

Date of Hearing: March 23, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

Isaac G. Bryan, Chair

AB 2494 (Rogers) – As Introduced February 20, 2026

SUBJECT: State forests: forest management

SUMMARY: Revises the state’s management policies for Demonstration State Forests (DSFs).

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Pursuant to the Z'berg-Nejedly Forest Practices Act, prohibits a person from conducting timber operations unless a timber harvest plan (THP) prepared by a registered professional forester has been submitted for such operations to the Department of Forestry and Fire Prevention (CAL FIRE). (Public Resources Code (PRC) 4511-4630)
- 2) Pursuant to the Timber Regulation and Forest Restoration Fund (TRFR Fund) (PRC) 4629 - 4629.13
 - a) Establishes the intent of the Legislature to identify and implement efficiencies in the regulation of timber harvesting between state agencies.
 - b) Imposes an assessment on a person who purchases a lumber product or an engineered wood product, as determined by the Board of Forestry, for storage, use, or other consumption in this state, at the rate of 1% of the sales price.
 - c) Requires moneys deposited in the TRFR Fund to be used, upon appropriation by the Legislature, for specified purposes and identifies specified proprieties for appropriations from the TRFR Fund.
- 3) Pursuant to the State Forest Law (PRC 4631-4664):
 - a) Declares it to be in the interest of the welfare of the people of this state and their industries and other activities involving the use of wood, lumber, poles, piling, and other forest products, that desirable cutover forest lands, including those having young and old timber growth, be made fully productive and that the holding and reforestation of such lands is a necessary measure predicated on waning supplies of original old growth timber. (PRC 4631)
 - b) Declares it to be in the interest of the welfare of the people of this state that the state retain the existing land base of DSFs in timber production for research and demonstration purposes, and cooperate with local governments in mitigating the impacts on school enrollment of geothermal development which occurs in proximity to state-owned forest lands. (PRC 4631.5)
 - c) Defines “management” as the handling of forest crop and forest soil so as to achieve maximum sustained production of high-quality forest products while giving consideration

to values relating to recreation, watershed, wildlife, range and forage, fisheries, and aesthetic enjoyment. (PRC 4639)

- d) Requires the management of DSFs and the cutting and sale of timber and other forest products from DSFs to conform to regulations prepared in conformity with forest management practices designed to achieve maximum sustained production of high-quality forest products while giving consideration to values relating to recreation, watershed, wildlife, range and forage, fisheries, and aesthetic enjoyment. (PRC 4651)
 - e) Authorizes CAL FIRE to permit a limited amount of commercial timber operations on the property within the Soquel DSF in order to provide funds for the maintenance and operation of the state forest and to allow fulfillment of the objectives for the Soquel DSF. Income from the state forest property shall sustain all costs of operation and provide income for research and educational purposes. (PRC 4661)
- 4) Creates the Forest Resources Improvement Fund (FRIF) from which moneys may only be expended, upon appropriation by the Legislature, for the cost of operations associated with management of lands held in trust by the state and operated as demonstration state forests by CAL FIRE, including restoration activities, and to reimburse CAL FIRE's cost of maintaining and improving the campground facilities, associated recreational facilities, natural environment, and access thereto. (PRC 4799.3)
 - 5) Establishes the California Timberland Productivity Act of 1982, to (1) maintain the optimum amount of the limited supply of timberland to ensure its current and continued availability for the growing and harvesting of timber and compatible uses; (2) discourage premature or unnecessary conversion of timberland to urban and other uses; (3) discourage expansion of urban services into timberland; and, (4) encourage investment in timberlands based on reasonable expectation of harvest. (Government Code 51100 *et seq.*)

THIS BILL:

