Staff Summary for February 11-12, 2026

## 16B. Department Wildlife and Fisheries Division Report, and Department Ecosystem Conservation Division Report

**Today's Item** **Information ☒** **Action ☐**

The Department will highlight items of note since the last Commission meeting for the Department Wildlife and Fisheries Division and the Ecosystem Conservation Division.

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

**Background (N/A)**

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

**Recommendation (N/A)**

**Exhibits**

1. Department chronic wasting disease (CWD) surveillance report for 2025, dated January 15, 2026
2. Department news release: "Naturally Reproduced Coho Salmon Found in Russian River's Upper Basin for the First Time in Decades," dated December 18, 2025
3. Department news release: "CDFW to Host Public Meeting on California's Salmon Fisheries," January 28, 2026
4. Department news release: "Factual Information About Lake Tahoe's Black Bears," dated January 30, 2026
5. Department summary of conservation efforts related to Clear Lake hitch, dated January 8, 2026

**Motion (N/A)**

**California Department of Fish and Wildlife CWD Surveillance Report 2025**

**Date of report:** 1/15/2026
**Prepared by:** Liberty Wood
**Contact Information** liberty.wood@wildlife.ca.gov

## Overview:

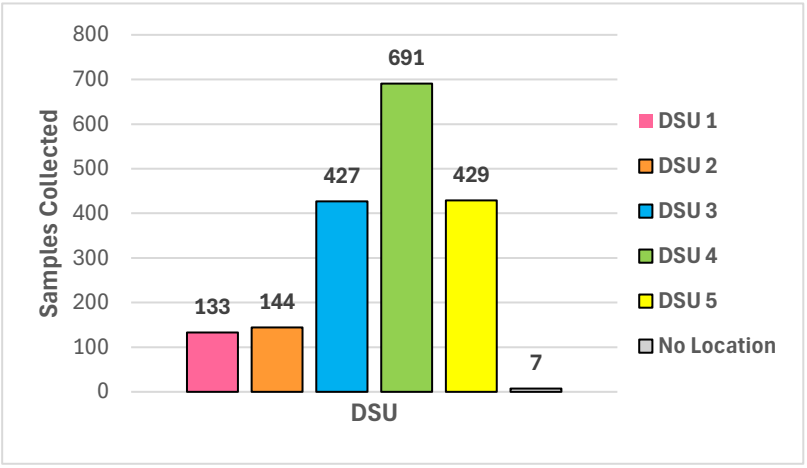
This report summarizes Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) surveillance activities conducted throughout the calendar year to date. The primary objective of California's CWD surveillance program is to detect the presence of the disease and monitor its prevalence to support informed management decisions.

The first CWD detections in California were from two adult bucks, one was found dead from unknown causes on September 20, 2023 in Madera County and the other from Bishop in Inyo County was found dead after vehicle collision on February 6, 2024. They were confirmed Positive May 2024. Two additional CWD detections were confirmed by WADDL on February 3, 2025, both were adult deer from the Bishop area, within 5 miles of the first detection in this area. CDFW has been monitoring California elk and deer populations for CWD since 2000.

## Surveilllance Update:

California's Chronic Wasting Disease Management Plan identies five Disease Sampling Units (DSUs) based on deer population estimates, Deer Conservation Units (DCUs), and harvest (Figure 1). **General surveillance goals are to test 300 deer per DSU per sampling period.**

**Figure 1:** Deer Sampling Units (DSU)




| Location | Samples | % of goal (300) |
|---|---|---|
| DSU 1 | 133 | 44.33% |
| DSU 2 | 144 | 48.00% |
| DSU 3 | 427 | 142.33% |
| DSU 4 | 691 | 230.33% |
| DSU 5 | 429 | 143.00% |
| No Location | 7 | or Other |
| Total | 1831 | 122.07% |

Samples collected from a Chronic Wasting Disease Management Zone (CMZ)

| | |
|---|---|
| D7 | 558 |
| X9a | 183 |
| X9b | 54 |
| X9c | 41 |
| Total | 836 |

