



AB-2494 State forests: forest management. (2025-2026)

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CALIFORNIA LEGISLATURE— 2025–2026 REGULAR SESSION

ASSEMBLY BILL

NO. 2494

Introduced by Assembly Member Rogers
(Coauthors: Assembly Members Connolly and Zbur)
(Coauthor: Senator McGuire)

February 20, 2026

An act to amend Sections 4629.6, 4629.8, 4629.9, 4631, 4631.5, 4639, 4651, 4652, and 4656 of, and to add Section 4649.5 to, the Public Resources Code, relating to state forests.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 2494, as amended, Rogers. State forests: forest management.

(1) Existing law authorizes the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection to engage in management of state forests and defines “management” for purposes of the state forests as a means of handling forest crop and forest soil to achieve maximum sustained production of high-quality forest products while giving consideration to values relating to, among other values, recreation, watershed, and wildlife, as provided.

This bill would redefine “management” for purposes of state forests as the handling of forest vegetation and soils within state forests for biodiversity conservation and *fire wildfire* resilience, while ~~maximizing the promotion of supporting~~ durable onsite carbon storage and sequestration, climate *mitigation and* resiliency goals, equitable forest access, wildlife and *fish habitat*, recreation opportunities, and compatible research efforts. *The bill would specify that timber harvesting consistent with this definition is permissible.*

(2) Existing law declares it is in the interest of the welfare of the people of the state and their industries and other activities involving the use of wood, lumber, poles, piling, wood pulp, and other forest products that desirable cutover forest lands be made fully productive and that the holding and reforestation of such lands is a necessary measure predicated on waning supplies of original old growth timber, as provided. Existing law further declares it is in the interest of the welfare of the people of the state that the state retain the existing land base of state forests in timber production for research and demonstration.

This bill would instead ~~declare~~ *declare, among other things, that desirable state forest lands, as provided,* should be restored to fulfill ecological ~~conditions~~ *functions* and processes, and managed consistent with the definition of management, and would further declare *it to be the policy of the state to be* to respect California Native American tribal sovereignty and to seek opportunities for comanagement and integration of indigenous traditional ecological knowledge in forest management. The bill would instead declare *it to be the policy of the state, among other things, to accept or acquire lands, the reforestation or restoration of which is not assured under private ownership, to restore those lands with locally appropriate species and manage those lands for public benefit, and* that the state should retain the existing land base of state forests primarily for research and demonstration purposes and allow the sale of timber and other forest ~~products only when harvest occurs for ecological restoration or research purposes.~~ *products.*

(3) Existing law requires the management of state forests and the cutting and sale of timber and other forest products from state forests to conform with regulations prepared by the Director of Forestry and Fire Protection and approved by the State Board of Forestry and Fire Protection. Existing law requires the regulations to conform with forest management practices designed to achieve maximum sustained production of high-quality forest products while giving consideration to values relating to, among other values, recreation, watershed, and wildlife, as specified. Existing law authorizes state forest lands to be used for grazing and mining purposes pursuant to regulations established by the board. Under existing law, a person who violates the rules and regulations pertaining to the state forests established by the board is guilty of a misdemeanor.

The bill would ~~prohibit~~ *require* the sale of timber and other forest products from state forests ~~unless harvest occurs for ecological restoration or research purposes~~ to occur in a manner consistent with the definition of management, as provided. The bill would repeal the authorization for state forest lands to be used for mining purposes. ~~The bill would require the regulations concerning the management of state forests and the cutting and sale of timber and other forest products to prioritize management practices, as specified.~~ The bill would require the regulations permitting grazing on state forest lands to be updated to reflect the redefinition of management. Because a violation of these regulations would be a crime, the bill would impose a state-mandated local program.

(4) Existing law requires the Secretary of the Natural Resources Agency, in consultation with the Secretary for Environmental Protection, to submit a report to the Joint Legislative Budget Committee on the activities of all state departments, agencies, and boards relating to forest and timberland regulation, as specified.

This bill would, among other changes to the report, require the report include additional information including, among other things, any identified staffing needs, by department, and costs per position, to support a more efficient review of timber harvest plans.

