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SB-287 California Trails Conservancy Program. (2025-2026)

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Date Published: 03/24/2025 02:00 PM

AMENDED IN SENATE MARCH 24, 2025

CALIFORNIA LEGISLATURE— 2025–2026 REGULAR SESSION

SENATE BILL

NO. 287

Introduced by Senator Arreguín

February 06, 2025

~~An act relating to conservation.~~ *An act to add Chapter 8.5 (commencing with Section 5829.5) to Division 5 of the Public Resources Code, relating to trails.*

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

SB 287, as amended, Arreguín. ~~California Trails Conservancy.~~ *California Trails Conservancy Program.*

Existing law establishes the Natural Resources Agency, composed of departments, boards, conservancies, and commissions responsible for the restoration, protection, and management of the state's natural and cultural resources.

This bill would establish in the agency the California Trails Conservancy Program. The bill would require the program to have specified purposes, including promoting enhanced and expanded environmentally sound greenways and trail networks. If the agency determines that it would benefit these purposes, the bill would authorize the agency to establish an ad hoc working group with specified members, including a representative from the Department of Parks and Recreation. The bill would authorize the agency to delegate administration of the program to the agency's Deputy Secretary for Access. The bill would also authorize the agency to administer funding for priority projects, as defined, through existing or new grants or competitive grant programs and would require that no less than 35% percent of the funding administered by the agency for the purposes of the program be allocated to projects benefiting disadvantaged communities, as defined.

This bill would make these provisions operative only upon an appropriation by the Legislature for its purposes.

~~Existing law establishes the Natural Resources Agency, composed of departments, boards, conservancies, and commissions responsible for the restoration, protection, and management of the state's natural and cultural resources.~~

~~This bill would provide that it is the intent of the Legislature to enact subsequent legislation to create the California Trails Conservancy within the Natural Resources Agency.~~

Vote: majority Appropriation: no Fiscal Committee: ~~no~~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) Trails are nature-based, mobility networks connecting people to the splendor of the outdoors and nonmotorized linkages between communities, enabling passive and active recreational enjoyment for all.

(b) The bulk of California's diverse natural outdoor wonders, including its coast, deserts, and mountainous terrains, can be best experienced by trail.

(c) Natural surface trails and other human-powered mobility corridors are the connective tissue between the built and natural environments, which link the motorized to the nonmotorized. These trails and corridors are the intersection between the human and nature interface, providing valuable exposure and engagement to the state's natural landscapes and parks, which are rich with unparalleled visual splendor and aesthetics.

(d) The popularity of trails and trail use soared during the COVID-19 pandemic and established a new and sustained outdoor constituency.

(e) Through trail-driven, nature-based exposures, California is galvanizing a new generation of environmental stewards with a shared purpose.

(f) Trails are an emerging economic driver in many California communities, helping rural California and elsewhere to bolster local economies.

(g) The growing popularity and need for trails were underscored during the awarding of funding through the California Drought, Water, Parks, Climate, Coastal Protection, and Outdoor Access For All Act of 2018, as approved by the voters at the June 5, 2018, statewide election.

(h) Trail use and enjoyment, such as trails associated with networks, including the American River Trail, the Iron Horse Trail, and the proposed Great Redwood Trail, also serve a utility, providing seamless and nonmotorized commuter corridors while reducing local traffic patterns and resultant pollutants.

(i) Trail demand is growing throughout the state, and it is incumbent upon California to meet this need where trail scarcities exist, particularly in and around our urban landscapes.

(j) Emerging trends in trail use, including electric bicycles and other mobility devices, are leading to increased use and user conflicts, resulting in increased injuries and accidents and accelerating the degradation of natural and other surface type trails.

(k) Unlawful trail development and patterns of unpermitted, unlawful trail activities resulting from various factors, including a scarcity of dedicated trails infrastructure, compromises the environmental, recreational, and aesthetic values of the state's landscapes, fragmenting habitat and inducing unwanted erosion.

(l) California's various land managers have vast networks of trails, prompting the need for a single entity established to, among other things, facilitate the coordination of efforts to plan for and promote seamless, multijurisdictional trails and trail linkages through increased use of memoranda of understanding, shared use, volunteer agreements, and trail easements between public, private, and nonprofit managers to maximize trail opportunities.

SEC. 2. Chapter 8.5 (commencing with Section 5829.5) is added to Division 5 of the Public Resources Code, to read:

CHAPTER 8.5. California Trails Conservancy Program

5829.5. *For purposes of this chapter, the following terms shall apply:*

(a) "Disadvantaged communities" has the same meaning as defined in subdivision (d) of Section 90100.

(b) "Priority projects" means either of the following projects:

(1) Projects that create new public access opportunities to nature in disadvantaged communities or underresourced communities with demonstrated park, greenspace, and trail deficiencies.

(2) Projects that increase connectivity and interconnectivity between and to communities and nature and that may promote ecotourism opportunities.

5829.6. *(a) There is hereby established in the Natural Resources Agency the California Trails Conservancy Program. The purposes of the program are all of the following:*

(1) To promote enhanced and expanded environmentally sound greenways and trail networks.

(2) To promote equitable access and expand diverse trail-based recreational and mobility opportunities for all Californians.

(3) To promote policies, practices, and funding opportunities to optimize the continued growth and integrity of existing and prospective systems of nature-based and other human-powered mobility networks for the benefit of all Californians.

(4) To facilitate the sharing of "best available practices" for the management and operations of trails and to encourage the formation of partnerships between federal, state, local, and nonprofit land management entities to accommodate emerging trends in trail use, user demographics, and user groups, and to promote trail connectivity between the built and natural environments, particularly in areas and communities of the state experiencing trail scarcities.

(b) If the agency determines that it would benefit the purposes of the program, as described in subdivision (a), the agency may form an ad hoc working group. The working group may be composed of members from the hiking community, the equestrian community, the mountain biking community, the environmental justice community, the land trust and conservation community, the local parks community, the tribal or the Native American community, members from a California-based outdoor enterprise or company, and representatives from the department, the Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Wildlife Conservation Board, the State Coastal Conservancy, the various state conservancies, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, the federal Bureau of Reclamation, the United States National Park Service, and the United States Forest Service.

(c) To achieve efficiencies, the agency may authorize the agency's Deputy Secretary for Access to administer the program established pursuant to subdivision (a).

(d) The agency may administer funding for priority projects through existing or new block grants or competitive grant programs.

(e) When administering funding for the purposes of the program, no less than 35 percent of the grant proceeds shall be allocated to projects benefiting disadvantaged communities.

5829.7. *(a) This chapter shall become operative only upon appropriation by the Legislature for its purposes.*

(b) It is the intent of the Legislature to allow moneys allocated pursuant to Section 94030 to be appropriated for the purposes of this chapter.

~~SECTION 1. It is the intent of the Legislature to enact subsequent legislation to create the California Trails Conservancy within the Natural Resources Agency.~~