

Staff Summary for June 17-18, 2026

2. Wildlife Prosecutor of the Year for 2025**Today's Item**Information Action

Announce and recognize the recipients of the annual Wildlife Prosecutor of the Year award.

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

The Commission's Wildlife Prosecutor of the Year policy seeks "...to honor a courtroom champion of California's fish, wildlife and natural resources, a person who tirelessly prosecutes fish, wildlife, natural resource and environmental crimes in California courts," and "...recognize this prosecutor through an annual Wildlife Prosecutor of the Year Award" (Exhibit 1).

Specifically, the award recognizes a prosecuting attorney who exhibits one or more of the following:

- (1) exceptional skill and an outstanding commitment to protecting California's fish, wildlife and natural resources;
- (2) superior performance in prosecuting wildlife, natural resource and environmental crimes;
- (3) relentless pursuit of justice for the most egregious violators and keen ability to prosecute complex, controversial or landmark cases; and/or
- (4) exemplary work promoting and maintaining a collaborative working relationship with wildlife officers in pursuit of conserving our natural resources.

Consistent with the policy, the Department's Law Enforcement Division (LED) makes up to four nominations recommended by staff that regularly work with the various prosecuting attorneys' offices. The recipient is selected by the Commission president and executive director with the Department director and deputy director for LED. The Commission presents the selected attorney with the award, which honors those attorneys who went above and beyond to prosecute wildlife crimes in the previous three years. The individual is also recognized during an event that includes their colleagues and peers.

For the first time since the award was created in 2015, *two* outstanding nominees have been selected to receive the award, with both individuals exemplifying all of the characteristics identified as qualities worthy of recognition.

Recipients for 2025

This year, the Commission and Department honor Deputy District Attorney (DDA) Ken Jorgensen from San Luis Obispo County and DDA Michael McCann from San Diego County for their superior prosecutorial accomplishments. Exhibits 2 and 3 provide details on their effective efforts to prosecute violators in central and southern California for repeated egregious acts against wildlife and the environment.

DDA Jorgensen employed exceptional skill and commitment to wildlife protection to prosecute multiple landmark cases. With his leadership, a commercial fisherman with a 15-year history of

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continual violations was finally held accountable. Additionally, through his relentless pursuit of justice, DDA Jorgensen worked lengthy, complex cases such as a multi-year case involving the ongoing unlawful destruction of habitat for a federally endangered and state rare plant; his escalation of enforcement actions led to injunctions on further destruction and the levy of significant civil penalties.

DDA Michael McCann wielded his tenacious abilities as a prosecutor, including his experience prosecuting large-scale narcotics cases, to launch a comprehensive investigation into a wildlife trafficking group with interstate and international illegal wildlife trafficking ties. The investigation spanned almost two years and uncovered evidence of firearms and drug trafficking as well. Working in tandem with the Department's Special Operation Unit (SOU), DDA McCann made himself available at all hours of the day and night to enable search warrants to be issued, multiple felony and misdemeanor charges to be filed, numerous unlawfully possessed wildlife to be seized, and an intricate underground trafficking network to be exposed.

For many years, DDAs Jorgensen and McCann have worked tirelessly and collaboratively with Department wildlife officers to effectively prosecute many high-profile cases to protect California's precious natural resources. The Commission and Department congratulate DDAs Ken Jorgensen and Michael McCann!

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

1. [Commission Wildlife Prosecutor of the Year Policy](#)
2. [CDFW memo, nomination for DDA Ken Jorgensen, received March 10, 2026](#)
3. [CDFW memo, nomination for DDA Michael McCann, received March 10, 2026](#)

Motion (N/A)

Wildlife Prosecutor of the Year

It is the policy of the Fish and Game Commission to honor a courtroom champion of California's fish, wildlife and natural resources, a person who tirelessly prosecutes fish, wildlife, natural resource and environmental crimes in California courts. The Commission will recognize this prosecutor through an annual Wildlife Prosecutor of the Year Award.

Eligibility

Any currently seated prosecuting attorney, including, but not limited to, city attorney, district attorney or deputy attorney general is eligible for nomination and the contribution(s) must have occurred during the previous three years.

Nominations

Based on input from wildlife officers and their experiences in the field, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife's deputy director and chief, Law Enforcement Division, may submit up to four nominations. The nominations must be submitted to a selection committee (identified below) no later than March 15.

