

Date of Hearing: April 14, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON WATER, PARKS, AND WILDLIFE

Diane Papan, Chair

AB 2051 (Wicks) – As Amended March 25, 2026

SUBJECT: Public resources: Coastal Resilience Permitting Working Group

SUMMARY: Requires the Secretary of the Natural Resources Agency (CNRA) to convene a working group and develop a roadmap with recommendations for improving coastal resilience permitting. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires the Secretary of CNRA to develop a Coastal Resilience Permitting Roadmap (Roadmap) with recommendations for process improvements and legislative reforms to enable efficient and timely delivery of environmental approvals by January 1, 2028.
- 2) Requires the Secretary of CNRA, in consultation with the Secretary of the Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA), to convene a Coastal Resilience Permitting Working Group (Working Group) for the purpose of developing the Roadmap.
- 3) Requires that the Working Group consist of representatives from federal, state, and local agencies, including but not limited to:
 - a) California Coastal Commission (Coastal Commission);
 - b) CalEPA;
 - c) San Francisco Bay, North Coast, and Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Boards (Regional Water Boards);
 - d) Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW);
 - e) Governor's Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation;
 - f) CNRA;
 - g) Ocean Protection Council;
 - h) San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC);
 - i) State Coastal Conservancy;
 - j) State Lands Commission;
 - k) State Office of Historic Preservation; and
 - l) State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board).
- 4) Requires that the Roadmap include, at minimum, recommendations that address:

- a) Administrative reforms that can be implemented by state agencies within their existing authority to improve permit issuance timelines, including:
 - i) Streamlining the process for determining that applications are complete, including limits on additional information requests when applicants submit complete applications consistent with permit guidelines and timelines for initial and successive reviews;
 - ii) Unified applications with a predictable sequence and timeline;
 - iii) Statewide or regional interagency project management teams for multiagency permitting, modeled on the Bay Restoration Regulatory Integration Team (BRRIT);
 - iv) Methods to standardize compensatory mitigation across agencies, including the consideration of engineering with nature features to enable projects to self-mitigate and a potential de minimis fill policy that allows de minimis fill within defined thresholds without the need to mitigate;
 - v) Delegating permit issuance to executive officers or using consent calendars when appropriate and applicable;
 - vi) Expanded use of regional general permits and programmatic agreements for known categories of coastal resilience projects;
 - vii) Process improvements that allow for permit approval when the design is complete or during the preapplication process, and for subsequent design changes arising from field conditions and in-depth engineering analysis;
 - viii) Standard measures that can be applied to pile driving and fill placement techniques, and other practices that are known to safeguard marine resources, including the types of conditions under which these measures should be utilized and can be scaled to varying project scope and footprint, taking into consideration variability across the ocean floor topographies;
 - ix) Recommendations for how to expedite and streamline the permitting of projects included in local sea level rise adaptation plans, as an incentive to complete and implement local plans; and
 - x) Consideration of project-based permit streamlining.
- b) A state process to align agency mitigation requirements and enable in-lieu fees or advance mitigation through which applicants can contribute funding to eligible restoration or mitigation initiatives, thereby avoiding temporal loss of habitat and associated increased mitigation requirements, and reducing the need for individual applicants to develop and implement project-specific compensatory mitigation;
- c) Legislative reforms that have the greatest potential to further accelerate permitting for projects that increase coastal resilience, with a focus on current legislative requirements that result in extensive analysis that could be avoided by application of standardized compensatory mitigation, advance mitigation, or standard construction practices, as well

- as identification of regulatory gaps and frictions that could lead to maladaptation over time;
- d) A coastal resilience project pilot program and any required legislative authorizations, if needed to test alternative approaches;
 - e) An evaluation of whether consolidated coastal resilience permits, similar to those provided for offshore wind, would facilitate timely permits; and
 - f) Workforce assessment and funding options for regulatory staffing positions and as-needed permitting support contracts to supplement staff, including a specific analysis of recommended pay scales needed to recruit and retain permitting staff that reflects the educational requirements for these positions, the cost of living in areas where these staff live and work, and private sector compensation for similar skills.
- 5) Requires that, on or before April 1, 2027, the Secretary of CNRA, in collaboration with the Coastal Commission, BCDC, CDFW, and the Regional Water Boards, convene a Advisory Group, consisting of representatives from at least the following:
- a) Department of Transportation (Caltrans), State Coastal Conservancy, and other relevant state agencies that seek permits for projects in coastal areas;
 - b) Local governments required to update their local coastal plans for sea level rise;
 - c) California ports;
 - d) Local transportation agencies and wastewater treatment agencies;
 - e) California Native American tribes that are on the contact list administered and maintained by the Native American Heritage Commission; and
 - f) Other members of the public, including businesses, home and affordable housing builders, commercial and recreational fishers, environmental organizations, and environmental justice organizations.
- 6) Requires the Secretary of CNRA, in consultation with the Coastal Commission, BCDC, CDFW, and the Regional Water Boards to conduct a series of public workshops with the Coastal Resilience Permit Advisory Group or subgroups thereof to:
- a) Solicit feedback regarding challenges with existing permitting processes, and recommendations and concerns from permittees and other interested parties regarding streamlining proposals; and
 - b) Review and seek comment on draft reform proposals from the Working Group's Roadmap.
- 7) Defines "coastal resilience project" as a project that maintains, protects, restores, or enables coastal ecosystems, infrastructure, or communities to withstand and adapt to sea level rise and other natural hazards amplified by climate change.

