

Date of Hearing: April 24, 2024

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

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

Policy Committee: Natural Resources

Vote: 10 - 0

Urgency: No

State Mandated Local Program: No

Reimbursable: No

**SUMMARY:**

This bill establishes the California Trails Conservancy Program at the California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA).

Specifically, this bill:

- 1) Establishes in CNRA the California Trails Conservancy Program to:
  - a) Promote enhanced and expanded environmentally sound greenways and trail networks.
  - b) Promote equitable access and expand diverse trail-based recreational and mobility opportunities for all Californians.
  - c) 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 CNRA, if it determines that it would benefit the purposes of the program, to form an ad hoc working group, as specified.
- 3) Provides that this bill shall only become operative if Section 2 of AB 1567 (Garcia) of the current legislative session takes effect on or before January 1, 2025.

**FISCAL EFFECT:**

Cost pressure of an unknown but potentially significant amount, likely in the tens of millions of dollars, to fund the proposed California Trails Conservancy Program (General Fund or bond funds). As noted above, this bill will become operative only if AB 1567 (Garcia) takes effect on or before January 1, 2025. AB 1567 includes \$25 million in general obligation (GO) bond funds for the creation of a California Trails Conservancy. CNRA notes it would likely request 5% of any allocation for purposes of this program to cover its implementation costs. For example, if the program is allocated \$25 million, CNRA's costs would be approximately \$1.25 million.

According to the Legislative Analyst's Office, the General Fund faces a structural deficit in the tens of billions of dollars over the next several fiscal years.

**COMMENTS:**1) **Purpose.** According to the author:

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...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) **Background.** Trails offer a direct conduit to Californians to access nature and exercise. State Parks 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, horseback riding, mountain biking, bird watching, dog walking, backpacking, and more.

The California Recreational Trails Act, passed in 1974, requires the director of State Parks to prepare and maintain a comprehensive plan for the development and operation of a statewide system of recreation trails. AB 1789 (Bennett), Chapter 522, Statutes of 2022, requires State Parks to prepare a full update of this plan by January 1, 2024. State Parks expects to complete the plan update by summer of 2025.

The fiscal year (FY) 2022-23 budget allocated \$35 million for CNRA's Recreational Trails and Greenways Program. In response to a multibillion dollar deficit, the subsequent FY 2023-24 budget reduced this allocation to \$10 million. State Parks is developing new guidelines for this program and will be soliciting applications in FY 2024-25. The Parks, Environment, and Water Bond Act of 2018 (Proposition 68) included \$30 million for the Trails and Greenways Investment Program, administered by CNRA, which has a remaining balance of \$32,000.

The Recreational Trails Program is administered at the federal level by the Federal Highway Administration and at the state level by State Parks and the Department of Transportation's Active Transportation Program. Since 1993, \$60 million in RTP grants have helped create or improve 300 nonmotorized trails and facilities throughout California. Earlier this year, State Parks recommended \$6.7 million to the program for seven local nonmotorized trail projects.

3) **Related Legislation.** AB 1567 (Garcia) authorizes approximately \$16 billion in GO bonds for safe drinking water, wildfire prevention, drought preparation, flood protection, extreme heat mitigation, clean energy, 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. This bill creates a framework for the establishment and allocation of funds pursuant to provisions in AB 1567, which calls for a California Trails Conservancy. AB 1567 is pending in the Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee.