
SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Sabrina Cervantes, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

AB 2051 (Wicks) - Public resources: Coastal Resilience Permitting Working Group

Version: July 6, 2026

Urgency: No

Hearing Date: August 3, 2026

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

Mandate: No

Consultant: Ashley Ames

Bill Summary: This bill would require the Secretary of the California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA) 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.

Fiscal Impact:

- 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.
- 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.
- The State Water Board and Regional Water Boards estimate ongoing costs of about \$5 million annually (General Fund, Waste Discharge Permit Fund, or other fund) to support state and regional board participation in the creation of Coastal Resilience Permitting Roadmap, including expansive subject matter expertise, developing recommendations, participating in statewide public workshops, providing legal consultation, and ensuring the necessary internal operational support to carry out the bill's provisions. In addition, the State Water Board anticipates that the scale of the required implementable solutions required by this bill's provisions would cost millions more ongoing, with significant information technology resources required to develop unified applications on a statewide or regional scale.
- The San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission.(BCDC) estimates ongoing costs of about \$1.1 million annually (General Fund) 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.

- The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) estimates costs of approximately \$270,000 in fiscal year (FY) 2027-28 and \$262,000 in FY 2028-29 and FY 2029-30 (General Fund) 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.
- The California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA) estimates ongoing costs of \$208,000 annually (General Fund) to consult with the members of the Working Group to collaborate on the drafting and recommendations to be included in the Roadmap.

Background:

Sea level rise in California. The Ocean Protection Council's 2024 guidance projects sea levels most likely rising 0.8 feet above 2000 levels by 2050 and 1.6 to 3.1 feet by 2100, with local variation — Humboldt Bay among the locations likely to see more. Rising seas will bring more frequent coastal flooding and storm surge, threatening communities and infrastructure valued in the estimated hundreds of billions of dollars, with the cost of response also estimated in the billions.

Planning requirements. SB 272 (Laird, Chapter 384, Statutes of 2023) requires local governments along the coastline, including San Francisco Bay, to develop a sea level rise plan by January 1, 2034, submitted either as part of a local coastal program (LCP) to the California Coastal Commission or as a shoreline resiliency plan to BCDC. Local governments with approved plans receive funding priority, subject to appropriation, for the adaptation strategies and projects those plans identify. Both agencies were required to issue preparation guidelines by December 31, 2024. SB 272 built on SB 1 (Atkins, Chapter 236, Statutes of 2021), which sought to coordinate and fund state sea level rise preparation.

The coastal agencies. The McAteer-Petris Act (Government Code §§66600 et seq.) established BCDC in 1965 as a temporary agency; it was made permanent in 1969 after completion of the San Francisco Bay Plan. BCDC's jurisdiction covers the Bay and land within 100 feet of the shoreline, and since 2008 it has led the Bay Area's preparedness and resilience work on rising seas, tides, and storm surge. It approved SB 272 guidance in December 2024. The Coastal Commission, created by voter initiative in 1972 and made permanent by the Coastal Act (Public Resources Code §§30000 et seq.), plans for and regulates land and water use in the coastal zone, which excludes BCDC's Bay jurisdiction. Development there generally requires a coastal development permit from the Commission or from a local government with a certified LCP, judged against Coastal Act policies. In November 2024 the Commission adopted updated Sea Level Rise Policy Guidance covering guiding principles, best available science, step-by-step direction for addressing sea level rise in LCPs and permits including SB 272 implementation, and adaptation strategies.

Permitting complexity. As many as 16 federal and state agencies may have a role in permitting a coastal project, among them the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, regional water quality control boards, the Coastal Commission, BCDC, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the State Lands Commission — agencies with overlapping but distinct jurisdictions. The Assembly's Select Committee on Permitting Reform examined this in 2024 and identified best practices including frontloading planning, providing a clear and straightforward process, maximizing consistency across agencies, and pre-determining mitigation measures.

A working model. The San Francisco Bay Restoration Regulatory Integration Team (BRRIT) offers a demonstrated alternative. Convened by the San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority with U.S. EPA support, it brings dedicated staff from six permitting agencies — the Corps, USFWS, NOAA Fisheries, the San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board, CDFW, and BCDC — together to improve permitting for multi-benefit habitat restoration projects and associated flood management and public access infrastructure, using preapplication consultation to accelerate review. All 11 fully permitted projects in BRRIT's 2025 Annual Report had permits issued within the target timeline; where partially permitted projects have missed it, the cause has been late changes to conditions, such as changes to federally listed species.

Mitigation approaches. CEQA guidelines mandate mitigation whenever a project may significantly affect the environment, and where habitat such as wetland is damaged, required mitigation frequently involves restoring, enhancing, or preserving comparable habitat. Advance mitigation compensates for impacts before they occur, permitting landscape-level planning, more efficient permitting, and no temporal loss of habitat; CDFW administers advance mitigation through conservation and mitigation banking and the voluntary Regional Conservation Investment Strategies program, which encourages landscape-scale assessment and planning to yield higher ecological benefit than project-by-project efforts. Self-mitigation avoids offsite compensatory mitigation by building habitat features and nature-based solutions into project design and construction.

Proposed Law: This bill would:

1. Require the Secretary of CNRA, in consultation with the Secretary of CalEPA, to convene a Working Group and to develop a Roadmap with recommendations for process improvements and legislative reforms to enable efficient and timely delivery of environmental approvals, due to the Governor and the Legislature by January 1, 2028.
2. Require the Working Group to consist of representatives from federal, state, and local agencies, including the Coastal Commission, CalEPA, CDFW, the Governor's Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation, CNRA, the Ocean Protection Council, BCDC, the State Coastal Conservancy, the State Lands Commission, the State Office of Historic Preservation, the State Water Board, and the San Francisco Bay, North Coast, Central Coast, Los Angeles, Santa Ana, and San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Boards.
3. Require the Roadmap to include, at minimum, recommendations addressing:

1. Administrative reforms implementable within existing agency authority, including improving efficiency in completeness determinations through preapplication consultations and clear permit guidelines; unified applications; interagency project management teams modeled on the BRRIT; methods to standardize compensatory mitigation, as applicable and feasible, including rewarding engineering with nature features to enable self-mitigation and consideration of thresholds for small amounts of fill that may not require mitigation; expanded regional general permits and programmatic agreements; process improvements allowing permit approval while design is being developed or complete and maintaining approval through nonsubstantive design changes; standard measures for borings, pile driving, and fill placement; and expedited permitting of projects in local sea level rise adaptation plans as an incentive to complete those plans.
 2. A state process to align agency mitigation requirements and enable in-lieu fees or advance mitigation.
 3. Legislative reforms with the greatest potential to accelerate permitting, and identification of regulatory gaps that could lead to maladaptation.
 4. A pilot program, if needed to test alternative approaches, and an evaluation of whether consolidated permits similar to those for offshore wind would facilitate timely permits.
 5. A workforce assessment and funding options for regulatory staffing and permitting support contracts, including analysis of pay scales needed to recruit and retain staff.
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4. Require the CNRA Secretary, on or before April 1, 2027, to convene a Coastal Resilience Permit Advisory Group including state permit-seeking agencies, local governments required to update their LCPs for sea level rise, ports, local transportation agencies, special districts, stormwater management and wastewater treatment agencies, California Native American tribes on the Native American Heritage Commission contact list, and members of the public including academics, businesses, builders, fishers, environmental and environmental justice organizations, and professional associations.
 5. Require the CNRA Secretary to conduct public workshops with the Advisory Group to solicit feedback on permitting challenges and to review draft reform proposals for potential inclusion in the Roadmap.
 6. Provide that when developing infrastructure to address adaptation, where feasible, a project alternative should be developed using existing or restored natural features and ecosystem processes to meet the project's goals.
 7. Define "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, including those amplified by climate change.

8. Make relevant legislative findings and declarations.

Related Legislation:

AB 996 (Pellerin, Chapter 286, Statutes of 2025) establishes an early consultation framework between a local government and the Coastal Commission prior to a local government's submission of a LCP or LCP amendment in order to facilitate Coastal Commission certification of the LCP or LCP amendment, including to meet sea level rise planning requirements, as provided.

SB 272 (Laird, Chapter 384, Statutes of 2023) requires a local government in the coastal zone or within the San Francisco Bay to develop a sea level rise plan as part of either a LCP or a shoreline resiliency plan that includes certain information, including sea level rise adaptation strategies and recommended projects; requires local governments to comply by January 1, 2034, as specified; and prioritizes funding for implementation of sea level rise adaptation strategies in approved plans, among other things.

SB 867 (Laird, 2022) would have required local governments in the coastal zone or within the jurisdiction of BCDC to implement sea level rise planning and adaptation, as specified, and would have prioritized funding for local government projects implementing an approved sea level rise adaptation plan, among other things. (*This bill was vetoed by Governor Newsom.*)

SB 1 (Atkins, Chapter 236, Statutes of 2021) establishes the California Sea Level Rise State and Regional Support Collaborative at the Ocean Protection Council to help coordinate and fund state efforts to prepare for sea level rise associated with climate change, and provides up to \$100M state funding annually to address sea level rise, among other things.

AB 72 (Petrie Norris, Chapter 369, Statutes of 2021) promotes the use of natural infrastructure to attenuate coastal hazards as part of climate adaptation, among other things.

AB 65 (Petrie-Norris, Chapter 347, Statutes of 2019) requires the State Coastal Conservancy to prioritize projects that provide natural infrastructure and multiple public benefits when allocating certain state monies.

Staff Comments: According to the State Water Board, its current fiscal projection reflects the operational reality of Regional Board involvement in coastal resilience projects. The necessity for multiple positions per region—rather than a single representative, or a flexible, coordinated role across the Water Boards—stems from the high level of prescription in the bill. According to the Water Board, as currently drafted, the bill would mandate a level of granular technical expertise that no single individual can provide across the diverse regulatory portfolio of a regional board. Unlike agencies that may oversee one or two permits, regional boards manage an array of regulatory programs. A single coastal resilience project may trigger requirements across several distinct permits such as 401 certifications, NPDES, WDRs, MS4s, etc. This level of specificity contributes to the bill's estimated costs.