

Date of Hearing: April 14, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON WATER, PARKS, AND WILDLIFE

Diane Papan, Chair

AB 2277 (Schultz) – As Amended March 9, 2026

SUBJECT: California State Park Stewardship Act of 2026

SUMMARY: Requires the Department of Parks and Recreation (State Parks) to integrate climate considerations into all aspects of park planning, development, and operations and establishes the Wildfire Safety and Climate Stewardship Fund (Fund) to support current and future state park stewardship. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Establishes that it is the policy of the state to address climate change-based issues through proactive stewardship and informed management of state park lands.
- 2) Requires State Parks to promote climate resilience, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and protect biodiversity by integrating climate considerations into all aspects of park planning, development, and operations.
- 3) Requires State Parks to identify and administer best practices for conducting climate stewardship activities through existing and future natural resource management tools and practices to accomplish #2, above.
- 4) Establishes the Fund, to be administered by State Parks, to support the stewardship of current and future state park lands for minimizing fire risk and other extreme weather impacts, and to ensure improved carbon uptake and storage and address the ongoing support and maintenance of critical and natural infrastructure needed to lower greenhouse gas emissions, in units of the state park system.
- 5) Requires State Parks to develop guidelines for the expenditure of funds to prioritize projects and programs that will enhance carbon sequestration while supporting durable programming consistent with the mission of State Parks.
- 6) Upon appropriation by the Legislature, requires State Parks to use money in the Fund to provide grants to eligible projects and programs consistent with this section. Determines that eligible projects and programs for a grant shall include, but not be limited to, those that implement park stewardship, preservation, protection, restoration, development, planning, acquisition, workforce development, and climate stewardship activities.
- 7) Clarifies that implementation of activities described in #6, above, may include, but are not limited to, implementation of prescribed burns, fuel reduction, reforestation, and road decommissioning, and restoration and management of riparian zones, grasslands, rangelands, forests, and wetlands projects and programs.
- 8) Gives grant priority to climate stewardship activities that support multiple cobenefits.
- 9) Permits State Parks to enter into an agreement to accept funding from any local, state, or federal agency, person, private entity, educational institution, tribal government, corporation, business or other organization for purposes of implementing Fund expenditures. Clarifies that

under State Park's direction, funds shall supplement, but not replace, existing resources for the purpose of enhancing climate resilience or stewardship in units of the state park system. Requires that funding received by State Parks shall be deposited in the Fund.

- 10) Makes findings and declarations regarding the crucial role of State Parks in preserving, managing, and stewarding the diverse natural lands and historic and cultural resources within the expansive state park system, ensuring they remain accessible to all and resilient to the impacts of current and future climate change.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Establishes the California state park system and vests State Parks with control of the state park system and responsibility for administering, protecting, developing, and interpreting state parks for the use and enjoyment of the public [Public Resources Code (PRC) § 5001 *et seq.*].
- 2) Requires the director of State Parks to promote and regulate the use of the state park system in a manner that conserves the scenery, natural and historic resources, and wildlife in the individual units of the system for the enjoyment of future generations (PRC § 5001.2)
- 3) Codifies the 30x30 goal. Further, requires the California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA) to promote and support partner state agencies and departments that acquire and steward state land, including, but not limited to, State Parks, in the acquisition of new state land and responsible stewardship of state land, as feasible (PRC § 71450 *et seq.*).
- 4) Finds and declares that the budget for State Parks has not kept pace with population and growing demand, and that the annual budget for state parks has been significantly below the amount necessary to maintain state parks (PRC § 5019.91).

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown. This bill is keyed fiscal.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **Purpose of this bill.** The author indicates that there is a lack of resources and statutory direction for State Parks to manage climate-driven threats, extreme heat, wildfires, and biodiversity loss. According to the author, “[This bill] affirms state policy to integrate climate considerations into all aspects of park planning, development, and operations. Specifically, [this bill] directs State Parks to implement science-based, climate-informed stewardship practices, such as reforestation projects, prescribed burns, and fuel reduction, and road decommissioning. This bill also establishes the [Fund] to support climate-informed stewardship practices.”
- 2) **Background.** The mission of California State Parks 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.” California’s state parks system includes beaches, underwater refuges, Native Californian cultural preserves, museums, lighthouses, ghost towns, recreation areas, and wilderness areas. The system of 280 state park units encompasses nearly 1.6 million acres of land, more than 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. State Parks recognizes that California's population is expected to grow by nearly 30% in the next quarter century, which will put ever-increasing pressure on the state's remaining wild lands.

