

Wood introduces bill to improve drought preparedness for North Coast watershed

March 7, 2022



Assemblymember Jim Wood (D-Santa Rosa) has introduced AB 2451, legislation creating a dedicated Drought Section within the Division of Water Rights responsible for improving drought planning, drought response and climate resiliency statewide, and directing the agency to conduct drought planning for North Coast watersheds.

Existing law establishes the State Water Resources Control Board (the Board) and the regional water quality control boards within the Natural Resources Agency. This Board has two divisions, one for Water Rights and one for Water Quality.

“Drought is not an episodic event and has not been for decades,” said Wood. “They are longer, more frequent, more severe and seriously threaten the health of rivers and streams, the wildlife that inhabit them and the ability to provide our North Coast communities with safe and affordable drinking water.”

This new Drought Section will be comprised of dedicated and appropriately resourced staff responsible for developing drought plans in advance of drought conditions. The bill would require the Board, in consultation with the Department of Fish and Wildlife, to adopt principles and guidelines for diversion and use of water in coastal watersheds during times of water shortage no later than March 31, 2023.

“Having consistent and predictable drought response helps both fish and people,” said Redgie Collins, Legal and Policy director for California Trout. “Our salmon and steelhead are in decline and common sense actions, such as AB 2451, will ensure that they have a future here in California,”

Matt Clifford, staff Attorney for the California Water Project, Trout Unlimited stated “The North and Central coast have suffered widespread impacts during the recent spate of severe dry years, with rural communities literally running out of water and salmon streams going dry. Yet in contrast to other parts of the state, there is currently no region-wide process in place to address these impacts – even though we know solutions exist. What we need are workable plans to preserve streamflows for drinking water and fish habitat under drought conditions, based on solid science and input from water users and local communities.”

“If California wants to achieve a future where drought isn’t an emergency, we must take action now and pass Assembly Bill 2451,” said Jay Ziegler, director of Policy and External Affairs at The Nature Conservancy.

“This bill is critical to proactively addressing the drought realities facing our state. AB 2451 can improve the overall climate resilience of water management in California.”