**CDFW Regional Sampling Totals**

| | |
|---|---|
| Region 1 | 269 |
| Region 2 | 128 |
| Region 3 | 117 |
| Region 4 | 880 |
| Region 5 | 84 |
| Region 6 | 326 |
| No Location or Other | 27 |
| Total | 1831 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Percent of samples coming from a CMZ: | 45.66% |
| Average amount of days WADDL results return from shipment: | 12 |

**2025 Sampled by DSU**

| | | DSU 1 | DSU 2 | DSU 3 | DSU 4 | DSU 5 | Unknown | Totals |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Species | Native Deer | 125 | 142 | 373 | 689 | 422 | 4 | 1755 |
| | Native Elk | 8 | 2 | 54 | 2 | 7 | 3 | 76 |
| | | | | | | | | 1831 |
| Sample Type | Hunter Harvest | 76 | 62 | 286 | 608 | 263 | 0 | 1295 |
| | Roadkill | 20 | 63 | 93 | 42 | 132 | 2 | 352 |
| | Clinical Suspect | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 3 |
| | Other | 37 | 19 | 47 | 40 | 33 | 5 | 181 |
| | | | | | | | | 1831 |
| Sex | Male | 83 | 88 | 305 | 618 | 317 | 1 | 1412 |
| | Female | 28 | 44 | 77 | 43 | 90 | 5 | 287 |
| | Unknown | 22 | 12 | 45 | 30 | 22 | 1 | 132 |
| | | | | | | | | 1831 |
| Age | Adult | 40 | 52 | 179 | 87 | 194 | 4 | 556 |
| | Sub-Adult | 34 | 59 | 152 | 101 | 152 | 1 | 499 |
| | Unknown | 59 | 33 | 96 | 503 | 83 | 2 | 776 |
| | | | | | | | | 1831 |
| Test Result | Not Detected | 122 | 127 | 396 | 657 | 386 | 6 | 1694 |
| | Pending | 5 | 6 | 15 | 10 | 13 | 0 | 49 |
| | Detected | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| | No Result | 6 | 11 | 16 | 24 | 28 | 1 | 86 |
| | Totals | 133 | 144 | 427 | 691 | 429 | 7 | 1831 |