- 1) Expands eligible uses of the TRFR Fund to include support for DSFs.
- 2) Includes DSFs as a priority for appropriations from the TRFR Fund.
- 3) Requires the secretary of Natural Resources Agency's (NRA) report to the Joint Legislative Budget Committees to include a listing of the costs associated with THP permits and agreements, the number of THPs approved in the past fiscal year, any expenditures or transfers from the TRFR Fund, an assessment of whether there is adequate staff to efficiently and effectively review plans under the forest practice program, any identified staffing needs by CAL FIRE and costs per position to support a more efficient review of THPs, the number of THPs submitted, returned for incompleteness, accepted, reviewed, and approved, the average time for THP review and time of review for any subsequent agreements or permits to support the conduct of timber operations under an approved THP, and percentage of preharvest inspections attended by each review team agency.
- 4) Revises the legislative intent for DSFs to declare that desirable forest lands, including those having young and old timber growth should be restored to fulfill ecological conditions and processes, and managed consistent with the definition of "management." Further declares it to be the policy of the state to respect California Native American tribal sovereignty and to

seek opportunities for co-management and integration of indigenous traditional ecological knowledge in forest management.

- 5) Further revises the policy of the state to acquire by purchase, exchange, lease, or grant all of the following:
 - a) The reforestation or restoration of which is not assured under private ownership, to reforest or restore such lands with locally appropriate species.
 - b) Disposal of forest lands primarily suitable for timber production, which may be acquired under precutting agreements.
 - c) Demonstration forests to furnish local needs of investigation, demonstration, and education throughout the state.
- 6) Strikes the 40,000 acreage cap for DSFs in specified districts.
- 7) Further declares that the state should do both of the following:
 - a) Retain the existing land base of DSFs primarily for research and demonstration purposes and allow the sale of timber and other forest products only when harvest occurs for ecological restoration or research purposes; and,
 - b) Cooperate with local governments in mitigating the impacts on school enrollment of geothermal development that occurs in proximity to state-owned forest lands.
- 8) Redefines “management” as the handling of forest vegetation and soils within DSFs, including, but not limited to, demonstration state forests, for biodiversity conservation and fire resilience, while maximizing the promotion of durable onsite carbon storage and sequestration, climate resiliency goals, equitable forest access, wildlife and recreation opportunities, and compatible research efforts.
- 9) Prohibits the sale of timber and other forest products unless harvest occurs for ecological restoration or research purposes in a manner consistent with the definition of management.
- 10) Requires the regulations for the management of DSFs and the cutting and sale of timber and other forest products from state forests to prioritize management practices consistent with the definition of management.
- 11) Redirects all recreational user fees received by CAL FIRE during each fiscal year from the FRIF to the TRFR Fund.
- 12) Redirects receipts from the sales of forest products and recreational user fees from the FRIF to the TRFR Fund.
- 13) Requires any other funds generated by a DSF, including, but not limited to, any funds that are deposited into the FRIF, to be transferred to the TRFR Fund.
- 14) Add foraging as a reasonable use of DSFs.

15) Strikes the use of mining in DSFs.

16) Provides that no reimbursement is required by this act pursuant to the California Constitution.

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS:

1) **Demonstration State Forests.** California has 14 DSFs totaling 85,000 acres – less than 1% of the state’s 31 million acres of forested land. The DSFs represent the most common forest types in the state and serve as a living laboratory for how to care for California’s timberlands. The forests provide research and demonstration opportunities for natural resource management, while providing public recreation opportunities, fish and wildlife habitat, and watershed protection. Not only do these forests matter for government-owned areas, but their findings inform private owners of California's 40% privately owned forest land across the state.

Common activities on DSFs include experimental timber harvesting techniques, watershed restoration, mushroom collecting, hunting, firewood gathering, cone collecting for seed, a variety of university research projects, horseback riding, camping, mountain biking, and hiking.

Timber harvesting has long been a primary activity in DSFs; current law stipulates managing DSFs to achieve maximum sustained production. Timber harvesting is also a component of research and development. Collectively, DSFs grow approximately 75 million board feet (MBF) of timber annually and harvest an average of 20 MBF each year, enough to build 12,500 single-family homes. Jackson Demonstration State Forest (JDSF) in Mendocino County is the largest of CAL FIRE's DSFs. On average, JDSF harvests 14.3 MBF of conifer timber each year.

2) **Funding DSFs.** The FRIF is a special revenue fund established to support management of the DSFs. Revenue comes primarily from timber sales with a minor amount, less than 1%, coming from recreational activities such as camping, mushroom foraging permits, firewood permits, and special use events like mountain bike races. The Legislature appropriates monies annually in the State budget, which sets a spending cap from this account.

