

# AB 1213 (Bloom)

## Bobcat Protection Act

### Fact Sheet

#### PURPOSE

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Bobcats are an irreplaceable part of California's natural heritage, playing an important ecological role not just in the ecosystems they inhabit, but also in the state's recreation, tourism and wildlife viewing industries. However, bobcats receive only very limited protections under current law.

While the Fish and Game Code generally provides that any take of native wildlife be managed according to sound scientific principles, no reliable population estimates exist for bobcats statewide in California and neither the Department of Fish and Wildlife nor the Commission possesses adequate data to determine a sustainable harvest limit for bobcats.

Current California trapping law is antiquated, allowing for unlimited trapping of bobcats for commercial purposes. Other wildlife in California that are prized for their fur—foxes, river otters, minks, beavers, even raccoons and muskrats—are regulated to protect against population impacts resulting from commercial trapping.

International demand for bobcat pelts for use in luxury clothing is now driving the bobcat trapping; it is time to give California's bobcats the same level of regulation and protection we give to our other wildlife species pressured by commercial exploitation. The bobcat is one of the few species where commercial trade in the species is driving hunting and trapping, and the demand for bobcat pelts is reportedly on the rise (\$78 per pelt in 2009, and reportedly as much as \$700 per pelt this year). The current state of the regulations means that bobcats could be severely depleted in a single trapping season or even extirpated in portions of the state. As the pelt prices climb, the pressure and impacts will increase.

#### SUMMARY

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The Bobcat Protection Act of 2013 would ban the commercial trapping of bobcats in California, along with the commercial sale and export of bobcat pelts. The Department's current authority to issue depredation permits for bobcats would not be affected. Hunting of bobcats consistent with existing law and regulations would still be allowed in California.

#### EXISTING LAW

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Existing law and regulations allow for the commercial sale and export of bobcat pelts lawfully taken by trappers and hunters. While bobcats are trapped primarily for their fur, rather than being classified as "fur-bearing mammals" under the Fish and Game Code, bobcats are considered "non-game mammals" under the Code.

Regulations passed by the Fish and Game Commission set a trapping season for bobcats from November 24 through January 31. These regulations provide no limits on the sex, age, numbers or location of bobcats that may be taken by licensed trappers in California. 14 C.C.R. § 478.

Approximately 80% of lawful take of bobcats in California is by commercial fur trappers, with the remainder either by hunters or under depredation permits.

#### BACKGROUND

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California has no meaningful estimates of either bobcat populations or sustainable harvest limits. Bobcat harvest levels tend to fluctuate with pelt prices. Rising demand for bobcat pelts in China and other foreign markets has recently lead to a rise in pelt prices and a consequent rise in bobcat harvest levels in California. In the 2011-2012 trapping season, the number of trappers reporting bobcat harvest more than doubled over the previous season, while the number of harvested bobcats rose by more than 50%.

During the 2012-2013 trapping season bobcat trapping generated significant public controversy after traps were found by property owners on their private lands on the boundaries of Joshua Tree National Park. Numerous bobcats that had long been observed, photographed and appreciated by residents and tourists within and along the boundaries of the National Park abruptly disappeared during the trapping season.

Current law places the onus on property owners wishing to protect wildlife to place no-trapping signs on their lands rather than on commercial fur trappers to demonstrate that they have permission to trap on such lands. Nothing in current law precludes licensed trappers from lining the boundaries of national parks areas in California with traps to catch bobcats as they cross the parks' boundaries

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**OPPOSITION**

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None on File

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