



Assembly Bill 2494 – Modernizing Our State Forests System

Updated: March 20, 2026

Bill Summary

AB 2494 redefines management of forest lands to include maximizing the promotion of climate resiliency goals, enhanced outdoor access, protecting biodiversity, and compatible research efforts. Under AB 2494, the sale of timber and other forest products will be allowed only when the harvest occurs for ecological restoration or research purposes. This bill will also allow the Timber Regulation and Forest Restoration Fund to spend funds for the state demonstration forest system.

Background

The State of California owns and operates 14 demonstration state forests, spanning approximately 85,000 acres of land and including both old and young timber growth. The Department of Forestry and Fire Protection is authorized to manage demonstration state forest lands and prepare regulations for the cutting and sale of timber within demonstration state forest lands.

Under existing law, the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection uses forest management practices to achieve maximum sustained production of high-quality forest products, while giving some consideration to recreation, watershed, and wildlife values. On average, 20 million board feet are harvested from demonstration forest lands each year. Maximum sustained production is achieved often by preparing a timber harvest plan, a sustained yield plan, or following a set of prescriptive silvicultural requirements.

Revenue generated by the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection from timber harvesting on demonstration state forest land is required to be spent on demonstration state forests, such as funding for research, infrastructure, recreation, and administration. Research is conducted in all 14 demonstration state forests and ranges from watershed protection, preservation of fish and wildlife habitat to forest health and fire resilience.

In 2020, Governor Newsom issued Executive Order N-82-20 which establishes California's 30x30

conservation framework. This initiative aims to conserve 30% of the State's lands and coastal waters by 2030 to meet three objectives: conserve and restore biodiversity, expand access to nature, and mitigate and build resilience to climate change.

Solution

This bill removes the requirement for management of demonstration state forest lands to achieve maximum sustained production of high-quality forest products, and instead declares that demonstration state forest lands be managed to be restored to fulfill ecological conditions and processes. AB 2494 establishes that demonstration state forest lands be used primarily for research and demonstration purposes and allow the sale of forest products only when harvest occurs for ecological restoration or research purposes.

This bill would also redefine "management" of demonstration state forests as the handling of forest vegetation and soils within state forests for biodiversity conservation and fire resilience, while maximizing the promotion of durable onsite carbon storage and sequestration, climate resiliency goals, equitable outdoor access, wildlife and recreation opportunities, and compatible research efforts. This is critical to support rural economies to transition away from dwindling extractive economies and help enhance ecotourism in these communities. The updated management principles in this bill align with Executive Order N-82-20 and help meet California's 30x30 initiative by encouraging ecological restoration and building resilience to climate change within demonstration state forests.

AB 2494 would allow the demonstration state forest system to receive funding from the Timber Regulation and Forest Restoration Fund and any income generated by the system would go back into that Fund.

AB 2494 establishes that the State of California shall seek opportunities for co-management of demonstration state forest lands with Native American Tribes and integration of indigenous traditional ecological knowledge in forest management to achieve restoration.



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Lastly, AB 2494 would enact clearer requirements on AB 1492 reporting requirements. AB 1492 was enacted over a decade ago and requires additional guidance on how annual reports are released and what content is required to be a part of these annual reports.

For More Information:

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