Selection Criteria

The award recognizes one attorney who exhibits one or more of the following:

1. exceptional skill and an outstanding commitment to protecting California's fish, wildlife and natural resources;
2. superior performance in prosecuting wildlife, natural resource and environmental crimes;
3. relentless pursuit of justice for the most egregious violators and keen ability to prosecute complex, controversial or landmark cases; or
4. exemplary work promoting and maintaining a collaborative working relationship with wildlife officers in pursuit of conserving our natural resources.

Selection Committee

The selection committee will consist of the president and the executive director of the Commission, and the Department of Fish and Wildlife's director and deputy director, Law Enforcement Division.

Award Announcement

The award will be announced at the Commission's meeting in June and presented to the recipient during a future event agreed upon by the selection committee where the prosecutor can be recognized for his or her efforts. The Commission will distribute a news release announcing the prosecutor of the year and showcasing the exemplary work and contributions to protecting California's fish and wildlife resources.

(Adopted: 06/22/2016; Amended; 08/07/2019)

Signed original on file,
received March 10, 2026

State of California
Department of Fish and Wildlife

Memorandum

To: Chief Nathaniel Arnold
Law Enforcement Division

Date: December 16, 2025

From: Lieutenant Joseph Ames
Lieutenant Matt Gil
Law Enforcement Division

Subject: **San Luis Obispo Deputy District Attorney Ken Jorgensen**

Deputy District Attorney Ken Jorgensen exemplifies exceptional skill, unwavering dedication, and a profound commitment to protecting California's fish, wildlife, and natural resources. His work has transformed the prosecution of environmental crimes in San Luis Obispo County, setting a new standard for collaboration, innovation, and justice.

Exceptional Skill and Commitment to Wildlife Protection

DDA Jorgensen has been instrumental in advancing the Department's mission to manage California's diverse fish, wildlife, and plant resources and the habitats upon which they depend. His impact is particularly evident in his work with the Marine Enforcement Division in Morro Bay, where commercial fishing violations—once rarely prosecuted—are now met with meaningful consequences.

Through his leadership, repeat offenders who previously faced little deterrent are now being held accountable. One landmark case involved a commercial fisherman with a 15-year history of continual violations. Recently the fishman was found violating numerous regulations and laws including failing to check traps, invalid trap identification numbers, incomplete landing receipts, no commercial license in possession, no trap validation, no buoy reflectors and failure to follow federal groundfish regulations. Thanks to Jorgensen's meticulous handling, the case resulted in a \$12,500 fine and a five-year probationary period, sending a clear message that San Luis Obispo County enforces its commercial fishing regulations. This conviction also paved the way for an upcoming Commission Action in early 2026, further strengthening regulatory compliance.

Superior Performance in Prosecuting Wildlife and Environmental Crimes

Recent legislative changes have made many Fish and Wildlife crimes eligible for diversion, often resulting in minimal penalties. Jorgensen has countered this trend by pursuing civil actions when appropriate, securing stronger outcomes and steeper penalties than typical criminal prosecutions.

Notably, he successfully resolved two unlawful guiding cases this year. In one, an unlicensed guide profited over \$10,000 from illegal operations. Wildlife Officers set up an undercover hunt to catch the suspect in violation. Once the case was filed, DDA

Jorgensen, through strategic negotiations, secured a settlement nearly equal to the illicit earnings and obtained a permanent injunction against future violations. Importantly, he ensured a portion of the penalty funds stayed local, benefiting the San Luis Obispo County Fish and Game Commission.

In another case, Jorgensen prosecuted a guide/taxidermist who trespassed on private property to harass wildlife over a fence for his clients to shoot. His efforts resulted in significant fines and a permanent bar on trespassing, reinforcing ethical standards in wildlife-related businesses.

Relentless Pursuit of Justice in Complex, Landmark Cases

Deputy District Attorney Ken Jorgensen has repeatedly demonstrated his willingness to take on lengthy, complex cases and perform the in-depth work necessary to achieve justice. A prime example is his handling of a multi-year case involving the unlawful destruction of habitat for Pismo Clarkia, a federally endangered and state rare plant with one of the largest populations in the world in San Luis Obispo County.

