

Date of Hearing: April 29, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

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

Policy Committee:	Natural Resources	Vote:	12 - 1
	Water, Parks and Wildlife		12 - 0

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

SUMMARY:

This bill requires the Secretary of the California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA), in consultation with the Secretary for Environmental Protection (CalEPA), to convene a Coastal Resilience Permitting Working Group (Working Group) for the purpose of developing a Coastal Resilience Permitting Roadmap (Roadmap) to accelerate coastal resilience projects.

Specifically, this bill, among other things:

- 1) Requires the Secretary of CNRA, in consultation with the Secretary of CalEPA, to convene a Working Group for the purpose of developing a Roadmap for coastal resilience projects (as defined) proposed along the California coast and in the San Francisco Bay, and in and adjacent to state and federal waters; requires development of the Roadmap to incorporate, but not delay, progress to advance responsible permitting and development of coastal resilience projects; and requires the Working Group to consist of representatives from federal, state, and local agencies, as specified.
- 2) Requires, on or before January 1, 2028, the Secretary of CNRA to submit the Roadmap to the Governor and Legislature, and sunsets this requirement on January 1, 2032.
- 3) Requires the Roadmap to include recommendations that address numerous specified topics, including administrative reforms that can be implemented by state agencies within their existing authority to improve permit issuance timelines, a state process to align agency mitigation requirements and enable in-lieu fees or advance mitigation, and a workforce assessment and funding options for regulatory staffing positions and as-needed permitting support contracts to supplement staff. For a detailed summary, please see the Assembly Water, Parks, and Wildlife Committee’s analysis of this bill.
- 4) To support deliberations of the Working Group, requires, on or before April 1, 2027, the Secretary of CNRA to, in collaboration with specified entities, convene a Coastal Resilience Permit Advisory Group (Advisory Group) and conduct a series of public workshops, as specified.

FISCAL EFFECT:

- 1) CNRA estimates General Fund costs of approximately \$769,000 over two years to facilitate interagency collaboration, public workshops, development of the Roadmap, and other deliverables required by the bill. According to CNRA, these resources will support one

limited-term senior environmental scientist position as well as consulting services (external or interagency) for facilitation, logistics, communications, audio-visual services, and document design support for Roadmap deliverables.

- 2) The Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC) estimates ongoing annual General Fund costs of approximately \$1.1 million to hire five staff to assist with development of the Roadmap and implement reforms identified by the Working Group. This estimate also includes the cost of contracting with a vendor to perform an assessment of BCDC's workforce as well as resources for additional office space (as BCDC's headquarters in San Francisco is at capacity.) BCDC notes that without additional positions and contracting resources, BCDC may need to utilize its existing permitting staff and its regulatory improvements team to implement this bill, thereby increasing permitting timelines and delaying implementation of BCDC's preexisting efforts to improve permitting processes.
- 3) The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) estimates General Fund costs of approximately \$270,000 in fiscal year (FY) 2027-28 and \$262,000 in FY 2028-29 and FY 2029-30 for one limited-term senior environmental scientist to organize input from the department's coastal regions (specifically, regions one, three, four, five, and seven); participate in the Working Group, Advisory Group, and public workshops; and assist with the development and review of the Roadmap. This estimate includes the cost of staff travel.
- 4) The California Coastal Commission estimates annual General Fund costs of approximately \$1.1 million in 2027 and 2028 for five limited-term staff to help develop relevant components of the Roadmap, including recommendations across 10 topic areas, new state agency mitigation processes, proposed legislative reforms, alternatives analyses, evaluation of the efficacy of offshore wind project permitting practices, and more. These staff will participate in the Advisory Group and hold multi-agency workshops to solicit feedback on existing agency processes and draft reform proposals for the Roadmap.
- 5) CalEPA estimates ongoing annual General Fund costs of approximately \$208,000 for one senior environmental scientist to consult with members of the Working Group and collaborate on the drafting of recommendations to be included in the Roadmap.
- 6) The State Water Resources Control Board estimates ongoing annual costs of approximately \$4.5 million (General Fund or Waste Discharge Permit Fund) for 18 positions to support participation by the state board and nine regional boards in the creation and implementation of the Roadmap, including developing subject matter expertise, drafting recommendations, participating in statewide public workshops, providing legal consultation, and ensuring the necessary internal operational support (including information technology resources) to implement the bill.

