

Date of Hearing: June 16, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL SAFETY AND TOXIC MATERIALS

Damon Connolly, Chair

SB 1253 (Laird) – As Amended June 10, 2026

SENATE VOTE: 35-0

SUBJECT: Salinas Reservoir: recreational use

SUMMARY: Prohibits, for the Salinas Reservoir, recreational uses from including bodily contact, unless specified water treatment, monitoring, and reporting requirements are met. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Prohibits, for the Salinas Reservoir, recreational uses from including recreation in which a participant has bodily contact with the water, unless the following conditions are satisfied:
 - a) The water subsequently receives complete water treatment in compliance with all applicable State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) regulations, including oxidation, filtration, and disinfection, before being used for domestic purposes; requires the treatment to, at minimum, comply with all state laws, State Water Board regulations, and federal laws and regulations, including, but not limited to, the United States Environmental Protection Agency Long Term 2 Enhanced Surface Water Treatment Rule; provides that SB 1253 does not limit the state or State Water Board from imposing more stringent treatment standards than those required by federal law;
 - b) The San Luis Obispo County Flood Control and Water Conservation District conducts a monitoring program for cryptosporidium, giardia, and total coliform bacteria, including *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*) and fecal coliform, at a location and frequency determined by the State Water Board, and provides the monitoring results to water suppliers directly receiving the water via infrastructure, as determined by the State Water Board, within 30 days of receiving the results; and,
 - c) The Salinas Reservoir is operated in compliance with State Water Board regulations.
- 2) Provides that recreational uses shall be subject to additional conditions and restrictions that are adopted by the entity operating the Salinas Reservoir, or required by the State Water Board, to further protect or enhance public health and safety.
- 3) Requires the San Luis Obispo County Flood Control and Water Conservation District—two years after approval of the changed use of the reservoir to a body contact reservoir by the State Water Board, and biennially thereafter—to file a report with the Legislature on recreational uses at the Salinas Reservoir and the water treatment program; requires the report to include, but not be limited to, all of the following information:
 - a) The estimated levels and types of recreational uses at the reservoir, on a monthly basis;
 - b) A summary of monitoring in the Salinas Reservoir watershed for cryptosporidium, giardia, and total coliform bacteria, including *E. coli* and fecal coliform;
 - c) The most current sanitary survey of the watershed and water quality monitoring;

- d) As deemed necessary by the State Water Board, an evaluation of recommendations relating to inactivation and removal of cryptosporidium and giardia;
 - e) Annual reports provided to the State Water Board, as required by the water permit issued by the State Water Board;
 - f) An evaluation of the impact of recreational activities on source water quality, including any microbiological monitoring;
 - g) A summary of activities for operation of recreational uses and facilities that optimize water quality;
 - h) The Salinas Reservoir management plan and operations plan; and,
 - i) The annual water reports submitted to consumers each year.
- 4) Provides that SB 1253 shall remain in effect until January 1, 2032, and as of that date be repealed.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Declares it to be policy of the state that multiple uses should be made of all public water, to the extent that multiple use is consistent with public health and safety. (Health and Safety Code (HSC) § 115825(a))
- 2) Prohibits, for reservoirs in which water is stored for domestic use, recreational uses from including bodily contact with the water by any participant, except as provided under state law. (HSC § 115825(b))
- 3) Specifies—for Modesto, Nacimiento, Sly Park, Canyon Lake, and Bear Lake Reservoirs, and reservoirs located in San Diego County—conditions under which recreational uses may include bodily contact with the water. (HSC § 115840, *et seq.*)

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown.

COMMENTS:

Need for the bill: According to the author:

"Senate Bill 1253 authorizes swimming and expanded recreation at Santa Margarita Lake in San Luis Obispo County under stringent sanitation requirements to ensure continued compliance with water quality standards.

The Salinas Reservoir, which forms Santa Margarita Lake, serves as a vital drinking water source for the City of San Luis Obispo. While bodily contact was historically restricted, modern advancements in water treatment and monitoring now allow for these activities to be conducted safely. Certain recreation access is already allowed, such as boating, kayaking, rowing, and more. SB 1253 permits recreational activities involving body contact with water, subject to rigorous water quality protocols and advanced treatment requirements to protect the public water supply."

Bodily contact with water in California reservoirs: It is the policy of the state that all public waters are to be used for multiple purposes, as long as the uses are consistent with public health and safety. To this end, state law prohibits recreational uses involving bodily contact with a reservoir that stores water for domestic use. Bodily contact with domestic water supplies can be a source of fecal pathogens and other contaminants that, if not treated, can pose serious threats to public health. However, state law does provide exemptions from this prohibition for specific bodies of water throughout the state, including all reservoirs in San Diego County and the Nacimiento, Modesto, Sly Park, Canyon Lake, and Bear Lake reservoirs.

For each exemption, statute delineates health and safety requirements, including monitoring and treatment requirements, that must be met in order for the exemption to remain in effect. In all cases, the water systems operating the reservoir and providing drinking water treatment are responsible for ensuring the protection of public health and compliance with drinking water standards.

The Salinas Reservoir: The Salinas Dam was built in 1941 by the United States (U.S.) Army as a water conservation project, to supply water to Camp San Luis Obispo and the City of San Luis Obispo. The construction of the dam formed the Salinas Reservoir (also known as Santa Margarita Lake). Both the Salinas Dam and delivery system were subsequently transferred from the U.S. Army to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (US ACE).