Wildlife Officers began investigating in 2021 after discovering ongoing habitat destruction, knowing this would be a challenging case. Pismo Clarkia does not bloom every year and can be easily eradicated without leaving clear evidence of its ability to repopulate, making proof of harm exceptionally difficult. Despite these obstacles – and multiple changes in lead investigators – Jorgensen remained steadfast in his commitment to see the case through.

By 2023, Wildlife Officers submitted a report for numerous Fish and Game Code violations, including unlawful take of a state rare species, streambed alterations, and pollution. Initially, another prosecutor hesitated to pursue the case due to its complexity, but Jorgensen immediately stepped in. He reviewed the extensive CDFW reports and recognized the litigation would be long and contentious, yet he was undeterred.

When the subjects refused to cease their destructive activities and continued violating cease-and-desist orders, Jorgensen escalated enforcement. He coordinated a search warrant with DA investigators, CDFW, and other environmental agencies, uncovering even more extensive habitat destruction and ongoing violations. Realizing that criminal penalties alone would not stop the offenders, Jorgensen devised a creative legal strategy: combining Fish and Wildlife statutes with Business and Professions Code provisions to impose significant civil penalties.

He organized multiple meetings with CDFW's Office of General Counsel, environmental scientists, and Wildlife Officers to ensure alignment and strengthen the case. After years of relentless effort, the prosecution concluded in early 2025 with a landmark settlement:

- **\$165,350 in fines**
- **Permanent injunctions prohibiting streambed alterations, pollution, and any future take of Pismo Clarkia**

- **Settlement funds distributed among CDFW, the San Luis Obispo County District Attorney's Office, and the County Fish and Game Advisory Commission**

This case exemplifies Jorgensen's tenacity, creativity, and commitment to protecting California's most vulnerable resources. His work ensured that even a species that may not bloom annually remain safeguarded for future generations.

Exemplary Collaboration and Leadership

Beyond the courtroom, Jorgensen fosters a culture of cooperation and education. He initiated quarterly roundtable meetings with state, county, and local environmental enforcement agencies, creating a forum for sharing intelligence, trends, and best practices. These meetings have strengthened interagency coordination and improved investigative outcomes.

Jorgensen's hands-on approach—such as participating in a patrol boat Bluefin ride-along—underscores his commitment to understanding the challenges faced by Wildlife Officers. His openness to one-on-one case discussions and proactive guidance has earned him widespread respect among officers, many of whom rarely have such access to a prosecutor.

Deputy District Attorney Ken Jorgensen's exceptional skill, relentless pursuit of justice, and collaborative spirit have profoundly advanced the protection of California's natural resources. His work not only secures convictions but also sets lasting precedents that deter future violations. For these reasons, he is eminently deserving of the Wildlife Prosecutor of the Year Award for 2025.

Signed original on file,
received March 10, 2026

State of California
Department of Fish and Wildlife

Memorandum

To: Chief Nathaniel Arnold
Law Enforcement Division

Date: December 16, 2025

From: Lieutenant Specialist Garrett Smittle
Special Operations Unit
Law Enforcement Division

Subject: **Michael McCann – Wildlife Prosecutor of the Year Award**

The Special Operations Unit would like to nominate San Diego Deputy District Attorney Michael McCann as the 2025 Wildlife Prosecutor of the Year.

California is home to the fourth largest economy in the *world*. It contains three domestic borders, an international border, numerous seaports (including the busiest port in the United States-the Port of Los Angeles) and over 1,100 miles of coastline. All these facts also mean California is a hotbed for wildlife trafficking activity. San Diego County, with its proximity to the United States/Mexico international border, is a popular entry point for wildlife traffickers. The San Diego District Attorney's Office is a valuable CDFW partner due to this proximity and their nexus to illegal trafficking routes.

International wildlife trafficking is worth at least \$23 billion, and that number is expanding each year. Many forms of wildlife trafficking are also linked to other large-scale trafficking networks, including human trafficking, firearms trafficking, and drug trafficking.

Wildlife trafficking in California includes a variety of different species, from native fish and shellfish species to ivory and rhino horn, to live exotic animals. While all these categories are extremely detrimental in their own rights, exotic animal trafficking poses a very real, potentially devastating threat to California's diverse, fragile, ecosystems and their native occupants. With over 1500 endemic species, California is a biodiversity hotspot. The introduction of non-native wildlife species could mean the downfall of certain species and potentially entire ecosystems. California has an extensive list of wildlife species that could cause harm. These species are typically classified as either (W) "Welfare" or (D) "Detrimental." Welfare species are listed as such to prevent the depletion of wild populations and to provide for animal welfare. Detrimental species are classified as such because it has been determined that they pose a threat to native wildlife, agriculture, or public health. Unfortunately, many of these species are also extremely popular in the pet trade.

