

THIRD READING

Bill No: AB 2494
Author: Rogers (D), et al.
Amended: 8/13/26 in Senate
Vote: 21

SENATE NATURAL RES. & WATER COMMITTEE: 5-2, 7/1/26
AYES: Becker, Allen, Cabaldon, Laird, Stern
NOES: Seyarto, Grove

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE: 5-2, 8/13/26
AYES: Cervantes, Cabaldon, Grayson, Richardson, Wahab
NOES: Seyarto, Dahle

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 58-20, 5/26/26 - See last page for vote

SUBJECT: State forests: forest management

SOURCE: Author

DIGEST: This bill redefines “management” for the purposes of managing the Demonstration State Forest system and further establish the goals, appropriate forestry techniques, research efforts, and other activities allowable on the demonstration forests pursuant to the definition of “management.”

ANALYSIS:

Existing law:

- 1) Prohibits, pursuant to the Z'berg-Nejedly Forest Practices Act, 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. (Public Resources Code [PRC] §§ 4511-4630)
- 2) Does the following, 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, 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) Does the following, 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 the Department 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 the Department, including restoration activities, and to reimburse the Department'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) Authorizes the TRFRF to fund the DSF system, if necessary.
- 2) Requires the annual TRFRF report include more details regarding the costs to review THPs and the number of THPs reviewed by TRFRF-funded positions.
- 3) Establishes the purpose of the DSFs to acquire lands in need of reforestation or restoration to manage those lands for public benefit.
- 4) Authorizes research on the DSFs that inform management strategies that promote science-based decision making.
- 5) Requires that the DSFs be managed to habitat and ecosystem conditions that provide a foundation for robust research programs.
- 6) Recognizes the importance of providing a level of staffing that supports research project development, implementation, monitoring, and maintenance.
- 7) Authorizes the secretary of CNRA to enter into comanagement agreements with California Native American tribes for the management of the DSFs and require the secretary to make good faith efforts to collaboratively develop comanagement agreements.

- 8) Authorizes research on the DSFs that inform:
 - a) Forest management strategies.
 - b) Science-based decision making.
 - c) Biodiversity.
 - d) Durable onsite carbon storage or sequestration.
 - e) Habitat.
 - f) Water or soil quality.
 - g) Watershed health.
 - h) Tribal stewardship.
 - i) Other goals that further a healthy and resilience ecosystem.
- 9) Authorizes timber harvest on the DSFs in furtherance of:
 - a) Research.
 - b) Demonstration of management strategies available to nonindustrial landowners.
 - c) Applying proven techniques or testing novel or emerging management approaches to address vulnerable stand conditions to restore them to resilient ecosystems.
- 10) Requires that the DSFs reasonably provide for recreation opportunities.
- 11) Specifies that nothing in these sections shall be construed as to limit the use of all forest management practices authorized under the Forest Practice Act and Rules.
- 12) Requires the Department to annually report to the Board its progress toward meeting restoration and conservation targets identified in forest management plans.
- 13) Authorizes metrics or targets to track progress that may include, but are not limited to, invasive species control, durable onsite carbon storage or sequestration, acres treated with prescribed fire, or improved habitat connectivity, water quality, or other ecosystem conditions.

- 14) Defines “California Native American Tribe,” “comanagement,” and “management.”
- 15) Requires maps setting forth the boundaries of purchase areas to be guided by, but not limited to, consultation with the Board.
- 16) Authorizes the board to adopt regulations that establish a preference for small or local sawmills.
- 17) Requires funds generated by a DSF to be deposited into the Forest Resources Improvement Fund.
- 18) Authorizes prescribed herbivory, recreation concession, and surface mining on DSFs pursuant to regulations established by the Board, and for those activities to reflect the definition of “management.”
- 19) Establishes that it is the policy of the state to conserve a research forest in Santa Cruz County
- 20) Establishes the intent of the Soquel DSF to provide an environment that, among other things, provides examples of innovations of timber operations and other forest management techniques.
- 21) Authorizes that funding from commercial timber operations on Soquel DSF may fund recreation purposes.
- 22) Requires the Board, rather than the Department, adopt a forest management plan for Soquel DSF.

Background

A modern mandate to address modern problems. The statutes authorizing the DSF system were adopted in 1946 and haven’t seen major updates since then. In the intervening 80 years, social and environmental forces have radically changed the public’s perception of timber harvesting, especially in the redwoods; illuminated the importance of forested lands towards combating climate change; and established policies to rectify past harms towards Native Americans.

