program and pilot project ecosystem restoration progress (Exhibit 1);
2. an update on the next phase of the gray wolf conservation plan, and the Department's efforts to advance state management of the species and to further support communities where gray wolf is known to reside (Exhibit 2); and
3. statewide, coordinated efforts to stem the advance of the non-native, invasive golden mussel, detected for the first time in North America and a significant threat to California's natural ecosystems, water infrastructure, agriculture, and economy (Exhibit 3).

Significant Public Comments (N/A)**Recommendation (N/A)****Exhibits**

1. Department news release: [CDFW Sees 'Ecosystem Engineers' at Work in Beaver Restoration Pilot Projects](#), dated April 7, 2025
2. Department news release: [California Enters Next Phase of Wolf Conservation Plan as State's Gray Wolf Population Continues to Expand](#), dated April 2, 2025
3. Department news release: [California Takes Action to Halt Golden Mussel Invasion](#), dated April 16, 2025

Committee Direction/Recommendation (N/A)

CDFW Sees ‘Ecosystem Engineers’ at Work in Beaver Restoration Pilot Projects

April 7, 2025



Media note: Download report, photos and video [here](#).

***[Follow this link \(opens in new tab\)](#)** to watch a video about the translocated beavers, CDFW’s post-release monitoring activities and pilot project ecosystem restoration progress.*

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) set out on its mission one-and-a-half years ago to begin returning beavers to watersheds throughout their native range in the state. Since then, the translocated beavers have begun their work as ecosystem engineers, initiating the restoration of wetlands and building resilience to the effects of climate change such as drought and wildfire.

Today, CDFW announces the release of a **[status report \(PDF\) \(opens in new tab\)](#)** on the translocated beavers and restoration sites, summarizing project successes, lessons learned and next steps for beaver restoration in California.

Between October 2023 and September 2024, CDFW placed 28 beavers in the Sierra Nevada at five release sites within two pilot projects, which were launched in partnership with the Tule River Tribe in Southern California and the Maidu Summit Consortium in Northern California.

The translocated beavers have since produced two litters of kits and built dams at three of the release sites. At the most productive release site, beavers have begun to dig a network of canals,

reconnected the stream with its floodplain and [increased the surface water area by approximately 23% \(opens in new tab\)](#).

As part of the state’s Initiative to Expand Nature-Based Solutions, in 2022 CDFW created the Beaver Restoration Program using funding appropriated when Gov. Gavin Newsom signed Assembly Bill 1757. The program aims to better understand where, when and how beavers, long thought of as a nuisance species, can be utilized to restore ecosystems and habitats in California. That knowledge will allow CDFW and the state of California to effectively utilize beavers as a nature-based solution in restoring and conserving habitats and watersheds.



“The Beaver Restoration Program was formed because we recognize the value that beavers can provide on a landscape,” said CDFW Beaver Restoration Program Supervisor Molly Alves. “We are putting beavers back into those portions of their historic range where they can build dams and create wetlands that protect our landscape, wildlife and people from climate change like drought and wildfire.”

In the Maidu Summit Consortium’s Tásmam Koyóm valley, which was burned over by the Dixie Fire in 2021, Alves pointed out that since beavers were placed there in October 2023, both available water and wetland habitat have been expanded by the busy beavers. They built a 100-meter dam across the wetland complex — the largest dam in the area that is just downstream from where the beavers decided to place their lodge. Beavers build dams that hold deeper water to allow for predator avoidance and increase the abundance of and access to preferred food sources.

To date, survival of the translocated beavers is estimated to be between 40-60%, with the primary causes of mortality being predation and illnesses related to underlying conditions (e.g., pneumonia) and capture-related stressors.

"Beavers used to be everywhere, but sadly that is no longer the case," said CDFW Director Charlton H. Bonham. "Our history treated beavers as nuisances, and we removed them from the landscape. In the past year CDFW working with the Tule River Tribe and the Maidu Summit Consortium brought beavers home to places they've been absent over 100 years.

"Beavers are nature's Swiss Army knife. The things they can do are amazing. We are finding in some of our scientific work that when beavers are on the landscape in the Sierra, the way they can create wet meadows serves as a fire break that can slow down or even stop catastrophic wildfire," added Director Bonham.

CDFW's status report also details the process for submitting beaver restoration project proposals (i.e., translocation requests), identifying priority projects for future implementation and selecting beavers for translocation. Additionally, to better understand the current distribution of beavers in California, CDFW is asking for the public's participation through an online [Beaver Observation Survey Tool](#)(opens in new tab).

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California Enters Next Phase of Wolf Conservation Plan as State's Gray Wolf Population Continues to Expand



CDFW NEWS

April 2, 2025

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CDFW Working to Conserve Species and Protect Ranchers

As California's gray wolf population grows, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) is advancing the state's management of this species and further supporting communities where they are known to reside.

At the end of 2024, there were seven known wolf packs in the state and four additional areas of known wolf activity. Most of those packs are in [northeastern California](#), although one is in the southern Sierra Nevada.

