
SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES AND WATER

Senator Monique Limón, Chair

2025 - 2026 Regular

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| Bill No: | SB 630 | Hearing Date: | September 12, 2025 |
| Author: | Allen | | |
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Subject: State parks: real property: acquisitions and leases

SUMMARY

This bill would exempt the Department of Parks and Recreation (State Parks) from using the State Public Works Board (SPWB) process to acquire land, under certain conditions, until January 1, 2033.

BACKGROUND AND EXISTING LAW

State Parks. State Parks' mission is to provide for the health, inspiration, and education of the people of California by helping to preserve the state's extraordinary biological diversity, protecting its most valued natural and cultural resources, and creating opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation. With 280 state park units, over 340 miles of coastline, 970 miles of lake and river frontage, 15,000 campsites, 5,200 miles of trails, 3,195 historic buildings, and more than 11,000 known prehistoric and historic archaeological sites, the department contains the largest and most diverse recreational, natural, and cultural heritage holdings of any state agency in the nation. More than 68 million people annually visit California's state park system.

Land acquisitions by the state. With limited exception, the Property Acquisition Law vests the SPWB with authority to acquire land and real property on behalf of state agencies. Specifically, the selection and acquisition of land or real property requires the SPWB's approval. The Department of General Services (DGS), which staffs SPWB, also plays a role, reviewing the site selection and acquisition process. Further, any contract for the acquisition of real property by the state requires the approval of the DGS Director.

Land acquisitions for State Parks. The Property Acquisition Law and State Parks' authorizing statutes provide a unique process for the acquisition of land and property for the state park system. In particular, State Parks, with the consent of the Department of Finance (DOF) and subject to the Property Acquisition Law, may acquire real property for the extension, improvement, or development of the state park system. Under this process, State Parks may select and appraise property for acquisition, but the appraisal and contract for acquisition requires DGS review and approval. The SPWB is responsible for acquiring any interests in real property, which have been appraised, selected, and settled through purchase negotiations by State Parks.

Existing law:

- 1) Establishes the Property Acquisition Law, which, with limited exception, vests the SPWB with authority to acquire land and other real property for other state agencies. Government Code (GOV) §§15850 *et seq.*

- 2) Establishes State Parks within the California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA). Vests State Parks with control of the state park system. State Parks is responsible for administering, protecting, developing, and interpreting the state park system for the use and enjoyment of the public, protecting this system from damage, and preserving the peace. Public Resources Code (PRC) §§501, 5001, 5003, and 5008.
- 3) Authorizes State Parks, with DOF's consent and subject to the Property Acquisition Law, to acquire title to or any interest in real property, which State Parks deems necessary or proper for the extension, improvement, or development of the state park system.
 - a) Authorizes State Parks to appraise and select real property for potential acquisition of, and addition to, the state park system. Requires DGS to review and approve all appraisals conducted by State Parks before purchase negotiations commence.
 - b) Authorizes State Parks to select real property it has appraised, submit purchase offers, and negotiate a purchase agreement with the owner or owners of the property. Requires DGS to review and approve all contracts related to the acquisition of real property by State Parks. PRC §5006.
- 4) Requires State Parks to submit funding requests to administer State Park's acquisition program through the Governor's Budget for properties that the State Parks has selected and appraised. The Governor's Budget must contain a separate description of each project, or acquisition program and its appraised value, or funding allocation. PRC §5006.
- 5) Establishes notice and hearing requirements that State Parks must meet before entering into any purchase agreements for the acquisition of real property in excess of \$500,000. PRC §5006.1.
- 6) Directs the SPWB to acquire, on behalf of and for State Parks, any interests in real property, including options to purchase, which have been appraised, selected, and settled through purchase negotiations by State Parks, as specified. GOV §15853.
- 7) Authorizes State Parks to receive and accept any gift, dedication, devise, grant, or other conveyance of title to or any interest in real property, including water rights, roads, trails, rights-of-way, buildings, facilities, and other improvements, to be added to or used in connection with the state park system. PRC §5005.