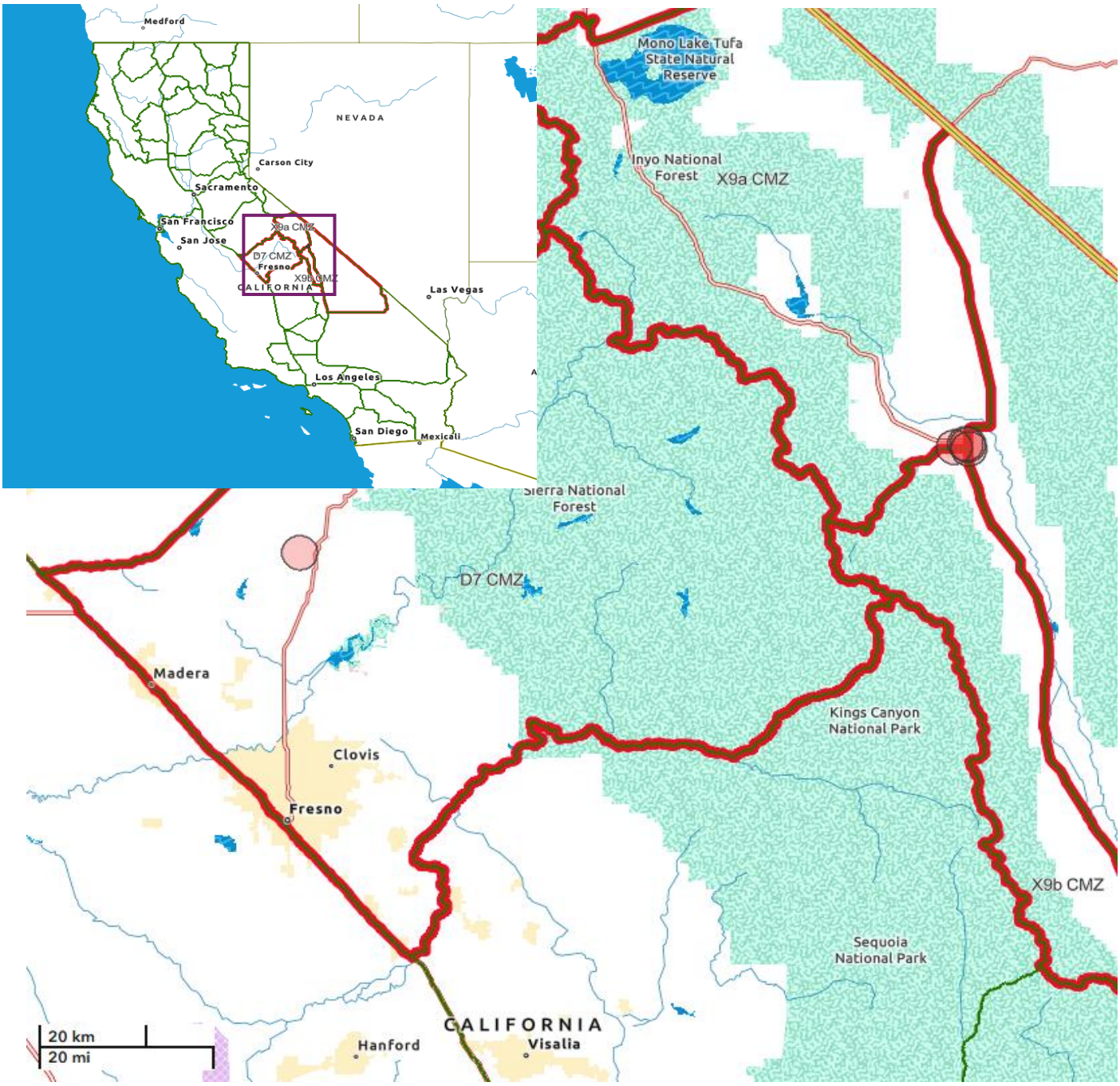
**Not Testable Samples breakdown**

| | | DSU 1 | DSU 2 | DSU 3 | DSU 4 | DSU 5 | Unknown | Totals |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sample Type | Hunter Harvest | 2 | 3 | 5 | 15 | 9 | 0 | 34 |
| | Roadkill | 1 | 6 | 8 | 6 | 10 | 1 | 32 |
| | Clinical Suspect | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | Other | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 9 | 0 | 20 |
| | % No Test DSU | 4.69% | 7.97% | 3.88% | 3.52% | 6.76% | 14.29% | 4.83% |

**2025 Samples by Samplng Method**

| | Statewide 2025 | Hunter Harvest | Roadkill | Clinical | Other | Totals |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Species | Native Deer | 1246 | 346 | 2 | 161 | 1755 |
| | Native Elk | 49 | 6 | 1 | 20 | 76 |
| | Other | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | | | | | | 1831 |
| Sex | Male | 1190 | 153 | 0 | 69 | 1412 |
| | Female | 35 | 164 | 3 | 85 | 287 |
| | Unknown | 70 | 35 | 0 | 27 | 132 |
| | | | | | | 1831 |
| Age | Adult | 328 | 144 | 1 | 83 | 556 |
| | Sub-Adult | 291 | 150 | 1 | 57 | 499 |
| | Unknown | 676 | 58 | 1 | 41 | 776 |
| | | | | | | 1831 |
| Test Result | Not Detected | 1236 | 307 | 2 | 149 | 1694 |
| | Pending | 25 | 13 | 0 | 11 | 49 |
| | Detected | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| | No Result | 34 | 32 | 0 | 20 | 86 |
| | Totals | 1295 | 352 | 3 | 181 | 1831 |

**Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) Detections across California**




As of this report, there have been a total of **5 CWD detections** across California:

**1** detection from a sample collected in **2023** out of **539** samples taken statewide
**2** detections from samples collected in **2024** out of **1,741** samples taken statewide
**2** detections from samples collected in **2025** out of **1,831** samples taken statewide

This report summarizes samples collected during the **2025 calendar year**. Although there are five confirmed CWD-positive cases statewide, **only the 2025 detection is included in this report**, as it is the only one that falls within the current reporting period.


