



AB 1818 (BLUMENFIELD): SANTA MONICA MOUNTAINS CONSERVANCY: UPPER LOS ANGELES RIVER WATERSHED PROGRAM

(INTRODUCED: FEBRUARY 11, 2010)

APRIL 2010

Overview

- This bill creates the Upper Los Angeles River and Watershed Program (Program) to be funded through state dollars and administered by the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy (SMC).
- The Program is dedicated to fund conservancy goals in half (the northern most 23 of the total 51 miles) of the Los Angeles River. Program goals include: resource protection, public recreation, water conservation and water quality in relation to the Los Angeles River watershed.
- The bill creates the Program Protection Account within the Conservancy Fund and continuously appropriates funds that may be transferred into the account for SMC program purposes.
- The Gateway Council of Government voted to oppose this legislation on Wednesday, April 7, 2010 as they are concerned that it could create a funding imbalance between the SMC and the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy (RMC).

Background

Within the Los Angeles River watershed are two organizations with the existing structure and capabilities to address resource protection, public recreation, water conservation and water quality. State Water Code requires watershed protection activities in the San Gabriel and LA River watersheds to be consistent Watershed Plan, adopted by the SMC and the RMC Conservancy in 2001.

- The Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy (SMC) – The SMC implements the Watershed Plan in the upper LA River watershed (upstream of the City of Vernon)
- The Rivers and Mountains Conservancy (RMC) – the RMC implements the plan in the San Gabriel River and lower LA River watershed.

Analysis

- AB 1818 requires the inclusion within the Program all identified projects by the City of LA its LA River Revitalization Master Plan (LARRMP); all projects identified by the County of LA in the LA River Master Plan (Master Plan); any other project that may be recommended by a stakeholder committee and approved by the SMC.
- State resource bond funds allocated for LA River protection have respected the same bifurcation of jurisdiction listed above. Proposition 84 allocated \$36 million to both conservancies equally. Additionally, the proposed November 2010 Water Bond provides \$75 million to both conservancies for projects specifically for projects identified in the LARRMP.
- This bill essentially creates a third program within the Los Angeles River watershed region. If this bill is enacted, there will be three programs instead of two competing for the same sources of funding to finance similar project goals in the same watershed.

- This bill creates a new separate state program for Upper Los Angeles River and Watershed Program projects, a program that is administered by the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy. In contrast, the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy has a different funding philosophy and does not limit its funding to its own program objectives; rather, the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy promotes watershed protection through re-granting funds to local agencies for projects that demonstrate a need for funding.
- According to the Committee on Natural Resources Analysis: “Given existing authority and funding to implement projects along the entire Los Angeles River watershed, the framework for watershed protection provided by the Watershed Plan, the Plan’s near identical purpose with this bill, and the Legislature’s clear preference for collaborative planning and implementation efforts, it is not clear why a separate Program is needed for only one-half of the River.”
- This bill creates continuous appropriations for the Program, which unduly elevates upper Los Angeles River projects over lower Los Angeles River priorities.

Supporters and Opponents

- Supporters: Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy
- Opponents: Gateway Council of Governments, San Gabriel Valley Council of Governments, and Rivers and Mountains Conservancy

Advantages and Disadvantages of AB 1818:

- Advantages: Supporters of AB 1818 contend this bill is necessary to provide continuous funding for upper Los Angeles River watershed conservancy projects.
- Disadvantages: Opponents of this bill contend that AB 1818 diverts funds from the lower Los Angeles River watershed region and serves as a barrier to collaborative planning efforts to address watershed problems in the region as a whole. Also discouraging is the potential diversion of funds away from the lower Los Angeles River watershed where most of the water pollution problems exist and also where there is a higher population density and concentration of lower-income communities as compared to the upper Los Angeles River watershed.

Legislative History:

- Introduced in the State Assembly, February 11, 2010
- Referred to the Assembly Committee on Natural Resources and Committee on Water, Parks and Wildlife, February 25, 2010.
- Amended and re-referred to the Assembly Committee on Natural Resources, March 16, 2010.
- Amended, and passed the Assembly Committee on Natural Resources (6-3) on March 22, 2010.
- Referred to the Assembly Committee on Water, Parks and Wildlife, April 5, 2010.
- Read a second time and amended in the Committee on Water, Parks and Wildlife, April 6, 2010.
- **Current location: Assembly Committee on Water, Parks and Wildlife.**