

Date of Hearing: April 9, 2024

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON WATER, PARKS, AND WILDLIFE

Diane Papan, Chair

AB 1838 (Jackson) – As Amended April 3, 2024

SUBJECT: Wildlife areas: San Jacinto Wildlife Area

SUMMARY: Requires the Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) to undertake various activities regarding the management of San Jacinto Wildlife Area (SJWA). Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires that, on or before January 1, 2031, and every fifteen years after, DFW to update the SJWA management plan in collaboration with California Native American Tribes, the Riverside County Regional Conservation Authority, the San Jacinto Basin Resource Conservation District, the Riverside County Habitat Conservation Agency, and the public.
- 2) Requires DFW to develop partnerships with community-based organizations, including environmental organizations, for the purposes of fundraising, maintaining habitat, engaging in conservation projects, and providing recreational programs in SJWA.
- 3) Requires that DFW hold public hearings related to SJWA on or before December 31, 2025 and every year after that would:
 - a) Review the status of SJWA;
 - b) Discuss the effectiveness of and updates to the management plan; and
 - c) Discuss community asset planning as specified.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Establishes the mission of DFW to manage the states diverse fish, wildlife, and plant resources, and the habitats upon which they depend for their ecological values and for their use and enjoyment of the public [Fish and Game Code (FGC) § 1801].
- 2) Establishes that it is the policy of the state that DFW use ecosystem-based management informed by credible science in all resource management to the extent feasible. Establishes that DFW create, foster, and actively participate in effective partnerships and collaborations with other agencies and stakeholders to achieve shared goals and better integrate resource conservation and management (FGC §§ 703.3 and 703.5).
- 3) Requires that, subject to an appropriation, DFW prepare draft management plans for parcels wholly within its jurisdiction (FGC § 1019).

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown. This bill is keyed fiscal.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **Purpose of this bill.** This bill requires DFW update the SJWA management plan every 15 years and develop partnerships for the stewardship of the SJWA. According to the author, “The [SJWA] is home to hundreds of species of birds and wildlife, a destination for those

seeking the peace of the outdoors, and is an integral asset to the people of Riverside County. This bill aims to further safeguard [SJWA] and its many benefits for future generations in Riverside and California.”

- 2) **Background.** DFW is responsible for the management of over 1.1 million acres of fish and wildlife habitat spanning over 700 properties statewide, which includes 109 wildlife areas and 141 ecological reserves. Wildlife Areas are maintained for the primary purpose of developing a statewide program of ecological conservation, restoration, preservation, development and management of wildlife, and wildlife habitat and hunting (California Code of Regulations, Title 14 § 551).

San Jacinto Wildlife Area. The first 3,318 acres of SJWA was purchased as mitigation for the State Water Project and was quickly followed by designation as a Wildlife Area by the Fish and Game Commission in 1982. SJWA now consists of two noncontiguous units, the Davis Unit and the Potrero Unit, totaling 20,126 acres of managed land, with 900 acres of restored wetlands. The SJWA is one of the largest public land holdings in the Inland Desert region of Southern California and is a highly visited recreation area. Recreational resources provided by the SJWA include waterfowl and upland small game hunting, bird watching, hiking, hunting dog training, and mountain biking. The SJWA also supports a diverse array of biological resources which include wetland habitats, riparian habitats, alkali habitats, vernal pools, waterfowl habitats, agriculture fields, and upland habitats. It is an important stop for a number of migratory birds along the Pacific flyway. The SJWA preserves components of several periods of California history and pre-history through the conservation of cultural and historical sites.

DFW is a participant in two regional conservation plans for which the SJWA provide significant conservation lands: the Stephens’ Kangaroo Rat Habitat Conservation Plan and Western Riverside County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP). The Stephen’s kangaroo rat was listed under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) in 1988 and was reclassified as threatened in 2022. As such, it provides important conservation for a variety of special status species and plants (including rare plants and alkali dependent rare plants) that require the management of habitat conditions. The MSHCP is a comprehensive, multijurisdictional plan that conserves endangered and threatened plant and animal species and associated habitats in western Riverside County. The MSHCP serves as a both a Habitat Conservation Plan pursuant to the federal ESA as well as a state Natural Communities Conservation Plan. The overall management of the SJWA is coordinated with the long-term management goals that the MSHCP needs to accomplish to achieve a sustained MSHCP Reserve.

Land Management Plan. These resources have been managed by DFW since the inception of the SJWA. In 2000, DFW drafted a Land Management Plan (LMP) to document management activities that occur on the SJWA. Since then, the Potrero Unit was added to the SJWA, the MSHCP was developed, and numerous environmental changes have occurred. The LMP was updated and finalized to address management of these biological, cultural, and recreational resources. The SJWA LMP is intended to cover the next 30 years of management needs. The SJWA LMP qualifies as a project under CEQA. As lead agency, DFW prepared a Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) for the LMP for SJWA. The PEIR has been prepared to provide the public, responsible agencies, and trustee agencies with information about the potential environmental effects of implementation of the SJWA LMP as well as an opportunity

to respond to its contents. The LMP/PEIR was authorized in August 2020. The LMP also addresses future capital expenditures and land acquisitions.

DFW may enter into other agreements or MOUs as necessary to further ongoing cooperative relationships with agencies and other joint powers authorities such as the Regional Conservation Authority, Riverside County Habitat Conservation Agency, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

None on file

Opposition

None on file

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