

Staff Summary for October 8-9, 2025

11A. Wildlife Resources Committee (WRC)**Today's Item****Information** ☐**Action** ☒

Receive summary and consider approving recommendations from the September 11, 2025 committee meeting. Discuss referred topics and consider revisions to topics and timing.

Summary of Previous/Future Actions

- Previous WRC meeting September 11, 2025; WRC
- **Today consider approving WRC recommendations** **October 8-9, 2025**
- Next WRC meeting January 13, 2026; WRC

Background

WRC works under Commission direction to set and accomplish its work plan (Exhibit 1). Today, the Commission will receive a report on the previous WRC meeting and recommendations, and provide direction for any referred topics and revisions to WRC topics and timing.

Previous Committee Meeting

WRC met on September 11 in Sacramento, with Zoom and phone options for public participation. Official meeting minutes are posted on the [Commission's YouTube page](#), with a link also available on the Commission's meetings page at fgc.ca.gov/meetings/2025. An abbreviated summary is included in this document.

Annual Regulation Changes

The Department presented three options for 2026-27 waterfowl hunting regulations for WRC discussion and a potential recommendation. There was general support for the Department's proposed Option 3, which would allow for a short falconry-only hunting season.

The Department presented several options for 2026-27 Central Valley sport fishing and Klamath River Basin sport fishing regulations for discussion and a potential recommendation. The variety of options are intended to capture the various possibilities that may be forthcoming from the Pacific Fishery Management Council in 2026.

Periodic Regulation Changes**A. Inland Sport Fishing**

The Department presented and WRC had an initial discussion about a recommendation for several corrections and multiple regulatory adjustments to increase fishing opportunity and to protect fish populations. At its January 2026 meeting, WRC will discuss further and consider making a recommendation to the Commission.

B. Upland (Resident) Game Bird Hunting

The Department presented the results of a recent survey, which was inconclusive from a management perspective. There were no recommended regulatory adjustments at this time,

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though the Department may return next year with a recommendation for modifying the turkey season.

C. Department Lands

This item was included on the agenda as an opportunity for members of the public to identify any specific recommendations and to ask questions. A member of the public appreciates the Department's annual meetings (typically in August) specific to activities at state wildlife areas and suggested that ideas generated during the meetings be discussed in more detail during the months following, before deciding whether to recommend the ideas.

D. Deer Hunting

The Department highlighted that individual species management plans are significant tasks to complete and typically take years; however, they are important foundations for future regulations. Combined with bandwidth challenges for both the Department and Commission, the Department did not have any recommendations for regulatory amendments now. The Department will continue to invite and listen to ideas from the hunting community as it further develops and completes the deer management plan.

E. Elk Hunting

The Department summarized progress that has been made to address conflict between elk and landowners, and then presented recommended amendments to elk hunting regulations. The proposals included adding new elk hunt zones, including creating a new "Balance of the State" zone (a working name) exclusively for SHARE hunts, adjusting tag allotments or seasons in some existing zones, and clarifying that hunters are limited to one elk tag per year. Discussion focused on the new SHARE zone and the potential to expand existing zones.

F. Bighorn Sheep and Pronghorn Antelope Hunting

Abundance data for both bighorn sheep and pronghorn antelope is still being collected and analyzed; once complete, the Department will recommend regulatory amendments as warranted by the analysis. Participants and the WRC co-chairs also discussed possible future regulatory amendments that would grant the Department discretion regarding bighorn sheep fundraising tags, though no official recommendations were offered. The discussion also included how to monitor and determine sustainable harvest levels.

G. Black Bear Hunting

The Department recommended expanding the bear hunt area to include the state's northeast corner where unexpectedly more black bears are being found (as this area is not typical bear habitat) and allowing two tags per hunter per season, without increasing the harvest limit. Questions involved modeling efforts and the environment's carrying capacity for bears. Opponents of the recommendations asserted that bear hunting is unpopular in California; that bears are facing unprecedented environmental challenges including drought, connectivity, and wildfire; and that there are ethical concerns with bear hunting. Supporters cited increases in hunting opportunity and increased revenue. The co-chairs acknowledged that the topic can be emotional, emphasized a precautionary approach, and noted the economic and recreational benefits of the recommendation.

