STATE OF CALIFORNIA
Budget Change Proposal - Cover Sheet
DF-46 (REV 03/25)

Fiscal Year	Business Unit Number	Department
2026-27	3600	Fish and Wildlife

Hyperion Budget Request Name	Relevant Program or Subprogram
3600-019-BCP-2026-GB	2590 and 2605

Budget Request Title
Cannabis Impacted Lands

Budget Request Summary
The California Department of Fish and Wildlife requests 22 positions (permanent position authority only) to further assess, mitigate and remediate cannabis impacted lands owned by the department, California Native American Tribes, and local jurisdictions, in addition to increasing enforcement support in Northern California. The positions will be funded by the department's existing authority provided through the continuous appropriation from the Cannabis Tax Fund – Department of Fish and Wildlife, Environmental Restoration and Protection Account - Allocation 3 (Allocation 3).

Requires Legislation (submit required legislation with the BCP)	Code Section(s) to be Added/Amended/Repealed
☐ Trailer Bill Language ☐ Budget Bill Language ☒ N/A	Click or tap here to enter text.

Does this BCP contain information technology (IT) components? ☐ Yes ☒ No *If yes, departmental Chief Information Officer must sign*.	Department CIO	Date
	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap to enter a date.

For IT requests, specify the project number, the most recent project approval document (FSR, SPR, S1BA, S2AA, S3SD, S4PRA), the approval date, and the total project cost.

Project No. Click or tap here to enter text.

Approval Date: Click or tap to enter a date.

Project Approval Document: Click or tap here to enter text.

Total Project Cost: Click or tap here to enter text.

If proposal affects another department, does other department concur with proposal? ☐ Yes ☐ No
Attach comments of affected department, signed and dated by the department director or designee.

Prepared By	Date	Reviewed By	Date
Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap to enter a date.	Nicole Nelson	1/9/2026
Department Director	**Date**	**Agency Secretary**	**Date**
Valerie Termini	1/9/2026	Bryan Cash	1/9/2026

Department of Finance Use Only

Additional Review: ☐ Capital Outlay ☐ ITCU ☐ FSCU ☐ OSAE ☐ Dept. of Technology

Principal Program Budget Analyst	Date submitted to the Legislature
Andrew Hull	1/9/2026

A. Problem Statement

A cornerstone of the department's Cannabis Program is protecting public lands from cultivation and the associated environmental damage per Revenue and Taxation Code Section 34019(f)(2)(B) and Fish and Game Code Section 12029(c). This responsibility spans over 141 ecological reserves, 85 public access properties, 109 wildlife areas, and 309 undesignated properties totaling more than 1.2 million acres. This does not include the department's real property interest obligations to monitor and protect 180,000 acres of mitigation lands and conservation easements without dedicated staff assigned to the land. The department lands (owned, managed, or monitored) serve a variety of purposes, from protecting sensitive wildlife, plant, and habitat communities, to providing access to hunting, fishing, and other forms of public recreation.

Unfortunately, many of the attributes that make the department lands desirable as wildlife habitat and public recreation sites (remoteness, minimal staffing, water sources, vegetative cover, etc.), also make them susceptible to cannabis cultivation and related illegal activities. These activities result in habitat degradation, fragmentation, pollution, poaching, land clearing, water theft and stream impairments, and undermine the legal cannabis market.

In 2019, the department targeted this problem with resources provided through Revenue and Taxation Code 34019(f)(2)(B). The department received position authority for seven scientists (Cannabis Lands Team) to initiate a statewide program to assess environmental impacts and implement land stewardship focused on preventing and deterring illegal cannabis and related activities, and developing and implementing projects to clean up, remediate, restore and monitor cannabis impacted lands. The Cannabis Lands Team developed 15 projects totaling over $5 million in addition to developing a statewide assessment and prioritization of department lands in need of boundary surveys before further protections can be implemented (e.g. fencing and signage) to prevent and deter illegal cannabis and related activities. Only a small portion of the department lands can be prioritized each year for the initial seven positions to conduct inspections, assess impacts, monitor fish and wildlife resources, and develop and implement projects. This workload is beyond what existing staffing can support, to further the program goals related to department lands impacted by cannabis or related activities.

