

Date of Hearing: August 5, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

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

Policy Committee:	Environmental Safety and Toxic Materials	Vote:	6 - 0
	Water, Parks and Wildlife		11 - 0

Urgency: No State Mandated Local Program: Yes Reimbursable: No

SUMMARY:

This bill authorizes recreational activities that involve bodily contact with water in the Salinas Reservoir if the water in the reservoir is subsequently treated to specified standards, water quality monitoring is in place, and other conditions are met.

Specifically, this bill, among other things:

- 1) Permits recreational uses that involve bodily contact with the water in the Salinas Reservoir (also referred to as Santa Margarita Lake) if 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, before being used for domestic purposes, as specified.
 - b) The San Luis Obispo County (SLO) Flood Control and Water Conservation District (SLO District) conducts a monitoring program for cryptosporidium, giardia, and total coliform bacteria 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 within 30 days of receiving the results.
 - c) The reservoir is operated in compliance with State Water Board regulations.
- 2) Subjects recreational use at the Salinas Reservoir to additional conditions and restrictions adopted by the entity operating the reservoir, or required by the State Water Board, that are required to further protect or enhance public health and safety and that do not conflict with State Water Board regulations.
- 3) Requires the SLO District to report to the Legislature and the State Water Board two years after the approval of the changed use of the Salinas Reservoir to a body contact reservoir, and every two years thereafter, on the recreational uses at the Salinas Reservoir and the water treatment program for that reservoir, as specified.
- 4) Sunsets on January 1, 2032.

FISCAL EFFECT:

- 1) The State Water Board anticipates minor and absorbable costs.

- 2) By imposing new requirements on the SLO District, the bill imposes a state-mandated local program. However, Article XIII B Section 6(a) of the California Constitution provides that the Legislature may, but need not, provide a subvention of funds to reimburse a local government for a legislative mandate requested by the local agency affected. This bill is sponsored by the County of SLO, and the SLO District is a dependent district of the county. Therefore, any costs incurred by the county or the SLO District are not required to be reimbursed by the state.

COMMENTS:

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

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.

- 2) **Background.** State law generally 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 provides exemptions from this prohibition for specific bodies of water throughout the state.

For each exemption, statute delineates health and safety requirements, including monitoring and treatment requirements, that must be met 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.

According to SLO County, the sponsor of this bill, the Salinas Reservoir (or Santa Margarita Lake) is a vital regional resource that supports recreation, tourism, and quality of life for residents and visitors alike. Currently, no bodily contact (such as swimming and waterskiing) is allowed in the Salinas Reservoir because it serves as one of the City of SLO's primary water supply sources for its roughly 16,000 connections. The County of SLO monitors water quality at the reservoir on a weekly basis and the City of SLO regularly monitors water quality of the raw water it receives from the Salinas Reservoir at its treatment plant.

This bill exempts the Salinas Reservoir from the bodily contact 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, including the Bear Lake Reservoir, which is subject to very similar requirements to those established by this bill.