

SENATE RULES COMMITTEE

Office of Senate Floor Analyses

(916) 651-4171

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Bill No: SB 1253
Author: Laird (D)
Amended: 6/10/26
Vote: 21

SENATE NATURAL RES. & WATER COMMITTEE: 7-0, 4/14/26

AYES: Becker, Seyarto, Allen, Cabaldon, Cortese, Grove, Stern

SENATE ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY COMMITTEE: 7-0, 4/22/26

AYES: Blakespear, Valladares, Allen, Dahle, Gonzalez, Hurtado, Menjivar

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE: Senate Rule 28.8

SENATE FLOOR: 35-0, 5/14/26 (Consent)

AYES: Allen, Alvarado-Gil, Archuleta, Arreguín, Ashby, Becker, Cabaldon, Caballero, Cervantes, Choi, Cortese, Dahle, Durazo, Gonzalez, Grayson, Grove, Hurtado, Jones, Laird, Limón, McGuire, McNerney, Menjivar, Ochoa Bogh, Padilla, Richardson, Rubio, Seyarto, Smallwood-Cuevas, Stern, Strickland, Valladares, Wahab, Weber Pierson, Wiener

NO VOTE RECORDED: Blakespear, Niello, Pérez, Reyes, Umberg

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 72-0, 8/13/26 (Consent) - See last page for vote

SUBJECT: Salinas Reservoir: recreational use

SOURCE: Author

DIGEST: Exempts the Salinas Reservoir from the general prohibition against bodily contact with water stored in a reservoir for domestic use if three conditions are met

Assembly Amendments require the San Luis Obispo County Flood Control and Water Conservation District (SLO District) to conduct a monitoring program for

cryptosporidium, giardia, and total coliform bacteria, including E. coli and fecal coliform and provide the results to water suppliers.

ANALYSIS:

Existing law:

- 1) Establishes as state policy that all public waters should be used for multiple purposes if the uses are consistent with public health and public safety.
- 2) Prohibits reservoirs that store water for domestic use from allowing recreation where there is bodily contact with the water, though there are several statutory exemptions to this law. Statutory exemptions have been provided in various instances, including exemptions for San Diego County, Modesto Reservoir, Nacimiento Reservoir, Sly Park Reservoir, Canyon Lake Reservoir, and Bear Lake Reservoir.
- 3) Requires all public agency water supply reservoirs to be open for recreational use, subject to regulations of the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB).
- 4) Authorizes a public agency operating any water supply reservoir that is open for recreation use to charge a use fee to cover the costs of policing the area around the reservoir.

This bill:

- 1) Prohibits recreation in which a participant has bodily contact with the water in the Salinas Reservoir, unless:
 - a) The water subsequently receives complete water treatment;
 - b) The reservoir is operated in compliance with SWRCB regulations; and
 - c) The SLO District conducts a monitoring program for cryptosporidium, giardia, and total coliform bacteria, including E. coli and fecal coliform and provides the results to water suppliers within 30 days of receiving the results.
- 2) Subjects recreational use of the Salinas Reservoir to additional conditions and restrictions adopted by the entity operating the reservoir or required by the SWRCB to protect or enhance public health and safety.

- 3) Requires the SLO District to file a report on the recreational uses at the Salinas Reservoir and the water treatment program for that reservoir two years after the changed use of the reservoir to a body contract reservoir is approved and every two years thereafter.
- 4) Repeals this exemption on January 1, 2032.
- 5) Declares the need for a special statute for the Salinas Reservoir.

Background

Salinas Reservoir. The Salinas Dam was built in 1941 by the 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). The Salinas Reservoir is located about 9 miles southeast of the Santa Margarita community in San Luis Obispo County, near the headwaters of the Salinas River. It captures water from a 112 square mile watershed and can store up to 22,320 acre-feet of water. Both the Salinas Dam and its 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 SLO District to operate and maintain the dam, its reservoir, and related facilities. The SLO District operates the reservoir for the City of San Luis Obispo through the County Public Works Department under a lease from US ACE. According to San Luis Obispo County's website, the Salinas Reservoir serves as one of the City of San Luis Obispo's primary water supply sources.

