

SB 45 – Wildfire, Drought, and Flood Protection Bond Act of 2022

SENATORS PORTANTINO, ALLEN, STERN, HURTADO

Fact Sheet

SUMMARY

SB 45 will provide the necessary investment to help our state become more resilient to climate change and reduce the impacts of climate-related natural disasters. This legislation, if enacted and passed by the voters, will provide funding for concrete steps that will help reduce the impacts of rising global temperatures and invest in necessary preventative measures to protect vulnerable communities and our natural resources.

BACKGROUND

According to California's 4th Climate Assessment prepared by the California Natural Resources Agency, the California Energy Commission, and the California Governor's Office of Planning and Research, the cost of climate change for California alone could be more than \$113 billion annually by 2050. The report determined that these costs will only compound if the state does not take action now to reduce the risk of climate change impacts such as more severe wildfires, prolonged drought, and deadly floods. Investing in preventative measures early will not only protect lives and property, but will save the state billions of dollars in avoided damage costs.

Wildfires

The wildfire season is becoming longer and more intense each year due to hotter temperatures and wide scale tree death resulting from prolonged drought. In fact, between 2010-2017 an estimated 129 million trees died, leaving behind massive amounts of highly combustible fuel. This phenomenon has led to the worst fires on record. A record 4.2 million acres burned in 2020, and over the last four years, fires have killed 134 people, destroyed 44,000 structures, and polluted the air for millions.

While the severity of these fires is heightened by climate change, the fires themselves are undoing progress to reign in greenhouse gas emissions. The 2018 fires are estimated to have released 68 million tons of CO₂, dwarfing the

progress California has made reducing emissions from the energy and transportation sectors.

The drought-induced tree die-off coupled with hundreds of acres of scorched woodlands is also reducing our ability to sequester carbon, further exacerbating climate impacts.

Urban expansion is increasing the population living in high fire risk zones, with an estimated 15 percent of California homes in high risk or extremely high-risk fire areas. This means the increase in number and severity of fires is being compounded by the cost to protect lives and homes and to rebuild after a fire.

Sea-level Rise

Sea-level rise already is affecting California's coastline, causing more extensive coastal flooding during storms, periodic tidal flooding and increased coastal erosion. According to the Ocean Protection Council, the rate of ice loss from Greenland and Antarctica is increasing and will soon become the primary contributor to global sea-level rise, overtaking ocean expansion from warming waters and the melting of mountain glaciers and ice caps. In California, frequent coastal flooding exacerbated by sea-level rise is expected to threaten nearly half a million people, \$150 billion in property, and 3500 miles of roads within the next 80 years. The number of hazardous sites, like wastewater plants, which are susceptible to 100-year flood events is expected to increase by nearly 2.5 times over a similar period, drastically increasing the risk of pollutant disasters if adaptation measures are not taken.

Droughts

Droughts are an expected feature of California's arid climate, but the four-year period between fall 2011 and fall 2015, which correlated with the hottest two years on record in 2014 and 2015, was the driest since record keeping began in 1895. The winter of 2017 provided only



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a brief respite before historic rainfall lows again in the winter of 2018.

Not only are we seeing less precipitation, but compounding the problem, warmer temperatures and prolonged drought have devastated the Sierra snowpack, which has historically been the source of most of the State's fresh drinking water. More precipitation is falling as rain instead of snow and the snow that does fall is melting early. Traditionally a robust Sierra snowpack gradually melting over the summer has recharged groundwater basins, storing water for later in the year when supplies are low. Now, not only are we getting less rain as a result of climate change, but we are losing our natural ability to store what does fall. Six of the past seven winters have had snowpack below 60 percent of average levels with 2015 recording the lowest snowpack levels in 120 years, surpassing another historic low in 2014.

Floods

Growing and sprawling rural and urban communities increase the state's population susceptible to flood risk. Twenty percent of the state's population lives in flood prone areas, with that number expected to grow as climate change causes more concentrated rainstorms instead of more frequent smaller showers. The value of buildings vulnerable to flooding is estimated to be around \$575 billion, without the inclusion of public infrastructure such as roads, airports, and seaports. Warming temperatures are expected to increase the frequency of both large-scale and small-scale floods. While stormwater can be used to recharge groundwater basins and supplement dwindling surface supplies, rain from these more intense weather events is more difficult to capture.

The state is currently investing less than half of what is needed to properly address the growing flood risks, with the estimated cost to repair existing levee and defensive flood control infrastructure alone more than \$34 billion. Proper investment in flood infrastructure can simultaneously protect buildings and agriculture, while

preserving and often enhancing ecosystems and wildlife habitat.

SOLUTION

This year's deadly wildfires, on the heels of last year's catastrophic events and a devastating multi-year drought, clearly demonstrate that the impacts of climate change are here now and are already costing California billions of dollars every year. Even with recent investments to reduce fire risks, the state is still far behind the curve. We must take aggressive steps to ensure communities and natural resources can adapt to a changing climate and to increase resiliency in the face of mounting climate impacts.

SB 45 proposes a general obligation bond to inject much needed revenue to address these impacts. The measure proposes to fund projects to reduce fire risk and restore already damaged areas; restore and protect impacted wetlands, watersheds, waterways, coastal resources, and fish and wildlife populations; reduce impacts in local communities and on vulnerable populations; and improve the resiliency of the state's water supplies and agricultural lands.

For example, this bond would be able to fund projects like the successful City of Campbell Hacienda Ave Green Streets project that while rehabilitating the roadway also installed landscaped parkways to capture stormwater and planted trees to reduce heat island effect. Another example is the North Yuba River forest restoration project that is removing debris and invasive species and restoring meadows in an effort to reduce the risk of devastating fires while also improving watershed health and flood control.

SUPPORT

Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments
Big Sur Land Trust
California Coastkeeper Alliance



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California Invasive Plant Council
County of Marine
Eastern Sierra Land Trust
Friends of Desert Mountains
Surfrider Foundation
Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority
The Nature Conservancy
Outdoor Alliance California
Peninsula Open Space Trust
Placer County Water Agency
Planning and Conservation League
Sacramento County
Safe Agriculture Safe Schools
Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority
Smith River Alliance
Sonoma Water
Transition Habitat Conservancy
Trust for Public Land
Western Rivers Conservancy
Wholly H2O
Wildlands Conservancy

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