

GOVERNOR'S VETO
AB 1225 (Bennett)
As Enrolled September 8, 2025
2/3 vote

SUMMARY

Requires the Director of the Department of Parks and Recreation (State Parks) to establish an Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC).

- 1) Requires the AAC to serve in an advisory capacity to the Director and make recommendations for improving the accessibility of units in the State Park system for individuals with disabilities.
- 2) Requires the AAC to include at least eight members, but no more than 14 members, which shall include the Chief of the Accessibility Division, no more than two representatives appointed by the Director, and additional members with demonstrated experience in public accessibility requirements.
- 3) Requires the AAC to do all of the following:
 - a) Evaluate disability accessibility models and provisions from relevant federal and state park systems;
 - b) Review services, programs, and activities provided by State Parks; and
 - c) Provide recommendations to the Director on drafting and updating general plans for State Parks, as requested by the director.
- 4) Permits the Director to implement those recommendations as the Director deems appropriate.
- 5) Prohibits a member of the AAC from receiving compensation, but permits a member to be reimbursed for reasonable and necessary expenses in connection with service on the AAC.

Governor's Veto Message

"This bill would require [State Parks] to establish an [AAC] to make recommendations to [State Parks] on improving accessibility throughout the state park system.

While I support enhancing accessibility to recreational opportunities in state parks, this bill would be duplicative of [State Parks'] existing Accessibility Division. Moreover, [State Parks] has completed hundreds of projects throughout the state park system, removing architectural and programmatic access barriers and constructing accessible trails pursuant to a court-approved timeline under a long-standing consent decree."

COMMENTS

According to the State Parks website, one of the core values at State Parks is cultural diversity and accessibility. Most state park units were established, and have trails and facilities, that were put in place before Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) or the state equivalent. According to the 2003 Transition Plan from the Accessibility Section of State Parks, even before the passage

of the ADA, State Parks had been working to make its parks and programs accessible to all visitors.

Accessibility at State Parks is guided by the Accessibility Guidelines, 2015, which is developed by the Accessibility Division at State Parks. The Guidelines embody a compilation of accessibility standards, recommendations, and regulations for compliance with accessibility laws and are intended for practical use throughout state parks in regular maintenance duties, construction projects, and to understand and review the work of outside contractors. These guidelines cover items from assistive listening systems to portable toilets and sinks.

Accessibility improvements are ongoing at state park units and each unit of the state park system has a webpage that describes the accessible facilities of each park and the degree to which there are any deviations from current accessibility standards. At the bottom of each of those webpages is a contact in order for park users to request updates to the provided information. Additionally, there is a mechanism by which to file a comment or complaint regarding access to state park units, which is also detailed on State Park's website.

State Parks currently provides a few mechanisms by which to increase access to persons with disabilities. State Parks provides a pass to persons with permanent disabilities that entitles the pass holder to a 50% discount for family camping and boat-use fees at over 100 units operated by State Parks. Wheel chairs and manually-powered aids (e.g., walkers, crutches) are allowed in all state park areas that are available to the public. Qualified service animals are allowed into all state park areas that are available to the public. State Parks is also continuing to improve the accessibility of its website for physical disabilities.

Accessibility improvements are also guided by the Tucker Consent Decree, which is a result of a 2005 lawsuit in which a group of plaintiffs filed a class action lawsuit against the California Parks System, alleging that they were "denied their right to full and equal access to, and use and enjoyment of facilities and programs of [State Parks] because of architectural and programmatic barriers." In settling *Tucker v. State of California Department of Parks and Recreation, et al.*, State Parks agreed to improve access to its parks through comprehensive architectural and programmatic barrier removal. As part of the settlement (i.e., the Tucker Consent Decree), Disability Rights Advocates monitors the progress of State Park's accessibility improvements. These improvements include making a reasonable portion of the trail system accessible for people in wheelchairs, providing access to beaches and shores, providing accessible signage for blind and low vision park visitors, and providing captioned videos and sign language interpreters for park activities. The current amended consent decree requires projects be completed between 2026 and 2038.