According to CAL FIRE’s most recent fund condition statementⁱ, \$10.728 million was appropriated from the FRIF in FY 2025/26 and \$11.386 million is proposed for FY 2026/27. Jackson, Boggs Mountain, Soquel, LaTour, and Mountain House DSFs have the greatest personnel and operational expenses. The remaining DSFs do not have assigned staff and are overseen by Resource Management personnel from the closest local CAL FIRE Administrative Unit.

In addition to FRIF, CAL FIRE’s Fire and Resource Assessment Program (FRAP) conducts and supports scientific research and monitoring related to a variety of wildfire and forest health issues at DSFs and administers grants for high-level scientific research. As of

November 2024, \$2.8 million from California Climate Investments have been implemented in DSFs.

Further, revenue generated from timber harvesting on DSFs is required by law to be spent on the DSFs. It cannot be spent on other things such as firefighting.

According to CAL FIRE, from timber sales between calendar year 2017-2024, JSDF (Mendocino County) generated \$42 million, LaTour (Shasta County) generated \$2.5 million, Mountain Home (Tulare County) generated \$812,000, and Sequel (Santa Cruz County) generated \$2.7 million. Importantly, timber revenues *do not* historically cover the DSFs operating, personnel, or research costs. For example, JSDF timber sales generated \$1.13 million in 2023, but its annual operating expenses were three times that amount (\$4.5 million).

- 3) **Shifting the state policy on management.** DSFs were established as testing ground for forest management and have historically included timber harvesting to show that ecological management and economically driven endeavors can coexist.

The state's policy on DSFs states that it is in the interest of the welfare of the people of this state and their industries and other activities involving the use of wood, lumber, poles, piling, and other forest products, that desirable forest lands, including those having young and old timber growth, be made fully productive and that the holding and reforestation of such lands is a necessary measure predicated on waning supplies of original old growth timber.

This bill is recasting the state's management policy to instead say that desirable forest lands, including those having young and old timber growth, should be restored to fulfill ecological conditions and processes, and managed consistent with this bill's definition of management, and that it is further declared to be the policy of the state to respect California Native American tribal sovereignty and to seek opportunities for co-management and integration of indigenous traditional ecological knowledge in forest management. Mendocino County Supervisor, Mo Mulheren, writes in support that, "From a local perspective, this is also about economic transition. Rural counties like ours need pathways that support restoration work, recreation, and stewardship jobs alongside responsible timber practices. AB 2494 helps create that balance."

The DSFs need to continue to be used for ongoing research and demonstration, and science-based research can take years to draw information from. This bill proposes to update the management policies away from timber harvesting and more toward restoration and biodiversity protections consistent with state environmental restoration goals. Logging is a vital tool for healthy forest management and fire risk reduction and needs to continue in DSFs.

- 4) **AB 1492 timber tax.** AB 1492 (Committee on Budget), Chapter 289, Statutes of 2012, requires a 1% tax on lumber and engineered wood products sold at the retail level to pay for agency staffing, permits, oversight, and environmental protection of California's forested ecosystems. The law also includes provisions to reduce regulatory costs to make California wood products more competitive with imports.

The intent of AB 1492 is to improve the state's ability to monitor the economic and environmental consequences of timber regulation, provide for a more efficient regulatory process that potentially takes a broader view than individual THPs, and fund critical restoration activities.

According to the *Report to the Joint Legislative Budget Committee on the Timber Regulation and Forest Restoration Program Assembly Bill 1492 Fiscal Years 2021-22 & 2022-23*ⁱⁱ, the AB 1492 TRFR Program's annual operating budget ranges from \$69 million - \$111 million.

In fiscal year (FY) 2021-22, the TRFR Fund had \$90.2 million in available resources, of which approximately \$59.2 million came from annual forest product sales assessment revenues. Of the \$90.2 million available, \$40.5 million was expended to support Program operations statewide. By the end of fiscal year 2021-22, the Fund had a balance of \$49.7 million.

In FY 2022-23, the TRFR Fund had \$111.4 million in available resources, of which approximately \$61.8 million came from annual forest product sales assessment revenues. Of the \$111.4 million available, \$52.1 million was expended to support Program operations statewide. At the end of fiscal year 2022-23, the Fund showed an ending balance of \$59.3 million.

