

Staff Summary for October 13-16, 2026

13B. 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**

A Department news release (Exhibit 1) reports that its new Bobcat Population Monitoring Project report — its most comprehensive bobcat survey to date — finds an estimated, stable statewide population of about 62,000 bobcats, distributed across most of California except major urban centers and heavily farmed parts of the Central Valley. Using modern tools such as GPS collars, fecal DNA, camera traps, and carcass necropsies, the five-year study shows bobcats to be highly adaptable carnivores capable of living in nearly any terrestrial habitat, though local populations can fluctuate due to factors like wildfire impacts and habitat loss.

Exhibit 2 is a Department news release outlining efforts by Department scientists, working closely with federal partners, to monitor the Sacramento River as extreme heat and limited cold water reserves at Shasta Reservoir threaten winter- and fall-run Chinook salmon.

A Department news release (Exhibit 3) announces the winner of the 2026 California Duck Stamp Art Contest.

Announcing yet another historic partnership with California tribes, the Department acquired 640 acres of high-value western Joshua tree habitat in San Bernardino County using the Western Joshua Tree Conservation Fund. The land will be co-managed by the Department and California Native American tribes. With this purchase, 923 acres have now been conserved, and additional acquisitions are being explored. The Department has also launched a new webpage detailing revenues, expenditures, and conservation actions funded by more than \$23.5 million in collected permit-mitigation fees dedicated exclusively to western Joshua tree protection and management. (Exhibit 4)

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

1. [Department news release, "CDFW Completes Bobcat Population Survey, Finds Stable Statewide Numbers Estimated at 62,000 Animals," dated August 31, 2026](#)
2. [Department news release, "Reminder of the Importance of Cold Water to Restore and Protect Salmon," dated September 4, 2026](#)
3. [Department news release, "Indiana Artist Wins 2026 California Duck Stamp Art Contest," dated September 10, 2026](#)

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4. [Department news release, "High-Quality Western Joshua Tree Habitat Acquired, to be Co-Managed by CDFW and Native American Tribes," dated September 17, 2026](#)

Motion (N/A)



CDFW NEWS

CDFW Completes Bobcat Population Survey, Finds Stable Statewide Numbers Estimated at 62,000 Animals

August 31, 2026



The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) is pleased to present the [California Bobcat Population Monitoring Project's Report of Findings \(PDF\)\(external link\)](#), the most extensive and comprehensive bobcat population survey ever conducted in California, and

possibly anywhere in the United States, and one that leveraged the best available scientific tools and techniques in the process.

The 140-page report was developed over five years and found bobcat populations distributed throughout the entire state with the exception of major urban areas and portions of the Central Valley subject to intense agricultural production.

The report estimates a stable, statewide population of 62,000 bobcats. Two previous statewide estimates from the 1970s and 1980s, which relied on less rigorous techniques, estimated 61,000 and 74,000 bobcats, respectively.

CDFW's latest findings incorporated modern scientific tools such as GPS satellite collars, fecal DNA analysis, camera traps and necropsies of bobcat carcasses from across the state to determine population size and health.

"What we've learned is that these charismatic wild felines are incredibly adaptable and can live in just about any part of the state," said Rachel Roberts, a Senior Environmental Scientist and CDFW's Statewide Bobcat Coordinator. "They can live in almost any type of terrestrial habitat. They're strictly carnivores but will eat almost any kind of meat. And while the statewide population seems stable, various factors can cause local growth and decline."

The California Bobcat Population Monitoring Project was born in 2020 after the enactment of California Assembly Bill 1254, which made it illegal to hunt, trap or otherwise take a bobcat, except under specified circumstances, including under a depredation permit. The legislation directed CDFW to develop a bobcat conservation and management plan before bobcat hunting could again be considered.

The California Bobcat Population Monitoring Project's Report of Findings is the first step in complying with the legislative mandate. CDFW expects to publish a draft Bobcat Conservation and Management Plan within the next 30 days. The draft plan, which will include bobcat biology, ecology, historical management information, Tribal perspectives and future management recommendations, will be available for a 30-day public and Tribal review period.

Other noteworthy findings within the Bobcat Population Monitoring Project Report include:

- Lower densities of bobcats were recorded in areas of major wildfire scars. While some species are well adapted to fire-scarred areas, catastrophic wildfires create large swaths of land with little to no suitable bobcat habitat.
- More bobcats were found in higher elevation areas than expected.
- Most human-bobcat conflicts involve chickens that are either unprotected or housed in poorly secured coops.

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CDFW NEWS

Reminder of the Importance of Cold Water to Restore and Protect Salmon

September 4, 2026



CDFW Scientists Keeping an Eye on River Conditions to Protect Winter-and-Fall-Run Salmon

As California continues to feel the impacts of a heat dome that is bringing higher than normal temperatures to large portions of the state, it's a good time to remember that fish and wildlife

— especially salmon — need cold water, too. River temperature management is critical for salmon's survival and spawning.