This bill reframes the mandate of the DSF system from one preoccupied with timber production and maintaining the state’s wood product industry to a mandate that encourages forestry management that, through the use of timber harvesting management techniques, improves habitat function, forest resiliency, and carbon storage.

FISCAL EFFECT: Appropriation: No Fiscal Com.: Yes Local: Yes

- The Department estimates costs of \$8.9 million in the first year, \$5.4 million in the second, and about \$5.3 million annually thereafter (General Fund) to support restoration targets set in Demonstration State Forest management plans; fund permitting, implementation, and monitoring of research within the forests; upgrade and maintain roads, bridges, recreation facilities, and fuel breaks; install entry kiosks and restroom facilities to accommodate increased recreational use; among other things.
- The State Water Board estimates one-time costs of \$13 million to \$15 million and ongoing costs of \$2 million to \$3 million annually (Timber Regulation and Forest Restoration Fund [TRFRF] or General Fund) to contract for the development of an information technology system supporting the tracking, collation, and reporting of timber harvest data, and to operate and maintain that system across the Regional Water Boards, the State Water Board, and the CalTREES system.
- To the extent that this bill reduces timber harvest on the DSFs, forgone revenue of an unknown amount to the Forest Resources Improvement Fund (FRIF), which derives its revenue primarily from the sale of forest products.

SUPPORT: (Verified 8/14/26)

Environmental Information Protection
Center (EPIC) (sponsor)
350 Bay Area Action
350 Humboldt
Amah Mutsun Tribal Band
Barefoot Naturalist Press
Bay Area Coalition for Headwaters
Biofuelwatch
Bolsa Chica Land Trust
California Environmental Voters
California Institute for Biodiversity
California Native Plant Society
California Native Plant Society
Sequoia Chapter
California Wilderness Coalition
(CALWILD)
Catholic Charities, Diocese of
Stockton
CDP Rural Caucus

Center for Biological Diversity
Center for Environmental Health
Central Valley Partnership
Clean Water Action
Cleaneearth4kids.org
Coalition to Save Jackson State Forest
Council of Mexican Federations
(COFEM)
County of Humboldt
County of Mendocino
Endangered Habitats League
Energy Associates
Environmental Action Committee of
West Marin
Environmental Center of San Diego
Fog Eater Cafe
Folklore
Fortunate Farm
Friends Committee on Legislation of

California
 Friends of Harbors, Beaches and
 Parks
 Friends of the Lost Coast
 Friends of the River
 Grassroots Institute (GRI) of
 Mendocino County Forest Working
 Group
 Green Latinos
 Hispanic Access Foundation
 Intertribal Sinkyone Wilderness
 Council
 Klamath Forest Alliance
 Latino Outdoors
 Lynne Paschal Massage Therapy
 Mendocino Fire Protection District
 Mendocino Producers Guild
 Mendocino Stone Ranch
 Mendocino Trail Stewards
 Mount Shasta Bioregional Ecology
 Center
 Moving Parts Press
 Natural Resources Defense Council
 (NRDC)
 Northern California Land Trust
 Planning and Conservation League
 Prodemocracy Workgroup, Grassroots
 Institute

Redwood Valley Little River Band of
 Pomo Indians
 Resource Renewal Institute
 Rise and Be Well
 Service Employees International
 Union, Local 1000
 Sherwood Valley Band of Pomo
 Indians
 Sierra Club California
 Sierra Club, Redwood Chapter
 Sierra Nevada Alliance
 Siskiyou Crest Coalition
 Siskiyou Land Conservancy
 Stanford Inn by the Sea - Historic
 Farm & Eco Resort
 Symbiotic Restoration
 The Bell
 The Climate Center
 The Study Club
 The Wildlands Conservancy
 Three Springs Institute
 Trout Unlimited
 Valerie
 Wildlands Network

1,760 individuals (1,757 by online
petition)

OPPOSITION: (Verified 8/14/26)

County of Tulare
 Manu Koenig

Oppose Unless Amended

AB Forestry
 Amador County Farm Bureau
 Associated California Loggers
 Association of Consulting Foresters

Auten Resource Consulting
 Big Creek Lumber Company
 Butte County Farm Bureau
 Cal Fire Local 2881
 Calaveras County Farm Bureau
 California Department of Finance
 California Farm Bureau
 California Forestry Association
 California Licensed Foresters