(5) Existing law authorizes the department to collect recreational user fees for overnight camping and reserved group activities in a demonstration state forest. *Existing law prohibits the department from charging a fee that exceeds the amount necessary to reimburse the department's costs for maintenance and improvement of campground facilities, associated recreational facilities, natural environment, and access thereto.* Existing law requires all user fees collected by the department to be deposited into the Forest Resources Improvement Fund and requires the fees to be used, upon appropriation by the Legislature, to reimburse the department's cost of maintaining and improving the campground facilities, associated recreational facilities, natural environment, and access thereto. Under existing law, the Forest Resources Improvement Fund is the depository for all revenue derived from the receipts from the sale of forest products, as defined, from state forests to support specified operations. Existing law authorizes money in the Forest Resource Improvement Fund to only be expended, upon appropriation by the Legislature, for the cost of operations associated with management of lands held in trust by the state and operated as demonstration state forests, as specified.

Existing law creates the Timber Regulation and Forest Restoration Fund in the State Treasury and requires that specified revenues received from a lumber or engineered wood products assessment, less amounts deducted for refunds and reimbursements, be deposited in the Timber Regulation and Forest Restoration Fund and, upon appropriation by the Legislature, be used for specified purposes, including for forest resources improvement grants and projects administered by the department.

This bill would instead require that all recreational user fees received by the department be deposited into the Timber Regulation and Forest Restoration Fund, as provided. The bill would instead also require that all revenue derived from the receipts from the sales of forest products, and any other funds generated by a demonstration state forest, be deposited in the Timber Regulation and Forest Restoration Fund, except as provided. The bill would require moneys deposited in the Timber Regulation and Forest Restoration Fund to, upon appropriation by the Legislature, be expended to support demonstration state forests, as provided. *The bill would repeal the*

prohibition on the department regarding charging a fee that exceeds the amount necessary to reimburse the department's costs for maintenance and improvement, as provided.

(6) The California Constitution requires the state to reimburse local agencies and school districts for certain costs mandated by the state. Statutory provisions establish procedures for making that reimbursement.

This bill would provide that no reimbursement is required by this act for a specified reason.

Vote: majority Appropriation: no Fiscal Committee: yes Local Program: yes

THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA DO ENACT AS FOLLOWS:

SECTION 1. Section 4629.6 of the Public Resources Code is amended to read:

4629.6. Moneys deposited in the fund shall, upon appropriation by the Legislature, only be expended for the following purposes:

(a) To reimburse the State Board of Equalization for its administrative costs associated with the administration, collection, audit, and issuance of refunds related to the lumber products and engineered wood assessment established pursuant to Section 4629.5.

(b) To pay refunds issued pursuant to Part 30 (commencing with Section 55001) of Division 2 of the Revenue and Taxation Code.

(c) To support the activities and costs of the department, the Department of Conservation, the Department of Fish and Wildlife, the State Water Resources Control Board, and regional water quality control boards associated with the review of projects or permits necessary to conduct timber operations. On or after July 1, 2013, except for fees applicable for fire prevention or protection within state responsibility area classified lands or timber yield assessments, no currently authorized or required fees shall be charged by the agencies listed in this subdivision for activities or costs associated with the review of a project, inspection and oversight of projects, and permits necessary to conduct timber operations of those departments and boards.

(d) For transfer to the department's Forest Improvement Program for forest resources improvement grants and projects administered by the department pursuant to Chapter 1 (commencing with Section 4790) and Chapter 2 (commencing with Section 4799.06) of Part 2.5.

(e) To fund existing restoration grant programs, with priority given to the Fisheries Restoration Grant Program administered by the Department of Fish and Wildlife and grant programs administered by state conservancies.

(f) (1) As a loan to the Department of Fish and Wildlife for activities to address environmental damage occurring on forest lands resulting from marijuana cultivation. Not more than five hundred thousand dollars (\$500,000) may be loaned from the fund in a fiscal year pursuant to this paragraph. This paragraph shall become inoperative on July 1, 2017.

(2) Any funds deposited into the fund pursuant to subdivision (d) or (f) of Section 12025 or subdivision (b), (c), (e), or (f) of Section 12025.1 of the Fish and Game Code shall be credited toward loan repayment.

(3) Moneys from the General Fund shall not be used to repay a loan authorized pursuant to this subdivision.

(g) To support demonstration state forests.

(h) To the department for fuel treatment grants and projects pursuant to authorities under the Wildland Fire Protection and Resources Management Act of 1978 (Article 1 (commencing with Section 4461) of Chapter 7).

(i) To the department to provide grants to local agencies responsible for fire protection, qualified nonprofits, recognized tribes, local and state governments, and resources conservation districts, undertaken on a state responsibility area (SRA) or on wildlands not in an SRA that pose a threat to the SRA, to reduce the costs of wildland fire suppression, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, promote adaptation of forested landscapes to changing climate, improve forest health, and protect homes and communities.

