

CONCURRENCE IN SENATE AMENDMENTS

AB 679 (Pellerin)

As Amended September 5, 2025

Majority vote

SUMMARY

Permits, until January 1, 2033, the Department of Parks and Recreation (State Parks) to acquire property for Big Basin Redwoods, Año Nuevo, and Butano state parks on its own behalf.

Senate Amendments

- 1) Add provisions requiring a public meeting before the close of escrow for real property acquisitions.
- 2) Require State Parks to report on acquisitions that use the acquisition authority granted in this bill.
- 3) Extend the sunset of State Parks acquisition authority from 2031 to 2033.
- 4) Add double jointing language with SB 630 (Allen) of the current legislative session to address conflicts.

COMMENTS

The Santa Cruz State Parks District contains numerous state parks and state beaches, including Big Basin Redwoods, Butano, and Año Nuevo state parks. Big Basin Redwoods State Park is the oldest state park in California. The lands known today as Big Basin were originally the homelands of the Quiroste and Cotoni tribes, ancestral relatives of today's Amah Mutsun Tribal Band and the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe.

Wildfires have always occurred in Santa Cruz County. Every few years, a wildfire burns from hundreds to a few thousand acres, and a few structures are destroyed. However, the CZU Fire was unusually extreme. The fire burned more land in Santa Cruz County than had been burned by all wildfires in the county in the previous 70 years combined. A total of 86,509 acres and over 1,400 structures were destroyed—900 of the destroyed structures were residences. One life was lost. Monetary damages have been estimated at \$340 million including approximately \$30 million of damage to public infrastructure. An estimated 97% of Big Basin was lost, including the park visitors' center, lodge, staff homes, and other buildings. The intense CZU fire followed by successive years of drought have inflicted damage on the old growth trees within Big Basin. Within two years, with the help of many partners, the Big Basin partially reopened to the public on July 21, 2022.

State Parks launched the Reimagining Big Basin project in summer 2021 to begin the planning process for permanent park facilities in response to the CZU fire. This process has included public events and activities to hear from partners, stakeholders and the community to assess the priorities for rebuilding. The Reimagining Big Basin Vision (Vision) highlights themes that emerged from the public process, including forest resiliency and how to be inclusive of California's diverse population as park facilities are reestablished. The Vision outlines a reimagined park that will be different from the Big Basin the public remembers, with facilities and services established outside of the old growth redwoods and areas with sensitive resources.

Access will be improved for alternative modes of transportation, including a shuttle to reduce congestion and increase non-automotive access to the park. According to the Vision, "The CZU Lightning Complex Fire demonstrated the importance of planning at the landscape scale. ... Coordination with adjacent landowners and managers and strategic acquisitions will strengthen wildlife corridors and habitat connectivity, trail connectivity, and the diversity of recreational experiences in the region."

Generally, direct acquisitions of real property by most state agencies, requires approval by both Department of General Services (DGS) and the State Public Works Board (SPWB). First, with few exceptions, every contract for the acquisition of real property entered into by or on behalf of the state must be approved by the Director of DGS. Second, as a general rule, both real property site selection and acquisitions made by state agencies must also be approved by SPWB (which is staffed by DGS for this purpose), unless the acquiring agency is exempt from the SPWB process. Before site selection or acquisitions are approved by SPWB, they are reviewed and approved by DGS, again as a matter of practice, rather than because of an explicit statutory requirement. For land acquiring agencies outside of the SPWB process, statute sometimes explicitly requires DGS to review and approve an appraisal, such as in the case of acquisitions made by the Wildlife Conservation Board.

A 2007 Legislative Analyst's Office report identified various challenges that state agencies face when conducting appraisals for purposes of making land acquisitions for resource conservation, including the lack of recent sales of comparable property, resolution of land use and environmental permitting issues, and the "one of a kind" resource values that are integrally related to the public interest in the property. Over the years, there have been numerous efforts to try and improve the efficiency of state resource land acquisition transactions for state entities that are subject to the jurisdiction of SPWB. This bill streamlines the acquisition process specifically for the fulfillment of the Reimagining Big Basin vision.

According to the Author

"Partner conservation organizations are essential partners for California State Parks in acquiring high priority lands for long-term preservation, and often purchase properties with the intention to ultimately transfer ownership of the lands to State Parks. Over the past several years, [State Parks] has partnered with various conservation organizations in the Santa Cruz Mountains region to evaluate land parcels near Big Basin Redwoods, Butano, and Año Nuevo State Parks for acquisition. However, as it stands, these partners often lack certainty that the lands they acquire will be purchased or accepted as a donation by [State Parks] 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.

[This bill] will help provide certainty of timely land transfer from acquisition partners to [State Parks] 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. [This bill] 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, or recreational purposes."

Arguments in Support

Sempervirens Fund, other regional land trusts, and the California State Parks Foundation write in support of the efficiency this bill enables for the acquisition of property for the three state parks. They observe the critical role of partnering conservation organizations in swiftly purchasing land that is intended to be transferred to State Parks. However, these partners often find themselves in a "vulnerable position as they must continue to own and manage high-conservation-value lands for long periods of time." This bill will provide additional assurances by "streamlining the acquisition process, specifically for the fulfillment of the Reimagining Big Basin vision, providing confidence in timely land transfers from acquisition partners to [State Parks] for land parcels that State Parks agrees to acquire."

Arguments in Opposition

None on file.

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee, this bill will have minor and absorbable costs to DGS and State Parks. The Senate Appropriations Committee did not hear this bill and, instead, reported it to the Senate Floor pursuant to Senate Rule 28.8; indicating this bill does not appropriate money, does not result in significant state costs or require the appropriation of funds, and will cause no significant reduction in revenues.

VOTES:**ASM WATER, PARKS, AND WILDLIFE: 10-3-0**

YES: Papan, Alvarez, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bennett, Boerner, Caloza, Hart, Celeste Rodriguez, Rogers

NO: Jeff Gonzalez, Macedo, Tangipa

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 10-4-1

YES: Wicks, Arambula, Calderon, Caloza, Elhawary, Fong, Mark González, Hart, Pacheco, Solache

NO: Sanchez, Dixon, Hadwick, Ta

ABS, ABST OR NV: Pellerin

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 57-13-9

YES: 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

NO: Bauer-Kahan, Castillo, Davies, DeMaio, Gallagher, Hadwick, Hoover, Lackey, Macedo, Sanchez, Ta, Tangipa, Wallis

ABS, ABST OR NV: Alanis, Bains, Chen, Dixon, Ellis, Flora, Jeff Gonzalez, Kalra, Patterson

UPDATED

VERSION: September 5, 2025

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FN: 0001983