

Date of Hearing: April 15, 2024

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

Isaac G. Bryan, Chair

AB 3147 (Garcia) – As Amended March 21, 2024

SUBJECT: California Trails Conservancy Program

SUMMARY: Establishes the California Trails Conservancy Program.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Establishes the California Natural Resources Agency (NRA) and vests it with the responsibility to restore, protect, and manage the state's natural, historical, and cultural resources for current and future generations. (Government Code 12805)
- 2) Establishes the Equitable Outdoor Access Act and sets forth the state's commitment to ensuring all Californians can benefit from, and have meaningful and sustainable access to, the state's rich cultural and natural resources. (Public Resources Code (PRC) 1000)
- 3) Requires the director of the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) to prepare, and continuously maintain, a comprehensive plan for the development and operation of a statewide system of recreation trails, which is known as the California Recreational Trails System Plan (Trails Plan). Requires the Trails Plan to present and future demand for trail-oriented recreation uses, recommend an integrated and interconnecting system of trail routes, and recommend priorities for funding. (PRC 5070.7)

THIS BILL:

- 1) Establishes in NRA the California Trails Conservancy Program. Establishes the purposes of the program as all of the following:
 - a) To promote enhanced and expanded environmentally sound greenways and trail networks;
 - b) To promote equitable access and expand diverse trail-based recreational and mobility opportunities for all Californians; and,
 - c) To promote policies, practices, and funding opportunities in order to optimize the continued growth and integrity of existing and prospective systems of nature-based and other human-powered mobility networks for the benefit of all Californians.
- 2) Authorizes NRA, if NRA determines that it would benefit the purposes of the program, to form an ad hoc working group. The working group may be composed of members from the hiking community, the equestrian community, the mountain biking community, the environmental justice community, the land trust and conservation community, and the tribal or the Native American community, members from a California-based outdoor enterprise or company, and representatives from the department, the Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Wildlife Conservation Board, the State Coastal Conservancy, the various state conservancies, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, the federal Bureau of Reclamation, the United States National Parks Service, and the United States Forest Service.

- 3) Provides that this bill shall only become operative if Assembly Bill 1567 of the 2023–24 Regular Session takes effect on or before January 1, 2025.

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS:

1) **Author’s statement:**

California’s trails are the intersection between human and nature interface, providing valuable exposure and engagement to the state’s natural landscapes and parks, which are rich with unparalleled aesthetics. Trail demand is growing throughout the state and is an emerging economic driver in many California communities, which is helping rural California and elsewhere to both prop up the economy and reverse trends resulting from revenue losses rooted in transitions from natural resource-based economies (timber, mining et al). The growth of electric bicycles and other mobility devices have led to a recent acceleration of the degradation of natural and other surface type trails. AB 3147 will promote equitable access and create a forum to better advance policies, practices, and funding opportunities to optimize the continued growth of existing and prospective California trail systems.

- 2) **Outdoors for All.** The Outdoors for All initiative is intended to expand parks and nature access in communities with little outdoor space, supporting programs to connect people who lack access.

Spending time outdoors directly benefits mental and physical health. It improves mood and happiness, lowers stress, and strengthens people’s sense of meaning. Research shows that people who visit outdoor spaces for 30 minutes or more during a week have lower rates of depression and high blood pressure. Access to outdoor spaces also facilitates exercise, which improves long-term physical health. Many healthcare professionals recognize these benefits, and in some places have started to issue medical prescriptions to spend time in nature to improve health outcomes.

NRA’s Pathways to 30x30 Annual Progress Report (May 2023) notes that by increasing both the variety and accessibility of outdoor recreation, California is working to enable everyone in California to enjoy and connect with nature.

Trails offer a direct conduit to Californians to access nature and exercise. DPR manages more than 3,000 miles of trails and its surveys have shown that the state’s trails provide experiences that attract more users than any other type of recreational facility. Trails can be used for hiking, running, horse-back riding, mountain biking, bird watching, dog walking, backpacking, and more. Managing and maintaining trails and access to those trails is an investment in California’s commitment to Outdoors for All.

- 3) **Funding for trails.** According to DPR’s *Recreation Trails Plan* (2022), a successful statewide trails and greenways program requires continual, broad-based and expanding sources of funding that are regularly available in order to establish and maintain a balanced program for planning, acquisition, development, maintenance, and management of trails.

Additional funding is always needed to pay for deferred maintenance, for the relocation and rehabilitation of old trails and to address increasing trail use.

California's budget for Fiscal Year (FY) 2022-23 contained \$35 million for DPR's trails program. The subsequent budget for FY 2023-24 reduced this allocation to \$10 million. For FY 2024-25, the proposed allocation remains uncommitted and programmed.

The Parks, Environment, and Water Bond Act of 2018 (Proposition 68), included \$35 million for trails, but that funding source has been oversubscribed at a margin greater than five-to-one.

- 4) **Climate bond.** AB 1567 (Garcia) proposes the Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparation, Flood Protection, Extreme Heat Mitigation, and Workforce Development Bond Act of 2024, to authorize \$15.105 billion in general obligation bonds for safe drinking water, wildfire prevention, drought preparation, flood protection, extreme heat mitigation, and workforce development programs.

AB 1567 includes \$25 million for the creation of a California Trails Conservancy, and \$25 million for the creation of the Office of Outdoor Recreation and Equitable Access.

According to the Legislative Analyst's Office, the state is facing a \$70 billion deficit, and multi-billion dollar deficits over the next several future fiscal years. As a result, the Legislature is considering several environmental bond proposals, in addition to AB 1567, as potential funding options to both fill the gaps where budget cuts are likely to be made and augment funding where the authors want to prioritize spending.

AB 3147 creates a framework for the establishment and allocation of funds pursuant to provisions in AB 1567, which calls for a California Trails Conservancy.

The author may wish to consider adopting amendments to provide that, regardless of the bill that the Legislature approves for putting a climate bond before the voters on the November 2024 ballot, this bill shall only go into effect if funding for a California Trails Conservancy is approved in a statewide bond initiative.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

None on file

Opposition

None on file

Analysis Prepared by: Paige Brokaw / NAT. RES. /