(j) To the Natural Resources Agency to provide a reasonable per diem for attendance at a meeting of the advisory body for the state's forest practice program by a member of the body who is not an employee of a government agency.

SEC. 2. Section 4629.8 of the Public Resources Code is amended to read:

4629.8. (a) Funds deposited in the fund shall be appropriated in accordance with the following priorities:

(1) First priority shall be for funding associated with the administration and delivery of responsibilities identified in subdivisions (a) to (c), inclusive, of Section 4629.6.

(2) Only after paragraph (1) is funded, the second priority shall be, if deposits are sufficient in future years to maintain the fund, by 2016, at a minimum reserve of four million dollars (\$4,000,000), for use and appropriation by the Legislature in years during which revenues to the account are projected to fall short of the ongoing budget allocations for support of the activities identified in paragraph (1).

(3) Only after paragraphs (1) and (2) are funded, the third priority shall be in support of activities designated in subdivisions (d) to (f), inclusive, of Section 4629.6.

(4) Only after paragraphs (1) to (3), inclusive, are funded, the fourth priority shall be to support the activities designated in subdivisions (g) to (j), inclusive, of Section 4629.6.

(b) Funds shall not be used to pay for or reimburse any requirements, including mitigation of a project proponent or applicant, as a condition of any permit.

SEC. 3. Section 4629.9 of the Public Resources Code is amended to read:

4629.9. (a) On January 10, and annually thereafter on January 10, in conjunction with the Governor's Budget, the Secretary of the Natural Resources Agency, in consultation with the Secretary for Environmental Protection, shall submit to the Joint Legislative Budget Committee a report on the activities of all state departments, agencies, and boards relating to forest and timberland regulation. This report shall include, at a minimum, all of the following:

(1) A listing, by organization, of the proposed total costs associated with the review, approval, and inspection of timber harvest plans and associated permits and agreements.

(2) The number of timber harvest plans, and acreage covered by the plans, reviewed and approved in the most recent fiscal year.

(3) To the extent feasible, a listing of activities, personnel, and funding, by department, for the forest practice program for the most recent fiscal year, and the preceding 10 fiscal years, including, but not limited to, any other expenditures or transfers from the fund.

(4) The number of staff in each organization dedicated fully or partially to (A) review of timber harvest plans, and (B) other forestry-related activities, by geographical location in the state.

(5) The costs of other forestry-related activities undertaken.

(6) A summary of any process improvements identified by the administration as part of ongoing review of the timber harvest process, including data and technology improvement needs.

(7) Workload analysis for the forest practice program in each department, including, but not limited to, an assessment of whether there is adequate staff to efficiently and effectively review plans.

(8) Any identified staffing needs, by department, and costs per position, to support ~~a~~ more efficient *and transparent* review of timber harvest plans.

(9) In order to assess efficiencies in the program and the effectiveness of spending, a set of measures for, and a plan for collection of data on, the program, including, but not limited to:

(A) The number of timber harvest plans submitted, returned for incompleteness, accepted, reviewed, and approved.

(B) Average and median time for plan review and time of review for any subsequent agreements or permits to support the conduct of timber operations under an approved timber harvest plan.

(C) Number and percentage of preharvest inspections attended by each review team agency.

(D) Number of acres under active plans.

(E) Number of violations.

(F) Evaluating ecological performance.

(b) A report required to be submitted pursuant to subdivision (a) shall be submitted in compliance with Section 9795 of the Government Code.

SEC. 4. Section 4631 of the Public Resources Code is amended to read:

4631. The Legislature finds and declares ~~that desirable forest lands, including those having young and old timber growth, should be restored to fulfill ecological conditions and processes, and managed consistent with the definition of "management" in Section 4639. It is further declared to be the policy of the state to respect California Native American tribal sovereignty and to seek opportunities for comanagement and integration of indigenous traditional ecological knowledge in forest management. It is further declared to be the policy of the state to acquire by purchase, exchange, lease, or grant all of the following:~~

~~(a) Such lands, the reforestation or restoration of which is not assured under private ownership, to reforest or restore such lands with locally appropriate species.~~

~~(b) Disposal of forest lands primarily suitable for timber production, which may be acquired under precutting agreements.~~

~~(c) Demonstration forests to furnish local needs of investigation, demonstration, and education throughout the state.~~

(a) California faces significant challenges related to biodiversity, climate change, wildfire-resilient forests, and public access to nature, and has set important goals regarding these challenges.