Five of the seven packs met CDFW's definition of a "breeding pair" in 2024, meaning two adults and two or more pups surviving until the end of the year. Because CDFW has documented at least four breeding pairs for two consecutive years, California is now in "Phase 2" of wolf management, as specified by the state's [2016 Conservation Plan for Gray Wolves in California](#).

The 2016 plan was an important milestone for CDFW and the state of California. Over a span of one and a half years and more than 40 meetings, CDFW convened and collaborated with multiple organizations, agencies, and local governments to develop the plan. This massive undertaking across diverse interests resulted in the first-ever conservation plan that still guides species management today. The plan includes the list of those invited to participate in its development

In Phase 2, as outlined in the conservation plan, CDFW plans to take the following actions:

- **Initiate a review to evaluate the status of gray wolves in the state.** This will include an opportunity for tribal and public input, and independent peer review.
- **Evaluate legal pathways under the California Endangered Species Act and the Federal Endangered Species Act to potentially issue permits allowing for more aggressive forms of hazing in specific situations.** Also known as "less-than-lethal harassment," examples include the use of tools and techniques such as firearms discharging nonlethal ammunitions or the use of motorized equipment to follow or pursue a wolf to modify wolf activity or presence near livestock.

Additional actions planned by CDFW in the coming weeks and months include:

- **Release of an online tool to provide location information for GPS-collared wolves.** This tool will greatly facilitate CDFW's efforts, as

guided by the Conservation Plan, to provide timely information regarding wolf activity in the vicinity of livestock production.

Release of CDFW's first annual report detailing its wolf conservation and management activities and summarizing information on California's wolves. This initial report will summarize information from 2015 – 2024.

CDFW is already taking action to monitor and track gray wolves, investigate livestock depredation and support reduced human-wildlife conflict with gray wolves. Those actions include:

- **Continuing to accept applications and issuing compensation payments to livestock producers who have had confirmed killed or injured livestock, or probable killed or injured livestock, by wolves through the [Wolf Livestock Compensation Program](#).** During development of this program, CDFW convened a stakeholder working group of interested parties with diverse perspectives, experience and expertise to gather information and provide input. In 2023, during early implementation of the program, CDFW conducted several technical assistance workshops with county agency partners to help producers understand the application process. From 2022 through early 2024, a pilot program compensated eligible producers for direct livestock loss, for the indirect impacts of wolf presence, and costs for nonlethal deterrence. Since late 2024, the program has paid producers for direct losses. To date, through both programs, CDFW has awarded or approved \$3.1 million in compensation. The “three-prongs” approach makes this program the most comprehensive in the nation.
- **Continuing to monitor the status of individual wolf packs, investigate areas of known or suspected wolf activity to search for new packs, and GPS-collar wolves in those packs without collared wolves.** In 2024, CDFW spent 203 staff days in the field attempting to capture and collar wolves. In the first part of 2025, CDFW has been able to collar and release 12 gray wolves in northern California. There are now more satellite-collared wolves in California than ever before, which is expected to improve understanding and management of the species in the state.
- **Continuing to reach out to and engage with the public:** CDFW is in regular communication and coordination with livestock producers, county agriculture departments, private timberland managers, federal agencies, tribes and conservation organizations. Ongoing communication also occurs in counties with known wolves and new areas of wolf activity including county boards of supervisors,

agricultural commissioners, farm services advisers, local cattlemen's associations, and Farm Bureau boards. In 2024, CDFW participated in 34 community engagement events to inform the public about ongoing wolf conservation efforts in California.

- **Continuing research collaborations such as the California Wolf Project (CAWP) to address key scientific questions about California's wolves, including their diet, habitat use, relationships with other wildlife and patterns of livestock conflict.** In 2025, the CAWP released its [2024 annual report](#). The research helps augment monitoring for future management actions and helps the public and stakeholders understand the process of wolf recovery through an evidence-based approach.
- **Continuing habitat improvements for native prey species.** CDFW will continue to partner with tribes and conservation organizations on habitat improvements and monitoring for wolf prey species, including deer, elk and pronghorn. Over the last 11 years, these efforts have funded over \$15 million in monitoring and habitat improvements such as guzzler installations, conifer removal and meadow restoration in the northern region of the state alone.
- **Continuing to investigate livestock depredations.** CDFW is actively engaged with livestock producers investigating loss of livestock due to suspected wolf depredation. In 2024, CDFW participated in or worked with federal and local authorities and livestock producers to conduct 79 investigations. Over 80% of all investigations were conducted on the day loss was reported.
- **CDFW's Law Enforcement Division (LED) will continue to investigate and evaluate any reports of undesired or abnormal wolf behavior that may represent threats to public safety.** Though these cases remain rare, both California state and federal law recognize the need to allow for human protection against animal attacks. Both provide the legal framework to allow individuals to take reasonable action to protect themselves or others from a direct and imminent threat from an animal. LED will work with partner agencies to appropriately and quickly respond to such incidents.

