

Date of Hearing: June 8, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

Isaac G. Bryan, Chair

SB 949 (Becker) – As Amended March 25, 2026

SENATE VOTE: 35-0

SUBJECT: Environmental protection: Natural Resources Agency: resource of statewide significance: Santa Cruz Mountains

SUMMARY: Designates the Santa Cruz Mountains as a resource of statewide significance that requires special protection, as defined.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Finds that Coyote Valley is a resource of statewide significance. (Public Resources Code (PRC) 31582 (b))
- 2) Finds that the East Bay Hills are a resource of statewide cultural, historical, and environmental significance. Requires East Bay Hills to be acknowledged as an area of statewide significance in local land use policy documents, such as general and specific plans, developed or updated on or after January 1, 2026, affecting land use within the East Bay Hills. (PRC 5598 (b) and (g))
- 3) Finds that the Santa Ana River is an extraordinary natural resource of statewide significance. (PRC 31171 (e))
- 4) Establishes the watersheds of the Otay River, Sweetwater River, and Tijuana River as extraordinary natural resources of statewide significance that have been subject to intense development and are in need of conservation, restoration, protection, including protection of sensitive species, improved water quality, and improved overall health of the ecosystems of the individual watersheds. (PRC 32659 (d))
- 5) Defines “protection” to include those actions necessary to prevent harm or damage to persons, property, or natural, cultural, and historic resources, actions to improve access to public open-space areas, or actions to allow the continued use and enjoyment of property or natural, cultural, and historic resources. Protection includes site monitoring, acquisition, development, restoration, preservation, and interpretation. (PRC 90100)
- 6) Establishes the goal of the state to conserve at least 30% of California’s lands and coastal waters by 2030, known as 30x30. (PRC 71450)

THIS BILL:

- 1) Defines the “Santa Cruz Mountains” as the area defined by the following boundaries:
 - a) The County of San Mateo west of Highway 101, north of Interstate 380, and west of Interstate 280.

- b) The County of Santa Clara west of Interstate 280, west of Route 85, and west of Highway 101, excluding the portion of Hydrologic Unit Code 12 Upper Llagas Creek below 400 feet in elevation and all of the following Hydrologic Unit Code 12 watersheds:
 - i) Canoas Creek;
 - ii) Metcalfe Canyon-Coyote Creek;
 - iii) Little Llagas Creek; and,
 - iv) Lower Llagas Creek.
 - c) The County of Santa Cruz north and east of State Highway 1.
- 2) Designates the Santa Cruz Mountains as a resource of statewide significance that requires special protection.
 - 3) Requires, to the extent that resources are available, and when appropriate, the Natural Resources Agency (NRA), and its boards, departments, and conservancies, to encourage collaborative stewardship approaches that support all of the following:
 - a) Protection, restoration, and preservation of the Santa Cruz Mountains' natural ecosystems;
 - b) Restoration and preservation of wildlife habitat in the Santa Cruz Mountains;
 - c) Promotion of healthy forest management in the Santa Cruz Mountains;
 - d) Improvement of watershed management in the Santa Cruz Mountains;
 - e) Development and maintenance of trails for public access and other recreational opportunities in the Santa Cruz Mountains;
 - f) Promotion of the long-term sustainability and conservation of working lands in the Santa Cruz Mountains to ensure they remain viable while contributing to the region's overall environmental health;
 - g) Collaboration with local tribes to protect tribal cultural resources, partner on restoration and management efforts, and support opportunities for tribal access, cultural practices, and the potential for comanagement of ancestral lands in the Santa Cruz Mountains; and,
 - h) Promotion of voluntary stewardship on public and private lands in the Santa Cruz Mountains through technical assistance, conservation easements, incentive programs, and multibenefit projects that contribute to the landscape-level goals of ecological health and climate resilience.
 - 4) States that this bill shall not be construed as authorizing NRA to impose additional regulatory requirements on land use or working lands, including timber and agricultural lands, within the Santa Cruz Mountains.

- 5) Finds and declares that a special statute is necessary and that a general statute cannot be made applicable within the meaning of Section 16 of Article IV of the California Constitution because of the unique nature of the Santa Cruz Mountains as set forth in the findings and declarations specified in Section 1 of this act.

FISCAL EFFECT: According to the Senate Appropriations Committee, pursuant to Senate Rule 28.8, this bill is determined to have negligible state costs.

COMMENTS:

