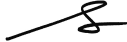




**EAST BAY REGIONAL PARK DISTRICT
BOARD LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE
AGENDA STAFF REPORT**

DATE	March 5, 2025
TITLE	Recommendation to Support Federal Legislation
DIVISION	General Manager's Office
FROM	Erich Pfuehler, Division Lead of Government and Legislative Affairs
APPROVED	Sabrina Landreth, General Manager 

RECOMMENDATION

The Board Legislative Committee concurs with the General Manager's recommendation to support the following legislation: S. 306, H.R. 183, S. 341 and H.R. 903, H.R. 582, and H.R. 550.

BACKGROUND

As part of the 2024-2025 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. 306 – Fire Ready Nation (Cantwell D-WA) aligns with the advocacy goal of wildfire resilience. This legislation would establish and maintain a coordinated program within the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) which improves wildfire, fire weather, fire risk, and wildfire smoke related forecasting, detection, modeling, observations and service delivery. Currently, NOAA has no defined authority in law for its wildfire services. S. 306 has bipartisan support.

S. 306 would establish a permanent Fire Weather Services Program within NOAA and authorize funding for research and acquisition of new technologies to prevent wildfires and forecast weather conditions that cause and impact wildfire. It would strengthen Federal firefighting tools including a pilot program for unmanned aircraft to gather chemical and survey data. This bill would also codify the Incident Meteorologist (IMET) Service into law and continue deployment of IMET specially-trained forecasters into the field to assist emergency responders with real-time lifesaving forecasts. Data collected by NOAA would be shared across multiple federal agencies to improve fire weather data collection and coordination.

This legislation could be included as a provision in the next round of amendments to the Weather Research and Forecasting Innovation Act (Weather Act) of 2017. Legislation to reauthorize the Weather Act passed the U.S. House on April 29, 2024 but was not acted upon by the U.S. Senate. A support position for S. 306 would be extended to a related or companion bill introduced in the House.

S. 341 and H.R. 903 – Wildfire Smoke Health Impacts (Merkley D-OR and Thompson D-WA) aligns with the advocacy goal of wildfire resilience. The legislation seeks to amend the Clean Air Act to provide Federal grant funding to improve air quality as a result of wildfire smoke. This funding would invest in measures that protect against the harmful effects of wildfire smoke and extreme heat. The bill also encourages research, development and implementation of strategies to mitigate the impacts of these environmental hazards and support healthy communities.

This legislation could be included as a provision in the next round of amendments to the Clean Air Act (CAA). The last series of amendments to the CAA occurred in 1990 which modified and extended Federal legal authority provided by the earlier Clean Air Acts of 1963 and 1970.

H.R. 183 – Law Enforcement Officer Recreation Pass (McClintock R-CA) aligns with the equitable park access advocacy goal. This bill would amend the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act to provide for a lifetime National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Pass for law enforcement officers. Under this legislation, qualifying law enforcement officers would receive their recreational pass at no cost. It would also remain valid for their entire lifetime, allowing them free access to national parks and Federal recreational lands. By creating this lifetime pass, the legislation seeks to show appreciation for law enforcement professionals and potentially encourage their use of national parks and Federal recreational lands.

This legislation could be included as a provision in the next Omnibus Public Lands bill. The last such bill was the John D. Dingell Jr. Conservation, Management and Recreation Act of 2019. A support position for H.R. 183 would be extended to a related or companion bill introduced in the Senate.

H.R. 550 – Wildfire Insurance Coverage Study (Waters D-CA) aligns with wildfire resilience key advocacy goal. This legislation would require the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to conduct a study assessing the danger that wildfires pose to communities and how the market for homeowners' insurance is responding to this growing threat. Specifically, this Act will direct the GAO to study the availability and affordability of insurance for homeowners and businesses in wildfire-prone areas across the U.S., the role that climate change plays in exacerbating wildfires and its impact on insurance markets, disparities in access to wildfire insurance coverage in low-income and underserved communities, the financial burden placed on families and businesses due to rising insurance premiums or lack of available coverage, and recommendations for federal actions to stabilize insurance markets, expand access to coverage, and protect families and businesses from the financial consequences of wildfires.

The Park District has previously supported this legislation (Resolution NO.: 2022-12- 293 and Resolution NO.: 2024-606-116). In 2024, this bill passed the House Financial Services Committee with bipartisan support, but did not receive a vote in Congress after being pulled by House of Representatives Speaker Mike Johnson. This legislation could be included as a provision of the next major wildfire package. Each year, Congress enacts legislation to call for GAO reports mostly through larger bills which combine a number of issues. For example, the 2023 National Defense Authorization Act called for 158 GAO mandates. Any major wildfire package will likely include GAO mandates. A support position for H.R. 550 would be extended to a related or companion bill introduced in the Senate.

H.R. 582 – Wildfire Resilience Grant Program (Huffman D-CA) aligns with the key advocacy goal of wildfire resilience. This bill would establish a grant program for communities to design and implement new Community Protection and Wildfire Resilience Plans. Community members, first responders and relevant state agencies would develop the plans to designate a targeted, specific grant program for home hardening within the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Units of “general local or regional government” are eligible for the grants.

H.R. 582 will invest \$1 billion per year to:

- Establish guidelines for communities to conceptualize new Community Protection and Wildfire Resilience Plans (CPWRP) that are developed in coordination with community members, first responders and relevant state agencies. CPWRPs will focus on implementing strategies and activities relating to:
 - Improving early detection technology, public outreach and education, alerts and warnings, evacuation planning, evacuation execution and access for first responders
 - Addressing vulnerable populations, including the elderly and those with disabilities
 - Hardening critical infrastructure and homes
 - Applying community-scale defensible space across contiguous areas
 - Building local capacity to implement and oversee the plan
 - Deploying distributed energy resources like microgrids with battery storage
 - Implementing strategic land use planning
 - Educating community members
 - Coordinating with existing wildfire plans
- Add home hardening as an allowable project under the United States Forest Service program.
- Provide grants of up to \$250,000 to develop a CPWRP and grants of up to \$10 million to implement a CPWRP.
 - Grants will be prioritized for low-income communities which are at high risk for fire or wildfire and communities recently impacted by a major wildfire
- Complete a report on all federal authorities and programs to protect communities from wildfires.

- Study how a CPWRP could be used as certification for insurance companies assessing community resilience.
- Continuously update wildfire hazard maps.
- Assess impediments to emergency radio communications across departments and agencies.
- Allow for structure hardening to be covered under existing community wildfire protection programs.

This legislation could be included as a provision in the next revision of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (Pub. L. 93-288, 88 Stat. 143 (1974), codified in 42 U.S.C. §§ 5121-5206 (2007)). The Stafford Act was amended in the Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act of 2007. A support position for H.R. 582 would be extended to a related or companion bill introduced in the Senate.

FISCAL IMPACT

None.

ATTACHMENTS

A. Federal Legislation Presentation - March 5, 2025 Legislative Committee