- 8) Makes findings and declarations related to sea level rise and challenges associated with coastal permitting.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Defines the coastal zone as the land and water area of the State of California from the Oregon border to the Mexico border, extending seaward to the state's outer limit of jurisdiction, including all offshore islands, and extending inland generally 1,000 yards from the mean high tide line of the sea, as shown on the maps in Section 17 of Chapter 1330 of the Statutes of 1976 [Public Resources Code (PRC) § 30103].
- 2) Establishes the Coastal Commission and charges it with planning and management of the coastal zone (PRC § 30300 *et seq.*).
- 3) Establishes BCDC and defines its jurisdiction as San Francisco Bay, including saltponds, managed wetlands, and certain waterways, and a shoreline band 100 feet in width (Government Code § 66610 and § 66620).
- 4) Enacts the Permit Streamlining Act, which sets timelines that public agencies must comply with in issuing permits (Government Code § 65920 *et seq.*).

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown. This bill is keyed fiscal.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **Purpose of this bill.** According to the author, “California’s coast and bays are on the front lines of climate change. Sea level rise, intensifying storm surges, and coastal flooding threaten vulnerable communities, sensitive ecosystems, and critical infrastructure across the state. Californians have responded with ambition—Senate Bill 272 requires local jurisdictions to prepare sea level rise adaptation plans, and voters approved Proposition 4 in 2024, dedicating billions of dollars to coastal resilience investments. The political will and the funding are in place. What remains is the capacity to deliver projects on the ground—and that is where our current permitting system falls short. Today, a project sponsor may need to secure up to ten separate permits from state, federal, and local agencies. The process is plagued by redundant and inconsistent application requirements, no aligned review timelines, sequential rather than concurrent permit processing, no single lead agency to coordinate or resolve conflicts, and chronic staffing vacancies in agencies that require highly specialized expertise. [This bill] takes a targeted, expert-driven approach: directing the Secretary of [CNRA] to convene a Coastal Resilience Permitting Working Group to develop a Coastal Resilience Permitting Roadmap—identifying actionable administrative, regulatory, and legislative reforms. Critically, the bill does not alter existing permitting requirements or weaken any environmental protection. California has made the commitments and investments. [This bill] is the practical, durable step toward building the institutional capacity to deliver on them.”
- 2) **Background.** In 2024, the Ocean Protection Council released sea level rise guidance suggesting that sea levels in California will most likely rise 0.8 feet above 2000 levels by 2050 and 1.6–3.1 feet by 2100. Local impacts may vary, with some locations, like Humboldt Bay, likely to see higher sea level rise. With the rise in sea level, more frequent coastal flooding and storm surge will occur, threatening communities and infrastructure along the

coast. Voters and the Legislature have acted to encourage coastal resilience, but projects face a gauntlet of federal, state, and local permits and permissions designed to protect California's biodiversity, natural resources, and communities. Navigating the permitting process can be time-consuming and costly for applicants, even for restoration or resilience projects.

Permitting requirements for coastal projects. Many agencies are potentially involved in issuing a permit for coastal development, with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)'s North-Central California Coastal Sediment Coordination Committee identifying at least 16 permitting agencies in its Efficient Permitting Roadmap. Major agencies include:

- The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), which issues permits for activities in navigable waters under Section 404 of the federal Clean Water Act and Section 10 of the federal Rivers and Harbors Act;
- The local Regional Water Board, which issues water quality certifications authorizing federal permitting under Section 401 of the Clean Water Act;
- The Coastal Commission, which issues coastal development permits under the California Coastal Act (this authority may be delegated to a local government); and
- CDFW, which issues incidental take permits for species protected under the California Endangered Species Act and lake or streambed alteration agreements.

Additional approvals may be required by other agencies [e.g., BCDC, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), State Lands Commission, etc.] and environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and/or National Environmental Policy Act may be required. Many of these permits and approvals rely on other permits and must be completed in sequence.

Permit streamlining. Due to struggles with the lengthy and complex permitting process, there has been interest in streamlining the permitting process to provide more certainty and efficiency for project proponents. In 2024, the Assembly investigated permitting in California through its Select Committee on Permitting Reform. In its final report, the Select Committee identified several best practices, including frontloading planning, providing a clear and straightforward process, maximizing consistency across permitting agencies, and pre-determining mitigation measures.

