

SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Ricardo Lara, Chair
2015 - 2016 Regular Session

AB 1201 (Salas) - Fish and wildlife: Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta: predation by nonnative species.

Version: August 17, 2015

Policy Vote: N.R. & W. 9 - 0

Urgency: No

Mandate: No

Hearing Date: August 17, 2015

Consultant: Marie Liu

This bill meets the criteria for referral to the Suspense File.

Bill Summary: AB 1201 would require the Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) to develop a plan by June 30, 2016 to reduce predation by nonnative fish species upon salmon, native species, and threatened and endangered species.

Fiscal Impact:

- One-time costs of at least \$750,000 to the General Fund to develop the predation reduction plan.
- Unknown cost pressures, likely in the millions of dollars to the General Fund to implement the plan.

Background: The California Endangered Species Act (CESA) aims to protect all species of plants and animals, and their habitat, which are threatened with extinction or are experiencing a significant decline which, if not halted, would lead to a threatened or endangered designation. DFW is responsible for the implementation of CESA.

The Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta is the largest estuarine system on the west coast. It serves as important and unique habitat for native wildlife, including Chinook salmon, steelhead, and numerous CESA listed species such as the Delta smelt. The Delta also serves as the “switching yard” for the state’s water distribution system.

The Delta is also the home of many introduced, non-native species, including striped bass, which prey upon salmon and other fish. Parties with interest in the Delta disagree on the extent that predation is responsible for the decline of CESA-listed species, such as the Delta smelt, relative to lack of instream flows and loss of habitat.

Proposed Law: This bill would require DFW to develop a science-based plan by June 30, 2016 to address predation by nonnative species upon CESA-listed and unlisted species that live in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, including a reduction of predation of all Chinook salmon. The plan may include prioritization and phasing of approaches that are the most practical and effective in addressing predation issues. The plan would be required to include DFW’s existing predation research.

In developing the plan, DFW would be required to actively solicit the input of the scientific community, including the Delta Independent Science board and all interested stakeholders.

DFW would only be able to implement the program if funding is made available.

Related Legislation: AB 1253 (Fuller, 2009) would have removed the existing restrictions on the commercial possession or sale of striped bass, and on the taking of striped bass with nets. AB 1253 was later amended to deal with another subject.

AB 2336 (Fuller, 2010) would have required the Delta Stewardship Council, in the course of developing and implementing the Delta plan, to direct the Delta Independent Science Board to conduct an assessment of the other stressors on populations of native species in the Delta. AB 2336 was held in the Senate Natural Resources Committee.

Staff Comments: To develop the predation reduction plan, DFW anticipates needing at least six new staff positions including three environmental scientists, one senior environmental scientist supervisor, one senior environmental scientist specialist, and an associate governmental program analyst at an annual cost of approximately \$750,000. There is limited information on recommended actions that can be taken to reduce predation, thus these costs can be seen as a minimum because DFW may find it needs additional staff to identify and prioritize actions that can be taken to address predation issues as required by the bill. These costs would come from the General Fund.

DFW estimates that to implement the plan, would necessitate a total of 10 staff positions and approximately \$5 million in one-time costs for boats, vehicles, contracts and equipment. Because this bill states that DFW would not be responsible for implementing this plan unless funding is made available, these costs would be cost pressures.

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