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Rattlesnake Exhibition

Co-Chair Anderson recused himself from this agenda item. Co-Chair Zavaleta vetted a Department recommendation to initiate regulatory amendments that would establish a permitting framework to allow the commercial use of native rattlesnakes for dog aversion training, the film industry, and safe handling courses. The dialogue is scheduled to continue, along with a potential recommendation, at the January 2026 WRC meeting.

WRC Recommendations

WRC makes three recommendations to the Commission.

1. *Waterfowl Hunting*: Support a future rulemaking regarding waterfowl hunting, including for the Department's recommended option 3 to allow a falconry-only season.
2. *Inland Sport Fishing*: Support the full suite of options for the annual Central Valley and Klamath River Basin sport fishing rulemakings, based on the Department's recommendations.
3. *Big Game Hunting*: Support future rulemakings for elk, bighorn sheep, pronghorn antelope, and black bear, based on the Department's recommendations.

Updates

WRC discussed a potential name change for the work plan topic "Rattlesnake Exhibition" to a title that better reflects the scope of activities being contemplated for permitting. Accordingly, Commission staff recommends renaming the topic "Commercial Use of Rattlesnake," a proposed change that has been incorporated into revisions to the WRC work plan (Exhibit 1).

Significant Public Comments

1. Animal Wellness Action and the Center for a Humane Economy jointly oppose the expansion of bear hunting opportunities in California, citing concerns with evolving monitoring methods, limited reproductive potential, ongoing threats to bears, and ethical considerations. They argue that there are better approaches to managing human-wildlife conflict than hunting, and that bears play an essential role in California's ecosystems. They recommend retaining or reducing bear tag quotas; considering a phase-out of recreational bear hunting; investing in and scaling up non-lethal conflict mitigation; using targeted removal only when necessary and under strict protocols; and requiring robust, peer-reviewed population models to better understand threats. (Exhibit 2)
2. The Modoc County sheriff supports the Department's recommendation, including expanding bear hunting areas into Modoc County and allowing hunters to purchase a second bear tag, asserting that bear populations are robust within Modoc County (Exhibit 3).
3. The Modoc County Board of Supervisors supports the Department's bear hunting recommendations, stating that bear populations are robust, increased hunting will maintain ecological balance, and expanded hunting will offer socioeconomic benefits (Exhibit 4).

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Recommendation

Commission staff: Approve the WRC recommendations. Approve the WRC work plan as reflected in Exhibit 1, including any changes identified during today's meeting.

Committee: Approve the WRC recommendations.

Exhibits

1. [WRC work plan, updated October 1, 2025](#)
2. [Letter from Wayne Pacelle, President, Center for a Humane Economy, and Kayla Clapper, California State Director, Center for a Humane Economy, received September 8, 2025](#)
3. [Letter from Willam "Tex" Dowdy, Sheriff, Modoc County, received September 9, 2025](#)
4. [Letter from Ned Coe, Chair, Modoc County Board of Supervisors, received September 10, 2025](#)

Motion

Moved by _____ and seconded by _____ that the Commission approves the WRC recommendations and the changes to the work plan as presented in Exhibit 1 and discussed today.

California Fish and Game Commission
Wildlife Resources Committee (WRC) Work Plan
Scheduled Topics and Timeline for Items Referred to WRC
Updated October 1, 2025

Note: Proposed changes to topics/timing are shown in blue underscore or strike-out font.