Moreover, the department's efforts have not yet included assessing or addressing impacts to California Native American Tribes and their ancestral lands. However, the environmental damage occurring on tribal land may be similar if not worse than what has been observed on California's public lands. The department has received formal requests to assist with monitoring and assessing impacts to tribal resources and local jurisdictions. It is anticipated that these requests will lead to an increased workload to enforce Fish and Game Code violations and mitigate impacts to fish and wildlife resources. In addition, the tribal partnerships will increase the department's formal consultation requests with tribes to ensure early and meaningful engagement. This workload cannot be initiated or sustained by existing scientific or administrative staffing.

There are department lands with unclear and unmarked borders or with encroachment issues or boundaries in dispute. The Cannabis Program's sole land surveyor completes an average of 10 projects annually, which does not meet the average yearly demand ranging from 15-18 projects since 2020. It is anticipated that the tribal and local jurisdiction public lands will also require property boundary surveys to resolve land ownership issues. Through these efforts, the department ensures violations are associated with the appropriate responsible party, and cleanup projects are implemented within the legal boundaries of tribal and public lands. This workload is more than the current land surveyor can accomplish alone.

California's environment continues to suffer the effects of illegal cultivation. For example, from January 2022 to December of 2024 there was a 209.5 percent increase in enforcement operations on illegal cannabis grows in Mendocino County. The enforcement work derived

from the enormous amount of illegal cannabis activity in the county is far too great to be addressed by the department's Mendocino dedicated enforcement squad, comprised of one Lieutenant Supervisor and six Wildlife Officers. A key component of successful prosecution is evidence collection, processing, and tracking. The volume of evidence seized annually during Cannabis Enforcement Program operations is overwhelming under current staffing conditions.

This situation is compounded by the return of cultivators to the unregulated market because they failed to meet the requirements of state or local licensing. Two key factors include: the sunsetting of state provisional licensing will result in many cultivators unable to meet the annual licensure requirements; and heightened administrative enforcement such as tax payments and enrollment fees will result in cultivators losing their legal basis to cultivate. The administrative tools do not guarantee that cultivators will cease operations and create an increased need for enforcement. While enforcement is a necessary part of the functional marketplace, the unintended consequence could be increased illegal cultivation and associated environmental damage.

Based on the past 10 years of Cannabis Program work, data shows a direct correlation with increased the department presence resulting in decreased cultivation impacts and increased conservation benefits. While much progress has been made, the scope and scale of the areas to be protected gives rise to needing increased support for assessment, mitigation, remediation and enforcement on public and tribal lands. Cumulatively, these efforts will lead to successful case prosecution, remediation of environmental damage, and positive public safety outcomes.

The Governor's Unified Cannabis Enforcement Task Force (UCETF) is co-led by the department and has a mission to aggressively combat the illicit market to support licensed operators. Since the UCETF inception in 2022, criminal investigations have risen commensurately with the onboarding of specially trained officers and increased access to investigatory resources. The department has led 67 percent of the 560 UCETF operations from 2022 through August 2025, with 129 of those occurring in 2025. UCETF operations are more extensive than ordinary criminal investigations in that they focus on organized crime, transnational drug trafficking, tax-fraud related felonies, and environmental damage related to cannabis cultivation. As a co-lead for UCETF, the department will continue to pursue these extensive criminal investigations, with a goal to increase operational tempo. The increased operations cannot be supported by current enforcement staffing.

Workload History

Workload Measure	PY – 4	PY – 3	PY – 2	PY-1	PY	CY*
Fish and Game Code Section 12025 Administrative Cases Initiated	1	15	20	7	14	0
Administrative Cases Referred to Department's Office of General Counsel	2	25	30	12	17	2
Warrants Served	573	1,008	1,440	1,015	960	236
Multiagency Taskforce Inspections or Case Coordination	357	205	300	492	427	95
Illegal Cannabis Plants Eradicated	12,489,283**	2,397,377	2,563,400	1,720,169	1,402,776	577,921
Trespass Sites Cleaned Up or Reclaimed	Unknown	34	45	18	25	1
Environmental Violations Documented	959	1,863	2,100	1,494	1,348	355

* Projections for 2025-26
**11 million plants are from two operations

B. Justification

The requested positions are essential to expanding and strengthening the department's capacity to protect public and tribal lands from the escalating threats posed by illegal cannabis cultivation. By establishing specialized scientific teams dedicated to unique geographic regions and watersheds, the department will enhance its ability to assess, mitigate, and remediate environmental impacts while fostering vital partnerships with local jurisdictions and local tribes to safeguard their ancestral resources.