1) **Author's statement:**

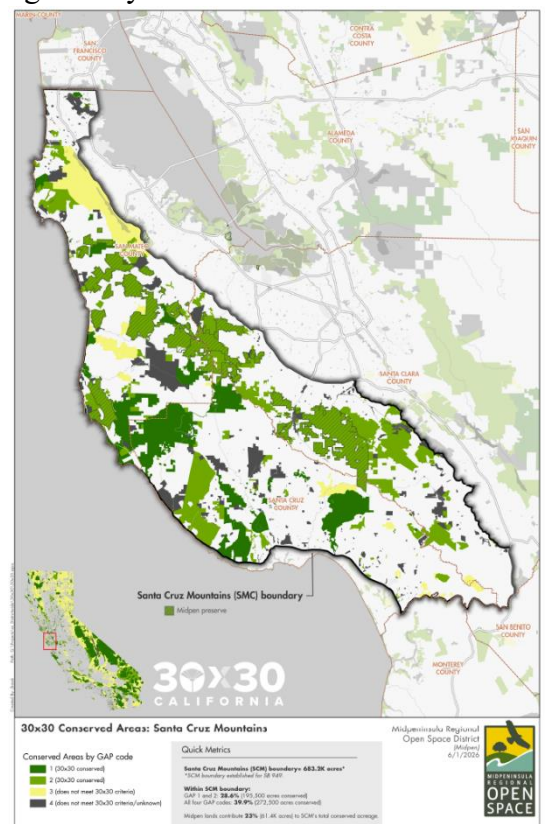
The Santa Cruz Mountains are one of California's most important natural landscapes- not just because of their ecological value, but because of their direct connection to millions of Californians. Few natural landscapes play such a direct role in protecting the health, safety, water supply, and quality of life of so many people.

In addition to the biological uniqueness, the region plays a critical role in sustaining ecological processes that support the broader landscape, including providing critical water infrastructure and working lands

Despite their ecological and recreational importance, there are currently no statewide policies that formally recognize the distinctiveness of the Santa Cruz Mountains. By enshrining the Santa Cruz Mountains in statute as an area of statewide significance, the Natural Resources Agency and its boards, departments, and conservancies will be better equipped to protect, restore, and preserve the natural ecosystems, habitats, and watersheds, while supporting healthy forest management alongside advancing public access and recreational opportunities.

- 2) **Santa Cruz Mountains.** The Santa Cruz Mountains hold significant ecological value as a vital hotspot for biodiversity along California's central coast.

The region, as outlined in the map to the rightⁱ, supports more than 350 native plant species, including Douglas-fir and the rare sandhills habitat supports populations of Ponderosa pine and several endemic species of plants, including Santa Cruz cypress, silverleaf manzanita, and Santa Cruz wallflower. Spring wildflowers are also widespread throughout the range. Wildlife in the mountains includes the California red-legged frog and marbled murrelet. It also features endemic species, such as the federally listed San Francisco garter snake, Zayante band-winged grasshopper and the Santa Cruz black salamander.



The region plays a critical role in sustaining ecological processes that support the broader landscape. Its forests and coast redwoods regulate local climate conditions through carbon capture, stabilize soils, and filter water that feeds into some of the most critical watersheds in the state. In addition, roughly 5 million people are within 20 miles of this important mountain range, creating intense pressure on its wildlife, recreation, and other natural resources.

The Santa Cruz Mountains contain a dense network of public parks, open-space preserves, conservation easements, watershed lands, and redwood reserves that qualify as 30x30 Conservation Areas under California's definition of lands that are durably protected and managed to sustain functional ecosystems. Pockets of the range are covered under the state's 30x30 framework totaling 28.6% (GAP 1 and GAP 2)ⁱⁱ of the Santa Cruz Mountain range's area. In the Santa Cruz Mountain area, there are 45,000 acres of GAP 4 lands that have the potential to count toward 30x30, alongside those that are already confirmed.

Despite the Santa Cruz Mountains' ecological and recreational importance, there is no dedicated state conservancy for the area, region-wide Natural Community Conservation Plan, or statewide policy that formally recognizes the distinctiveness of the entire region. According to the author, this gap leaves the region vulnerable to uncoordinated management and conservation outcomes, potentially hindering the effectiveness of conservation initiatives in the area.

- 3) **Resources of statewide significance.** SB 392 (Greyson), Chapter 754, Statutes of 2025, declares that East Bay Hills as an area of statewide significance. According to the East Bay Regional Park District during the legislative consideration of SB 392, such a designation will help East Bay Hills in various ways, such as making it more competitive in grant applications.

Other examples of areas the state has declared to be of statewide significance include the Santa Ana River and Lower American River.

Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District, Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority, and others write in support that by formalizing this designation for the Santa Cruz Mountains, SB 949 empowers the NRA to prioritize the restoration of these natural ecosystems and the maintenance of public resources. With this designation, this bill requires, to the extent that resources are available, and when appropriate, NRA and its boards, departments, and conservancies, to encourage collaborative stewardship approaches that support protection, restoration, and preservation of the Santa Cruz Mountains' natural ecosystems, wildlife habitat, and healthy forest management; improvement of watershed management development and maintenance of trails for public access and other recreational opportunities; promotion of the long-term sustainability and conservation of working lands; collaboration with local tribes; and, promotion of voluntary stewardship on public and private lands in the Santa Cruz Mountains.

- 4) **Related legislation.** AB 1426 (Kalra, 2026) establishes the Diablo Range Conservation Program Act and acknowledges the Diablo Range as a resource of statewide significance. This bill was held in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

Amah Mutsun Land Trust
County of San Mateo Board of Supervisors
County of Santa Clara
Green Foothills
Land Trust of Santa Cruz County
Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District
Santa Clara Valley Habitat Agency
Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority
Sempervirens Fund

Opposition

None on file

Analysis Prepared by: Paige Brokaw / NAT. RES. /

ⁱ Map of Santa Cruz Mountains boundary overlaid with 30x30 protected areas provided by Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District

ⁱⁱ What are Gap status codes: [GAP Status Code Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQ\) | U.S. Geological Survey](#)