
THIRD READING

Bill No: AB 679
Author: Pellerin (D), et al.
Amended: 7/17/25 in Senate
Vote: 21

SENATE NATURAL RES. & WATER COMMITTEE: 5-2, 7/16/25
AYES: Limón, Allen, Hurtado, Laird, Stern
NOES: Seyarto, Grove

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE: Senate Rule 28.8

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 57-13, 5/5/25 - See last page for vote

SUBJECT: Department of Parks and Recreation: Big Basin Redwoods, Año Nuevo, and Butano State Parks

SOURCE: Author

DIGEST: This bill exempts property acquired by the Department of Parks and Recreation (State Parks) for Big Basin Redwoods, Año Nuevo, and Butano State Parks from the requirement that property be acquired by the State Public Works Board (SPWB) on behalf of the Department.

ANALYSIS:

Existing law:

- 1) Establishes the Property Acquisition Law, which, with limited exception, vests the SPWB with authority to acquire land and other real property for other state agencies. (Government Code (GOV) §§15850 *et seq.*)
- 2) Establishes State Parks within the California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA). Vests State Parks with control of the state park system. State Parks is responsible for administering, protecting, developing, and interpreting the state park system for the use and enjoyment of the public, protecting this system

from damage, and preserving the peace. (Public Resources Code (PRC) §§501, 5001, 5003, and 5008.)

- 3) Authorizes State Parks, with Department of Finance (DOF)'s consent and subject to the Property Acquisition Law, to acquire title to or any interest in real property, which State Parks deems necessary or proper for the extension, improvement, or development of the state park system.
 - a) Authorizes State Parks to appraise and select real property for potential acquisition of, and addition to, the state park system. Requires the Department of General Services (DGS) to review and approve all appraisals conducted by State Parks before purchase negotiations commence.
 - b) Authorizes State Parks to select real property it has appraised, submit purchase offers, and negotiate a purchase agreement with the owner or owners of the property. Requires DGS to review and approve all contracts related to the acquisition of real property by State Parks. (PRC §5006)
- 4) Requires State Parks to submit funding requests to administer State Park's acquisition program through the Governor's Budget for properties that the State Parks has selected and appraised. The Governor's Budget must contain a separate description of each project, or acquisition program and its appraised value, or funding allocation. (PRC §5006)
- 5) Establishes notice and hearing requirements that State Parks must meet before entering into any purchase agreements for the acquisition of real property in excess of \$500,000. (PRC §5006.1)
- 6) Directs the SPWB to acquire, on behalf of and for State Parks, any interests in real property, including options to purchase, which have been appraised, selected, and settled through purchase negotiations by State Parks, as specified. (GOV §15853)
- 7) Authorizes State Parks to receive and accept any gift, dedication, devise, grant, or other conveyance of title to or any interest in real property, including water rights, roads, trails, rights-of-way, buildings, facilities, and other improvements, to be added to or used in connection with the state park system. (PRC §5005)

This bill:

- 1) Exempts State Parks, when acquiring certain properties, from complying with the process to acquire land by the SPWB.
 - a) The properties exempt from this process are for Big Basin Redwoods, Año Nuevo, and Butano State Parks.
 - b) This exemption sunsets on January 1, 2031.
- 2) Establishes requirements for the acquisition of land by State Parks for Big Basin Redwoods, Año Nuevo, and Butano State Parks.
 - a) The purchase price shall not exceed the fair market value of the property.
 - b) The fair market value shall be set forth in an appraisal that is prepared by a licensed real estate appraiser and approved by DGS.
 - c) The real property shall be appraised and an appraisal review completed before commencement of any purchasing negotiations.
 - d) All contracts related to the acquisition of real property shall be reviewed and approved by DGS.
- 3) Makes findings and declarations, including the need for a special statute and that the key objectives of this bill are to streamline the process of transferring high-priority lands to State Parks to fulfill specified goals among Big Basin, Año Nuevo, and Butano State Parks.