(b) Lands that are owned and managed by the state should make a greater contribution toward reaching these goals than privately owned lands.

(c) State forest lands, including those having young, mature, or old timber growth, should be restored to fulfill ecological functions and processes, and managed consistent with the definition of "management" in Section 4639.

(d) It is the policy of the state to respect California Native American tribal sovereignty and to seek opportunities for comanagement and integration of local indigenous traditional ecological knowledge in forest management.

(e) It is the policy of the state to accept or acquire lands, the reforestation or restoration of which is not assured under private ownership, to restore those lands with locally appropriate species and manage those lands for public benefit.

SEC. 5. Section 4631.5 of the Public Resources Code is amended to read:

4631.5. The Legislature further declares that the state should do ~~both~~ *all* of the following:

(a) Manage state forests consistent with the definition of "management" in Section 4639.

~~(a)~~

(b) Retain the existing land base of state forests primarily for research and demonstration purposes and allow the sale of timber and other forest products only when harvest occurs for ecological restoration or research purposes.

~~(b)~~

(c) Cooperate with local governments in mitigating the impacts on school enrollment of geothermal development that occurs in proximity to state-owned forest lands.

SEC. 6. Section 4639 of the Public Resources Code is amended to read:

4639. (a) "Management" means the handling of forest vegetation and soils within state forests, including, but not limited to, demonstration state forests, for biodiversity conservation and ~~fire~~ *wildfire* resilience, while ~~maximizing~~

~~the promotion of supporting~~ durable onsite carbon storage and sequestration, climate *mitigation and* resiliency goals, equitable forest access, wildlife and *fish habitat*, recreation opportunities, and compatible research efforts.

(b) Timber harvesting consistent with the definition in subdivision (a) is permissible.

SEC. 7. Section 4649.5 is added to the Public Resources Code, to read:

4649.5. The sale of timber and other forest products shall ~~be prohibited unless harvest occurs for ecological restoration or research purposes occur~~ in a manner consistent with the definition of "management" in Section 4639.

SEC. 8. Section 4651 of the Public Resources Code is amended to read:

4651. The management of state forests and the cutting and sale of timber and other forest products from state forests shall conform to regulations prepared by the director and approved by the board. ~~These regulations shall prioritize management practices consistent with the definition of "management" in Section 4639.~~

SEC. 9. Section 4652 of the Public Resources Code is amended to read:

4652. (a) The department may collect recreational user fees for overnight camping and reserved group activities in a demonstration state forest. ~~The department shall not charge a fee that exceeds the amount necessary to reimburse the department's costs for maintenance and improvement of campground facilities, associated recreational facilities, natural environment, and access thereto.~~

(b) All recreational user fees received by the department during each fiscal year shall be deposited into the Timber Regulation and Forest Restoration Fund established pursuant to Section 4629.3 and shall be used, upon appropriation by the Legislature, to reimburse the department's cost of maintaining and improving the campground facilities, associated recreational facilities, natural environment, and access thereto.

(c) Notwithstanding Section 4799.13, receipts from the sales of forest products and recreational user fees shall be deposited monthly with the State Treasurer in the Timber Regulation and Forest Restoration Fund. The Controller shall keep a record of accounts of such receipts separately.

(d) Any other funds generated by a demonstration state forest, including, but not limited to, any funds that are deposited into the Forest Resources Improvement Fund, shall be transferred to the Timber Regulation and Forest Restoration Fund.

SEC. 10. Section 4656 of the Public Resources Code is amended to read:

4656. (a) This chapter does not interfere with the reasonable use of state forests for hunting, fishing, foraging, recreation, and camping, except as otherwise provided by law.

(b) The use of state forest lands for grazing purposes shall be permitted pursuant to regulations established by the board in accordance with Chapter 3.5 (commencing with Section 11340) of Part 1 of Division 3 of Title 2 of the Government Code, and reflect the definition of "management" in Section 4639. The use and development of water facilities for irrigation and power shall be permitted as provided by law.

SEC. 11. No reimbursement is required by this act pursuant to Section 6 of Article XIII B of the California Constitution because the only costs that may be incurred by a local agency or school district will be incurred because this act creates a new crime or infraction, eliminates a crime or infraction, or changes the penalty for a crime or infraction, within the meaning of Section 17556 of the Government Code, or changes the definition of a crime within the meaning of Section 6 of Article XIII B of the California Constitution.