

Date of Hearing: April 29, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

AB 1894 (Blanca Rubio) – As Amended April 16, 2026

Policy Committee: Water, Parks and Wildlife Vote: 13 - 0

Urgency: No State Mandated Local Program: No Reimbursable: No

SUMMARY:

This bill prohibits a public agency from prohibiting imported water deliveries for groundwater replenishment due to invasive mussels unless there is substantial, documented evidence of a proven health and safety risk as a result of the invasive mussels.

The bill defines “imported water deliveries for groundwater replenishment” as deliveries of water imported from outside a region’s local watershed or natural boundary, primarily originating from the State Water Project, the Colorado River, or the Eastern Sierra, where the water is to be used for managed aquifer recharge, groundwater injection, spreading, percolation, or other activities intended to replenish groundwater supplies. For purposes of this definition, “water” includes, but is not limited to, surface water conveyed by an aqueduct, canal, pipeline, or other conveyance.

FISCAL EFFECT:

Minor and absorbable costs to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), the Department of Parks and Recreation’s Division of Boating and Waterways (DBW), and the State Water Resources Control Board.

As part of the Governor’s fiscal year (FY) 2026-27 budget, CDFW is requesting eight permanent positions to increase the department’s capacity to prevent the spread of golden mussel from infested waters. The administration intends to fund these positions for three years from \$20 million appropriated to the department in the 2025 Budget Act.

COMMENTS:

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

While water agencies in Los Angeles County have been told that imported water deliveries have now resumed, there remains significant concern about the reliability of those assurances for the future. Agencies faced serious disruptions in delivering imported water needed to replenish groundwater for six months, despite complying with state law and developing approved plans to address invasive mussels. These uncertainties undermine the court-ordered management of the Main San Gabriel Groundwater Basin and threaten the primary

drinking water source for more than 1.5 million residents, many in disadvantaged communities.

This bill ensures that critical water decisions affecting the entire state are made consistently at the state level and not through a patchwork of conflicting local rules. By aligning policy with science and existing law, this bill protects our water supply, supports emergency response needs, and upholds California's commitment to the human right to water while prioritizing strategies to mitigate the threats of the invasive golden mussel.

- 2) **Background. *Golden Mussel.*** According to CDFW, golden mussel is an invasive bivalve. Adult mussels form byssal threads that enable them to attach to surfaces and spawn multiple times each year, producing thousands of offspring. In October 2024, golden mussels were discovered in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta – the first known occurrence in North America. Since then, golden mussels have been detected throughout the Delta and the State Water Project (SWP).

Golden mussels have been linked to a loss of native and game fish, because they compete for the same food sources, and contribute to harmful fish-killing algal blooms. Recreational impacts include waterbody closures, mandatory inspections, increased boat launch or entry fees, and reduced numbers of fish and shellfish for consumption. Economic impacts include costly repairs and maintenance (boats, water infrastructure, hydroelectric facilities) and reduced water flow affecting food production, water delivery to homes, and flood control.

The most common way invasive mussels move between waterbodies is by hitchhiking on watercraft and equipment. According to CDFW, there are no socially and environmentally benign methods currently available to eliminate invasive mussels once they are present. Therefore, containing mussels within infested areas is the only means to minimize additional new, widespread impacts. While the spread of invasive mussels in interconnected waters cannot be prevented without restricting navigation, their overland spread, attached to and within watercraft and equipment, can be prevented.

Since the discovery of golden mussels in the state, CDFW has been coordinating with other agencies to survey the extent of infestation in the Delta, sample for golden mussel in waters statewide, and update existing outreach and education material to include golden mussel. CDFW also formed an interagency Golden Mussel Task Force that developed a statewide Golden Mussel Response Framework in April 2025. This proposal to respond to golden mussels builds upon the department's existing capacity within the Invasive Species Program's Quagga and Zebra Mussel Project that has successfully contained quagga mussel within Southern California since 2007. Under this project, motorized boats pay an infestation prevention fee (via a sticker issued by the Department of Motor Vehicles), and revenues from the fee are primarily used for grants distributed by DBW. The current sticker is collected every two years, and as of January 2026, the current fee for the sticker is \$16 and expires at the same time as the vessel registration renewal sticker. To date, in fiscal year 2025-26, CDFW has collected approximately \$2.5 million in fees, and DBW expects to award up to \$2 million in grants to eligible applicants in 2026.

Budget trailer language in 2025, among other things, extended the state's quagga and zebra mussel protections to golden mussels, expanded the current mussel sticker fee to include golden mussels, and allowed the fee to increase from \$30 to up to \$42.

To date, sticker fees have not been used for golden mussels; however, DBW is promulgating emergency regulations to comply with last year's budget trailer language – specifically to change the name of the current grant program to add golden mussels and to establish a technical advisory group to increase the sticker fee to enable a more robust response to the invasion of the golden mussel.

Imported Water Deliveries. In 2025, Los Angeles County, fearing mussel infestation from imported water, prohibited water imports from infested waters. As a result, several agencies within the county were unable to recharge groundwater with imported water from the SWP to replenish groundwater supplies. This has been a challenge, because water agencies and communities throughout the county rely on a combination of imported and local water supplies, and some agencies, including Burbank Water and Power, are 100% reliant on imported water deliveries.

On March 24, 2026, the county claimed to have “officially lifted its prohibition to allow for the gradual reintroduction of imported water to support groundwater recharge operations in the San Gabriel and San Fernando Valleys” with additional monitoring and interim safeguards. Sponsors of this bill indicate this has not been the case in practice, but negotiations and agreements for pilot projects are underway between some water agencies and the county to treat water for golden mussels before water is moved through infrastructure to the spreading grounds. There is still concern among water agencies that spreading will be prohibited in the future, and agencies are currently developing additional agreements or language to clarify how spreading will be conducted under the risk of invasive mussels.

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