Topics	Category	May 2025	Sep 2025	Jan 2026
Periodic and Annual Regulations				
Upland (Resident) Game Bird Hunting	Regulatory	X	X/R	
Big Game Hunting (deer, elk, pronghorn antelope, black bear, Nelson bighorn sheep)	Regulatory	X	X/R	
Waterfowl Hunting	Annual Regulatory	X	X/R	
Central Valley Sport Fishing	Annual Regulatory	X	X/R	
Klamath River Basin Sport Fishing	Annual Regulatory	X	X/R	
Inland Sport Fishing	Regulatory		X	X/R
Department Lands	Regulatory	X	X/R	
Regulations & Legislative Mandates				
Restricted Species	Regulatory			
Take of Coyotes	Referral for Review	X		
Rattlesnake Exhibition <u>Commercial Use of Rattlesnake</u>	Regulatory		X	X/R

KEY: X = Vetting/Discussion X/R = Discussion/Potential Recommendation to Commission



Commissioner Erika Zavaleta, Co-Chair
Commissioner Darius W. Anderson, Co-Chair
Wildlife Resources Committee
715 P Street
16th Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Proposal on expanded sport hunting of black bears

Dear Committee Members:

On behalf of Animal Wellness Action and the Center for a Humane Economy and its tens of thousands of supporters in California, we respectfully submit these comments opposing the proposed expansion of bear hunting opportunities in California (including additional tags, increased quotas, or an extended season).

The Department of Fish & Wildlife (CDFW) updated Black Bear Conservation & Management Plan and associated materials estimate approximately 60,000 black bears statewide (CDFW reports an estimated statewide population near 60,000 and a broader estimate range of roughly 49,000–71,000), and notes that population levels have been stable in recent years using the updated models. Because population estimates, monitoring methods, and management goals are actively being updated, changing harvest opportunity now by expanding tags or the hunting season would be premature and potentially counterproductive.

California has outstanding bear habitats and bears are colonizing those lands. That said, bears maintain densities driven by suitable habitat and food availability. As a species with limited reproductive potential, with females not able to reproduce until several years into adulthood and then having one or two cub every other year, population growth is offset by corresponding mortality. Bears do not achieve high densities as prey species do, such as rabbits or deer.

Adding intense human taking of bears, mainly by sport and trophy hunting, compounds threats to bears. Evidence documents negative indirect effects of hunter-caused mortality on cub survival and other demographic rates (for example through effects on social stability/structure and increased infanticide or reduced reproduction under certain harvest regimes). Those studies caution that management must account for social-structure effects and the potential for human-caused mortality to reduce population growth even when adult mortality rates seem sustainable. Expanding quotas or season length without careful, conservative, peer-reviewed population modeling risks unintended declines or localized impacts.

The policy issue before this body requires a synthesis of ecology, animal behavior, bear reproductive strategies, and human behavior in bear country. It is also a matter of ethics and animal welfare. Voters banned any trophy hunting of mountain lions 35 years ago by ballot initiative, affirming the ban with a second plebiscite six years later. Mountain lion populations have been stable since that time, and professional scientists tell us there is no ecological or human social need to expand killing opportunities. On the contrary, the human take of bears is extensive, and Californians have signaled discomfort with bear hunting in the state at this level. In prior years, the Legislature, acting on the wishes of the people of California, banned all hound hunting. And prior to that, the state outlawed baiting, insisting on stopping these unfair and reckless practices.

California doesn't see higher bear densities or great bear-human conflicts in national parks, where sport hunting of bears is entirely forbidden. Bear-human encounters are, however, closely correlated with keeping food away from bears and not habituating the animals to these caloric sources. Once bears understand that they can exploit human foods, they are more likely to break into cars, cabins, or campgrounds and find themselves more in conflict with people. The appropriate response to human-wildlife conflicts is to focus on good human behavior and good bear behavior will follow.

CDFW's incident data and outreach materials emphasize that human injury from black bears is rare, and Department personnel confirm that conflicts arise from attractants (garbage, unsecured food, livestock feed/compost) and food-conditioning. CDFW's contemporary approach—reflected in the new management plan and in programs such as Trap-Tag-Haze (TTH)—prioritizes non-lethal capture, genetic monitoring, and hazing to resolve conflicts while minimizing unnecessary mortality. Where conflict is a continuing problem, and cannot be readily remediated, it is recommended to engage in targeted removal of individual conflict animals. Sport hunters shooting bears they come across during hunting season is akin to a crime-control strategy that endorses shooting into a crowd. If there is any positive outcome, it is accidental and of a very low probability. Expanding season length or tags is a blunt instrument that will not address the root causes of conflict and at odds with the wildlife protection sensibilities of the California electorate. The state already reserves the authority to take lethal action against bears exhibiting behavior that could be, or has been, dangerous to people.