Climate Resiliency. California is one of the most “climate-challenged” regions in North America and is already facing numerous threats such as extreme heat, severe drought, flooding, mega-wildfires, and sea-level rise. California’s Fourth Climate Assessment notes that there will be negative impacts to California’s ecosystems, both on land and in the ocean, leading to local extinctions, migrations, and management challenges. The actions taken to prepare for, recover from, and generally manage the impacts of climate change are termed climate resilience. These actions can generally be categorized as adaptation (actions to cope with current threats and prepare for future extremes) and mitigation (actions to reduce the numerous factors that contribute to climate change).

Like the state as a whole, State Parks faces unprecedented threats as a result of the changing climate. The parks system will need to take a range of management actions to adapt to these challenges. At the same time, the state parks system also provides diverse mitigation opportunities to make California more resilient to climate change.

Biodiversity. California boasts incredible biological diversity. Approximately 40 of the state’s 770 native wildlife species and about 2,100 of its 6,300 plant species are found nowhere else in the world. State parks provide a refuge for many of these species across the state including some of the 450 species of plants and animals that are currently listed under the federal or state Endangered Species Acts. However, these native species are under threat from many angles. Additionally, recovery from natural disasters like wildfire often favors faster-growing non-native plants, choking out native landscapes. Drought-stressed trees are also more susceptible to the pests and diseases that increase tree mortality.

Wildfires. State Parks protects some of the state’s most unique natural resources. For example, California has 49 state parks (144,000 acres) that provide habitat for redwoods (only 5% of the original 2.2 million acres of old-growth coastal redwood forests remain since European settlement). As noted in the California State Parks Foundation report, “Building a Climate-Resilient California State Park System,” California State Parks are also under wildfire threat because of over 150 years of fire suppression, exacerbated by climate change. California’s Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan (2021), calls for State Parks and other state agencies to increase the use of prescribed fire on high-risk state lands, which will help achieve the state’s 500,000-acre fuels reduction goal, and to implement a monitoring program to gather information about the ecological benefits of these forest management practices. In 2021, the Wildfire and Forest Resilience Program was created in State Parks to carry out ecosystem resilience treatments (e.g., prescribed burns, forest thinning, monitoring), post-fire recovery and restoration, planning, and education and outreach. State Parks maintains a burn team to decrease fuel loads, improve habitat for native species, and increase forest diversity.

Sea Level Rise. State Parks manages nearly one quarter of the California coastline. State Parks has 128 coastal park units (111 oceanfront units and an additional 17 units within the coastal zone)—this is nearly one-half of State Parks units. More than 50 million people visit these coastal units annually. By 2100, California is projected to experience 1–7 feet of sea level rise. State Parks modeling suggests that 5 feet of sea level rise and a 100-year storm

would result in the inundation of 593 structures, 150 acres of parking lots, 93 campgrounds and day-use areas, and 65 miles of access roads—without considering underground infrastructure, bluff erosion, and archaeological losses.

State Parks has a goal of preparing for 3.5 feet of sea level rise by 2050. Some examples of projects that are already underway, including shoreline stabilization, native plantings, habitat restoration, infrastructure redesign, and building managed retreat into hazard management plans. The State Parks Sea Level Rise Adaptation Strategy (2020) includes six principles:

- 1) Integrate sea level rise adaptation into projects, plans, and funding decisions.
- 2) Translate best available science into practicable, long-term solutions.
- 3) Work with partners.
- 4) Balance access with resource protection.
- 5) Align its approach with the Coastal Act to improve permitting and compliance.
- 6) Increase public awareness.

The unprecedented winter storms of January 2023 inflicted over \$190 million of damage to coastal state parks and devastated Seacliff and New Brighton State Beaches. State Parks is currently undertaking a Recovery and Resilience Study of the beaches to understand the impacts of sea level rise and develop recommendations to build beaches that are more resilient. This study includes a public survey to understand visitors' values.

Extreme Heat. Extreme heat threatens both public health and the natural resources in state parks. Mitigating climate impacts by protecting landscapes that offer sanctuary from the heat will be particularly appreciated by those in urban areas. It is possible that park visitation will increase in response, so State Parks will need to respond to increased park usage as the natural resources become increasingly valuable and stressed. Recently, State Parks closed the Skyline Trail at Mount San Jacinto State Park due to dangerously high temperatures, which had led to an increase in rescue operations for hikers suffering from heat exhaustion and dehydration on the trail.