To supplant the downshift in timber harvest revenues supporting DSFs, this bill would move the DSF budgeting to TRFR Fund to tap into those revenues by including DSFs as a funding priority.

Because DSFs have greater operating and personnel expenses than timber revenues they generate, even without reduced timber production, shifting to the TRFR Fund will create a drawdown on that fund to operate the DSFs, and how the DSFs are prioritized under the current statutory funding framework will impact the available resources to manage them.

Stakeholders in opposition to this bill cite concerns with shifting the DSFs budget to the TRFR noting that because the TRFR Fund prioritizes regulatory and programmatic functions first, support for DSFs would be pushed to a lower priority tier. They state, "This change creates significant uncertainty about whether the forests will have the reliable funding needed to maintain infrastructure, support research programs, and carry out forest health projects."

The author may wish to work with CAL FIRE and the Assembly Appropriations Committee to determine the best state account to maintain reliable funding for DSFs.

- 5) **CAL FIRE Management Plans.** The state is required to develop forest management plans (FMP) for the DSFs and update them every 10 years. CAL FIRE is currently working on updating the JDSF management plan, which provides overarching goals and general parameters for the management of JDSF for the next 10 years, or until a subsequent plan or major revision is approved.

The final draft FMP with public comments is expected to be released March 2026, and plan approval and public comment response is expected in May. A change to the statute governing DSF management will interrupt CAL FIRE's current administrative process to update the Jackson FMP, likely creating both delays and costs to CAL FIRE.

The author may wish to consider working with CAL FIRE to align the timing of this bill to the greatest extent possible with that ongoing administrative effort to update Jackson's FMP.

- 6) **Timber yield taxes.** In California, Timberland Production Zones (TPZs) are designated areas created by local governments and are restricted to the production of timber for an initial 10-year term. The land within a TPZ is assessed based on its ability to grow trees, which may result in a lower assessed value compared to land zoned for other uses. Special restrictions apply to rezoning TPZ lands, and if the land is removed from timberland production classification, a tax recoupment fee is payable based on a statutory factor multiplied by the last pre-timberland production classification assessed value of the property and on the number of years remaining in the 10-year term.

The five largest working-forest DSFs representing ~68,000 acres (80% of all DSF land) are located in counties with TPZs, including Jackson, Boggs Mountain, Soquel, LaTour, and Mountain Home. Taxes on the timber produced get remitted to the state, and then the state returns yield tax revenues to the county of harvest. The yield taxes are designed to replace the property taxes that used to be paid on standing timber. The state timber yield tax rate (rate varies by tree species) is applied to the harvest value and then paid to a county. Annually, the DSFs contribute about \$175,000 in timber yield tax across all forests combined.

If timber production is reduced in DSFs, those revenues will be lost to the counties that receive them for local public services. The author's office and local supporters counter that the forests will encourage greater visitation and the benefits from that tourism will help buffer any yield tax revenue reduction.

- 7) **30x30.** The state has a goal of conserving 30% of California's lands and coastal waters by 2030 – known as 30x30. The 30x30 goal was codified by SB 337 (Min), Chapter 392, Statutes of 2023.

As of November 2025, the California Natural Resources Agency reported 26.1% of state land (26.5 million acres) and 21.9% coastal waters (737.61 acres) have been protected under 30x30. California must protect an additional 4.8 million acres of land and 500,000 acres of coastal waters by 2030 to reach its goal. To be eligible for 30x30 protections, lands must be durably conserved and managed for biodiversity. If the DSF governing policy pursuant to this bill is adopted, the DSFs could help advance the state meeting its 30x30 goals. But, the state will need to consider the trade-offs for that benefit under this bill.

- 8) **Author's statement:**

Our Demonstration State Forest system contains precious old growth redwoods, madrones and oaks, and allows for innovative research around wildfire resiliency and watershed restoration. Under current state law, the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection is responsible for the Demonstration State Forest system, and their first priority is to achieve maximum sustained production of high-quality timber products. These management principles are outdated and do not reflect the state's current climate resiliency goals.

