

## Staff Summary for April 15-16, 2026

**15B. 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's 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 news release: "The Secret Winter Lives of Late Tahoe's Black Bears," dated March 24, 2026](#)
2. [Department news release: "CDFW and Partners Find Orphaned Mountain Lion Kitten Following Coordinated Monitoring Effort," dated March 26, 2026](#)
3. [Department news release: "CDFW Research Links California's Nutria Invasion to Pacific Northwest Population," dated April 7, 2026](#)

**Motion (N/A)**



# CDFW NEWS

*March 24, 2026*

## The Secret Winter Lives of Lake Tahoe's Black Bears



### ***Keep Tahoe Bears Wild!***

Spring is in the air at Lake Tahoe, and black bears are emerging from their winter dens. This includes mother bears with new cubs of the year that are only about 8 to 10 weeks old.

The reproduction cycle began back in the spring of last year, yet the mother bear has only been pregnant since around Thanksgiving. If the math doesn't add up, here's why: Black bears have a unique reproductive cycle that allows them to mate in the

spring/summer but delay true pregnancy until the fall to increase the odds of success for a healthy pregnancy and fetus.

Black bears mate in the summer from June to August, and the adult females undergo a process called delayed implantation. The sperm from the male fertilizes the microscopic egg inside the female, which quickly develops into a small ball of cells called a blastocyst. At this point, the pregnancy process pauses with the blastocyst floating around in the uterus, suspending further development until the fall. This pause allows time for the female to gain the fat reserves she will need to sustain both herself and any cubs she may have during the upcoming winter hibernation, or torpor, as it's more accurately called for bears.

Hibernation is tightly related to resource availability, and bears prepare for it in the fall by entering a period called "hyperphagia" (pronounced hi·per·fay·jee·uh). This period is marked by a substantial increase in feeding activity when bears are known to consume about 25,000 calories per day. All bears experience this feeding frenzy whether pregnant or not.

As natural food supplies dwindle and snow gradually blankets the Tahoe Basin, bears naturally go into hibernation to save precious energy and resources. This is because bears do not eat or drink during hibernation, nor do they urinate or defecate. Instead, they have developed the ability to live off acquired fat stores and recycle wastes back into usable proteins. During this period, their heart and metabolic rates drop significantly, and they can lose 25 to 40 percent of their body weight.

The stresses of hibernation are even more pronounced for females with cubs. To prepare for hibernation, the female's body will carry out a self-evaluation in the late fall. If she has acquired the necessary fat reserves to sustain herself and her cubs throughout the entire hibernation period, the blastocyst will implant onto the uterine wall, and the fetus will begin to develop. In other words, true pregnancy begins. If the female has not accumulated enough body fat, the pregnancy ends and the blastocyst is reabsorbed by her body.

Sometime before Feb. 1, a pregnant female will give birth in the den to a litter of one to four blind, naked cubs weighing less than 1 pound. The female hardly awakens from torpor during birth, becoming just alert enough to lick the cubs clean and move them into a position that keeps them warm and allows them to nurse. The cubs continue to nurse and grow, becoming more active through the remainder of hibernation. A female with new cubs of the year emerges from the den between March and May with cubs weighing around 5 to 7 pounds.

Throughout the cubs' first year, they learn everything about how to be a bear from their mother, including where to find food and what is dangerous and to be avoided. Cubs of the year are dependent on their mothers for several months and are taught how to forage on natural foods, including grass, berries and grubs. A female with cubs will be busy caring for and teaching her new cubs and will not mate again in the summer. Cubs

of the year stay with their mother through the following hibernation and their first birthday, emerging from their mother's den again the following spring as yearlings. Newly emerged yearlings are typically 50 to 150 pounds, and though they may be a bit awkward, they are well equipped and ready to go off on their own. Mother bears, once free of these "teenagers," will once again find a mate and breed to continue the cycle of producing cubs every other year.

As omnivores, a bear's diet is about 85 percent plant-based, with the remaining portion coming from insects, small mammals and carrion. Bears provide essential ecosystem functions, including helping to spread seeds through their scat, transporting pollen on their fur and tongues, cleaning up animals that died during the winter and aiding in nutrient cycling by digging for insects.