In 1947, the US ACE entered into an agreement with the San Luis Obispo County Flood Control and Water Conservation District (District) for the operation and maintenance of the dam, its reservoir, and related facilities. The District operates the reservoir for the City of San Luis Obispo through the County Public Works Department under a lease from US ACE. The Salinas Reservoir, along with the Whale Rock and Nacimiento Reservoirs, serve as the City of San Luis Obispo's primary water supply sources.

Recreation facilities at Salinas Reservoir are operated by the County of San Luis Obispo as a county park with opportunities for boating, fishing, picnicking, and camping. Currently, no bodily contact (swimming, waterskiing, etc.) is allowed in the lake because it is a domestic water supply reservoir.

This bill: State law prohibits recreational uses of a reservoir from including bodily contact (e.g., swimming) if the reservoir stores water for domestic use. SB 1253 exempts the Salinas Reservoir from this prohibition, as long as specified water treatment, monitoring, and reporting requirements designed to protect public health and drinking water safety are met. This approach is consistent with exemptions established over the last 30 years for other reservoirs throughout the state, including the Bear Lake Reservoir, which is subject to very similar requirements to those established in SB 1253.

Arguments in support: According to the County of San Luis Obispo:

"SB 1253 provides a practical and carefully structured path forward to allow limited passive (i.e., swimming, paddleboarding, kayaking, etc.) recreational water contact activities at the Salinas Reservoir (Santa Margarita Lake), while maintaining robust public health protections. The bill appropriately conditions such use on the continued application of advanced water treatment processes, including oxidation, filtration, and disinfection, consistent with all applicable state and federal requirements.

Santa Margarita Lake is a vital regional resource that supports recreation, tourism, and quality of life for residents and visitors alike. At the same time, it remains an important component of the City of San Luis Obispo's water supply system. SB 1253 strikes the appropriate balance by recognizing these dual roles and ensuring that any expanded recreational use is paired with stringent safeguards and regulatory oversight by the State Water Resources Control Board."

Arguments in opposition: None on file.

Double referral: Should the Assembly Environmental Safety & Toxic Materials Committee approve this bill, it will be re-referred to the Assembly Water, Parks, and Wildlife Committee.

Related legislation:

- 1) AB 440 (Bigelow, Chapter 54, Statutes of 2021). Modifies the conditions required for the Bear Lake Reservoir bodily contact exemption and extends operation of the exemption indefinitely.
- 2) SB 930 (Gaines, Chapter 149, Statutes of 2016). Extended the sunset on the bodily contact exemption for Bear Lake Reservoir until January 1, 2022, and requires the Lake Alpine Water Company to file a biennial report file with the Legislature on recreational uses at Bear Lake Reservoir and the water treatment program for that reservoir.
- 3) SB 143 (Stone, 2015). Would have exempted the Diamond Valley Reservoir from the prohibition against bodily contact with water, if certain conditions were met. SB 143 died in the Senate Environmental Quality Committee.
- 4) SB 14 (Gaines, Chapter 172, Statutes of 2013). Authorized, until January 1, 2017, recreational uses at Bear Lake Reservoir, if certain conditions were met, including water treatment, monitoring, and reporting requirements.
- 5) SB 1063 (Gaines, 2012). Would have authorized, until January 1, 2016, recreational uses at Bear Lake Reservoir if certain conditions were met, including water treatment, monitoring, and reporting requirements. SB 1063 was vetoed by Governor Brown.
- 6) AB 80 (Blakeslee, 2009). Would have amended the water storage and treatment requirements for Nacimiento Reservoir. AB 80 died on the Assembly Floor.
- 7) SB 1046 (Senate Environmental Quality Committee, Chapter 253, Statutes 2007). Extends the authorization for bodily contact with water at Canyon Lake Reservoir indefinitely.
- 8) AB 1934 (Leslie, Chapter 374, Statutes of 2004). Authorized recreational uses, until January 1, 2007, at Bear Lake Reservoir if certain conditions were met; required the Lake Alpine Water Company to file, on or before January 1, 2006, a report on the recreational uses at Bear Lake Reservoir, as specified.

- 9) AB 2439 (Haynes, Chapter 519, Statutes of 2004). Authorizes bodily contact with water in the Canyon Lake Reservoir until January 1, 2008, if certain conditions are met; required the Elsinore Valley Municipal Water District to file a specified report.
- 10) SB 1074 (Senate Environmental Quality Committee, Chapter 742, Statutes of 2003). Extends the authorization for bodily contact with water at Modesto Reservoir indefinitely.
- 11) SB 1093 (Costa, Chapter 968, Statutes of 2002). Authorizes bodily contact with water in the Sly Park Reservoir if certain conditions are met; required the El Dorado Irrigation District to file a specified report.
- 12) SB 2201 (Monteith, Chapter 70, Statutes of 1998). Authorized recreational uses that included bodily contact with water, until January 1, 2004, at Modesto Reservoir if certain conditions were met.
- 13) AB 1460 (Bordonaro, Chapter 524, Statutes of 1997). Authorizes recreational activity in which there is bodily contact with the water in the Nacimiento Reservoir if certain conditions are met.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

County of San Luis Obispo (sponsor)
City of San Luis Obispo

Opposition

None on file.

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