

ASSEMBLY THIRD READING

AB 2494 (Rogers)

As Amended May 18, 2026

Majority vote

SUMMARY

Revises the state's management policies for Demonstration State Forests (DSFs).

Major Provisions

- 1) Expands eligible uses of the Timber Regulation and Forest Restoration Fund (TRFRF) to include support for DSFs, as needed to supplement to the moneys provided by the Forest Resources Improvement Fund (FRIF), and includes support for DSFs in the prioritization framework for expenditures from the TRFRF.
- 2) Expands the scope of an existing annual report required to be submitted by the secretary of the California Natural Resources Agency (NRA) to the Joint Legislative Budget Committee on the activities of state departments, agencies, and boards relating to forest and timberland regulations, and requires this report to include, among other things, any identified staffing needs, by department, and costs per position, to support more efficient and transparent review of timber harvest plans (THPs).
- 3) Finds and declares that all old growth trees should be protected; that appropriately planned timber harvests and long-term sustainable forestry can accelerate the development of complex, mature forest structure and conditions; and, that tribal comanagement of forest lands, integrated with local indigenous traditional ecological knowledge, can accelerate the development, among other findings.
- 4) Redefines "management" as the handling of forest vegetation, water, and soils within state forests, including, but not limited to, demonstration state forests, to maximize biodiversity conservation and wildfire resilience while supporting durable onsite carbon storage and sequestration, watershed conservation, water quality enhancement, climate mitigation and resiliency goals, equitable forest access, wildlife and fish habitat, recreation opportunities, education, and compatible research efforts.
- 5) Provides that, to the extent consistent with the definition of "management," all forest management practices recognized under the California Forest Practice Rules shall be considered valid tools for achieving the specified DSF objectives.
- 6) Adds foraging as a reasonable use of DSFs, strikes the use of mining in DSFs, and declares, among other things, the policy of the state to respect California Native American tribal sovereignty and to seek opportunities for comanagement and integration of local indigenous traditional ecological knowledge in forest management. Makes a number of other conforming changes and modifications to codified findings and declarations to reflect the revised management framework for DSFs.

COMMENTS

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.

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.

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 say that desirable forest lands 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.

The DSFs need to continue to be used for ongoing research and demonstration, and science-based research can take years to draw information from.

According to the Author

"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, [CAL FIRE] 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."

Arguments in Support

A group of environmental organizations, including Endangered Habitats League and Clean Water Action, write that the bill establishes a forward-looking framework that centers biodiversity conservation, fire resilience, outdoor access, and environmental restoration. In particular, this bill would require commercial timber harvesting to occur only where it aligns with ecological restoration or research. This change would ensure that these forests function as living laboratories for sustainable land management.

Arguments in Opposition

According to the California Forestry Association, California's DSFs were established to serve as working forests that demonstrate sustainable forest management practices. Existing law defines management as the handling of forest crops and soils to achieve maximum sustained production of high-quality forest products while balancing recreation, watershed, wildlife, and other values. AB 2494 would fundamentally redefine this mission by shifting the statutory definition of forest management away from sustained production and toward a framework centered primarily on biodiversity conservation, carbon storage, and climate resilience. While these values are important—and are already incorporated into modern forest management—this proposed change effectively transforms DSFs from working laboratories of sustainable forestry into primarily ecological reserves. Such a shift strikes at the heart of the demonstration forest concept.

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee, this bill will result in costs of an unknown amount for CAL FIRE to implement this bill and, among other things, develop a process to establish a preference for local sawmills and establish measurable goals and include performance metrics in the forest management plan for each state forest to cumulatively track progress toward restoration and management targets.

VOTES**ASM NATURAL RESOURCES: 10-4-0**

YES: Bryan, Connolly, Garcia, Haney, Kalra, Muratsuchi, Pellerin, Schultz, Wicks, Zbur

NO: Ellis, Alanis, Hoover, Macedo

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 11-4-0

YES: Wicks, Aguiar-Curry, Calderon, Caloza, Fong, Mark González, Krell, Pacheco, Pellerin, Sharp-Collins, Solache

NO: Hoover, Dixon, Ta, Tangipa

UPDATED

VERSION: May 18, 2026

CONSULTANT: Paige Brokaw / NAT. RES. / (916) 319-2092

FN: 0003021