LED, alongside CDFW wildlife biologists, dedicates numerous staff hours and resources to supporting wolf conservation. Wildlife officers have jurisdiction to investigate the death of California wolves; they take these investigations seriously and pursue every lead to determine the cause of death and whether a crime has occurred. In the last five years, CDFW wildlife officers have conducted eight investigations into gray wolf

deaths, as well as spent nearly 1,000 staff hours in the forensics lab processing 1,693 samples.

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Persons with disabilities needing reasonable accommodation to participate in public meetings or other CDFW activities are invited to contact CDFW's Accessibility Coordinator in the CRO Office at (916) 902-5577, or send an email to CivilRights@wildlife.ca.gov. Reasonable Accommodation requests for facility and/or meeting accessibility should be received at least 21 days prior to the event. Requests for American Sign Language Interpreters should be submitted at least two weeks prior to the event, and requests for Real-Time Captioning at least four weeks prior to the event. These timeframes are to help ensure that the requested accommodation is met. If a request for an accommodation has been submitted but due to circumstances is no longer needed, please contact the Accessibility Coordinator immediately.

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California Takes Action to Halt Golden Mussel Invasion

April 16, 2025



In response to the recent detection of golden mussel (*Limnoperna fortunei*) in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, the state of California has developed a comprehensive [Golden Mussel Response Framework \(opens in new tab\)](#) to address this urgent invasive species threat. The discovery in October 2024 marked the first known occurrence of golden mussel in North America. To combat this threat, the framework provides coordinated strategies by multiple California departments to prevent further introduction and spread of golden mussels, as well as to contain and suppress infestations to minimize their impact on the environment, water conveyance, recreation and agriculture.

In addition, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) is offering \$1 million in grant funding to boating facility operators to enhance efforts against invasive mussels, particularly the threat of golden mussels. This funding supports projects that help prevent the introduction and spread of invasive mussels in lakes, reservoirs and waterways, ensuring the long-term health of state waters. The [grant solicitation and application link](#) can be found on CDFW's website.

Native to East and Southeast Asia, golden mussels pose a significant threat to California's natural ecosystems, water infrastructure, agriculture, and economy. The invasive species has already caused major disruptions in other parts of the world, including heavy biofouling of water intake systems, and negative impacts to habitat and wildlife.

"The discovery of golden mussels in California is a serious challenge that requires coordinated action and a long-term commitment," said CDFW Director Charlton H. Bonham. "This response

framework recommends critical steps that must be taken across state, regional and local levels to limit the spread and mitigate the impacts of this invasive species.”

“Taking coordinated action to address this invasive species will help safeguard critical water infrastructure like the State Water Project from the negative impacts golden mussels can pose to water delivery systems,” said John Yarbrough, DWR Deputy Director for the State Water Project. “Using this new framework and close collaboration with partner agencies, DWR will implement strategies to address this invasive species and minimize impacts by monitoring for the mussels in SWP waters and developing a mitigation plan.”

Reservoir managers across the state are adjusting their recreational plans for the upcoming boating season to address concerns for the golden mussel.

“Recreational boating is a significant contributor to California’s economy, and California State Parks’ Division of Boating and Waterways (DBW) is working diligently with allied industry and agency partners to provide outreach and educational information to boaters and waterbody managers on the importance of the [Clean, Drain and Dry \(opens in new tab\)](#) message to help protect the state’s waterways from invasive species,” said DBW Deputy Director Ramona Fernandez. “DBW recommends boaters contact the waterbody manager to learn of any updated requirements before they head out.”

DBW maintains a list of contacts at: [https://dbw.parks.ca.gov/inspections \(opens in new tab\)](https://dbw.parks.ca.gov/inspections).

The response framework developed by the Golden Mussel Task Force is composed of key state and federal agencies, including CDFW, DWR, California State Parks, California Department of Food and Agriculture, and several other federal and local partners. It outlines a comprehensive strategy to respond to the invasive species, focusing on preventing further introduction, containing mussels within currently infested waters and reducing population within the invaded range where feasible.

Key recommendations in the response framework include:

1. Containment and Prevention Measures

- Development of a map of Delta launch sites to prioritize management at high-use sites.
- Investigation of pathways of spread, such as watercraft and overland movement, aquaculture trade, etc.
- Increased inspection and decontamination capacity for watercraft, with expanded training for inspectors.

2. Education and Outreach

- Launch of education campaigns to inform the public about the golden mussel threat and how they can help prevent its spread.

- Posting of signage at waterbodies where golden mussels are present promoting the “Clean, Drain, Dry” practice following and ending every outing.
- Collaboration with businesses that provide watercraft cleaning services to promote industry standards.

3. Incentives and Partnerships

- Promotion of watercraft cleaning services within and around the Delta to assist in controlling the spread of the mussels.

The Golden Mussel Task Force will continue to collaborate to mitigate the impacts of this invasive species and protect the state’s water resources. The Golden Mussel Framework is a dynamic document, evolving with new information and adaptive management strategies.

For more information or to learn how you can help prevent the spread of golden mussel and report sightings visit: <https://wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Invasives/Species/Golden-Mussel>.

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