Though seeing a female bear with her new cubs can be a very exciting experience, bears play an important role in Lake Tahoe's ecosystem and allowing them access to human food and garbage is detrimental to natural processes and their health. 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 conflict, including being hit and killed by vehicles. Cubs taught to seek human food sources do not learn how to forage naturally. Instead, once they separate from their mother, they become dependent on human food sources and pass on the same unhealthy foraging habits to their own cubs.

You can support black bears during their reproductive process by giving females with cubs plenty of space and by securing attractants and human food sources that may lead new cubs down a path toward conflict. It is a shared responsibility to keep Tahoe's bears healthy, safe and wild!

For more information about black bear reproduction and cubs, visit [January / February Is Birthday Time for Bears\(external link\)](#). For more information on coexisting with bears, visit [BearWise.org\(external link\)](#) or [TahoeBears.org\(external link\)](#).

To report human-bear conflicts:

- In California, contact the CDFW at (916) 358-2917 or report online using the Wildlife Incident Reporting (WIR) system at [apps.wildlife.ca.gov/wir\(external link\)](#).
- Non-emergency wildlife interactions in California State Parks can be reported to their public dispatch at (916) 358-1300.
- In Nevada, contact the NDOW at (775) 688-BEAR (2327).
- If the issue is an immediate threat, call the local sheriff's department or 911.

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# CDFW NEWS

*March 26, 2026*

## **CDFW and Partners Find Orphaned Mountain Lion Kitten Following Coordinated Monitoring Effort**

LOS ANGELES — The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), in partnership with the National Park Service (NPS) and the Los Angeles Zoo, has intervened on an orphaned mountain lion kitten in Southern California following a coordinated, science-based monitoring effort.

The approximately 22-day-old kitten, identified as P-131, was detected through ongoing tracking of his collared mother (P-129) as part of long-term research led by the National Park Service. Biologists observed a change in the mother’s movement patterns that indicated the den may have been abandoned.

Using GPS collar data, telemetry and remote cameras, wildlife professionals monitored the den site over several days to allow for the possibility of the mother’s return. On day five, CDFW’s Wildlife Health Lab authorized intervention once it became clear the kitten was alone and his condition was declining.

“Decisions like this are based on real-time monitoring, the animal’s condition and whether intervention is likely to make a meaningful difference. In this case, the data showed the kitten would not survive on its own, and intervention was appropriate. Each situation is evaluated individually using science, state law and professional judgment,” said Kyle Evans, CDFW’s Environmental Program Manager in Southern California.

These decisions are made case-by-case and prioritize both animal welfare and the long-term conservation of the species. In this instance, monitoring data allowed biologists to detect a problem early, confirm abandonment and respond at the appropriate time.

P-131 was found malnourished and with a permanent injury to his hind foot due to possible ambilocal strangulation but seems to be in good condition otherwise. He was collected and transported to the Los Angeles Zoo where he is receiving veterinary care and will be transferred to the Oakland Zoo for long-term care once he is stable. Due to his young age and a permanent injury, the kitten is not a candidate for release back into the wild.

Over time, P-131 may serve in an educational capacity to help the public better understand mountain lions, the challenges wildlife face in a human-dominated landscape and human stewardship responsibilities.

Mountain lions are a specially protected species in California and play an important role in maintaining ecological balance. Management actions are limited and highly specific. CDFW evaluates each situation individually, including cases involving orphaned or injured animals, and only intervenes when conditions indicate the animal cannot survive in the wild or when public safety is at risk.

### **A Broader Conservation Context**

Wildlife outcomes like this one exist along a broader spectrum of management, ranging from no intervention, to conflict prevention to response actions when necessary.

CDFW works with communities across California to reduce human-wildlife conflict through practical measures such as securing attractants, promoting human prevention actions and supporting coexistence strategies.

Not every situation results in intervention, and not every intervention results in placement. This outcome reflects a specific set of circumstances where monitoring, timing and condition aligned to allow for action.

CDFW remains committed to science-based wildlife management that balances public safety, animal welfare and long-term conservation.

