




**EAST BAY REGIONAL PARK DISTRICT  
BOARD LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE  
AGENDA STAFF REPORT**

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<b>DATE</b>	April 2, 2025
<b>TITLE</b>	Recommendation to Support Federal Legislation
<b>DIVISION</b>	General Manager's Office
<b>FROM</b>	Erich Pfuehler, Division Lead of Government and Legislative Affairs
<b>APPROVED</b>	Sabrina Landreth, General Manager 

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**RECOMMENDATION**

The Board Legislative Committee concurs with the General Manager's recommendation to support the following legislation: S. 350, S. 453, S. 602, S. 791, S. 811, S. 949, H.R. 403 and H.R. 753.

**BACKGROUND**

As part of the 2025-2026 Legislative Session, the East Bay Regional Park District (Park District) Board of Directors will take formal positions on bills as they are introduced and considered by their respective Legislatures. To guide bill analysis, the Park District's Board of Directors established seven key advocacy goals through Resolution NO.: 2024 – 12 – 288. These advocacy goals strive to align funding and policy advocacy with identified project and program needs and priorities. Guided by the Park District mission, elected Board of Directors and General Manager, Government and Legislative Affairs staff work to align advocacy goals with Park District need. Overarching principles include equitable service delivery, advancing climate resiliency adaptation and mitigation, guiding work with an environmental ethic, supporting inclusive interpretation and educational opportunities, increasing conservation through land acquisition and ensuring the fiscal health of the Park District. The specific goals are as follows:

**Climate – Friendly Transportation:** To expand accessible active and public transportation to and within East Bay parks and trails.

**Ecosystem Stewardship:** To support ecosystem health through restoration, acquisition and habitat enhancement, and improved efficiencies in regulatory approvals.

**Equitable Park Access:** To ensure equitable access to parks so all East Bay communities can enjoy the physical and psychological benefits of nature.

**Extreme Weather Preparedness:** To address sea level rise, lake health and other climate-related challenges with nature-based infrastructure and proactive mitigation strategies.

**Green Jobs:** To guide the development of career pathways for all in the parks, recreation, outdoor and environmental fields.

**Welcoming Visitor Use Facilities:** To ensure all visitors feel welcomed to East Bay parks and trails by providing facilities which are safe, accessible, inclusive and sustainable.

**Wildfire Resilience:** To minimize the risk of catastrophic wildfire in the East Bay by using proactive, ecologically sound vegetation management strategies.

## ANALYSIS

The legislation proposed for support by the Park District, as listed below, has been identified based on its alignment with at least one of the seven advocacy goals of the Park District and in support of the overarching principles of advocacy approved by Resolution NO.: 2024 – 12 – 288. To engage on the identified bills, the proposed resolution will direct staff on specific actions related to Park District supported legislation, including writing letters of support, participating in committee or bill hearings in Washington D.C., and engaging with the author/sponsor and relevant elected official's offices directly.

**S. 350 (Padilla D-CA) – Wildfire Emergency Act** aligns with the key advocacy goal of Wildfire Resilience. This bipartisan bill would direct the Secretary of Agriculture to select and implement landscape-scale forest restoration projects to assist communities in increasing their resilience to wildfire, firefighter training, energy resilience retrofits and wildfire-hardening home modifications in low-income communities. It would also take numerous steps to ensure the Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Department of Energy (DOE) and the Department of the Interior (DOI) are better able to mitigate the risk and impact of wildfires.

Specifically, S. 350 would:

- Provide the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) with pilot authority to leverage private financing aimed at increasing the pace and scale of forest restoration projects. The USFS would be able to expand up to 20 existing collaborative forest restoration projects using this pilot authority. This includes authorization for funding aimed at programs to expand the forest conservation and wildland firefighting workforce.
- Establish a prescribed fire-training center in the West and authorize grants to support training the next generation of foresters and firefighters.
- Authorize up to \$50 million to support community grants of up to \$50,000 for locally focused land stewardship and conservation.
- Expand an existing DOE weatherization grant program to provide up to \$13,000 to low-income households to make wildfire-hardening retrofits, such as ember-resistant roofs or gutters.
- Establish an energy resilience program at DOE to ensure critical facilities remain active during wildfire disruptions, authorizing up to \$100 million for necessary retrofits.
- Expedite the placement of wildfire detection equipment on the ground, such as sensors or cameras, as well as the use of space-based observation.

