

Staff Summary for August 13-14, 2025

14B. Department Wildlife and Fisheries Division, and Department Ecosystem Conservation Division

Today's Item

Information ☒

Action ☐

Receive updates from Department divisions on items of note since the previous Commission meeting.

Summary of Previous/Future Actions (N/A)

Background (N/A)

Significant Public Comments (N/A)

Recommendation (N/A)

Exhibits

1. [Department news release: "Scientific Surveys Show Continued Decline in White Sturgeon Population," dated July 9, 2025](#)
2. [Department news release: "CDFW Completes 2025 Waterfowl Breeding Population Survey," dated July 25, 2025](#)

Motion (N/A)



CDFW NEWS

July 9, 2025

Scientific Surveys Show Continued Decline in White Sturgeon Population



Recent results from white sturgeon monitoring surveys by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) suggest the white sturgeon (*Acipenser transmontanus*) population has continued to decline. CDFW fisheries biologists now estimate there are approximately 6,500 white sturgeon between 40-60 inches long in California — down sharply from the previous estimate of approximately 30,000 fish in that size range, based on the 2016-2021 survey average.

There may be many reasons for the downward trend, including mortality from harmful algal blooms, poaching, past sport fishing harvest and poor river and Delta conditions.

In 2024, CDFW implemented a new method for surveying the white sturgeon population in collaboration with the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission and local sturgeon fishing guides. Surveys take place in the spring and fall from San Pablo Bay to Rio Vista and surrounding areas. The methods are based off white sturgeon surveys conducted in Oregon and Washington and modified for use in California. The study design has been peer-reviewed and is the most robust and comprehensive white sturgeon population monitoring survey ever conducted in California.

While CDFW's efforts in 2024 established a new baseline of data, multiple years of this new survey approach are needed to confirm the findings and accurately track population trends.

The surveys utilize a “mark-recapture” technique combined with statistical analyses to estimate population size. Each spring, baited setlines (lines with multiple baited hooks) are used to capture sturgeon. The fish are then measured, scanned for existing tags, tagged if necessary, and then released. In the fall, the number of tagged sturgeon that are recaptured is compared to the number of untagged sturgeon caught, allowing scientists to estimate the overall population size.

In addition to providing an estimate of fish between 40-60 inches, the new survey method caught a greater size range of fish, allowing CDFW to estimate the abundance of a broader segment of the population than in the past. Based on the new methods, 19,000 white sturgeon between 10-87 inches fork length (the length from the tip of the snout to the fork in the tail) are estimated to be in California.

Based on historical surveys conducted by CDFW between 1954–2022, the number of white sturgeon in California has been in decline for many years. The species is currently a candidate for listing as threatened under the California Endangered Species Act (CESA) and receives full CESA protection while its status is reviewed. Sturgeon fishing is now limited to catch-and-release only with protective seasons, fishing areas and handling restrictions.

At its Aug. 13 meeting, the California Fish and Game Commission is expected to consider whether to continue recreational catch-and-release regulations for white sturgeon. These regulations have been discussed in public meetings with opportunity for public comment.

To read the full [sturgeon survey report download the document\(opens in new tab\)](#). To learn more about conservation efforts for this prehistoric species, visit wildlife.ca.gov/Conserve-the-Sturg.

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CDFW NEWS

July 25, 2025

CDFW Completes 2025 Waterfowl Breeding Population Survey



The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) has completed its 2025 waterfowl breeding population survey. The results of the survey show both mallard and total duck species have increased this year.

The breeding population of mallards increased from 177,828 to 265,640 (a 49% increase), and total ducks (all species combined) increased from 373,864, to 474,495 (a 27% increase). Mallards remain below the long-term average by 16%.

“The survey indicated an increase in mallard abundance, and habitat conditions were good in northern California, so we expect average to above-average production for all waterfowl species,” said CDFW Waterfowl Program Biologist Melanie Weaver.

Since 1948, CDFW biologists and warden-pilots have conducted this survey annually using fixed-wing aircraft. The population estimates are for those areas where the vast majority of waterfowl nesting occurs in California, including wetland and agricultural areas in northeastern California, throughout the Central Valley, the Suisun Marsh and some coastal valleys.

The complete [2025 California Waterfowl Breeding Population Survey Report \(PDF\)\(opens in new tab\)](#) is available at the CDFW website.

The majority of California’s wintering duck population originates from breeding areas surveyed by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in Alaska and Canada, and these results should be available by late August. CDFW survey information, along with similar data from other Pacific Flyway states, is used by the USFWS and the Pacific Flyway Council when setting hunting regulations for the Pacific Flyway states, including California.

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