

Date of Hearing: April 9, 2024

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON WATER, PARKS, AND WILDLIFE

Diane Papan, Chair

AB 3036 (Rendon) – As Amended March 21, 2024

**SUBJECT:** Los Angeles River: river ranger program

**SUMMARY:** Requires the two state conservancies with jurisdiction along the Los Angeles (LA) River (the Conservancies) to collaborate with the Department of Parks and Recreation (State Parks), the California Conservation Corps (CCC), and the State Lands Commission (SLC), to develop a permanent river ranger program (Program) along the LA River. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Codifies findings and declarations regarding the LA River, the mission of the Program, and the guiding principles of the Program.
- 2) Requires the Conservancies to collaborate with State Parks, CCC, and SLC to develop a Program to provide a network of river rangers who provide assistance to the public at sites along the LA River and its tributaries. Requires the Conservancies to solicit participation of representatives from local governments that have jurisdiction over segments of the LA River.
- 3) Establishes the objectives of the Program, including establishing an identity for the LA River, improving public safety for visitors, promoting equal access and equity among all communities along the LA River, among other things.
- 4) Defines “Conservancies” to be the San Gabriel and Lower LA Rivers and Mountains Conservancy and the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy.

**EXISTING LAW:**

- 1) Establishes the San Gabriel and Lower LA Rivers and Mountains Conservancy [Public Resources Code (PRC) § 32600 *et seq.*].
- 2) Establishes the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy (PRC § 33000 *et seq.*).
- 3) Establishes State Parks and vests State Parks with control of the state park system. State Parks is responsible for administering and managing the state park system for the use and enjoyment of the public, protecting this system from damage, and preserving the peace (PRC §§ 501, 5001, 5003, and 5008).
- 4) Establishes CCC and requires CCC to implement and administer the conservation corps program, which includes the management of environmentally important lands and water, public works projects, facilitating public use of resources, assistance in emergency operations, assistance in fire prevention and suppression, energy conservation, and environmental restoration (PRC § 14000 *et seq.*).
- 5) Establishes that SLC is the steward and manager of the state's public trust lands. SLC has direct administrative control over the state's public trust lands and oversight authority over public trust lands granted by the Legislature to local public agencies (PRC § 6009).

**FISCAL EFFECT:** Unknown. This bill is keyed fiscal.

**COMMENTS:**

- 1) **Purpose of this bill.** This bill establishes the Program for the LA River. According to the author, “The [LA] River is not only an important ecosystem, but a critical resource for communities across LA County. It’s important we continue to build on our mission of revitalizing the LA River, in order to protect vulnerable habitats and support this irreplaceable cultural resource. [This bill] would work to further protect the river by establishing a River Ranger program, which would provide critical environmental protection and diverse educational resources in order to protect the River now, and into the future.”
- 2) **Background.** Parks, open spaces, recreation facilities, trails, and gardens are essential community infrastructure, but, as mentioned, not all communities have access to these resources. In LA County, communities with the fewest parks often have the environmental burdens, i.e., most pollutants and other stressors that directly impact public health and well-being. In LA, people of color account for 84% of the population living in areas with highest environmental burdens. Over time, some areas of the county have accrued significant environmental burdens as the result of historic land development practices, natural resource extraction and consumption, industrial operations, transportation projects, energy production and other impacts of urbanization.

*The LA River.* In the late 1700s when the Spanish founded the pueblo that became Los Angeles, the LA River supported diverse flora and fauna and much of what is now southern and western LA was marsh. The Spanish followed the example of the Native Americans and settled near the river to use its flow to supply drinking and irrigation water. As Los Angeles grew and prospered, settlements and farming continued to encroach upon the river’s floodplain, while also depending upon it for water. As time progressed, booming development along the river as well as increasing urbanization provided for larger and larger impacts from river flooding. Between 1850 and 1900, there were 11 major flood events along the river. More serious flooding in the 1930s required federal help. In 1936, Congress directed the US Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) to “channelize” the river to help control flooding. Channelization by concrete started in 1938 and was completed in 1960. The river is now straighter and deeper in many locations, moving high volumes of flood water rapidly downstream to San Pedro Harbor. The Flood Control District and the Corps share the responsibility for the operation and management of these flood control and water conservation facilities.

Although planners had envisioned greenbelts interconnecting parklands along the river as early as the 1930s, the more recent interest in the revitalization and promotion of the re-integration of the river and its tributaries into the adjacent neighborhoods began in the mid-to-late 1980s. There was growing recognition that compared to other large American cities Los Angeles has relatively fewer parks, particularly in under-represented communities. In the early 1990s, community activism over turning a railyard adjacent to the river (the Taylor Yards) into open space coincided with the County of Los Angeles beginning a process that, after considerable input from stakeholders and community outreach, resulted in the County’s Los Angeles River Master Plan in 1996.

*LA River Jurisdictions.* The author points out that the governance of the LA River’s entire watershed is complex. Many small cities have jurisdiction over the LA River and its

tributaries. The Lower LA River includes the cities of Vernon, Commerce, Maywood, Bell, Bell Gardens, Cudahy, South Gate, Lynwood, Compton, Paramount, Carson, and Long Beach. The upper watershed includes several tributaries including the Tujunga, Pacoima, and Rio Honda, passing through a number of cities from the Santa Monica Mountains to downtown Los Angeles. Each of these cities individually has jurisdiction over their portion of the LA River for law enforcement. The LA River crosses several state agency jurisdictions, mainly the San Gabriel and Lower LA Rivers and Mountains Conservancy and the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy.

*The LA River Ranger Program.* Pursuant to AB 1558 (C. Garcia, 2017), the Conservancies with LA River jurisdiction developed a program to provide a network of river rangers who assist the public at sites along the LA River and its tributaries. Work to implement AB 1558 began in January 2018 and was completed May 2019. The Program Establishment Plan<sup>1</sup> was developed by a stakeholder and community-driven process to gain an understanding of how a Program could help meet community needs. Representatives from 22 cities along the Los Angeles River and one mile up the tributaries, federal, state, and county agencies, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that do work along the River guided overall development of the program framework and components. The Conservancies also partnered with fourteen local NGOs, who attended 51 community events and collected 3,820 surveys. AB 1558 was repealed on January 1, 2019. This bill codifies the objectives that were used to guide the development of the Program Establishment Plan from AB 1558. This bill further codifies the guiding principles established in the Program Establishment Plan.

- 3) **Double referral.** This bill is also referred to the Assembly Natural Resources Committee.
- 4) **Related legislation.** AB 2285 (Rendon) of the current legislative session encourages the Governor's office, state agencies, and the Legislature to recognize the coequal goals and benefits of the 30x30 goal (conserving at least 30% of the state's land and coastal waters by 2030) and Outdoors for All when distributing resources, and, to the extent practical, maximize investment in urban communities consistent with those initiatives. AB 2285 is set for hearing in this Committee.

AB 1558 (C. Garcia), Chapter 452, Statutes of 2017, required the Conservancies in collaboration with State Parks, CCC, and SLC to develop the Program and, no later than June 30, 2018, prepare a plan for the design and implementation of the Program with the listed objectives.

AB 530 (Rendon), Chapter 684, Statutes of 2015, created the Lower Los Angeles River Working Group that developed the idea of a river ranger program for the entire LA River.

## **REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**

### **Support**

None on file

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<sup>1</sup> [Los Angeles River Ranger Program Establishment Plan - Watershed Conservation Authority \(ca.gov\)](https://www.ca.gov/legislation/bills_2017/1558)

**Opposition**

None on file

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