Background

Land acquisitions by the state. With limited exception, the Property Acquisition Law vests the SPWB with authority to acquire land and real property on behalf of state agencies. Specifically, the selection and acquisition of land or real property requires the SPWB's approval. DGS, which staffs SPWB, also plays a role, reviewing the site selection and acquisition process. Further, any contract for the acquisition of real property by the state requires the approval of the DGS Director.

Land acquisitions for State Parks. The Property Acquisition Law and State Parks' authorizing statutes provide a unique process for the acquisition of land and property for the state park system. In particular, State Parks, with the consent of the DOF and subject to the Property Acquisition Law, may acquire real property for the extension, improvement, or development of the state park system. Under this process, State Parks may select and appraise property for acquisition, but the appraisal and contract for acquisition requires DGS review and approval. The

SPWB is responsible for acquiring any interests in real property, which have been appraised, selected, and settled through purchase negotiations by State Parks.

Addressing Governor's Veto. This proposal was previously heard in the Legislature in 2024 (AB 2103, Pellerin) and was vetoed by Governor Newsom. In his veto message, he wrote, "While the intent of this bill is to streamline [State Parks's] acquisition process for park units impacted by the CZU Lightning Fire Complex, its public hearing requirements may slow the acquisition process and would significantly increase [State Parks's] costs. [...] It is important to remain disciplined when considering bills with significant fiscal implications that are not included in the budget, such as this measure."

Finding a middle ground between transparency and fiscal impact. This bill includes a public participation pathway that notifies the public of pending land acquisitions under this bill while also minimizing costs to State Parks.

Key to this compromise is allowing State Parks to co-locate the opportunity to comment on a land acquisition at a pre-planned meeting that might have other items on the agenda. So long as adjacent landowners to the parcel to be acquired are notified, and the parcel to be acquired is clearly described in the meeting notice, State Parks may utilize existing resources to fulfill the requirements of this bill.

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

SUPPORT: (Verified 8/25/25)

California State Parks Foundation
Land Trust of Santa Cruz County
Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District
Save the Redwoods League
Sempervirens Fund

OPPOSITION: (Verified 8/25/25)

None received

ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT: According to the author, "Following the devastating 2020 CZU Lightning Complex Wildfire in the Santa Cruz Mountains Region, the California Department of Parks and Recreation has partnered with various conservation organizations to evaluate land parcels near Big Basin Redwoods, Butano, and Año Nuevo State Parks for the Department to acquire.

These conservation partners and State Parks have the mutual goal of transferring ownership of land parcels to the Department for long-term protection.”

“However, these partners often lack certainty that the lands they acquire will be purchased or accepted as a donation by the Department in a timely manner, leaving the partner entities in a vulnerable position, as they must continue to own and manage the lands in the meantime.”

“AB 679 will help provide certainty of timely land transfer from acquisition partners to the Department of Parks and Recreation for land parcels that State Parks agrees to acquire. Specifically, this bill would add property acquired for Big Basin Redwoods, Año Nuevo, and Butano State Parks, to the list of exemptions from the Public Works Board process. AB 679 will allow State Parks to work with conservation organizations more effectively in order to speed up the land acquisition process and permanently protect lands for conservation, cultural, and recreational purposes and facilitate rebuilding these parks after the CZU fires.”

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 57-13, 5/5/25

AYES: Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alvarez, Arambula, Ávila Farías, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Connolly, Elhawary, Fong, Gabriel, Garcia, Gipson, Mark González, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Irwin, Jackson, Krell, Lee, Lowenthal, McKinnor, Muratsuchi, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Ransom, Celeste Rodriguez, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Schiavo, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Valencia, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

NOES: Bauer-Kahan, Castillo, Davies, DeMaio, Gallagher, Hadwick, Hoover, Lackey, Macedo, Sanchez, Ta, Tangipa, Wallis

NO VOTE RECORDED: Alanis, Bains, Chen, Dixon, Ellis, Flora, Jeff Gonzalez, Kalra, Patterson

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