The Legislative Analyst's Office recently warned of General Fund structural deficits of around \$35 billion per year in the 2027-28 FY and ongoing.

While it is reasonable to assume state agencies may require some limited-term resources to participate in the Working Group and Advisory Group and to help develop the required Roadmap, any costs anticipated or incurred by agencies following the development of the Roadmap (in 2028 and onwards) – including many of the significant resource needs outlined above – should not be attributed to this bill. While the bill may create cost pressures on agencies to implement permit streamlining recommendations, implementation of identified reforms is

beyond the scope of this bill. Further, with many of the active and ongoing efforts underway at state agencies to streamline and expedite permitting for restoration and resilience projects (see below), it is reasonable to assume agencies may be able to incorporate a portion of the work created by this bill into their existing regulatory improvement efforts, to the extent there is overlap.

COMMENTS:

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

The communities most at risk from climate change are disproportionately low-income and communities of color, located in low-lying areas adjacent to San Francisco Bay and the Pacific coast, with limited resources to self-finance adaptation. Every year of permitting delay is a year these communities remain exposed to harm they did not cause and cannot afford to absorb. AB 2051 would outline a process that could help accelerate the delivery of flood protection, wetland restoration, and shoreline adaptation infrastructure to the people who need it most...The bill's Coastal Resilience Permit Advisory Group is specifically charged with ensuring that streamlining efforts do not weaken protections for fish and wildlife habitat, tribal cultural resources, or public access.

2) **Background. Coastal Resilience.** California's coast is increasingly experiencing and vulnerable to the effects of a changing climate, with higher sea levels, stronger storms, and recurrent flooding placing growing pressure on communities, natural habitats, and key infrastructure. Strengthening coastal resilience is critical to managing these risks, helping to protect people and property while sustaining the environmental health and economic vitality of these regions. However, coastal resilience projects often face barriers related to permitting, resulting in fewer projects, higher costs, and lost opportunities.

The author notes that a project sponsor may need to secure up to 10 separate permits from state, federal, and local agencies – and the process is often challenged by redundant and inconsistent application requirements, poorly 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.

Permit Streamlining. There are several local and state efforts underway, as well as numerous legislative efforts over the years, to streamline and expedite permitting for restoration and resilience projects. For example, the Permit Streamlining Act requires a public agency that is the lead agency for a development project to approve or disapprove the project within specified time periods.

Launched in 2021, CNRA's Cutting the Green Tape program creates new pathways to accelerate, scale, and improve the quality of beneficial habitat restoration projects. According to a March 2026 press release from the Newsom administration, over the past four years, the program has helped more than 500 restoration projects move forward by reducing costly delays and making the approval process easier to navigate. Tools like the Statutory Exemption for Restoration Projects, the State Water Resources Control Board's Statewide Restoration General Order, the Coastal Commission's Public Works Plans, Restoration

Consistency Determinations, and the newly authorized Restoration Management Permit have collectively saved restoration projects more than \$12 million to date.

In March 2026, the secretaries of CNRA and CalEPA issued a joint memo calling on agencies to redouble their efforts to identify and eliminate unnecessary permitting delays. Among other actions, the memo directs agencies to continue simplifying funding pathways; find new ways to improve regulatory processes; uphold early, often, and meaningful tribal consultation; assess opportunities to create dedicated restoration teams; utilize Cutting the Green Tape improvements in mitigation projects; and improve coordination with other entities that have overlapping regulatory oversight or program delivery.

Similarly, BCDC is proposing amendments to its regulations as part of an ongoing effort to modernize its permitting program. The Bay Restoration Regulatory Integration Team is comprised of staff from each of the six state and federal regulatory agencies with jurisdiction over the San Francisco Bay. This team provides project proponents with a “one-stop-shop” for complex multi-benefit habitat restoration and associated flood management projects.

According to the sponsors of this bill – Bay Area Council (BAC) and Bay Planning Coalition (BPC) – this bill creates a more consistent, cross-agency approach to coordination and streamlining for a broader set of climate adaptation and resilience projects and builds on existing permit streamlining efforts by addressing clear gaps in their scope rather than duplicating work.

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