
SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Anna Caballero, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

AB 1520 (Committee on Water, Parks, and Wildlife) - Public resources: conservation

Version: August 18, 2025

Urgency: No

Hearing Date: August 25, 2025

Policy Vote: N.R. & W. 7 - 0

Mandate: No

Consultant: Ashley Ames

Bill Summary: This is the Assembly Water, Parks, and Wildlife Committee omnibus bill; it would make various changes to statutes relating to water, parks, and wildlife.

Fiscal Impact:

- The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) estimates ongoing costs of \$326,000 in 2026-27 and \$317,000 annually thereafter (General Fund or special fund) for one position due to increasing the number and complexity of projects reviewed. CDFW notes that bonds as a form of security require significantly more effort and staff time for compliance and enforcement than the enforcement of cash or a letter of credit. In addition, CDFW anticipates ongoing forgone revenue of about \$3,900 annually due to the bill's changes to Water Right Registration Fees for small use irrigation registrations, which would become exempt from fees under AB 1520.
- The California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA), Department of Parks and Recreation (State Parks), the State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board), and the Department of Justice anticipate any costs would be minor and absorbable, and that in some cases the bill could result in cost savings.

Background:

Mitigation bank financial assurances. Mitigation is mandated under the California Environmental Quality Guidelines whenever a project may result in a significant impact to the environment. One approach has been the creation of mitigation banks to compensate for terrestrial impacts. These banks are generally large, connected areas of preserved, restored, enhanced, or constructed habitats (for example, wetlands) that are set aside for the express purpose of providing mitigation for project impacts to wetlands, threatened and endangered species, and other sensitive resources. Mitigation banks are required to provide some level of financial assurance that the property will be managed in perpetuity in the event a bank sponsor defaults. Existing law allows for the use of either cash or a letter of credit as a form of security for mitigation bank agreements. The federal 2008 Compensatory Mitigation Rule allows for financial assurances in the form of performance bonds, escrow accounts, casualty insurance, and letters of credit—this bill would allow CDFW to also consider performance bonds as an option for mitigation bank financial assurance.

Concession agreements. The Department of Parks and Recreation (State Parks) has a variety of partners, including private and public-sector entities, who provide quality services, programs, and facilities that enhance the convenience, enjoyment, education, and recreational experiences of state park visitors. The requirements for State Parks to

provide public notice regarding a proposed concession contract is inconsistent; some require notice when the contract is for more than three years and others require notice when the contract is for more than two years —this bill clarifies that contracts for a period of more than three years have a public notice requirement.

Duck Stamp. In the past, hunters were required to purchase and affix a Duck Stamp to their hunting licenses. Today, hunters are no longer required to carry the stamps because California's modern licensing system prints proof of additional fees paid directly onto the license. However, the Duck Stamp tradition continues in an annual contest where artists submit their work to be selected for the next years duck stamp, which may be purchased by stamp collectors. All funds generated by the sale of stamps are deposited in the State Duck Stamp Account, which is administered by CDFW for projects approved by the Fish and Game Commission for the purpose of protecting, preserving, restoring, enhancing, and developing waterfowl habitat. Much of this conservation work is done through contracts with nonprofit conservation groups. This bill would apply certain contracting requirements that apply to other fish and wildlife habitat preservation, restoration, and enhancement projects to also apply to "duck stamp" projects.

Water rights registration. Water right registrations have been offered by the State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) since January 1, 1989, and provide an expedited pathway to acquisition of an appropriative water right for certain small projects: small domestic use, small irrigation use, and livestock stockponds. These registrations last for a term of up to five years and can be renewed for additional five-year terms if the registrant meets conditions placed upon the registration, reports their use, and pays fees—this bill updates code to reflect this process.

Water year. Water Conservation Districts are required to report their groundwater use and supplies using a definition of water year (July 1 to June 30) that conflicts with the standard water year definition (October 1 to September 30) that is used elsewhere in the water code (e.g., Water Code §§ 6001, 71683, and 1005.4). Having to analyze water usage over two different ranges can cause complications with other pertinent requirements that require gathering and reporting data on the standard water year definition—this bill aligns the definition of water year.

Proposed Law: This bill would make various changes to statutes related to water, parks, and wildlife. Specifically, this bill would:

1. Permit the use of performance bonds as a form of financial security for mitigation bank agreements.
2. Provide consistency in situations where State Parks needs to provide public notice for concession agreements.
3. Extend certain contract requirements that apply to conservation projects to apply to Duck Stamp Projects.
4. Require CDFW be subject to certain provisions in making grants or entering into agreements pursuant to the State Duck Stamp Account, as provided.

5. Change the definition of “water year,” for purposes of requirements imposed on Water Conservation Districts, so that it is consistent with other definitions of “water year.”
6. Update the renewal process for water rights registration to provide registration without filing if annual fees have been submitted on time.
7. Make nonsubstantive, technical changes such as repealing obsolete provisions, correcting cross-references, and updating department, agency, and location names.

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