

Staff Report 75

PROPOSED ACTION:

Consider supporting the codification of a beaver restoration program in California through collaboration with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and support of [AB 2196](#) (Connolly).

BACKGROUND AND PROPOSED LEGISLATION:

Interest in beaver restoration and awareness about their tremendous ecological benefits has garnered an enormous amount of excitement in recent years. In 2022, the Legislature allocated over \$3 million dollars in funding to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to create and sustain a beaver restoration program. In 2023, the Legislature authorized the Department to expend an additional \$2 million dollars for grants in support of beaver coexistence. Since then, the Department has hired five full-time professionals to staff the program and relocated a family of seven beavers to the ancestral lands of the Mountain Maidu people, California's first successful relocation in more than 75 years.

To relocate beavers is to move them from a site where their activities are damaging the land to an approved site where they have the potential to thrive and improve the environment. Landowners can work with a governmental entity to relocate beaver families rather than kill them. Relocating involves coordination among biologists, governmental entities, Tribes, and others and includes habitat evaluation and monitoring.

[AB 2196](#) requires the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, through consultation with beaver restoration program partners, to develop a program to promote beaver restoration across California by revising beaver related policies and guidelines, coordinating restoration efforts, proactively mitigating human-beaver conflict, and relocating beavers into watersheds. Beaver restoration program partners include federal agencies, nonprofit organizations, federally recognized tribes, non-federally recognized California Native American tribes

included on the contact list maintained by the Native American Heritage Commission, academic programs, and other entities.

Nobody knows how many beavers are in California, but we know that their population in North America has declined from 100-200 million to roughly 10-15 million because of human exploitation and nuisance eradication. For decades, beavers were seen as pests, rather than as an important keystone species. Beaver restoration has taken on more salience in recent years as the world grapples with climate change and the loss of biodiversity. Interest in beaver benefits was sharpened with the publication of “Eager: The Surprising, Secret Life of Beavers and Why They Matter” (2019) by Ben Goldfarb, which described how ecosystems with beavers are far healthier than those without them. A consortium of “beaver-believers,” scientists, land managers, farmers, ranchers, environmental NGOs, and others, have been shouting from the rooftops about these incredible ecosystem engineers that can ameliorate environmental problems and mitigate climate change.

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife wrote in a 2022 budget change proposal that “Beavers are an untapped, creative climate-solving hero that helps prevent the loss of biodiversity facing California.” The Governor’s 2020 [30 x 30 initiative](#) states that California’s long-term vitality is threatened by the loss of biodiversity. According to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, “[t]he North American Beaver (*Castor canadensis*) is both an ecosystem engineer, helping to create and maintain diverse habitat throughout the state, and a keystone species, filling a critically important role in maintaining the ecosystem for the other species that depend on it.”

In late April, California unveiled [81 targets](#) for nature-based solutions that will help California achieve its world-leading climate goals, including reaching carbon neutrality by 2045. The targets include a recommendation to restore meadow wetlands through restoring proper hydrologic flow, removing conifer encroachment, and/or beaver reintroduction. These nature-based solution targets are connected to the state’s Natural Working Lands/Climate Smart Strategy and both are components of [AB 1757](#) (2022, C. Garcia).

Environmental groups, in a letter submitted in support of including beaver and process-based restoration in the California Natural and Working Lands Climate Smart Strategy, state, “The scientific literature indicates that beaver dams and associated ponds help mitigate the impacts of climate change, drought and wildfire through sequestering carbon, increasing surface and groundwater storage,

attenuating flood waters and creating green ribbons of fire-resistant riparian corridor that serve as critical refugia for species unable to escape fire.”

The California Association of Professional Scientists, which also supports AB 2196, notes that “Beavers have proven to be one of nature’s most effective ecological engineers. Their impact on California’s ecosystem cannot be understated. Beavers maintain our natural habitats, improve biodiversity, reduce flooding, create natural fire breaks, and improve hydrologic conditions.” Environmental groups also point out that “To help ensure that the full complement of California’s efforts associated with beaver restoration remains a state and department priority, it is important and valuable to codify the core activities described in the Budget Change Proposal that created the beaver restoration program at the department. AB 2196 ensures that the leadership and effort of the last few years will continue and ensures a legacy...of a new and enduring chapter of ecological leadership.”

This past January, Governor Newsom heralded a new Salmon Strategy that commits to complete at least two more beaver relocation pilots this year, advancing partnerships with Tribal Nations, like the Tule River Tribe, and conservation organizations.

Embracing the benefits of beaver restoration fits into the Commission’s ethos and role as a public land manager. The California Department of Fish and Wildlife has already received funding to operate a beaver restoration program and has developed a [modern beaver policy](#) that recognizes the tremendous ecological benefits of beavers. But that funding and policy do not have the same force as a statute. Codifying this program elevates it and ensures that the important work and ecological benefits endure. It fortifies it against upheaval in the event of future non-beaver-believing leadership. Beavers really are a true marvel and a “climate-saving hero.” The beaver restoration program that AB 2196 would codify embodies the Commission’s climate activism, collaborative leadership, and tribal partnership goals. It can also facilitate the potential relocation of beavers to lands under the Commission’s jurisdiction one day.

OTHER PERTINENT INFORMATION:

1. AB 2196 is supported by the California Association of Professional Scientists, 350 Humboldt, 350 Sacramento, Active San Gabriel Valley, Beaver Institute, California Coastkeeper Alliance, California Indian Environmental Alliance, California Trout, CalWILD, Clean Water Action, Center for Biological Diversity,

Cleanearth4kids, Climate Action California, National Wildlife Federation, Natural Heritage Institute, Occidental Arts and Ecology Center, Ohlone Humane Society Wildlife Rehabilitation Center, San Diego Humane Society, San Luis Obispo Beaver Brigade, Scott River Watershed Council, Sierra Wildlife Rescue, Swift Water Design, the Climate Center, Wildlands Network, Tuolumne River Trust, Trout Unlimited, Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, the Rewilding Institute, The Nature Conservancy, The Pacific Forest Trust, Mount Shasta Bioregional Ecology Center, Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District, Friends of the River, Freshwater Life, Environmental Protection Information Center, Environmental Action Committee of West Marin, Defenders of Wildlife, Community Alliance with Family Farmers, Climate Reality Project, San Fernando Valley Chapter, Climate Reality Project, San Francisco Chapter, Sequoia Riverlands Trust, and the Planning and Conservation League.

2. AB 2196 has no known opposition.
3. AB 2196 received overwhelming bipartisan support in the Assembly, is awaiting referral in the Senate Rules Committee, and has received no “no” votes.

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

It is recommended that the Commission:

Support the codification of a beaver restoration program in California through collaboration with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and support of [AB 2196](#) (Connolly).