



PCL INSIDER: News from the Capitol

Legislature Dives in to Address Water Issues

With close to 100 active water-related bills this session, nearly all recently introduced, water is certainly a high priority for the Legislature. Many of the bills lack substantive language and most have yet to set foot in a policy committee hearing – but some have already been signed into law! Here are a few initial highlights:

The Legislature took swift action around **drought response** at the end of February, introducing and then nearly unanimously passing [SB 103](#) and [SB 104](#) (Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review). Governor Brown [signed the bills](#) on March 1st. PCL is supportive of this effort, which helps to speed up existing funding (primarily from previous voter-approved bonds) for drought relief activities, including conservation, recycling, stormwater capture, and assistance to disadvantaged communities.

Other bills aimed at addressing the drought and providing longer-term solutions for California will take a slower and more traditional route through hearings over the next few months. PCL-supported [SB 750](#) (Wolk), requiring submetering on new multiunit dwellings to facilitate water conservation, is still active from last session and will hopefully move forward after some fine-tuning. Several bills, including [AB 1636](#) (Brown), [AB 2104](#) (Gonzalez), and [SB 992](#) (Nielsen), aim to prohibit penalties on homeowners for having brown lawns. Others strive to encourage water recycling and conservation, including [AB 2282](#) (Gatto), a recycled water infrastructure bill.

Stormwater is an important topic this year, with bills such as [SB 985](#) (Pavley) to better encourage the use of stormwater as a resource. [AB 2403](#) (Rendon) adds stormwater and recycled water to the definition of water under Proposition 218, helping allow easier funding of stormwater capture and reuse projects. [SB 916](#) (Correa) begins a shift towards biodegradable motor oil to help prevent stormwater pollution.

The main action on **drinking water** is happening through the budget process this year, with the shift of the State's drinking water program from the Department of Public Health to the State Water Board. This follows up on last year's stalled [AB 145](#) (Perea & Rendon) and subsequent stakeholder discussions. PCL participated in those discussions as a member of the Drinking Water Reorganization Task Force, jointly convened by the California Environmental Protection Agency and the California Health & Human Services Agency. We are supportive of the program's move, which will allow for a more integrated approach to water quality issues and better address the needs of disadvantaged communities.

A number of bills relate to specific aspects of **Integrated Regional Water Management Plans**, including [AB 1249](#) (Salas), [AB 1731](#) (Perea), [AB 1874](#) (Gonzalez), and [SB 1049](#) (Pavley). Similarly, several bills address **Urban Water Management Plans**, including [AB 2067](#) (Weber), [SB 1036](#) (Pavley), and [SB 1420](#) (Wolk).

Major action on **groundwater management** is likely to wait until the start of a fresh 2-year session next year, but the legislature is eager to begin that conversation as soon as possible with informational hearings and the introduction of several smaller bills. So far, the two key groundwater bills to watch are [SB 1168](#) (Pavley) and [AB 1739](#) (Dickinson).

Not exclusive to water, but related to water quality concerns, is **hydraulic fracturing** ("**fracking**") moratorium bill [SB 1132](#) (Mitchell & Leno).

Coastal and ocean protection is another important topic this year. PCL-sponsored [AB 976](#) (Atkins), giving the Coastal Commission the ability to levy administrative penalties for violations of the Coastal Act, is still active from last session, and we expect to see the Assembly and Senate work on their remaining concerns over the next few months. A number of less controversial Coastal Commission bills have also been introduced, including [AB 474](#) (Stone), [AB 288](#) (Levine), and [SB 1096](#) (Jackson). Ocean pollution prevention bills are back, as [SB 270](#) (Padilla, De León, & Lara) tries again for a single-use bag ban, and [AB 1699](#) (Bloom) addresses microplastics. Like sea otters? [SB 987](#) (Monning) helps promote contributions to the California Sea Otter Fund via tax return checkoffs.

The biggest question in water this year is whether a revised **water bond** can make it through the Legislature to replace the \$11.14 billion bond currently on the November ballot – and what that bill would need to look like in order to gain approval from two-thirds of the Legislature and then the majority of California's voters. At the moment, there are ten different water bond proposals, not including the current bond. Senate front-runner [SB 848](#) (Wolk) has made it through three policy committees thus far, and is next scheduled for Senate Appropriations. While PCL has not taken a formal support position on SB 848, we appreciate its investment in safe drinking water, ecosystem protection, and local water supplies (e.g. conservation, recycling, stormwater capture) – as well as its consistent focus on the accountability of public funds, particularly for storage projects. Assembly front-runner [AB 1331](#) contains many positive investments as well and is scheduled for its first policy committee hearing on March 25th – but recently took amendments that include an additional \$1B in storage funding (lacking the legislative oversight found in SB 848), which raises concerns from PCL and others. Ultimately, leadership in both the Assembly and Senate will play a key role in deciding whether a single bond proposal will move forward and what it will look like.

Lastly, it's that time of year: in the rush to introduce new bills before the Feb 21st deadline, legislators put forward numerous **spot bills** related to water. These bills are placeholders, many changing no more than a single word of existing code, and bide their time until substantive amendments are introduced. These types of bills are also effective vehicles for last-minute gut-and-amend legislation towards the end of session. Stay tuned for updates over the next few months.

[Apply Now for Spring/Summer Internships](#)

PCL is seeking two interns for spring and summer to assist with our water and fundraising efforts. We are looking for a **Water Policy Intern** to provide legislative and policy support on a variety of statewide issues, including coastal protection, stormwater capture and reuse, Bay-Delta planning efforts, and more. We are also recruiting a **Development Intern** to assist with prospective donor research, event planning, grant research, and more. For full descriptions and application information, please click [here](#).

New Leadership at PCL

We are pleased to welcome **Sage Sweetwood** as the new Executive Director of the Planning and Conservation League and the Planning and Conservation League Foundation. Sage brings to PCL more than 40 years of experience as a mayor, a California Coastal Commissioner, and a successful Healthcare entrepreneur who founded one of the nation's first PPOs. Sage has been a long time board member of the Planning and Conservation League and is eager to lead the organization into its next fifty years of cutting-edge environmental advocacy. You can read more about Sage's wealth of experience [here](#).



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