Recreation facilities at Salinas Reservoir are operated by San Luis Obispo County as a county park with opportunities for boating, fishing, picnicking, and camping. No bodily contact (swimming, waterskiing, etc.) is allowed in the lake because it is a domestic water supply reservoir. While swimming is not allowed in the Salinas Reservoir, there is a swimming pool that is open on a limited schedule.

According to its website, the Salinas Reservoir is known for its excellent fishing and peaceful boating atmosphere. San Luis Obispo County Parks conducts mandatory boat inspections at the reservoir to prevent the spread of Quagga, Zebra, and Golden Mussels and other invasive species, and, earlier this year, started requiring a 30-day quarantine for boats with internal ballasts or ballast bags (e.g. wakeboard and ski boats). There are individual picnic sites with shade, ample seating, larger barbecues, and other amenities throughout the park. The park also

has a range of hiking and riding trails that offer views of the lake and surrounding mountains.

According to the reservoir's Water Quality Monitoring Report for Water Year 2024 (October 2023 – September 2024), prepared by San Luis Obispo County's Department of Public Works Water Quality Division, "water quality parameters were typical of historical data throughout the reservoir, with no significant anomalies observed."

Bodily contact with water in California reservoirs. The Health & Safety Code requires all public waters to be used for multiple purposes, as long as the uses are consistent with public health and safety. To this end, existing law prohibits recreational uses in which the participant has bodily contact with water in a reservoir in which water is stored for domestic use. Bodily contact with domestic water supplies can be a source of fecal pathogens and other contaminants that, if not treated, can be a serious threat to public health.

Existing law does provide exemptions from this bodily contact prohibition, however, for all reservoirs in San Diego County, the Nacimiento Reservoir, the Modesto Reservoir, the Sly Park Reservoir, the Canyon Lake Reservoir, and the Bear Lake Reservoir. In each of these cases, the exemptions come with detailed health and safety requirements that must be adhered to, including monitoring and treatment requirements.

In all cases, the water system operating the reservoir and providing treatment to the drinking water are responsible (and have accepted responsibility) for ensuring drinking water meets drinking water standards and public health is protected.

Comments

Need for the bill. 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."

Water quality monitoring at the reservoir. San Luis Obispo County is already required to evaluate existing water quality conditions, identify any water quality problems, and establish an appropriate monitoring program to include chemical,

limnological, and bacteriological parameters. The monitoring program was established using the guidelines published by the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board in the Water Quality Control Plan for the Central Coast Basin Plan. Water quality monitoring is conducted by the County's Water Quality Laboratory and Water Treatment Operators.

The County has established a routine sampling schedule for organic, inorganic, general mineral, lake nutrients, bacteriological, and physical analyses at the Salinas Reservoir, its tributaries, and reservoir releases. Different parameters are sampled at different frequencies. Parameters such as iron, manganese, algae, odor, and turbidity are sampled monthly, and other parameters such as coliform bacteria (total and E. coli), nitrate, and phosphate are analyzed quarterly.

Drinking water systems with surface water sources must comply with the Long-Term 2 Enhanced Surface Water Treatment Rule, which is designed to reduce the risk of disease caused by Cryptosporidium and other microorganisms, which are associated with bodily contact. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency estimates that full compliance with this rule will reduce the incidence of illness associated with these microorganisms by 89,000 to approximately 1.4 million cases per year. The rule requires that the permitted community water system, which is the City of San Luis Obispo in this case, collect samples for E. coli or Cryptosporidium. The County conducts bacteriological analyses of coliform to evaluate general water quality.

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

SUPPORT: (Verified 8/13/26)

None received

OPPOSITION: (Verified 8/13/26)

None received

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 72-0, 8/13/26

AYES: Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alanis, Arambula, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Boerner, Bryan, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Castillo, Chen, Connolly, Davies, DeMaio, Dixon, Elhawary, Ellis, Fong, Gabriel, Garcia, Gipson, Jeff Gonzalez, Mark González, Hadwick, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Hoover, Irwin, Jackson, Johnson, Kalra, Krell, Lackey, Lee, Lowenthal, Macedo, McKinnor, Muratsuchi, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Patterson, Pellerin, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Ransom, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers,

Blanca Rubio, Sanchez, Schiavo, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Ta,
Tangipa, Valencia, Wallis, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas
NO VOTE RECORDED: Alvarez, Berman, Bonta, Flora, Petrie-Norris, Celeste
Rodriguez, Schultz

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