

Date of Hearing: January 22, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

AB 763 (Ward) – As Amended January 5, 2026

Policy Committee: Environmental Safety and Toxic Materials Vote: 7 - 0

Urgency: No

State Mandated Local Program: No

Reimbursable: No

SUMMARY:

This bill requires a Regional Water Quality Control Board (regional board) that has established general waste discharge requirements (WDRs) for timber harvesting, as specified, to approve, deny, or otherwise act on a request for coverage for a timber harvesting operation performed consistent with an approved timber harvesting plan (THP) subject to those established general WDRs.

FISCAL EFFECT:

Costs, likely minor and absorbable, to the State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) and the regional boards. The bill's only requirement is consistent with the State Water Board and regional boards' existing process for regulating timber harvesting operations.

COMMENTS:

1) **Purpose.** According to the author:

AB 763 makes a targeted, technical improvement by clarifying that Regional Water Quality Control Boards with established general waste discharge requirements will approve, deny, or otherwise act on requests for coverage when a timber harvesting operation is consistent with an approved plan. The bill also recognizes and preserves flexibility to consider any forthcoming legislative recommendations resulting from the California Natural Resources Agency [CRNA]'s Lean Six Sigma review of the Timber Harvest Permitting Process. Together, these efforts support responsible forest management while maintaining strong environmental protections.

2) **Background. THPs and WDRs.** Commercial timber operations on non-federal forestlands in California are regulated under the Z'berg-Nejedly Forest Practice Act and implemented under the California Forest Practice Rules (FPRs). For private timberlands, the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) is the lead agency responsible for regulating timber harvesting under the FPRs. The FPRs require a registered professional forester to submit a THP to CAL FIRE prior to starting most timber operations. A THP is both a California Environmental Quality Act functional equivalent environmental document and an operational plan that details how timber operations are to occur.

Once a THP is submitted to CAL FIRE, regional water board staff review the plan as a "review team" member, along with certain other state agencies. One of the roles of a regional water board in the review of a THP is to issue permit coverage to the plan approved by CAL FIRE through a WDR or a waiver of a WDR. WDRs establish conditions or requirements to control discharges of waste to waters of the state in compliance with water quality requirements. This bill requires a regional water board that has established general WDRs for timber harvesting to approve, deny, or otherwise act on a timber harvester's request for permit coverage to conduct timber harvesting operations consistent with an approved THP subject to general WDRs. According to the State Water Board, this is consistent with its existing practice.

Lean Six Sigma. The California Natural Resources Agency's (CNRA) Timber Regulation and Forest Restoration Program (Program) seeks to provide efficient and consistent environmental oversight of commercial timber harvest on California's non-federal timberland to protect natural resources while allowing sustainable harvest.

After more than a decade in operation, the Program is undergoing a formal "Lean Six Sigma" assessment to evaluate California's THP process and explore the associated complexities of multiagency review. Lean Six Sigma is a method for improving processes within businesses and government agencies by reducing waste, reducing variation, and increasing efficiency.

According to CNRA, the NiVACK Group is operating as CNRA's consultants to provide an objective, third-party analysis of the THP process. The assessment involves extensive stakeholder engagement across agency personnel, tribes, the timber industry, and other interested stakeholders. CNRA anticipates the Lean Six Sigma report will be ready for public release this year. According to the author's office, this bill preserves the flexibility to consider any forthcoming recommendations resulting from the Lean Six Sigma review of the THP process.

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