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SB-1224 Watersheds: wildlife habitat: Counties of Orange and San Diego. (2021-2022)

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PASSED IN SENATE MAY 26, 2022

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AMENDED IN SENATE MAY 19, 2022

CALIFORNIA LEGISLATURE— 2021–2022 REGULAR SESSION

SENATE BILL

NO. 1224

Introduced by Senator Bates
(Principal coauthor: Assembly Member Nguyen)

February 17, 2022

An act relating to watersheds.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

SB 1224, Bates. Watersheds: wildlife habitat: Counties of Orange and San Diego.

The Wildlife Conservation Law of 1947 establishes the Wildlife Conservation Board in the Department of Fish and Wildlife and requires the board to determine the areas in the state that are most essential and suitable for certain wildlife-related purposes. Under that law, the board may authorize the department to acquire real property, rights in real property, water, or water rights for the benefit of wildlife.

This bill would authorize the Wildlife Conservation Board, upon an appropriation by the Legislature, to make grants to acquire fee title or conservation easements or to perform restoration, or a combination thereof, in watersheds with habitats for sensitive wildlife populations in specified regions in the Counties of Orange and San Diego, as provided.

This bill would make legislative findings and declarations as to the necessity of a special statute for the Counties of Orange and San Diego.

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

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

SECTION 1. The Legislature finds and declares all of the following:

(a) The southern region of the County of Orange and northern region of the County of San Diego are known for their beaches, but the area around the county line that separates the two counties is also home to magnificent ecologically intact habitats, including aquatic, riparian stream, oak woodland, grassland, and coastal sage scrub.

(b) These large areas of undeveloped habitat, including portions of Camp Pendleton and the Cleveland National Forest, embrace elevational gradients from sea to mountaintops, essential for climate resilience.

(c) A key component of this area is the 139 square mile San Mateo Creek Watershed, one of the last major watersheds in southern California that has no dams or channels. The San Mateo Creek Watershed's pristine drainages and high water quality support an unparalleled concentration of 11 endangered and threatened species, including southern steelhead trout, Pacific pocket mouse, arroyo southwestern toad, Least Bell's vireo, California gnatcatcher, San Diego fairy shrimp, tidewater goby, southwestern willow flycatcher, and western snowy plover.

(d) Other watersheds in this area boast similar important environmental traits.

(e) The beaches in this area depend on the fresh water from these healthy watersheds for sand transport, which in turn works to maintain the condition of the beaches in this area.

(f) The beaches provide unparalleled recreational opportunities for all Californians.

(g) Restoring and conserving these unique watersheds near the county line of the Counties of Orange and San Diego has a direct correlation to the health of the coastline so that it can withstand the impacts from sea level rise resulting from changes to our climate.

(h) Preserving these open spaces meets all three "key objectives" of California's 30X30 Initiative, for biodiversity, equitable access, and climate adaptation.

SEC. 2. Upon an appropriation by the Legislature for these purposes, the Wildlife Conservation Board may provide grants to acquire fee title or conservation easements or to perform restoration, or a combination thereof, in watersheds with habitats for sensitive wildlife populations in the southern region of the County of Orange and the northern region of the County San Diego, east of Interstate 5, with highest priority for projects in the San Mateo Creek Watershed.

SEC. 3. The Legislature finds and declares that a special statute is necessary and that a general statute cannot be made applicable within the meaning of Section 16 of Article IV of the California Constitution because of the unique nature of watersheds within the Counties of Orange and San Diego.