For more information on Mountain Lions  
visit: <https://wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Mammals/Mountain-Lion>

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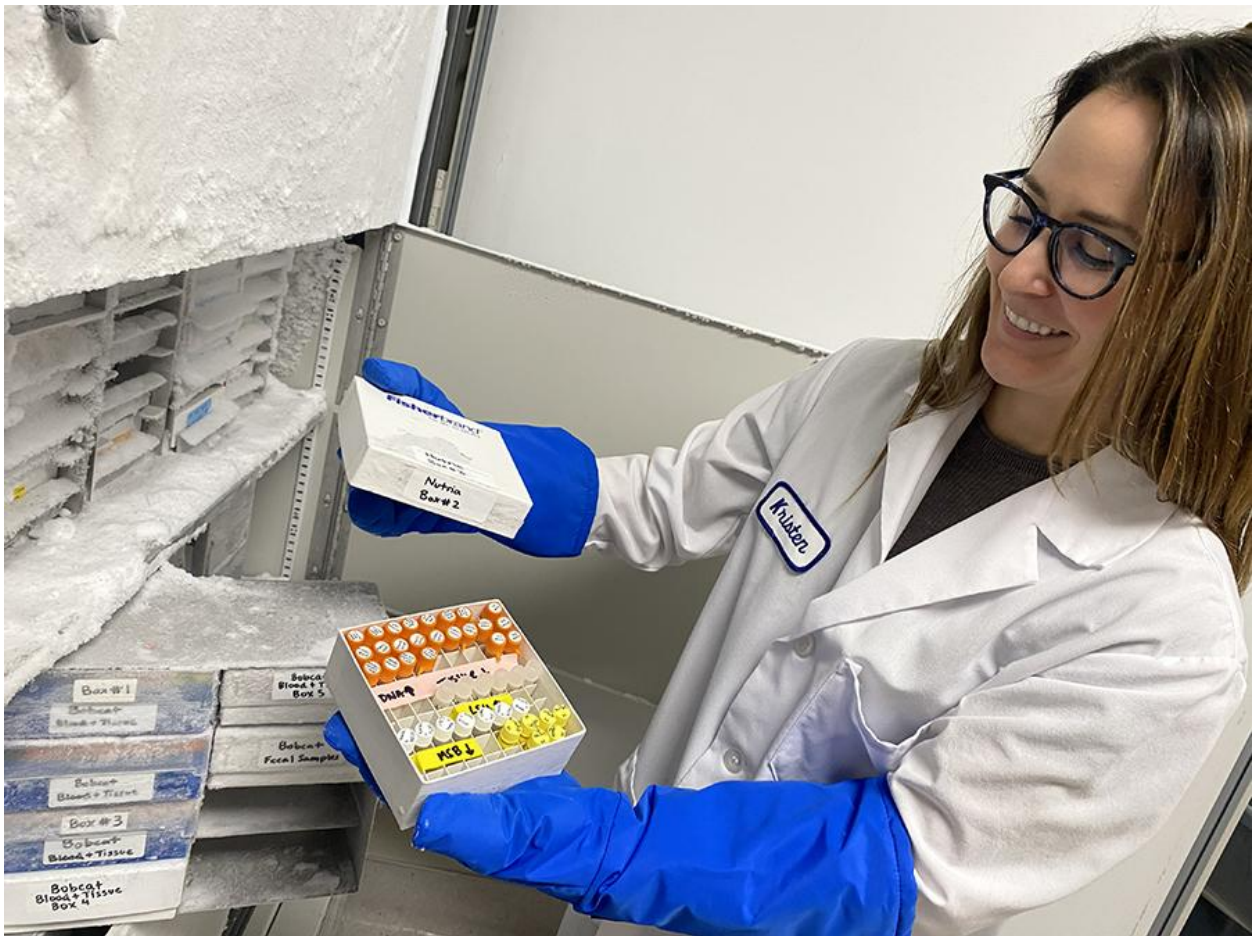
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# CDFW NEWS

April 7, 2026

## *CDFW Research Links California's Nutria Invasion to Pacific Northwest Population*



## **Study Also Informs Eradication Efforts, Offers Toolkit for Future Research Worldwide**

*Scientists with the Wildlife Genetics Research Unit at the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) have completed a genomic study of nutria, an invasive South American rodent, linking their 2017 discovery in Merced County to a population in central Oregon. This was the first genomic study of the semi-aquatic pest species that is harmful to wetland habitats and agriculture and has challenged control efforts of land and wildlife managers worldwide for decades.*

