

CONCURRENCE IN SENATE AMENDMENTS

AB 2494 (Rogers)

As Amended August 20, 2026

Majority vote

SUMMARY

Revises the state's management policies for Demonstration State Forests (DSFs) and further establishes the goals, appropriate forestry techniques, research efforts, and other activities allowable on the demonstration forests pursuant to the definition of "management."

Senate Amendments

- 1) Revise and reformat findings and declarations.
- 2) Revise the annual reporting requirements for the Secretary of the Natural Resources Agency (NRA).
- 3) Revise the definition of "management."
- 4) Define "public benefits" as including, but being limited to, biodiversity conservation and habitat, durable onsite carbon storage and sequestration, climate resiliency and adaptation, ecosystem function, recreation, watershed health, wildfire resilience, and a living laboratory for ecological research.
- 5) Require all projects, including research and timber harvest plans, to be designed to balance the public benefits. Require the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) to provide for a variety of project designs that balance these public benefits across each DSF. Require projects to be designed to provide multiple public benefits, but does not require a project to accomplish all public benefits.
- 6) Authorize the Board of Forestry's (Board) regulations to establish a preference for small or local sawmills.
- 7) Require CAL FIRE to be guided by consultation with the Board instead of by a specified report when preparing a map and data relating to forest conditions.
- 8) Declare that it is the policy of the state to establish and conserve the Soquel DSF and would revise the Legislature's intent relating to that DSF, as provided. Require that income from that DSF to additionally provide income for recreation.
- 9) Authorize the Secretary of NRA to enter into comanagement agreements with California Native American tribes to incorporate traditional ecological knowledge and indigenous knowledge into the management direction of a forest in the demonstration state forest system.
- 10) Provide that timber harvesting within DSFs may occur in furtherance of specified objectives.
- 11) Require DSFs to reasonably provide for recreation opportunities.
- 12) State that the use of forest management practices authorized under the Z'berg-Nejedly Forest Practice Act in specified context is not limited.

- 13) Require CAL FIRE to report to the Board progress toward meeting restoration and conservation targets identified in forest management plans.
- 14) Require the state to cooperate with local governments in mitigating the impacts on school enrollment of geothermal development that occurs in proximity to state-owned forest lands.
- 15) Under the Timber Regulation and Forest Restoration Fund (TRFR):
 - a) Delete obsolete language.
 - b) Authorize use of funds to fund costs directly associated with only the administration, staffing, and creation of the "FOREST Fund" and "FOREST Program," not to exceed the fee revenue allocated for these purposes. This double-joints the bill with AB 706 (Aguiar Curry) to avoid chaptering out amendments to Public Resources Code 4629.6.
 - c) Clarify funding support for DSFs.
- 16) Make technical and clarifying amendments.

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

County of Tulare writes that AB 2494 raises significant concerns regarding its potential to restrict responsible timber harvesting and active forest management activities that are widely recognized as essential tools for reducing hazardous fuel loads and improving forest resilience. Limiting these practice may inadvertently increase fire risk and undermine ongoing efforts to protect communities, infrastructure, and natural resources.

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee:

- 1) CAL FIRE 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 DSF 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.
- 2) The State Water Board estimates one-time costs of \$13 million to \$15 million and ongoing costs of \$2 million to \$3 million annually (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.

- 3) To the extent that this bill reduces timber harvest on the DSFs, forgone revenue of an unknown amount to the Forest Resources Improvement Fund, which derives its revenue primarily from the sale of forest products.

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

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 58-20-2

YES: 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

NO: Alanis, Castillo, Chen, Davies, DeMaio, Dixon, Ellis, Flora, Gallagher, Jeff Gonzalez, Hadwick, Hoover, Johnson, Lackey, Macedo, Patterson, Sanchez, Ta, Tangipa, Wallis

ABS, ABST OR NV: Muratsuchi, Celeste Rodriguez

UPDATED

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