# CDFW NEWS

*December 18, 2025*

## Naturally Reproduced Coho Salmon Found in Russian River's Upper Basin for the First Time in Decades

**Discovery in Isolated Pool Prompts Fish Rescue by Pinoleville Pomo Nation and CDFW**

***In case you missed it:***

SACRAMENTO – Governor Gavin Newsom last week celebrated a monumental achievement for California as salmon are making a comeback in Northern California. This summer, several juvenile Coho salmon were spotted in the Russian River's upper basin — a first in more than 30 years. California has recently marked significant progress in its comprehensive strategy to help these threatened and endangered salmon species recover — all the more critical as protections for endangered species have been rolled back at the federal level.

"California's salmon strategy is about more than restoring a species — it's about restoring an entire way of life," said Newsom. "It's about honoring tribal sovereignty, protecting the ecosystems that define this state, and doing the hard, generational work to make sure these rivers still run for our kids and grandkids. The return of this species to the Russian River demonstrates a new win in our strategy to preserve a healthy and sustainable future for all."

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) announced that juvenile Coho salmon were spotted in a tributary of the Russian River in Mendocino County by a Pinoleville Pomo Nation water specialist — the first observation confirming natural reproduction of Coho in the Russian River's upper basin since 1991. Governor Gavin Newsom's Salmon Strategy for a Hotter, Drier Future, coupled with beneficial wet weather conditions, is supporting California's struggling salmon populations as they return to historical habitats like the Russian River.

The Coho discovery was a sign of recovery for the endangered species, but it also called for swift action to ensure their survival.

Snorkeling in an isolated pool on Ackerman Creek north of Ukiah in June, Pinoleville Pomo Nation Environmental Protection Agency Water Resources Specialist Dakota Perez Gonzalez discovered young Coho salmon. These fish, as well as juvenile steelhead trout and Chinook salmon, were disconnected from surface water flow and other suitable habitat and likely to perish when the pool eventually dried up.

**Strong Regional Partnerships**

To help the species continue to thrive, Pinoleville Pomo Nation and CDFW partnered for a rescue effort when it was discovered that these juvenile fish had become stranded in an isolated and drying pool.

"Pinoleville Pomo Nation respects the relationship of traditional ecological knowledge, passed down through generations, while learning about contemporary conservation practices," said Pinoleville Pomo Nation Vice Chairperson Angela James. "We honor Mother Earth by protecting the sustainability of our natural resources. Our Tribal

Citizens currently utilize every cultural resource Ackerman Creek provides for us. By actively engaging in habitat restoration, water quality monitoring and the preservation of native species, we reaffirm our commitment to the health of the Ackerman Creek for future generations."

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) and Pinoleville Pomo Nation staff set out to rescue the Coho and as many other fish as possible from the isolated pool. Teams used nets to collect two Coho, three Chinook, 146 steelhead and hundreds of other native and introduced fish species. Three Pinoleville Pomo Nation environmental interns — T.J. Feliz, Marisol Tlelo and Riley Dizon — provided critical support to the fish rescue.

The adult Coho that spawned these young fish likely migrated in December 2024 from the Pacific Ocean, through more than 90 miles of the Russian River, and into Ackerman Creek. The last confirmed account of juvenile Coho in upper Russian River tributaries was prior to 1991. The 2025 observation of juveniles in Ackerman Creek is the first evidence that adult Coho have successfully reproduced in the Russian River's upper basin in over 34 years.

This isn't California's first salmon rescue operation: during the drought-prone years of 2021-23, CDFW staff engaged in 51 rescue events in 25 waters, saving nearly 14,000 Coho salmon from death in drying pools and warm water. These rescued juvenile fish go on to support healthy adult populations of salmon statewide.