CDFW's Special Operation Unit (SOU) is tasked with seeking out and investigating these criminal, wildlife trafficking organizations and individuals. In recent years the SOU has observed a drastic increase in illegal trafficking of exotic, and venomous reptile. To

protect our native, wild species, all venomous reptile species (except for native California rattlesnakes), require a special permit issued by CDFW. These restricted reptiles remain in high demand in the pet trade across the world (including California).

Many of these criminal networks are underground and facilitated through private chat groups and social media pages. CDFW became aware of an entity on social media that appeared to be selling live Morelet's crocodiles (restricted within California). CDFW investigators contacted the San Diego County Deputy District Attorney, Michael McCann, and with his steadfast support, the SOU opened and conducted a comprehensive investigation. In addition to his support, Prosecutor McCann also offered the services of two District Attorney investigators to help with the case. This investigation involved numerous search warrants, and the evidence uncovered violations originating in San Diego County, with interstate and international illegal wildlife trafficking ties.

The suspects were engaged in trafficking numerous venomous and restricted species into and across California, including crocodiles, caimans, Gila monsters, snapping turtles, palm pit vipers, and Komodo island pit vipers. Many of these animals were hidden in small containers and driven across the San Ysidro border crossing.

San Diego Prosecutor McCann was in lockstep with CDFW investigators as the case progressed, from reviewing numerous search warrants prior to submission, to taking calls at all hours to discuss new intelligence or tactics. The SOU also discovered evidence of firearms and drug trafficking during the investigation, and with his history of prosecuting large-scale narcotics cases, Michael was able to successfully navigate these topics and provided outstanding prosecutorial support to our investigation.

Once the bulk of the investigation was completed, investigators drafted a residential search warrant with prompt review from Mr. McCann. During the execution of this warrant, wildlife officers discovered evidence of other crimes being committed, and a "piggyback" warrant was immediately sought. Mr. McCann dropped what he was doing to facilitate an expedited review of this warrant and ensured that it was on the judge's desk very quickly.

In the subsequent days, Mr. McCann continued to support investigating officers by approving additional search warrants, meeting with CDFW's Office of General Counsel, the Orange County District Attorney's Office (who also had a pending case against the same suspect), and the suspect's defense attorney.

Mr. McCann understands the importance of combatting illegal wildlife trafficking, both domestically and internationally. Throughout this investigation, he diligently researched and learned the complex laws related to the importation and possession of wildlife. He was always a phone call away from our investigators – just another example of Mr. McCann's willingness to go above and beyond to strengthen the bond between investigators and the district attorney's office.

At the conclusion of the investigation, which spanned almost two years, numerous unlawfully possessed wildlife species were seized and prevented from entering the illegal wildlife trafficking market. Multiple felony and misdemeanor charges were filed against the subject, including illegal wildlife possession and sales, illegal possession for sale of controlled substances, and illegal possession of firearms. The evidence uncovered in this case also revealed an intricate underground network of illegal wildlife traffickers working within California, and Mr. McCann is already on board moving forward on these new suspects in the coming future.

Mr. McCann was able to successfully negotiate a global plea deal with the suspect, San Diego County and Orange County, prior to a jury trial. Part of this successful negotiation was due to the mountain of evidence compiled over the past years, as CDFW and Mr. McCann collaboratively worked on this investigation together.

This successful investigation, and case resolution, would not have been possible without Mr. McCann's tenacious prosecution, and willingness to go the extra mile. This example sets a high bar for future and ongoing wildlife trafficking cases. The success of this case will likely deter future would-be smugglers from engaging in such activity and may have saved some of California's fragile ecosystems from an untimely end. The Special Operations Unit found an excellent asset to build collaborative alliances in San Diego County any beyond with Prosecutor Michael McCann. His partnership is an outstanding example of how long-term, complex investigations into illegal wildlife trafficking can be enhanced through dedicated prosecution.

It is for these reasons the Special Operations Unit nominates Mr. Michael McCann as the 2025 Wildlife Prosecutor of the Year.