Fostering tribal partnerships will increase the department's need for additional administrative support to ensure early and meaningful consultation. In addition, the administrative positions will analyze and audit cannabis tax funds and perform administrative tasks associated with specialized service contracts necessary to address impacts in discreet geographic areas. Furthermore, administrative positions are needed to support coordination with local jurisdictions to assess cleanup, remediation and restoration opportunities on cannabis impacted lands. Last, there will be correspondence and reports documenting environmental impacts to be processed, tracked and disseminated by the new administrative staff. This administrative support is essential to successfully resolving the environmental impacts on public and tribal lands.

The scientific teams will allow for increased presence and monitoring on department lands, serving discreet geographic areas. In addition, they will document environmental impacts, support prosecution of violations in coordination with law enforcement, coordinate with tribes and local jurisdictions on cleanup, remediation and restoration opportunities, conduct consultations for early and meaningful engagement with tribes, and develop, implement and coordinate projects to address environmental impacts on public and tribal lands. The land surveyor will provide technical expertise and legal surveying records to resolve landowner disputes and support the increased demand for property boundary surveys. These survey records will allow for increased protection of public and tribal lands, prosecution of appropriate responsible parties and implementation of cleanup projects within the legal boundaries of tribal and public lands.

Given the 209.5 percent increase in cannabis-related investigations from 2022 to 2024, particularly in northern California where outdoor cultivation and resource impacts are most acute, an increased law enforcement presence is critical to deter illegal activities and enforce Fish and Game Code violations and other environmental impacts effectively. The current burden on existing personnel, including the department's Cannabis Enforcement Program and minimally staffed Mendocino County Sheriff's Office, compromises statewide coverage and enforcement responsiveness.

In addition, expanding analytical support through Research Data Specialists will provide real-time investigative research, evidence analysis, and data trend identification essential for dismantling illicit cannabis operations connected to organized crime. This enhanced technical capacity is necessary to meet the growing complexity of investigations and to support successful prosecutions that uphold the integrity of the legal cannabis market and promote public safety. In addition, they will expand the technical and investigative capacity of the Cannabis Enforcement Program, thereby increasing the department's ability to further the UCETF mission and fulfill the co-lead commitments.

Further, augmenting Property Controller positions in Southern California will ensure meticulous and organized evidence management in compliance with legal and audit requirements. These positions will also manage past evidence records, assist in disposal of unneeded property, and ensure the appropriate distribution of State property. These positions will enable the department to handle the increasing volume of seized evidence efficiently across the state.

Collectively, these positions will empower the department to extend its reach beyond current limitations, addressing both the environmental degradation of public and tribal lands and the operational challenges of enforcement and evidence management. This investment directly supports the mandate under Revenue and Taxation Code Section 34019(f)(2) and Fish and Game Code Section 12029 to protect California's natural resources and uphold the rule of law in the face of ongoing illegal cannabis cultivation. Lastly, the requested positions provide a range of business support services and technical expertise necessary to carry out the enhanced program operations.

C. Departmentwide and Statewide Considerations

California's course to legalize medical and adult-use cannabis requires well defined permitting, licensing, and enforcement processes to ensure the commercial industry's compliance with environmental protections and to minimize, mitigate, and remediate impacts to the state's fish and wildlife and their ecosystems caused by illegal cultivation. Advancing these protections supports the state's broader strategic goals of environmental stewardship, public safety, and equity by ensuring that lawful operators—particularly affecting communities historically harmed—can compete on a level playing field.

The department works closely with many state departments, including the Department of Cannabis Control (DCC), the State Water Resources Control Board, the Department of Parks and Recreation, and the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection to address cannabis cultivation related impacts. These state agencies and other partners have sought to raise

awareness of the natural resource damages from cannabis cultivation. Also, the department's enforcement staff are often the most effective at deterring unlicensed conduct and documenting environmental harm. The regulated market will only thrive once there are fewer unlicensed cultivators than licensed cultivators. Increasing statewide enforcement efforts is an essential part of supporting the legal market. The Governor's Unified Cannabis Enforcement Taskforce is furthering this work to support the legal market. The proposed positions will provide greater capacity to develop and implement shared program objectives and strategies to address cultivation related environmental impacts. A thriving regulated market—central to California's equity and environmental protection goals—depends on reducing the prevalence of unlicensed cultivation. Expanding statewide enforcement capacity directly supports this outcome.