**Hatcheries at Work**

The Coho were taken to the Warm Springs Fish Hatchery where a Coho captive breeding program has been working to recover endangered Russian River Coho since 2001. The steelhead were also taken to the Warm Springs Fish Hatchery, and other native fish were released into Ackerman Creek near its confluence with the Russian River.

"Coho likely would have disappeared from the Russian River basin by 2004 if not for the Coho captive breeding program," said Bay Delta Region Inland Fisheries Program Manager Corinne Gray. "While there have been five observed adult Coho that have returned to their natal waters at Coyote Valley Fish Facility below Coyote Dam since 2012, it has been decades since evidence of successful spawning and rearing of Coho has been seen in tributaries in the Russian River's upper basin."

In the winter of 2024-25, Coho returned in record numbers to habitat throughout the northern half of the California Central Coast, from the Golden Gate National Recreation Area in Marin County to the Sinkyone Wilderness in Mendocino County. Though there have been successful returns of Coho in the lower Russian River watershed, Coho are not often seen migrating into the upper Russian River watersheds.

CDFW staff actively seek out naturally reproduced Coho juveniles to maximize genetic diversity in the captive breeding program. The Russian River Coho captive breeding

program is a multi-agency partnership implemented by the United States Army Corps of Engineers, where these natural origin juvenile Coho are hatchery reared to adulthood and then spawned. This takes a few hundred fish and multiplies them to about 150,000 that are released to local tributaries with the goal of restarting sustaining populations of Coho.

**Improved Fish Passage and Habitat Restoration**

As the state invests in improved fish passage and habitat restoration, California is starting to see salmon emerge in unexpected and historic watersheds.

This summer, Coho salmon were spotted in the Jenner Headlands Reserve on the Sonoma Coast, their first sighting in the area in roughly 60 years. This area was previously preserved in 2010 thanks in part to funding provided by the California State Coastal Conservancy and the Wildlife Conservation Board. These investments by the state support critically important habitat restoration and preservation opportunities, even years after acquisition.

In November, for the first time since the 1950s, Chinook salmon were documented migrating into the reaches of Alameda Creek in the San Francisco Bay Area. The Chinook were able to swim further up the largest local tributary to the San Francisco Bay as a result of the Sunol Valley Fish Passage Project implemented by CalTrout and PG&E. Developing and updating fish passages is also identified in the state's Salmon Strategy as a key way to support movement of healthy fish populations.

Additionally, in a key effort to advance the Salmon Strategy, CDFW and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries have partnered on Salmon Habitat Restoration Priorities (SHaRP), a collaborative commitment to restore important salmon and steelhead habitat. SHaRP helps salmon build resilience, and projects in the impacted zones have seen substantial increases in adult Coho salmon returns which in turn can help repopulate upstream areas like Ackerman Creek.

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***Media Contacts:***
*Krysten Kellum, CDFW Communications, (916) 825-7120*
*Angela James, Pinoleville Pomo Nation Tribal Council*


# CDFW NEWS

*January 28, 2026*

## CDFW to Host Public Meeting on California's Salmon Fisheries

*The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) invites the public to attend its annual Salmon Information Meeting. The hybrid meeting will feature the outlook for this year's ocean salmon fisheries, in addition to a review of last year's salmon fisheries and inland spawner returns.*

*This year, the meeting will be held in person at the California Natural Resources Agency Auditorium at 715 P St. in Sacramento on Wednesday, Feb. 25, 2026, at 1 p.m., and will also be livestreamed online.*

*The 2026 Salmon Information Meeting marks the beginning of a two-month public process to help develop annual sport and commercial ocean salmon fishing seasons. The input is also used to inform inland salmon season development later in the spring.*

*The annual pre-season salmon management process involves collaborative negotiations between west coast states, federal agencies, tribal co-managers, commercial troll representatives, commercial passenger fishing vessel representatives, private recreational anglers, non-governmental organizations and others interested in salmon fishery management and conservation.*