PROPOSED LAW

This bill would:

- 1) Exempt State Parks, when acquiring certain properties, from complying with the process to acquire land by the SPWB.
 - a) The properties exempt from this process are those that:
 - i) Do not create a new unit of the state park system;

- ii) The consideration to be paid by State Parks is no more than one million dollars;
 - iii) Do not require capital improvements or additional resources that cannot be absorbed within existing resources available to State Parks; and
 - iv) State Parks has given public notice and held a public meeting prior to acquisition.
- b) This exemption sunsets on January 1, 2033.
- 2) Authorizes DGS to waive approval for leases and appraisals related to land leased or acquired for State Parks' use.
- 3) Establishes public notice, public meeting, and legislative reporting requirements related to the acquisition of land by State Parks pursuant to this bill.

ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT

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. SB 630 creates a streamlined approval process for low-cost and low-risk property transactions after a due diligence process. SB 630 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 agency and nonprofit partners to address pressing needs for park access, infrastructure, and operations."

ARGUMENTS IN OPPOSITION

None received.

COMMENTS

This bill is double-jointed with AB 679 (Pellerin).

Concerns with the SPWB process. Concerns with the SPWB process for acquiring land for State Parks or other conservation purposes is not new. AB 2497 (Laird, Chapter 462, Statutes of 2006) directed the CNRA Secretary and the DOF Director to convene a workgroup to evaluate and develop options for improving the efficiency of state resources land acquisition transactions for those departments and conservancies subject to the SPWB's jurisdiction.

According to an Assembly floor analysis of AB 2455 (Laird, 2008, discussed below), the resulting AB 2497 report notes that the two-step approval process of the SPWB contributes to delays and increased costs to State Parks, who appears before SPWB more than any other resource agency. The report identified several options requiring legislative action, including expanding SPWB membership, establishing a new State Parks-related acquisition board, and creating a new resources conservation board to

consider all state resources land acquisitions and set statewide acquisition priorities. The workgroup did not reach consensus on the options requiring legislative action.

AB 2455 (Laird, 2008) would have authorized State Parks to acquire real property, subject to the review and approval of a proposed State Parks Preservation Board. The Governor vetoed this bill noting that the administration at the time was implementing the actions identified in the AB 2497 report that did not require legislative action and that the Legislature should give this process time to play out before considering additional legislation.

Sempervirens Fund provided a recent example of how acquisitions for State Parks can get delayed through the existing process. Sempervirens Fund partnered with State Parks in May 2019 to acquire properties to eventually add to Castle Rock State Park, but the SPWB didn't approve the acquisition until May 2023. According to Sempervirens, delays occurred during this multi-year process in part due to hold-ups with the SPWB and DGS. State Parks had little to no control over this part of the land sale process and often was not kept apprised of the status of the project. State Parks had to constantly follow up with these two departments to keep things moving.

Consistent Public Process. While there can be delays in the SPWB process, it is worth noting that there are many reasons for these delays, including factors that are not within SPWB's control. For example, incomplete applications or applications that do not meet certain standards, for an appraisal for example, would slow the process. It is worth noting that the Legislature established the Property Acquisition Law to create uniformity in the state's land acquisition process, provide checks on individual state agencies, and incorporate multiple layers of review and due diligence to ensure the state's acquisition of lands is responsible. The Property Acquisition Law also includes a public process in these proceedings, providing a forum for the public to weigh in and comment on potential acquisitions. Finally, the Property Acquisition Law already provides some streamlining for State Parks compared to other state agencies by creating a process that is unique to State Parks.

That said, the Legislature has found it necessary to exempt some state agencies from the SPWB's process, including the Department of Water Resources (DWR), the Central Valley Flood Protection Board, the Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), and the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB), as well as the State Lands Commission and the State Coastal Conservancy in certain instances. WCB may authorize acquisition of real property and authorize CDFW to acquire property. Before authorizing the purchase of any land, however, WCB must notify all the adjoining landowners of the property proposed for acquisition and include an explanation of the proposed use of the land. Other agencies exempt from the SPWB's process make decisions at open meetings noticed to the public at least ten days in advance. Also, the purchase price for the property cannot exceed the fair market value of the property, which must be established by a licensed appraiser and approved by DGS.