This bill prioritizes the environment, recreation, scientific research and addressing climate change as the main focuses for these public lands. The updated management principles in this bill align with Governor Newsom's 30x30

initiative by encouraging climate change adaptation within Demonstration State Forests. Furthermore, this bill declares that it is the intention of the State of California to pursue co-management of Demonstration State Forests with California's Native American tribes and integrate Indigenous traditional ecological knowledge to achieve restoration.

This bill also moves the state away from relying on commercial timber harvesting by providing an alternative funding method for the Demonstration State Forest system, while also moving communities away from harmful extractive economies.

- 9) **Committee amendments.** The *Committee may wish to consider* the following amendments to clarify that timber harvesting is maintained as an acceptable DSF management activity.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

350 Humboldt	Marin
Alta Peak Chapter, California Native Plant Society	Epic
Bay Area Coalition for Headwaters	Fog Eater Cafe
Biofuel Watch	Forests Forever
Bolsa Chica Land Trust	Fortunate Farm
California Environmental Voters	Friends Committee on Legislation of California
California Institute for Biodiversity	Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks
California Native Plant Society	Friends of South Fork Gualala
California Native Plant Society Dorothy King Young Chapter	Friends of the Eel River
California Native Plant Society Sequoia Chapter	Friends of the Lost Coast
California Outdoor Recreation Partnership	Intertribal Sinkyone Wilderness Council
California Trout	Klamath Forest Alliance
Calwild	Latino Outdoors
Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Stockton	Mendocino Producers Guild
Center for Biological Diversity	Mendocino Trail Stewards
Center for Environmental Health	Mount Shasta Bioregional Ecology Center
Central Valley Partnership	Natural Resources Defense Council
Clean Earth 4 Kids	Northern California Regional Land Trust
Clean Water Action	Prodemocracy Workgroup, Grassroots Institute
Coalition to Save Jackson State Forest	Resource Renewal Institute
Council of Mexican Federations in North America Cofem	Sierra Club, Redwood Chapter
Coyote Valley Band of Pomo Indians	Sierra Nevada Alliance
Earthlings Unite	Siskiyou Crest Coalition
Endangered Habitats League	Siskiyou Land Conservancy
Environmental Action Committee of West	Symbiotic Restoration
	The Alliance for Social, Environmental and Indigenous Justice
	The Climate Center

The Grassroots Institute
 The Study Club
 The Wildlands Conservancy
 Three Springs Institute

Trout Unlimited
 Valerie
 Wildlands Network

Opposition

Amador County Farm Bureau
 Associated California Loggers
 Association of Consulting Foresters
 Butte County Farm Bureau
 Calaveras County Farm Bureau
 California Farm Bureau Federation
 California Forestry Association
 California Licensed Foresters Association
 California Women in Timber
 Del Norte County Farm Bureau
 El Dorado County Farm Bureau
 Forest Landowners of California
 Gualala Redwood Timber LLC
 Hearst Forests
 Humboldt County Farm Bureau
 Jefferson Resource Company
 Ken Pimlott, Director, CAL FIRE* (**retired
 - as an individual*)
 Lake County Farm Bureau
 Lassen County Farm Bureau
 Mariposa County Farm Bureau

Mendocino Farm Bureau
 Modoc County Farm Bureau
 Napa County Farm Bureau
 Nevada County Farm Bureau
 Plumas-Sierra County Farm Bureau
 Redwood Empire
 Redwood Timber Co.
 Rural County Representatives of California
 (RCRC)
 Sacramento County Farm Bureau
 San Mateo County Farm Bureau
 Santa Clara Farm Bureau
 Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau
 Shasta County Farm Bureau
 Siskiyou County Farm Bureau
 Stanislaus County Farm Bureau
 The Buckeye Conservancy
 Trinity County Farm Bureau
 Tuolumne County Farm Bureau
 Yuba-Sutter Farm Bureau

Analysis Prepared by: Paige Brokaw / NAT. RES. /

ⁱ <https://ebudget.ca.gov/2026-27/pdf/GovernorsBudget/3000/3540FCS.pdf>

ⁱⁱ <https://resources.ca.gov/-/media/CNRA-Website/Files/Initiatives/Forest-Stewardship/FYs-21-22-to-22-23-AB-1492-Report-Final.pdf>