*These leaders utilize the most current information shared at the Salmon Information Meeting to work together to develop a range of recommended ocean fishing season alternatives at the March 4-9 Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC) meeting(opens in new tab) in Sacramento, Calif. Final season recommendations will be adopted at the PFMC's April 7-12 meeting in Portland, Ore(opens in new tab).*

*Salmon Information Meeting details, agenda, informational materials and instructions to view the livestream will be published in advance of the event on CDFW's Ocean*

*Salmon page. Livestream login information and a handout with the meeting presentations will be posted by the morning of Feb. 25. Please see the Ocean Salmon web page for a complete Calendar of Events and contact information regarding the Salmon Preseason Process, including other opportunities for engagement in the ocean salmon season development process.*

***Media Contacts:***

*Emma Keller, CDFW Marine Region, (707) 502-8418*
*Steve Gonzalez, CDFW Communications, (916) 804-1714*


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# CDFW NEWS

January 30, 2026

## Factual Information About Lake Tahoe's Black Bears

**Keep Tahoe Bears Wild!**

The Tahoe Interagency Bear Team (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.

Tahoe bears may at times seem like a unique bear species due to their general lack of fear and boldness around humans (habituation), but these black bears follow the usual biological patterns of black bears across California and Nevada. Whether living in or visiting bear country here at Lake Tahoe or beyond, this information should clarify what human actions are needed to help wild bears survive and thrive.

## Secure Crawl Spaces

Web cam photos and videos of bears denning under homes can perpetuate the myth that property owners and residents should allow bears to den under homes and in crawl spaces. It can also encourage unwanted behavior such as laying out hay or other materials for bears. However, most homeowners don't even know a bear is under or around their home until it has already established a makeshift den.

Bears often damage the insulation, exposing pipes to freezing temperatures or even damaging them in the process. Once a bear gets established, it can be difficult to make it leave. This increases the chances of human-bear conflict and habituated behavior.

Bears under homes need to be addressed by trained agency professionals as bears can be dangerous and unpredictable. If disturbed, mother bears with newborn cubs may abandon the den, orphaning the cubs in the process. For this reason, only a wildlife professional should evaluate the situation and offer advice to homeowners.

It's important to remember that bears have evolved to comfortably survive winter without human help, so it is essential to board up all crawl spaces around homes to discourage bears from denning underneath. The TIBT video "Securing Your Crawl Space" will show you how to go about this.

## Deny Access to Human Food and Trash

Black bears are very resilient and adaptive animals, and, as opportunistic omnivores, they will take advantage of any available food source, including human-provided foods like garbage. Their highly developed sense of smell allows them to find these food sources, even when locked in a vehicle or home, which in turn may lead bears into conflict with people.

It is true that bears need a lot of calories, especially in preparation for winter, but giving them handouts will not set them up to thrive. Repeated exposure to human foods can lead to food-conditioned bears which then view human homes and neighborhoods as reliable sources of food.

When mother bears teach their cubs to access human foods, they not only continue the cycle of human food-conditioning, but the cubs are much more prone to be involved in conflict, including being hit and killed by vehicles.

Consuming human food and garbage is incredibly unhealthy for bears because the high sugar content can increase tooth decay and painful abscesses. Intentionally feeding bears is illegal in both California and Nevada.

As omnivores, a bear's diet is about 85% plant-based, with the remaining portion coming from consuming insects, small mammals and carrion. Bears should be allowed to fulfill their very important and vital ecological role as seed dispersers, predators and scavengers.

## Get 'BearWise' to Keep Bears Wild

Black bears are smart. They have learned how to unscrew lids and open sliding glass and vehicle doors. They are also strong. In order to access food, they can peel a car door down from the top or break through a typical home door or window. Even after an incident like the 2021 Caldor Fire, where a huge swath of vegetation was burned in the Sierra Nevada mountains, wildlife biologists saw bears find natural ways to survive like the resilient omnivores that they are.

On rare occasions, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) and Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW) must remove bears that are putting human life and property at risk. No one, including agency biologists who have dedicated their lives and careers to protecting bears, want this outcome. It is only used with great discretion and as a last resort.