Earlier this year, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) announced that commercial ocean salmon fishing was back after being closed for three straight years. To avoid salmon impacts that could result in a return to salmon season closures, we need to ensure cold water pools are preserved, when possible, to help preserve and protect California's salmon populations.

CDFW and federal and state partners are working to monitor river conditions to give endangered Sacramento River winter-run Chinook salmon eggs a chance for survival after their spawning was observed several weeks later than usual. The eggs of late-season spawning fish can be at risk due to decreases in river flows and warmer water temperatures.

CDFW and partners are also closely monitoring flow and temperature conditions for Sacramento River fall-run Chinook salmon spawning that will follow winter-run spawning.

In July, during peak winter-run Chinook salmon spawning, water releases from Shasta Dam were elevated to meet downstream water demand for municipal and agricultural uses, and Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta water quality requirements, but those flows will drop significantly heading into fall. At the same time, Shasta Reservoir has below-average cold-water reserves despite high overall storage volume, making it harder to keep river temperatures cool through November and beyond when eggs are still developing.

Monitoring by CDFW, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission (PSMFC) will provide fisheries information and recommendations to the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) to inform adjustments to Shasta Dam operations to protect these salmon that have deep cultural significance for Native American tribes and play a critical role in California's biodiversity and commercial and recreational ocean salmon fisheries.

"CDFW and our partners are using a number of tools to help inform Reclamation operations to maximize survival of the next generation of Sacramento River winter-run Chinook salmon — one of the state's most endangered fish — and for fall-run Chinook," said CDFW Northern Region Manager Jason Roberts. "We are committed to providing data and technical input to Reclamation with the goal of maximizing the survival of these salmon eggs through an unfavorable situation."

Fall-run Chinook salmon begin spawning in the Sacramento River when eggs from winter-run Chinook salmon that spawned in late July and early August may still be in their gravel egg nests, called redds. Great care must be taken to simultaneously ensure winter-run Chinook salmon redds are protected, establish suitable flow conditions prior to the onset of fall-run Chinook salmon spawning and refill Shasta Reservoir for the next season.

CDFW, USFWS and PSMFC teams are surveying 26 miles of river from Keswick Dam northwest of Redding to Balls Ferry east of Anderson. Using boat and aerial surveys, scientists map locations of salmon egg nests and measure water depths to understand which redds may face higher risks as river flows and temperatures change.

CDFW and PSMFC staff are closely monitoring 103 winter-run Chinook salmon redds that were constructed by salmon in shallow water this year when flow releases from Shasta were

greatest. Crews will monitor these redds repeatedly as flow conditions change until the fry have emerged from the gravel.

Since May, field crews have also collected data from more than 6,300 winter-run Chinook salmon carcasses. Chinook salmon die after they spawn, and their bodies provide fisheries biologists with information to understand when they were born, where they've been and the health of the population.

Temperature loggers placed in the river help scientists estimate when eggs will finish hatching. This data informs Reclamation operations at Shasta Dam as they make flow decisions aimed at supplying enough water for redds to support successful hatching. Dam operators are also able to pull water from different reservoir depths, but cooling the river only works if enough cold water remains in the system.

CDFW scientists monitoring Sacramento River winter-run Chinook Salmon in the upper Sacramento River estimate that approximately 20 percent of the eggs spawned this year may not survive the rising temperatures, based on modeling from UC Santa Cruz and the NOAA Southwest Fisheries Science Center.

Winter-run salmon are so-named for the winter season in which they leave the ocean and enter the Sacramento River. They spawn in the summertime, building redds in the cool, clean gravel beds near Redding. Their eggs remain in the river for about three months, relying on steady, cold water flowing from Shasta Dam to survive the Central Valley heat. Fall-run Chinook salmon are traditionally the river's largest run of Chinook salmon, and CDFW expects a robust return of fall-run Chinook salmon to the Sacramento River this fall. Critically important economically and environmentally, CDFW and partners are working to advocate for suitable river conditions this year for both winter-run and fall-run Chinook salmon.

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CDFW NEWS

Indiana Artist Wins 2026 California Duck Stamp Art Contest

September 10, 2026



A painting by Jeffrey Klinefelter of Etna Green, Ind., has been chosen as the winner of the 2026 California Duck Stamp Art Contest. Klinefelter's painting, which depicts a

greater white-fronted goose, will be the official design for the 2026-27 California Duck Stamp.

The judging was held in June, with entries evaluated by a panel of experts in ornithology, conservation, art and printing. Designs were judged on originality, artistic composition, anatomical accuracy and suitability for reproduction as a stamp and print.