Addressing Governor's Veto. A similar proposal to this bill, but limited to specific parks in the Santa Cruz area, was previously heard in this Committee in 2024 (AB 2103, Pellerin) and at the time the bill came to this Committee it did not include requirements for public notice or comment. The Committee added a requirement for State Parks to notify the city or county, the budget and policy Committees of the Legislature, and

members of the Legislature representing the area proposed for acquisition; for State Parks to hold a public hearing where the public could comment on the proposed acquisition; and require State Parks to provide an opportunity for the public to comment in writing on the proposed acquisition.

The Senate Appropriations analysis of AB 2103 discussed the following fiscal impacts of those public meeting requirements, communicated by State Parks:

Ongoing costs until January 1, 2030, likely in the upper tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars annually (General Fund), for State Parks to meet the requirements of this bill to fee title or any lesser right or interest in real property, as specified. State Parks estimates costs of \$12,000 per day to hold public meetings, which includes travel and overnight accommodations for State Parks personnel as well as streaming services to allow for remote public participation and comment. Therefore, holding public meetings for 5 or more days would result in costs exceeding the Suspense threshold.

The Senate Appropriations Committee amended the bill to, instead of requiring State Parks to hold a public meeting, allow a City Council, Board of Supervisors, or Member of the Legislature to request a public meeting from State Parks.

Despite these amendments to lower the fiscal impact of the bill, Governor Newsom vetoed it. In his veto message, he wrote, “While the intent of this bill is to streamline [State Parks’s] acquisition process for park units impacted by the CZU Lightning Fire Complex, its public hearing requirements may slow the acquisition process and would significantly increase [State Parks’s] costs. [...] It is important to remain disciplined when considering bills with significant fiscal implications that are not included in the budget, such as this measure.”

This bill has public notice and public meeting requirements that balance public transparency with fiscal impacts. Key to this balance is allowing State Parks to co-locate the opportunity to comment on a land acquisition at a pre-planned meeting that might have other items on the agenda. So long as adjacent landowners to the parcel to be acquired are notified, and the parcel to be acquired is clearly described in the meeting notice, State Parks may utilize existing resources to fulfill the requirements of the Committee amendments.

Related legislation.

AB 679 (Pellerin, 2025) would exempt State Parks from the SPWB process for land acquisitions related to Big Basin Redwoods, Año Nuevo, and Butano State Parks. This bill was heard in the Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee on July 16, 2025, and on September 10, 2025, the bill was sent to Engrossing and Enrolling.

AB 2103 (Pellerin, 2024) would have exempted State Parks from the SPWB process for land acquisitions related to Big Basin Redwoods, Año Nuevo, and Butano State Parks. This bill was vetoed.

AB 566 (Pellerin, 2023) would have authorized State Parks to enter into an agreement with an eligible entity to permanently protect lands in or for the state park system and to acquire land on its own behalf. This bill failed to meet the House of Origin deadline.

SB 1167 (Allen, 2022) would have exempted acquisitions of land or other real property for the state park system from the requirement that the SPWB acquire the land if certain conditions were met, including that State Parks had determined that the land or property would not require additional state resource to manage, among others. This bill was not heard in Assembly Water, Parks, and Wildlife Committee.

AB 727 (Maze, 2007) would have removed the authority of DWR and WCB to acquire land or real property without the SPWB and removed DWR's authority to use the power of eminent domain. This bill failed to pass the Assembly Business and Professions Committee.

AB 2455 (Laird, 2008) would have authorized State Parks to acquire real property, subject to the review and approval of a proposed State Parks Preservation Board. The Governor vetoed this bill.

AB 2497 (Laird, Chapter 462, Statutes of 2006) required the CNRA Secretary and DOF Director to jointly convene a workgroup to evaluate and develop options for improving the efficiency of state resource land acquisition transactions for those departments and conservancies subject to the jurisdiction of the SPWB.

SUPPORT

Clean Earth 4 Kids

OPPOSITION

None Received

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