Bears are large, strong animals and once they become conditioned to human foods or comfortable around people and human surroundings, they pose a significant threat to human safety. For these reasons it is very important for people to be educated and dedicated to being "BearWise." Learn how at the BearWise website.

It's also important to note that except in the case of the immediate protection of human life, the only people who can legally interact with wildlife are designated state agency representatives or law enforcement professionals.

## Slow Down for Bears, Wildlife

It can be exciting to see a big, beautiful animal like a black bear in a neighborhood, but it is not where bears belong. Human-developed areas pose many dangers to bears, particularly busy roads with cars, which bears must cross in order to get to the unhealthy human food and garbage in developed areas.

By allowing bears to comfortably live in or pass through neighborhoods, the chances that they will get struck and killed by vehicles increases greatly. If a bear is in your neighborhood, encourage it to move on by scaring it away so that it can lead a safer life away from developed areas and conflict. Slow down for bears and other wildlife in the Tahoe Basin. For more information on bear-vehicle collisions, see the TIBT video "When Bears and Humans Collide."

The TIBT is dedicated to creating the best environment for bears to thrive and remain wild in an ever-growing, ever-changing environment like the Lake Tahoe Basin. CDFW and NDOW should be the only point of contact for any bear-related incidents or questions. CDFW and NDOW have trained black bear experts who can help navigate any human-bear conflicts.

We encourage the public to visit our website, TahoeBears.org, for accurate, science-based information about bears. To report bear incidents or conflict in the Lake Tahoe Basin, use the following:

- In California, contact CDFW at 916-358-2917 or report online using the Wildlife incident Reporting (WIR) System.
- Non-emergency bear collisions in California State Parks can be reported to public dispatch at 916- 358-1300.
- In Nevada, contact NDOW at 775-688-BEAR (2327).
- If the issue is an emergency, call the local sheriff's department or 911.

Thank you for helping keep Tahoe bears wild and safe!

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**Media Contact:**
Peter Tira, CDFW Communications, (916) 215-3858

Clear Lake Hitch-Related Conservation Efforts

Summary Prepared by California Department of Fish and Wildlife Staff

January 8, 2026

Below is a summary of Clear Lake Hitch related conservation efforts being discussed in the Task Force. It does not include the many research and conservation actions being conducted by our partners in Tribal governments.

- Summit – The Task Force is preparing a summary of recommendations and requests to be presented at a leadership summit in February or March of 2026. Outcomes from the leadership summit will be presented to interested parties, including the Lake County Board of Supervisors and Blue-Ribbon Committee for the Rehabilitation of Clear Lake, in Spring of 2026.
- Co-management agreement
    - A draft co-management agreement has been developed by the California Natural Resources Agency and is being reviewed by Tribal governments.
    - The Lake County Board of Supervisors unanimously approved the creation of a working group to develop a co-management agreement with Tribal governments.
- County of Lake
    - Monitoring results from the Lake County Watershed Protection District 2025 Visual Survey and Community Science Visual Survey have been published.
- Department of Fish and Wildlife
    - Instream Flow Assessment: This study evaluates instream flows to support Clear Lake Hitch passage on six tributaries. A draft report is undergoing internal review and is expected to be released in early 2026
    - CDFW has initiated the State Recovery Planning Process for Clear Lake Hitch.
    - Monitoring results for the CDFW 2025 Visual Survey and Relative Population Estimate have been published.
- State Water Resources Control Board
    - Groundwater/Surface Water Study – O'Connor Environmental, Inc. has been contracted to conduct hydrologic analysis of groundwater/surface water interactions. Draft report is expected in 2027.
- California Conservation Corp have removed woody debris and vegetation from tributaries to promote Clear Lake Hitch migration.
- Monitoring Results from the 2025 United States Geological Survey Summer Gillnet Survey have been published.
- The United States Fish and Wildlife Service have proposed to list Clear Lake Hitch as threatened under the Endangered Species Act.