*To identify the origins of nutria in California, CDFW research scientists compared DNA of invasive nutria populations around the world. This led to building a dataset showing the genetic similarity among nutria on a global scale that will serve as a toolkit for future research. The genetic data also give insight into how nutria populations spread across a landscape — information that will inform eradication efforts and development of management strategies.*

*“CDFW conducts sophisticated genetics research to improve management outcomes for California’s wildlife populations,” said CDFW Wildlife Genetics Research Lead Mike Buchalski. “The results of this study additionally will benefit future national and global genetic research on nutria.”*

*“Genetics allowed us to narrow down the most likely source of California’s nutria population and provide land and wildlife managers with information about how these animals are spreading across the landscape,” said CDFW Research Scientist Kristen Ahrens. “We have also created a global reference dataset that others can use to compare populations and trace invasion pathways.”*

*Nutria were introduced to countries all over the world to be raised for their pelts at the height of the fur trade in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, including in California. When that trade collapsed nutria were set free from fur farms, leading to a limited number of feral populations on the landscape, which seemingly failed to thrive. Localized nutria eradication efforts followed, and they were ultimately declared eradicated from California by the late 1970s.*

*There was no sign of nutria presence in the state until 2017 when a pregnant female was found in Merced County. Unlikely that nutria could have gone undetected since eradication in the 1970s, particularly given the rapid rate of reproduction and geographic spread observed following their discovery, CDFW went to work to assess genetic variation in past and present nutria populations in California to find the origin of this recent discovery.*

*To compare today’s nutria with those present before eradication, historical genetic data were essential. CDFW’s Ahrens located and sampled nutria skins and skulls housed in museums and universities across California, and one unexpected source in a taxidermy nutria found at the Butte County Weights and Measures Department office. Recovering*

*DNA from decades-old specimens allowed direct comparison of past and present maternal lineages, providing critical insight into the origins of the current invasion.*

*CDFW's Nutria Eradication Program team provided tissue samples for DNA sequencing of California's current nutria population.*

*For broader comparison, Ahrens obtained tissue samples from federal and state wildlife management agencies for other nutria populations in the U.S. — Louisiana, Texas, Maryland, Virginia, Oregon and Washington. Ahrens was also able to tap into publicly archived sequenced DNA from invasive nutria in South Korea, Japan and Brazil.*

*Comparisons showed that nutria in California today are most genetically similar to populations in central Oregon. Historical California nutria represented multiple maternal lineages, based on analysis of the museum bone and taxidermy specimens. In contrast, today's population traces back to a single lineage, also detected in historical samples, a pattern most consistent with a recent reintroduction rather than survival of the earlier, more diverse population.*

*Ultimately, the genetic research suggests California's current nutria invasion was the result of intentional reintroduction, with the original source animals likely being transported from the central Oregon population, which is prohibited by Fish and Game Code section 2118 and Title 14, California Code of Regulations section 671. Eradication efforts are now costing the state about \$5 million per year.*

*"This study supports our long-held belief that the current invasion is the result of reintroduction rather than explosive growth of a remnant, undetected population," said Nutria Eradication Program Manager Valerie Cook. "While we can only speculate on the 'reasoning' behind the reintroduction of this incredibly destructive invasive species, these findings highlight the critical importance of biosecurity inspections aimed at preventing the importation and transportation of invasive plants and animals into and within California."*

*CDFW's Nutria Eradication Program has taken 7,841 nutria in California since 2017. Eradication efforts are underway across hundreds of thousands of acres of wetland and riparian habitat in California's Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta and Central Valley, spanning from San Pablo Bay to Kings County. Visual observation surveys, motion-detection cameras and scat-detection dogs help CDFW's eradication team detect nutria presence for subsequent trapping efforts.*

*Findings of the nutria genomic study will be another valuable tool for the CDFW Nutria Eradication Program. This study demonstrates how genetics can shed light on population structure and patterns of gene flow to better understand how nutria disperse across a landscape.*

*The nutria genomic research took place over the past five years and was funded by the California Department of Water Resources. Research was done in partnership with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.*

The recently published paper on the study, [Population Genomic Insights Into Recent Nutria Invasion Dynamics\(external link\)](#), is available online.

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