

## SENATE THIRD READING

SB 630 (Allen)

As Amended July 16, 2025

Majority vote

**SUMMARY**

Exempts the Department of Parks and Recreation (State Parks) from certain Department of General Services (DGS) and State Public Works Board (SPWB) processes for the acquisition of specified properties.

**Major Provisions**

- 1) Permits the Director of DGS to waive approval for all of the following:
  - a) Every contract for the acquisition or hiring of real property in fee or in any lesser estate or interest, entered into by or on behalf of the state;
  - b) Leases that State Parks enters into for leasing property in the state park system; and
  - c) Leases of property that State Parks determines necessary or proper for the extension, improvement, or development of the state park system.
- 2) Permits the Director of DGS to waive review and approval of any appraisal conducted by State Parks, including appraisals for leases such as agricultural leases.
- 3) Increases the threshold value at which the Director of DGS may waive their approval for state real estate acquisitions or conveyances from \$150,000 to \$500,000.
- 4) Provides, until January 1, 2031, that State Parks does not need approval from the Director of the Department of Finance to receive gifts of real property or approval from the Director of DGS for any contract for the acquisition or hiring of real property in fee or in any lesser estate or interest for transactions that meet the following requirements:
  - a) The acquisition is not for creating a new unit of the state park system;
  - b) The consideration to be paid by State Parks for the acquisition does not exceed one million dollars (\$1,000,000);
  - c) At the time of the acquisition, the property does not require capital improvements or additional resources that cannot be absorbed within existing resources available to State Parks; and
  - d) Public notice has been given.
- 5) Provides that State Parks does not need SPWB approval to acquire properties that meet the requirements in #4.

**COMMENTS**

There are 280 park units (beaches, historic sites, museums, off-highway vehicle recreation areas, parks, etc.), over 340 miles of coastline, 970 miles of lake and river frontage, 15,000 campsites,

and 5,200 miles of trails in the state park system. Millions of people visit the California state park system annually.

For direct acquisitions of real property by most state agencies, statute provides an approval role for both DGS and 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. SPWB is required to both select the site of acquisition and acquire the property. State Parks is exempt from the requirement that SPWB select the property and is able to select properties on its own behalf to develop a cohesive state park system that achieves the mission of State Parks. As such, State Parks has developed a robust structure for evaluating and ranking priority properties.

Concerns with the SPWB process for acquiring land for State Parks or other conservation purposes are not new. A 2007 Legislative Analyst's Office report identified various challenges 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 improve the efficiency of state resource land acquisition transactions for state entities that are subject to the jurisdiction of SPWB, like State Parks.

This bill streamlines the acquisition process by allowing State Parks to make specific property acquisitions without oversight of DGS and SPWB. Arguably, the State Park properties that meet the requirements in this bill would not increase the cost to State Parks. Additionally, most of the properties that satisfy the qualifications of this bill have been held by State Park partners for many years and have already undergone thorough evaluation by the partners during their acquisition. This bill also proposes to extend the threshold at which the Director of DGS may waive approval of acquisitions by any state agency from \$150,000 to \$500,000.

### **According to the Author**

"[State Parks] has more potential to protect communities and the environment than is currently being realized. The standard acquisition process for State Parks is complex and routinely takes multiple years to complete, due primarily to onerous and oftentimes duplicative requirements and review by [DGS] and [SPWB], which face significant backlogs in processing acquisition packages from many state departments. With limited funds available to purchase critical lands needed to meet our 30x30 goals and increase outdoor access, the state should be removing bureaucratic barriers to help stretch every dollar. [This bill] creates a streamlined approval process for low-cost and low-risk property transactions after a due diligence process. [This bill] would allow State Parks to be more efficient and effective in meeting operational needs, reducing state costs and creating efficiencies for both State Parks and DGS. Importantly, it would allow State Parks to be more responsive in working with local agencies and nonprofit partners to address pressing needs for park access, infrastructure, and operations."

**Arguments in Support**

A coalition of environmental and recreational groups write in support of increasing the efficiency by which State Parks can acquire properties to "complete existing parks." These groups note that there are many properties that land trusts and other partners have acquired at the request and support of State Parks and that have been held for decades in anticipation of transfer to State Parks. Supporters believe that "these property transfers will help address the significant recreational use demands on our park lands and, in many instances, actually reduce the burden of managing State Park units by lowering or eliminating the operational complications of inholdings or incomplete parks."

**Arguments in Opposition**

None on file.

**FISCAL COMMENTS**

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee, this bill has the following fiscal impact:

- 1) State Parks anticipates cost savings of an unknown amount for each real estate transaction it undertakes utilizing the streamlined process authorized by this bill (General Fund, State Park and Recreation Fund). Currently, each transaction takes up to two or three years, and State Parks pays DGS a minimum of \$90,000 to review each transaction. By allowing DGS to delegate its review to State Parks, each delegated transaction will likely result in time- and cost-savings.

In addition, State Parks expects a vast majority of the acquisitions affected by this bill to be in-holdings (areas within a state park that are owned by a private landowner). Many state park units experience operational, resource management, or land use challenges associated with these privately-owned lands located within or adjacent to park units. For example, an in-holding can create a situation where landowners encroach into the park with incompatible uses, such as vehicle storage and built structures, or an in-holding can require park staff to travel longer distances within the park because they must go around an in-holding. Therefore, acquiring in-holdings is a priority for State Parks, and the streamlined process authorized by this bill is likely to save the department time and money in managing its park units. Finally, State Parks notes the public notice and meeting requirements are absorbable within existing resources.

- 2) DGS reports minor and absorbable costs. The extent exempting the acquisition of property by State Parks from the SPWB process or DGS review results in increased costs to the state, these costs would likely be borne by the General Fund. However, these costs are speculative and the bill includes guardrails to ensure the streamlined process in the bill is used to acquire properties that are low- to no-cost and low-risk.

**VOTES****SENATE FLOOR: 34-1-5**

**YES:** Allen, Alvarado-Gil, Archuleta, Arreguín, Ashby, Becker, Blakespear, Cabaldon, Caballero, Cervantes, Choi, Cortese, Durazo, Gonzalez, Grayson, Grove, Laird, Limón, McGuire, McNerney, Menjivar, Ochoa Bogh, Padilla, Pérez, Richardson, Rubio, Smallwood- Cuevas, Stern, Strickland, Umberg, Valladares, Wahab, Weber Pierson, Wiener

**NO:** Niello

**ABS, ABST OR NV:** Dahle, Hurtado, Jones, Reyes, Seyarto

**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: 11-4-0**

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

**NO:** Dixon, Jeff Gonzalez, Ta, Tangipa

**UPDATED**

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