Judge Andrea Mott, Migratory Game Bird Biologist with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), was impressed by Klinefelter's winning painting.

"Wow, just wow. This will make a charming stamp. The background is well-suited for California. The image is incredibly lifelike and detailed. It's a great representation of the species," Mott said.

Diane Ford received second place in the competition; Donald Shlie received third place and Lee Hoemann received honorable mention.

The greater white-fronted goose, often referred to as a "specklebelly" or "speck" by waterfowl hunters, was selected by the California Fish and Game Commission as the species for the 2026-27 California Duck Stamp. The species is characterized by its brownish-gray body, barred belly and distinctive white forehead. Greater white-fronted geese breed in the Arctic tundra and migrate to wintering areas that include California's Central Valley where they can be found in large flocks on wetlands and agricultural fields.

Klinefelter is an accomplished wildlife artist who has previously won California stamp art competitions. He won the 2020-21 California Duck Stamp Art Contest and has also won multiple California Upland Game Bird Stamp Art contests.

Artists from around the country submitted entries for the contest that was sponsored by CDFW. The annual competition was established in 1971 and is open to artists from across the United States, to attract a wide range of wildlife artists.

All proceeds generated from California Duck Stamp sales go directly to waterfowl conservation projects throughout California. Although hunters are no longer required to carry a physical stamp in the field because California's automated licensing system provides proof of the purchase on the license, CDFW continues to produce the stamps, which are available to hunters and collectors upon request.

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CDFW NEWS

[High-Quality Western Joshua Tree Habitat Acquired, to be Co-Managed by CDFW and Native American Tribes](#)

September 17, 2026



Western Joshua Tree Conservation Fund Web Page Announced

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) has made a significant purchase of western Joshua tree habitat using the Western Joshua Tree Conservation Fund. The land will be co-managed by CDFW and California Native American tribes.

On Aug. 24, CDFW acquired 640 acres of western Joshua tree habitat northwest of Pioneertown in San Bernardino County. According to research, this property is highly likely to provide the best future suitable western Joshua tree habitat in Southern California based on environmental factors and climate projections.

The land acquisition will contribute to meeting conservation targets laid out in the Western Joshua Tree Conservation Plan. CDFW is now working with the Native American Land Conservancy on plans for long-term protection and co-management of the property by CDFW and California Native American tribes.

“This is an example of the Western Joshua Tree Conservation Plan successfully put into action, as was intended, to help us protect this unique species in collaboration with tribal partners,” said CDFW Director Meghan Hertel. “There is nothing else quite like the western Joshua tree. They are an important part of Native American cultural traditions, a keystone species for our desert ecosystems and they are also a sight worth taking a road trip for.”

The western Joshua tree is a slow-growing succulent that is culturally significant to Native American Tribes and an icon of the American Southwest. These unique monocots face threats such as wildfire, land development and a warming climate.

“We are so blessed to be able to steward this place into the future,” said Native American Land Conservancy President Michael Madrigal (Cahuilla Tribe). “I will never forget the first time I went to this new preserve. It is such an amazing place with some of the largest Joshua trees I have ever seen.”

This is the second property acquired using funds from the Western Joshua Tree Conservation Fund. A total of 923 acres of habitat have now been conserved; CDFW is currently looking into additional properties totaling 2,500 acres.

Western Joshua Tree Conservation Fund Web Page Launched

CDFW recently launched a new web page that shows revenue and expenses related to the Western Joshua Tree Conservation Fund, which is where collected take permit mitigation fees are deposited to be used for conservation and management of western Joshua tree habitat.

The Western Joshua Tree Conservation Act prohibits take of western Joshua tree without a CDFW-issued permit. Permit fees are deposited into the Western Joshua Tree Conservation Fund and used solely for the purposes of acquiring, conserving and managing western Joshua tree conservation lands and completing other activities to conserve the western Joshua tree. To date, more than \$23.5 million has gone into the Western Joshua Tree Conservation Fund.

This new web page shows money spent, committed and reserved from the Western Joshua Tree Conservation Fund, and is organized by conservation action categories identified in the Western Joshua Tree Conservation Act. These categories are land acquisition and conservation easements, restoration, monitoring, endowments for land management and transaction costs.

The Western Joshua Tree Conservation Fund web page will be updated regularly to reflect the Western Joshua Tree Conservation Fund balance and expenditures.

To learn more, visit the Western Joshua Tree Conservation Fund web page at <https://wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Environmental-Review/WJT/WJTCA/Fund>.

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Photo caption: Western Joshua trees are pictured at the recently acquired, 640-acre property near Pioneertown, San Bernardino County, that will provide high-quality habitat for the species. Photo courtesy of the Native American Land Conservancy

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