

CONCURRENCE IN SENATE AMENDMENTS
AB 1520 (Committee on Water, Parks, and Wildlife)
As Amended September 5, 2025
Majority vote

SUMMARY

Makes various changes to statutes related to water, parks, and wildlife.

Senate Amendments

Make technical changes and add language to address a conflict with SB 72 (Caballero) of the current legislative session.

COMMENTS

This committee bill corrects erroneous language and cross references and includes various consensus items.

Mitigation is mandated under the California Environmental Quality Act 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 allows the Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) to also consider performance bonds as an option for mitigation bank financial assurance.

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 are inconsistent—this bill clarifies that contracts for a period of more than three years have a public notice requirement.

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 year's 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, which suffer from contracting delays—this bill extends the existing exemption for certain conservation projects to relevant Duck Stamp projects.

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 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 Section 6001, 71683, and 1005.4). Having to analyze water usage over two different ranges causes conflicts with other pertinent requirements that require gathering and reporting data on the standard water year definition—this bill aligns the definition of water year.

According to the Author

"[This bill] is the Assembly Water, Parks, and Wildlife Committee's omnibus bill, which makes a number of helpful statutory updates. AB 1520 largely consists of technical revisions that clarify existing code and correct outdated language, while some provisions create efficiencies for the departments and stakeholders in the Water, Parks, and Wildlife Committee's jurisdiction. All elements of [this bill] have been vetted by a diverse group of stakeholders to confirm their non-controversial nature."

Arguments in Support

Numerous environmental groups write in support of this bill. California Waterfowl Association and several waterfowl-related organizations write that this bill will reduce the cost and delay to time sensitive Duck Stamp habitat projects on state lands. United Water Conservation District (UWCD) indicates that correcting the definition of water year will allow UWCD and other conservation districts to report on the same schedule as all other agencies rather than be required to estimate groundwater reporting data and then adjust after the fact, and will bring conservation districts into alignment with state regulations. California Ecological Restoration Business Association writes in support for expanding the allowable financial assurances for mitigation banks noting that bank sponsors are financially constrained in their ability to invest in new bank projects and the inclusion of performance bonds are more accessible to sponsors and equally effective assurance mechanisms.

Arguments in Opposition

None on file.

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee, this bill has the following fiscal impacts:

- 1) 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 [this bill].

- 2) The California Natural Resources Agency, State Parks, 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.

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

UPDATED

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

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