- 3) **Proposed committee amendments.** To provide better clarity on the goals of and activities included in climate stewardship, *the Committee may wish to request that the author take the following amendments:*

Section 1, proposed PRC § 5019.96:

(a) For the purposes of this ~~section~~ **article**, the following definitions apply:

(1) (A) "Climate stewardship activities" means projects and programs that ***utilize nature-based solutions to*** intentionally contribute to climate resilience, measurably increase ***durable*** carbon sequestration, ~~carbon stability, or both, and reduce unintended greenhouse gas emissions state parks~~ ***and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, in the state park system.***

~~(B)~~ "Climate stewardship activities" include, but are not limited to, ***preservation, protection, restoration, development, planning, acquisition, and restoration workforce development, such as*** climate-informed reforestation, prescribed burns, fuel reduction, and road decommissioning, and ***habitat*** restoration and management ~~of riparian zones, grasslands, rangelands, forests, and wetlands projects and programs across all land types.~~

(2) ~~Unit of the~~ ***The*** state park system" means an area specified in Section 5002.

(b) It is the policy of the state to address ~~climate change-based issues~~ ***and mitigate climate change impacts in the state park system*** through ~~proactive~~ stewardship, ***as defined in Section 71453.*** and informed management of state park lands. The department shall promote climate resilience, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and protect biodiversity by integrating climate considerations into all aspects of park planning, development, and operations.

(c) To implement the policy described in subdivision (b), the department shall ~~identify and administer best practices for conducting~~ ***conduct*** climate stewardship activities through existing and future natural resource management tools and practices. ***The department shall promote climate resilience, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and protect biodiversity by integrating climate considerations into relevant aspects of park planning, development, and operations.***

Section 2, proposed PRC § 5019.97

(a) (1) The Wildfire Safety and Climate Stewardship Fund is hereby established, to be administered by the department, to support ~~the stewardship of current and future state park lands for minimizing fire risk and other extreme weather impacts, and to ensure improved carbon uptake and storage and address the ongoing support and maintenance of critical and natural infrastructure needed to lower greenhouse gas emissions, in units of~~ ***climate stewardship activities*** the state park system.

(2) The department shall develop guidelines for the expenditure of ***moneys in the*** funds to prioritize ***multi-benefit*** projects and programs that will ~~enhance carbon sequestration supporting durable~~ ***support*** programming consistent with the department's mission.

(3) Upon appropriation by the Legislature, the department shall use moneys in the fund to provide grants to eligible projects and programs consistent with this ~~section~~ ***article***. Eligible projects and programs for this grant shall include, but not be limited to, those that implement park stewardship, preservation, protection, restoration, development, planning, acquisition, workforce development, and climate stewardship activities consistent with this section.

(4) ~~Implementation of activities described in paragraph (3) may include, but are not limited to, implementation of prescribed burns, fuel reduction, reforestation, and road decommissioning, and restoration and management of riparian zones, grasslands, rangelands, forests, and wetlands projects and programs.~~

(5) ~~Grant priority shall be given to climate stewardship activities that support multiple cobenefits.~~

(b) The department may enter into an agreement to accept funding from any local, state, or federal government, person, private entity, educational institution, tribal government, corporation, business or other organization for purposes of implementing this section. Under the department's direction, these funds shall supplement, but not replace, existing resources for the purpose of enhancing climate resilience or stewardship ~~in units of~~ the state park system. Funding received by the department pursuant to this subdivision shall be deposited in the fund established in subdivision (a).

- 4) **Arguments in support.** The co-sponsors of this bill write that this bill “an important step forward in California’s climate policy as the bill ensures park management advances a climate-resilient future aligned with the state’s broader climate and wildfire resilience goals and coordinated with neighboring land managers. California state parks encompass more than 1.6 million acres of land, including roughly one-quarter of the state’s coastline,

hundreds of miles of lake and river frontage, and an extensive statewide trail network. These lands protect biodiversity, preserve cultural and historic resources, and provide essential recreational access for millions of visitors each year. The stewardship of these lands is essential and should be recognized as such.”

- 5) **Related legislation.** AB 2440 (Reyes), Chapter 716, Statutes of 2024, among other things, requires CNRA to promote and support partnering state agencies and departments that acquire and steward state land, including, but not limited to, State Parks, in the acquisition of new state land and responsible stewardship of state land, as feasible.

AB 1589 (Huffman), Chapter 533, Statutes of 2012, enacts the California State Parks Stewardship Act of 2012, that requires State Parks to develop an action plan to increase revenues and collection of user fees, permits State Parks to enter into operating agreements with a qualified nonprofit organization for the care and operation of the state park system, and establishes the State Park Protection Fund.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

California State Parks Foundation (co-sponsor)
Save the Redwoods League (co-sponsor)
Sempervirens Fund (co-sponsor)
Center for Environmental Health
Clean Earth 4 Kids
Resource Renewal Institute
Sonoma Land Trust
The Climate Center

Opposition

None on file

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