Black bears contribute to ecosystem health in several documented ways: they disperse large numbers of seeds of fleshy-fruited plants, act as scavengers and nutrient redistributors (affecting soil and riparian nutrient dynamics), and influence community interactions that can benefit plant reproduction and biodiversity. Peer-reviewed work demonstrates bears' role as effective seed dispersers and documents bear-mediated pathways for nutrient movement in riparian and forest systems—functions that are lost or degraded when bear density or social structure is reduced. Management decisions that increase mortality risk for bears (for example through expanded hunting) risk degrading those ecological services.

Animal Wellness Action and the Center for a Humane Economy urge the Wildlife Resources Committee to reject any regulatory or administrative effort to expand bear hunting opportunities. Here are our recommendations:

1. **Retain bear tag quotas or reduce them.** Given current population estimates and active updates to monitoring methods, expanding sport hunting opportunities is not justified on the basis of population control of bear-human conflict reduction.
2. **Consider a phase-out on recreational bear hunting.** The state should adopt a clear policy goal of moving away from recreational lethal take of black bears and instead support non-lethal coexistence. If the Committee is not prepared to adopt an immediate phase-out, it should at minimum adopt a precautionary moratorium on quota or season expansion while CDFW completes improved monitoring (the plan calls for further data collection and modeling).
3. **Invest in and scale up non-lethal conflict mitigation.** Increase funding and operational support for CDFW's Trap-Tag-Haze (TTH) program and related non-lethal measures (secure-trash programs, community outreach, livestock protection, subsidized bear-proof containers). These interventions reduce conflicts and avoid the ecological costs of increased mortality.
4. **Use targeted removal—only when necessary—and follow strict protocols.** When individual animals are repeatedly involved in dangerous behavior and non-lethal options are exhausted, targeted removal may be necessary. Those removals should be targeted, documented, and followed by community mitigation measures to prevent replacement animals from repeating the problem.
5. **Require robust, peer-reviewed population models on an ongoing basis to better understand the threats that bears face.** Any proposal to expand hunting should include published, peer-reviewed demographic modeling that explicitly accounts for social-structure impacts, cub survival, and spatial heterogeneity in density and human–bear interactions. Existing evidence shows harvest can have indirect negative effects; future management must be informed by rigorous science.

Thank you for considering these comments

Sincerely,

Wayne Pacelle
President
Center for a Humane Economy
Animal Wellness Action

Kayla Clapper
California State Director
Center for a Humane Economy



WILLIAM "TEX" DOWDY
Sheriff - Coroner

MODOC COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

102 South Court Street - P.O. Drawer 460 - Alturas, California 96101

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September 9, 2025

California Fish and Game Commission
Wildlife Resources Committee
P.O. Box 944209
Sacramento, CA 94244-2090

RE: Support for Bear Management Proposals

Dear Chair and Members of the Wildlife Resources Committee:

As the elected Sheriff of Modoc County, I am writing to formally express support for the items scheduled for discussion at the Wildlife Resources Committee meeting on September 11, 2025, at 10:00 a.m., specifically:

1. The proposal to expand the bear hunt area into the Northeastern California Bear Conservation Region, encompassing the majority of Modoc County
2. The proposal is to authorize hunters to obtain a second bear tag per season.

The black bear population in California remains robust and continues to expand geographically, including into Modoc County and the greater Northeastern region. The expansion of regulated hunting opportunities provides the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) with a practical and science-based tool for population management. Regulation ensures that harvest levels remain consistent with conservation objectives, while affording rural communities' relief from bear-related conflicts

California's bear population estimates exceed historical averages, and to continue to prevent the hunting of bears in Modoc County is and will pose a conservation concern. The authorization of a second bear tag would promote more effective population management and generate additional revenue to support wildlife conservation and enforcement efforts statewide.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Commission to adopt both proposals. Expansion of the hunting area and authorization of a second bear tag are consistent with responsible wildlife management, statutory conservation mandates, and the protection of California residents and their property.