According to Disability Rights Advocates, State Parks has allocated over \$90 million in funding for access improvements to over 65 parks and has completed a total of 73 accessible trail projects, but because some of these projects were completed almost 20 years ago, there is ongoing maintenance and updates needed. The sponsors also acknowledge that State Parks adheres to the ADA and Title 24; however, they do note that State Parks does not consult with individuals with disabilities or disability advocacy groups during the planning of new trails or facilities.

According to the Author

"California's parks and beaches should be accessible to everyone, but many still face barriers that limit their ability to enjoy them. With 1.6 million acres owned by State Parks and 280 miles of

coastline, it's essential that we remove obstacles and create truly inclusive outdoor spaces. [This bill] establishes [the AAC] within [State Parks] to assess current challenges and recommend improvements, ensuring our public lands meet the needs of all visitors. By prioritizing accessibility, this bill helps make California's natural beauty open to everyone, regardless of ability."

Arguments in Support

This bill's sponsors, Disability Rights Advocates, write that full participation in outdoor spaces remains a systemic issue and that this bill will provide a "critical step toward rectifying these longstanding inequities by establishing an advisory body dedicated to improving accessibility in our state's parks and coastal areas." They also note the health benefits from nature-based recreation. California Outdoor Recreation Partnership also notes that the AAC is a natural and needed extension of the state's Outdoors For All initiative. Several letters also cite the value in having more accessible public spaces to discourage stereotypes and misconceptions that individuals with disabilities are not interested in enjoying nature.

Arguments in Opposition

None on file.

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee:

"State Parks notes it cannot absorb the workload resulting from this bill within existing resources and estimates General Fund costs of approximately \$361,000 in year one and \$341,000 annually thereafter for two positions and public meeting costs. In addition, State Parks anticipates \$200,000 in ongoing General Fund costs for legal costs. As discussed below, State Parks is operating under a consent decree and working to improve access to parks through comprehensive barrier removal. To the extent the work of and recommendations developed by the AAC conflict with or deviate from the terms of the settlement, State Parks (and potentially the Attorney General and the courts) may incur costs."

VOTES

ASM WATER, PARKS, AND WILDLIFE: 13-0-0

YES: Papan, Jeff Gonzalez, Alvarez, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bennett, Boerner, Caloza, Hart, Macedo, Celeste Rodriguez, Rogers, Tangipa

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 14-0-1

YES: Wicks, Arambula, Calderon, Caloza, Dixon, Elhawary, Fong, Mark González, Hart, Pacheco, Pellerin, Solache, Ta, Tangipa

ABS, ABST OR NV: Sanchez

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 79-0-0

YES: Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alanis, Alvarez, Arambula, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Castillo, Chen, Connolly, Davies, DeMaio, Dixon, Elhawary, Ellis, Flora, Fong, Gabriel, Gallagher, Garcia, Gipson, Jeff Gonzalez, Mark González, Hadwick, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Hoover, Irwin, Jackson, Kalra, Krell, Lackey, Lee, Lowenthal, Macedo, McKinnor, Muratsuchi, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Patterson, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Ransom,

Celeste Rodriguez, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Sanchez, Schiavo, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Ta, Tangipa, Valencia, Wallis, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

SENATE FLOOR: 39-0-1

YES: Allen, Alvarado-Gil, Archuleta, Arreguín, Ashby, Becker, Blakespear, Cabaldon, Caballero, Cervantes, Choi, Cortese, Dahle, Durazo, Gonzalez, Grayson, Grove, Hurtado, Jones, Laird, Limón, McGuire, McNerney, Menjivar, Niello, Ochoa Bogh, Padilla, Pérez, Richardson, Rubio, Seyarto, Smallwood-Cuevas, Stern, Strickland, Umberg, Valladares, Wahab, Weber Pierson, Wiener

ABS, ABST OR NV: Reyes

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CONSULTANT: Stephanie Mitchell / W., P., & W. / (916) 319-2096

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