D. Outcomes and Accountability

The department will be able to further assess, mitigate and remediate cannabis impacted lands owned, managed, or monitored by the department, California Native American Tribes and local partners in addition to increasing enforcement support in Northern California.

These positions will create specialized teams with the ability to focus on unique geographic areas and watersheds and develop relationships with local tribes and jurisdictions. The proposal will also increase law enforcement presence and operations in the northern state where outdoor cultivation is highest and impacts to resources are prevalent. Lastly, the requested positions provide a range of business support services and technical expertise necessary to carry out the enhanced program operations.

Projected Outcomes

Workload Measure	CY	BY	BY+1	BY+2	BY+3	BY+4
Fish and Game Code Section 12025 Administrative Cases Filed	15	15	17	17	17	17
Cases Referred to Local Prosecutors or the Office of the Attorney General	429	429	476	476	476	476
Administrative Cases Referred to Department's Office of General Counsel	12	12	14	14	14	14
Warrants Served	1,017	1,017	1,144	1,144	1,144	1,144
Multiagency Taskforce Inspections or Case Coordination	425	425	478	478	478	478
Illegal Cannabis Plants Eradicated	1,500,000	1,500,000	1,687,500	1,687,500	1,687,500	1,687,500
Trespass Sites Cleaned Up or Reclamated	19	19	19	19	19	19
Environmental Violations Documented	1,623	1,623	1,650	1,825	1,825	1,825

E. Implementation Plan

Implementation of this proposal would begin on July 1, 2026, or upon legislative approval before or through the 2026-27 Budget Act.

F. Supplemental Information

The Department will purchase seven vehicles for the requested law enforcement positions with existing Allocation 3 funding, distributed as follows:

- Six Code 3 4x4 pickups for the proposed Wardens.
- One Code 3 4x4 SUV for the proposed Lieutenant Supervisor.

BCP Fiscal Detail Sheet

(Dollars in Thousands)

BCP Title: Cannabis Impacted Lands

BR Name: 3600-019-BCP-2026-GB

Budget Request Summary

Personal Services

Personal Services	FY26 Current Year	FY26 Budget Year	FY26 BY+1	FY26 BY+2	FY26 BY+3	FY26 BY+4
Positions - Permanent	0.0	22.0	22.0	22.0	22.0	22.0
Total Positions	**0.0**	**22.0**	**22.0**	**22.0**	**22.0**	**22.0**

Fund Summary

Fund Source

Fund Source	FY26 Current Year	FY26 Budget Year	FY26 BY+1	FY26 BY+2	FY26 BY+3	FY26 BY+4
Total State Operations Expenditures	**$0**	**$0**	**$0**	**$0**	**$0**	**$0**

Program Summary

Program Funding

Program Funding	FY26 Current Year	FY26 Budget Year	FY26 BY+1	FY26 BY+2	FY26 BY+3	FY26 BY+4
Total All Programs	**$0**	**$0**	**$0**	**$0**	**$0**	**$0**

Personal Services Details

Positions

Positions	FY26 Current Year	FY26 Budget Year	FY26 BY+1	FY26 BY+2	FY26 BY+3	FY26 BY+4
0756 - Environmental Program Mgr I (Supvry) (Eff. 07-01-2026)	0.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
0762 - Environmental Scientist (Eff. 07-01-2026)	0.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0
0764 - Sr Envirnal Scientist (Supvry) (Eff. 07-01-2026)	0.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0
0765 - Sr Envirnal Scientist (Spec) (Eff. 07-01-2026)	0.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0
1549 - Prop Cntrller II (Eff. 07-01-2026)	0.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0
3049 - Sr Land Surveyor (Eff. 07-01-2026)	0.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
4800 - Supervisor I (Eff. 07-01-2026)	0.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
5393 - Analyst II (Eff. 07-01-2026)	0.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0
5758 - Research Data Spec II (Eff. 07-01-2026)	0.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
8418 - Lieut (Supvr) (Eff. 07-01-2026)	0.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
8421 - Warden (Eff. 07-01-2026)	0.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0
Total Positions	**0.0**	**22.0**	**22.0**	**22.0**	**22.0**	**22.0**