

FACT SHEET: SB 1175

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WILDLIFE TRAFFICKING AND TRADE ACT

AS AMENDED MAY 13, 2020

SUMMARY

The Wildlife Trafficking and Trade Act (SB 1175) seeks to address the conditions which led, in part, to the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, namely wildlife trafficking and trade. This bill requires the Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) to suspend import permits for species potentially linked to novel zoonotic disease transmission until studies show no link exists or individual animals may be adequately tested and screened. This bill additionally pushes back against recent Trump Administration actions which weaken federal protections for iconic African trophy species. With limited exceptions, this bill prohibits the possession of new hunting trophies or parts of a number of African species as well as prohibits the live sale of invasive bullfrogs and turtles for human consumption.

THE PROBLEM

In SARS, MERS, and now COVID-19, initial human infection arose from viral transmission between wildlife and humans, such as bats and civets in the case of SARS. In California, the type of retail markets where wildlife is sold for human consumption which led to SARS and potentially COVID-19 do not exist in the same form. However, there is potential risk to human health from the importation of wild animals carrying viruses or other disease. Hundreds of permits authorizing the possession of live wild animals (so-called “restricted species”) are issued by CDFW each year. The COVID-19 pandemic illustrates how important it is to fully evaluate the risks those animals pose to Californians.

Approximately 2 million bullfrogs and 300,000 turtles are imported into the state each year for live sale for human consumption. These imported species are among the most invasive in the world, and the release of these animals to the wild present risks to protected native species in the state. No health certificates are required to import bullfrogs into the state.

Beyond the clear health concerns of trafficked live animals, the trade in live animals or their trophies has detrimental impacts to global biodiversity. In fact, the world is currently witnessing the widespread decimation of many of Africa’s most iconic large animal populations.

Between 2007 and 2014, Savanna elephant populations declined by 30%, equal to 144,000 elephants. African lion populations are estimated to have declined by 43% between 1993 and 2014. The situation is just as dire for other species, including in this state. According to a recent news article, the current federal administration has rolled back federal protections for wildlife numerous times.

BACKGROUND

California must take a lead in protecting ourselves and endangered species by providing CDFW the authority to restrict imports of animals and trophies. Trophy hunting is touted as a tool for conservation in Africa, but studies suggest the benefit to imperiled species is overstated. Federal policy began shifting in 2014 with a negative impact declaration for African elephant permits from Zimbabwe and continued with the protection of African lions under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). However, not all of these efforts have been long lasting, and, in 2017, the federal government under the Trump administration reversed the 2014 decision and has since weakened multiple provisions of the ESA. The threat of future pandemic scenarios and unclear federal policy necessitate legislative action. This bill seeks to limit the entry of restricted species linked with zoonotic diseases into the state; the trade in invasive species; and the ongoing hunting of endangered, threatened, or otherwise imperiled species.

THE SOLUTION

SB 1175 takes a number of steps to address the multi-faceted problem of zoonotic disease and biodiversity loss by: 1) Limiting contact with potential animal disease carriers by immediately suspending import permits until testing can prove the species is not a carrier of disease. 2) Stopping the sale of live frogs, turtles, and non-poultry birds for human food. 3) Discouraging American demand for trophies by making possession illegal, whole or part, of a number of African species except for scientific or educational purposes or where the trophy was obtained before January 1, 2021.

SUPPORT

Social Compassion in Legislation (co-sponsor)
Center for Biological Diversity (co-sponsor)
Action for Animals
Animal Defenders International
Animal Rebellion
Animal Wellness Action/Animal Wellness Foundation
Bear League
Berkeley Animal Rights Center
Born Free USA
Capital Kitty Catos
Coalition for Pets & Public Safety
Compassionate Bay
Delfina Saddlery
Direct Action Everywhere
EPIC
Hector Hill Animal Sanctuary
Humane Decisions
In Defense of Animals
Lean and Green Kids
Long Beach Spay and Neuter Foundation
Orange County Animal Save
PawPAC
PeaCe
People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals
Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine
PlantDiego
Point Reyes Safaris
Poison Free Calabasas
Poison Free Malibu
Project Coyote
Sarah Killingsworth Photography
Save the Frogs!
Saving Gentle Hearts
Sierra Wildlife Coalition
SPCA Fiji Islands
The Fix Project DBA Fix Long Beach
Wildcare of SoCal
Wildlife Emergency Services
Wildlife Generate
Women United for Animal Welfare
Hundreds of individuals