The prescribed fire-training center, community grants for land stewardship and conservation, and wildfire-hardening retrofit provisions could be beneficial to the Park District. The Park District Board of Directors previously supported similar legislation in Resolution NO.: 2023-09-198.

**S. 453 (Padilla D-CA) – Wildfire Intelligence Center** aligns with the key advocacy goal of Wildfire Resilience. This bill recognizes the interjurisdictional coordination wildfire response necessitates. The legislation seeks to create a national center aimed at compiling comprehensive information on wildfires at all stages to better prepare for wildfires, assist with decision-support during a crisis, inform recovery and streamline Federal wildfire response to ensure that states have a “one-stop-shop” within the Federal government. This center would also increase monitoring and imaging capabilities that land management agencies currently cannot achieve. At this time, available technological services are highly fragmented across more than 50 Federal programs. The Wildfire Intelligence Center will leverage cutting-edge technology to improve the interoperability and effectiveness of the many entities engaged in wildfire work.

S.453 would:

- Establish a Wildfire Intelligence Center between the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce and Department of the Interior to study, plan, coordinate and implement the Federal wildfire response.

- Facilitate cross-coordination and information-sharing between departments and state, local and tribal jurisdictions.
- Provide comprehensive assessment and modeling of wildfires to inform responses, land and fuels management, risk reduction, post-wildfire recovery and rehabilitation.
- Improve emergency planning with enhanced evacuation plans, power shutoff strategies and fire response tactics.
- Leverage cutting-edge technologies for wildfire mitigation and response.

Knowledge learned by the Wildfire Intelligence Center could be beneficial to the Park District's vegetation management and wildfire response work, particularly from the information-sharing provision.

**S. 602 (Padilla D-CA) – Wildfire Resilience Through Grazing Research Act** aligns with the key advocacy goal of Wildfire Resilience. This bill would add the “Grazing for Wildfire Mitigation Initiative” to the National Institute of Food and Agriculture’s High-Priority Research List. Knowledge learned through this grazing research could inform additional improvements for the Park District’s grazing program.

This legislation would:

- Support research and development of grazing land management techniques for wildfire mitigation and recovery by driving research at land-grant colleges and universities like the University of California system, Kansas State University, University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa and Oklahoma State University.
- Promote the dissemination of information about wildlife grazing land management techniques to public and private landowners, land managers and livestock owners, including land management activities which protect against negative environmental impacts and improve soil health.

**S. 791 (Van Hollen D-MD) and H.R. 1718 (Mfume D-MD) – Justice Thurgood Marshall Historic Site in the State of Maryland** aligns with the overarching principle of supporting inclusive interpretation and educational opportunities. This bipartisan legislation would establish Public School 103 (P.S. 103) in West Baltimore as a National Historic Site and designate it as an affiliated area of the National Park System (NPS). P.S. 103 was built in 1877 and is the former elementary school of Thurgood Marshall, the first Black Supreme Court Justice. Restoring P.S. 103 for adaptive re-use was a \$15 million revitalization effort, including \$1 million in Congressionally directed funding. The building was completed in December of 2023 and opened to the public on July 2, 2024 as the Justice Thurgood Marshall Amenity Center. The date of this opening coincided with what would have been the 116th birthday of the late Supreme Court justice. Universities, non-profits and the Baltimore/Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport will rent out classrooms for educational programs.

Other parts of the building will hold the history of the school, Thurgood Marshall and other Black leaders from Baltimore, such as Congressman Elijah Cummings. The bill is part of a years-long effort to provide the site national recognition. The Maryland Delegation secured language in the John S. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management and Recreation Act (P.L. 116-9) directing the National Park Service to complete a special resource study of Public School 103. The National Park Service found the school met its criteria for national significance and suitability for addition to the National Park System. This legislation would recognize the former elementary school as the Thurgood Marshall Historic Site within the NPS and help further preserve the site.