Association
 California Women in Timber
 County of Madera
 County of Santa Cruz Board of
 Supervisors
 Dkm Forestry
 Forest Landowners of California
 Hamey Woods
 Hearst Forests
 Humboldt County Farm Bureau
 Jefferson Resource Company, INC.
 Madera County Farm Bureau
 Mariposa County Farm Bureau
 Mendocino and Humboldt Redwood
 Companies
 Mendocino County Farm Bureau
 Federation
 Nevada County Farm Bureau
 Plumas-sierra County Farm Bureau

Redwood Region Logging
 Conference
 Resource Conservation District of
 Tehama County
 Rural County Representatives of
 California
 Sacramento County Farm Bureau
 San Benito County Farm Bureau
 San Joaquin County Farm Bureau
 Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau
 Shasta County Farm Bureau
 Siskiyou County Farm Bureau
 The Buckeye Conservancy
 Tulare County Farm Bureau
 Tuolumne County Farm Bureau
 Western Wood Preservers Institute
 Willits Redwood Company
 Four individuals

ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT: According to the author, “California is home to 14 Demonstration State Forests, which span 85,000 acres. The largest being Jackson Demonstration State Forest in my district in Mendocino County, which accounts for more than half of the total acreage. Under current statute, Demonstration State Forests must be managed by the Department to achieve maximum sustained production of timber products as the top priority.”

“These management principles haven’t been updated in over 50 years. They’re completely outdated and do not reflect the state’s current climate resiliency goals.”

“This bill will update the management principles to prioritize biodiversity conservation, carbon sequestration, wildfire resiliency, recreation, and research in the Demonstration State Forest System.”

“This bill does not ban commercial timber harvesting. There’s no denying that some timber harvesting is necessary in order to restore our forests to ecological health. However, commercial timber harvesting should not be the top priority of our public lands.”

“Lastly, AB 2494 seeks to elevate our state’s 30x30 framework, enhance ecotourism, and increase Tribal co-management in Demonstration State forests.”

ARGUMENTS IN OPPOSITION: A coalition letter from Farm Bureaus, forestry professionals, forested landowners, Resource Conservation Districts, Rural County Representatives, Local 2881, former directors of the Department, and individual scientists write in an “oppose unless amended” position. They raise several issues with the bill:

“To ensure that the Demonstration State Forest program continues to deliver world-class research and restoration projects that inform the regulations and best practices governing California’s timberland owners, agencies, and other stakeholders under what is arguably the most environmentally sustainable regulatory framework in the world, AB 2494 should be amended to clarify that long-term sustained yield of all forest products is an equal co-benefit alongside the other goals articulated in the definition of management. Additionally, terms such as “maximize” and “climate mitigation and resiliency goals” should be reconsidered or more clearly defined.”

“In addition to the policy concerns listed above, we remain concerned about AB 2494’s impact on funding for the Demonstration State Forest program. Since its inception, the program has been self-sustaining, with funding derived from timber operations approved by the Department in accordance with management plans and approved Timber Harvest Plans (THPs).”

[...]

“While we must oppose the bill as currently drafted, we appreciate the conversations we have had with Assemblymember Rogers regarding our shared goal of ensuring healthy, fire-resilient, biologically diverse, fiscally sound, and publicly accessible Demonstration State Forests. To that end, we look forward to working with him and the Committee on amendments to ensure that active forest management—including the long-term sustained yield of forest products, robust and ongoing longitudinal research, protection of rural communities and economies, wildfire prevention, and fiscal certainty—remains central to the Demonstration State Forest system.”

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 58-20, 5/26/26

AYES: Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alvarez, Arambula, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon, Caloza,

Carrillo, Connolly, Elhawary, Fong, Gabriel, Garcia, Gipson, Mark González, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Irwin, Jackson, Kalra, Krell, Lee, Lowenthal, McKinnor, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Ransom, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Schiavo, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Valencia, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

NOES: Alanis, Castillo, Chen, Davies, DeMaio, Dixon, Ellis, Flora, Gallagher, Jeff Gonzalez, Hadwick, Hoover, Johnson, Lackey, Macedo, Patterson, Sanchez, Ta, Tangipa, Wallis

NO VOTE RECORDED: Muratsuchi, Celeste Rodriguez

Prepared by: Edith Hannigan / N.R. & W. / (916) 651-4116
8/17/26 9:58:45

**** END ****