Thank you for your consideration of Modoc County's position on this matter.

Respectfully submitted,



William "Tex" Dowdy
Sheriff, Modoc County

From: Tiffany Martinez [REDACTED]

Sent: Wednesday, September 10, 2025 5:17 PM

To: FGC <FGC@fgc.ca.gov>

Cc: Ned Coe <[REDACTED]>; Chester Robertson
[REDACTED]

Subject: Support for Adjusting Various Regulations Related to Hunting for Black Bears

Please see the attached letter from the Modoc County Board of Supervisors.

Tiffany Martinez

Clerk of the Board/Assistant County Administrative Officer

Modoc County

204 South Court Street

Alturas, CA 96101

Office: (530) 233-6201
[REDACTED]

“Probably the most dangerous phrase that anyone could use in the world today is that dreadful one: "But we have always done it that way.”

Grace Hopper - Computer Scientist

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**Modoc County
Board of Supervisors**

Established in 1874



204 S. Court Street
Alturas, California 96101

Phone: (530) 233-6201

September 9, 2025

California Fish and Game Commission
Wildlife Resources Committee
P.O. Box 944209
Sacramento, CA 94244-2090

RE: Support for Adjusting Various Regulations Related to Hunting for Black Bears

The Modoc County Board of Supervisors would like to express full support for the upcoming agenda item scheduled for discussion at the Wildlife Resources Committee meeting on September 11, 2025, at 10:00 a.m. regarding the update to various regulations related to hunting for black bear (genus *Ursus*), including seasons, hunt limits, bag and possession limits, and hunt zones. As stated in the Commission agenda packet, the Commission has **not amended bear regulations since 2012** and, in recent years, has held off on making any proposed changes until the Department completed an update to its bear management plan in April 2025.

The black bear population in California remains robust and continues to expand geographically, including into Modoc County and the greater Northeastern region. This statement is supported by the Black Bear Conservation and Management Plan for California, which states there are an **“estimated 60,000 black bears, one of the largest bear populations in the United States.”**

We recognize that management of any species is complex, but effective wildlife management is essential to maintaining ecological balance, ensuring the health of species populations, and protecting California’s diverse habitats for future generations. The black bear population in California has grown significantly in recent decades, and without proper management, their overabundance can place increased pressure on prey species and ecosystems. Black bears, as apex predators, have a direct influence on populations of non-predatory animals.

This is a fundamental part of the elementary cycle of life: when predator numbers become too high, they reduce populations of prey species such as deer and elk. In turn, this creates a ripple effect across the food web, impacting plant communities, water resources, and the many species that rely on balanced habitats. Responsible hunting serves as an important tool to help keep predator-prey relationships in check, preventing over-predation and allowing non-predator populations to thrive. As elected officials, we hear stories almost daily from our constituents about the increased black bear population within Modoc County and the impact it is having on our deer and elk population.

Furthermore, expanding bear hunting opportunities will provide both ecological and socioeconomic benefits. Wildlife managers will gain a valuable tool to mitigate increasing human-bear conflicts, particularly in rural and suburban communities. Hunters, operating within the framework of science-based regulations, will contribute to conservation funding through license and tag fees, directly supporting wildlife management programs and habitat restoration projects that benefit all species.

For the reasons outlined above, we respectfully urge the Committee to advance updates to the regulations governing black bear hunting. These updates should be guided by objective, unbiased science and informed by the lived experiences of Californians across the state's diverse regions. Based on feedback from our constituents, the Board of Supervisors expresses its support for expanding the bear hunting zone in Modoc County to include the eastern region, thereby opening black bear hunting opportunities across the entirety of the county.

Management strategies must be flexible rather than one-size-fits-all, carefully considering differences between urban and rural landscapes. By adjusting seasons, hunt limits, zones, and possession regulations in a measured and regionally appropriate way, the state can ensure that black bear populations are managed responsibly. Such stewardship is vital to preserving ecological balance, protecting biodiversity, and safeguarding California's natural heritage for future generations.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Ned Coe,
Chair of the Board