In some parts of the state, these best practices have been deployed for coastal permitting, including in the Bay Area, where the San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority, with support from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, convenes dedicated staff from six permitting agencies (USACE, USFWS, NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service, San Francisco Bay Regional Water Board, CDFW, and BCDC) to improve the permitting process for multi-benefit habitat restoration projects and associated flood management and public access infrastructure. The resulting coordinating group, BRRIT, uses pre-application consultation to accelerate the permitting process. Of the 11 fully-permitted projects identified in the BRRIT 2025 Annual Report, 100% had all permits issued within the target timeline. Where some partially-permitted projects have not met the target timeline, this has been due

to late changes to conditions (for example, changes to listed species under the federal Endangered Species Act).

Other permit streamlining efforts have also been launched statewide, including under CNRA's "Cutting the Green Tape" initiative. In a February 2026 memorandum, the Secretaries of CNRA and CalEPA highlighted several key streamlining efforts:

- The Statutory Exemption for Restoration Projects (SERP), which has allowed CDFW to streamline CEQA compliance for 83 habitat restoration or enhancement projects;
- The Restoration Management Permit, which consolidates five permits into one and has allowed CDFW to reduce average processing time for applications to less than three months;
- The Statewide General Restoration Order issued by the State Water Board for large restoration projects, which has saved applicants, on average, \$25,730 and reduced processing time by 5.5 months;
- Public Works Plans created by the Coastal Commission, which now cover over 350,000 acres of completed wildfire resilience and forest restoration projects.

There remains an opportunity to coordinate across permitting entities, as these streamlining efforts and the timelines required for permit issuance under the Permit Streamlining Act generally impact a single permit, rather than the total compliance timeline, which may involve the sequential issuance of numerous permits.

Mitigation, advance mitigation, and self-mitigation. Mitigation is mandated by CEQA guidelines whenever a project may result in significant impact to the environment (see, 14 California Code of Regulations §§ 15021 and 15091). These requirements exist to ensure that California's natural resources are preserved and protected into the future, for the benefit of all. When habitat (such as a wetland) is damaged by a project, the required mitigation for that damage frequently includes the restoration, enhancement, and/or preservation of comparable habitat. In "advance mitigation," efficiencies can be obtained by compensating for impacts before they occur. This allows for landscape-level planning, more efficient permitting, and no temporal loss of habitat. Programs for advance mitigation through CDFW include conservation and mitigation banking and mitigation credit agreements; Caltrans also has a program for regional-scale advance mitigation. Some project proponents seek to "self-mitigate" to avoid the requirement for off-site compensatory mitigation entirely. This can be accomplished (currently on a case-by-case basis) by implementing habitat features and engineering with nature-based solutions into project design and construction. This bill lays out increasing opportunities for advance mitigation and self-mitigation as topics for the Working Group to consider.

- 3) **Arguments in support.** The Exploratorium writes, "California's coast and bays are on the front lines of climate change. Sea level rise, storm surges, and increasingly frequent flooding threaten vulnerable communities, sensitive ecosystems, and critical infrastructure across the state." The Bay Area Council and Bay Planning Coalition add, "Despite urgent need and significant demand for public and private investment for climate adaptation, coastal resilience projects in California routinely face protracted and unpredictable permitting

timelines. Overlapping state and federal authorities, inconsistent mitigation requirements, and inadequate interagency coordination create barriers that delay the very projects our communities need most. [This bill] takes a practical, expert-driven approach to solving this problem by convening the agencies, technical practitioners, and stakeholders best positioned to identify the specific reforms needed.”

- 4) **Dual referral.** This bill was also referred to the Assembly Natural Resources Committee, where it passed by a vote of 12-1 on March 23, 2026.
- 5) **Related legislation.** AB 1581 (Kalra), Chapter 681, Statutes of 2024, creates the consolidated Restoration Management Permit, to streamline restoration projects.

SB 174 (Budget and Fiscal Review), Chapter 74, Statutes of 2024, a public resources trailer bill, among other provisions, extends SERP to January 1, 2030.

SB 272 (Laird), Chapter 384, Statutes of 2023, requires the Coastal Commission and BCDC to develop guidelines for sea level rise plans, and requires local governments lying in the coastal zone or in BCDC’s jurisdiction to adopt sea level rise plans by January 1, 2034.

SB 155 (Budget and Fiscal Review), Chapter 258, Statutes of 2021, a public resources trailer bill, among other provisions, creates SERP to exempt certain conservation and restoration projects from CEQA.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

Bay Area Council (co-sponsor)
 Bay Planning Coalition (co-sponsor)
 California State Association of Counties
 City of Port Hueneme
 Coastal Quest
 East Bay Dischargers Authority
 Econcrete
 McFadden Finch Holdings Company
 Orange County Transportation Authority
 Port of Redwood City
 San Francisco Bay Ferry
 San Francisco International Airport
 San Mateo County Flood and Sea Level Rise Resiliency District
 Santa Clara Valley Water District
 The Exploratorium
 The Nature Conservancy
 Wildcoast

Opposition

None on file

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