The Park District's future plans for a joint visitor center with NPS at Thurgood Marshall Regional Park – Home of the Port Chicago 50 would be a complementary recognition of the contributions of the former Supreme Court Justice on the West coast. History and learnings at each facility could be shared for mutual benefit. Support of this legislation would provide continued reassurance to NPS about the importance of a West coast visitor center which shares important African-American and cultural history.

**S. 811 (Klobuchar D-MN) – Recreational Trails Full Funding Act** aligns with the key advocacy goal of Welcoming Visitor Use Facilities. This bipartisan bill would deliver funding increases for the Recreational Trails Program (RTP). Since 2013, RTP funding has remained constant at about \$84 million annually. This bill would bring funding in line with non-highway recreational vehicle gas-tax revenues, as originally intended, which last year reached a total of an estimated \$281 million. RTP has funded thousands of projects nationwide including essential trail maintenance. To date, the Park District has received \$4,497,470 in RTP funding.

**S. 949 (Kelly D-AZ) – National Park Service Funding** aligns with the advocacy goal of Welcoming Visitor Use Facilities. The intent of the legislation is to ensure the National Park Service (NPS) is fully staffed in light of the current Administration's efforts to significantly reduce the number of NPS staff.

**H.R. 403 (Swalwell D-CA) – Preventing the Next Natural Disaster** aligns with the key advocacy goal of Extreme Weather Preparedness. This bill would make several changes to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)'s pre-disaster mitigation grant program by increasing funding and improving data collection to better track and manage resources before and after natural disasters, including:

- An increase FEMA's set aside for pre-disaster mitigation assistance from 6% to 15%.
- Provide for a 2% set-aside for capacity-building assistance.
- Require FEMA to prioritize applicants with the highest hazard risk in coordination with FEMA's National Risk Index, environmental justice communities and low-income communities.
- Create a new community outreach assistance program to increase the number of successful grant applicants from communities with high-hazard risk, environmental justice challenges and low-incomes.
- Encourage FEMA to incorporate climate change into the National Risk Index, its cost-benefit analysis and ensure grant funding is used to support projects which are designed to withstand future flooding and wildfires.
- Require FEMA within three years to establish a central Federal database, in coordination with the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, the United States Environmental Protection Agency, the Small Business Administration and the United States Army Corps of Engineers, to consolidate data collected by all local, state and Federal agencies involved in disaster response.
- Require FEMA to collect and post demographic data about the impact of natural disasters and Federal recovery efforts to better allocate and track resources. FEMA is also required to analyze disaster spending aimed at finding what could have been saved by improved pre-disaster mitigation.

The Park District has received \$6,326,910 from FEMA's pre-disaster mitigation assistance and \$7,366,273 from the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program. Increasing the set aside would be significant for the Park District's vegetation management work. The Park District Board of Directors previously supported similar legislation in Resolution NO.: 2023-09-198.

**H.R. 753 (Chu D-CA) – Fire Information and Reaction Enhancement (FIRE) Act** aligns with the key advocacy goal of Wildfire Resilience. This bill would direct the Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to maintain a program aimed at improving wildfire forecasting and detection. The goals of the program will be to develop and extend accurate wildfire forecasts and warnings to reduce loss of life, injury, property and damage to the economy, with a focus on improving:

- The prediction of intensification and spread of wildfires.
- The forecast and communication of smoke dispersion from wildfires.
- Information dissemination and risk communication to create more effective watch and warning products.
- The early detection of wildfires to contain their growth and mitigate damages.
- Authorize the Administrator of NOAA to conduct development, testing and deployment activities related to the following: advanced satellite detection products, grid-based assessments and outlooks of fuel moisture and danger levels, coupled atmosphere and fire modeling systems, systems to link climate predictions to achievable land management decisions and improved spatial and temporal resolution observations in high latitudes.

### **FISCAL IMPACT**

None.

### **ATTACHMENTS**

- A. Federal Legislation for Support – Board Legislative Committee April 2, 2025