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Bills to speed up Calif. water bond projects fail in committees

By TIM HEARDEN
Capital Press

SACRAMENTO — An Assembly committee voted down a bill that would have given surface storage projects funded under the \$7.5 billion water bond the same expedited environmental reviews that were granted two years ago for the Sacramento Kings' new arena.

The bill by Assemblyman James Gallagher, R-Nicolaus, would have set special administrative and judicial review procedures under the California Environmental Quality Act for such proposed water storage projects as Sites Reservoir near Maxwell, Calif., or Temperance Flat Reservoir near Fresno.

Similar language was approved in a bill in 2013 to fast-track construction of the Kings' pro basketball arena as well as legislation in 2011 to expedite review of a proposed downtown Los Angeles football stadium and convention center project.

However, the Assembly Natural Resources Committee defeated the water project bill, 6-3, on April 27 despite Gallagher's plea that the Democrat-controlled Legislature get projects going quickly to avoid devastation from future droughts.

"When the voters passed the water bond, they expected their representatives to implement a speedy solution to the drought,

and they expect these storage projects to get off the ground as soon as possible," Gallagher said during a water rally April 27 at the state Capitol.

Gallagher, the Assembly Agriculture Committee's vice chairman, proposed setting deadlines for legal disputes over planned water projects and prohibiting courts from stopping the construction or operation of projects. His bill would also have set a more speedy construction timeline for projects.

The bill's opponents — which included the California League of Conservation Voters, the Natural Resources Defense Council and Sierra Club California — argued the merits for such fast-tracking are dubious for any project and that the Kings' legislation was different.

For instance, the 2013 legislation required the arena in downtown Sacramento to be certified as environmentally efficient and that the project have minimal traffic and air quality impacts, while the Gallagher bill doesn't include any mitigation measures, Lawrence Lingbloom of the Natural Resources Committee wrote in a bill analysis.

"If people want to do bills ... like the Sacramento Kings bill, what they would want to do is identify a specific project, go to the supporters and opposition, have them meet together and come up with the mitigation measures," Assemblyman Das Williams, D-Carpenteria, the committee's chairman, told the Sacramento Bee. "This has not been done in either case."

Gallagher's Assembly Bill 311 was one of several GOP water storage-related bills that died in committee. Bills by Assemblyman Devon Mathis, R-Porterville, that would have diverted high-speed rail funds to surface water projects and granted CEQA exemptions for

water recycling projects during a drought were voted down in Assembly committees.

AB 397, the rail bill, lost, 11-5, in the Transportation Committee while AB 956, the recycling bill, was rejected, 6-3, in the Natural Resources Committee.

The defeats came as hundreds of growers, farmworkers and community leaders joined lawmakers at the Capitol rally to urge speedy approval of water projects under Proposition 1, the water bond that passed in November. State Sen. Jim Nielsen, a rancher who co-sponsored Gallagher's bill, complained during the rally that legislators often don't consider the future.

"The water that we're trying to secure is for the generations," Nielsen, R-Gerber, said. "Most things done in this building are about me and now. They are not looking to the generations, and in this area — water — we have neglected our generations since Lake Oroville in the early '60s. No major state-funded project has gone into effect since then and we have been doing nothing but sharing the scarcities."

In other legislative developments, an antibiotics bill by Sen. Jerry Hill, D-San Mateo, is advancing despite concerns from groups including the California Cattlemen's Association. Senate Bill 27 was awaiting action in the Senate Appropriations Committee after passing, 3-0, recently in the Agriculture Committee.

However, Sen. Cathleen Galgiani, D-Stockton, the agriculture committee's chairman, indicated she would call the bill back to the panel once amendments are added, the CCA told members in a legislative bulletin.

The bill would effectively bar the over-the-counter sales of antibiotics for livestock without a veterinarian's prescription and set up a system to track the use of the drugs in the field.



Tim Hearden/Capital Press

John Livingston, an instructor at Shasta College in Redding, Calif., encourages seventh-graders to touch and handle sawdust during a presentation at an education day April 30 at a logging site near Viola, Calif.

Logging education stresses technology

By TIM HEARDEN
Capital Press

VIOLA, Calif. — The excitement among a gaggle of fifth-graders was palpable as logger Loren German guided his hot saw toward a tall pine tree and ran the circular blade through it at the bottom.

"Timber!" yelled the students from West Cottonwood School in Cottonwood, Calif., as the tree fell.

German, a tree feller for Creekside Logging Co. in Redding, Calif., had just told the youngsters how a full array of hand and foot controls make the machine easier to operate, including controls that keep the cab level as he's climbing a hill.

"There isn't one thing out here that you'll see today that isn't run by computers," he told the students. "So learn computers. My machine, believe it or not, has two computers."

Advancements in technology in the timber industry was

a key theme at the Sierra Cascade Logging Conference's annual education day in the woods, to which some 600 Northern California elementary through high school students came on April 29 and 30.

Youngsters each year are given a tour of an active logging site to engage them about what really goes on in the industry, with some 15 stations teaching them about such aspects as water quality control, fire prevention and forest replanting. This year, presenters stressed the industry's technological advancements as a way to entice tech-savvy youngsters seeking careers in computers, event spokesman Mike Quinn said.

"It's all hand-eye coordination, just like with a video game," field trip organizer Larry Strawn said of operating machinery.

Advancements have been made in the working environment, too. Jessica MacDonald, a student in the heavy

equipment program at Shasta College in Redding, sat on the edge of a fire bulldozer as she told youngsters that the program is female-friendly.

Nearby, Shasta College instructor John Livingston held a 1950s-era hand saw as he told middle-schoolers about changes in equipment over the past few decades. He said researchers may soon develop the ability to use lasers to cut logs.

"Technology is huge," Livingston said, noting that the fire dozer uses a \$120,000 satellite system. "Everything's going to technology because we don't have the labor. We've got to have the technology for one person to do the jobs of two or three people."

Jesse Kavanagh, a seventh-grader at Evergreen Elementary School in Cottonwood, found the idea of working in logging appealing.

"It looks like a good place, out in the forest, and you get paid pretty good," he said. "Sounds fun."

Quicker water fund approval needed

By FENIT NIRAPPIL
Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — California's Democratic senators have called out Gov. Jerry Brown over water spending, saying that in the face of the relentless drought the state should more quickly approve funds to recycle and save water.

In a joint letter released last week, the senators urged their fellow Democrat's administration to get projects started in months instead of years.

California is in its fourth year of drought, and the Sierra Nevada snowpack that supplies a third of the state's water is nearly depleted.

Climate change means such droughts "are likely to become much more the norm rather than the extreme," the letter stated. "We must respond by aggressively developing and implementing policies that will make California more drought and climate resilient in the future."

The problem isn't a lack of money, it's a matter of using existing funds wisely, the senators wrote.

Voters in November approved a \$7.5 billion bond measure for water infrastructure, habitat restoration and storage projects. Lawmakers also have authorized more than \$1.7 billion in emergency water spending over the last two years.

Brown's administration decides how to spend that money, and the senators are urging his deputies to act more quickly.

The governor acknowledged that projects can be slow to materialize. "Getting things done is different than talking about getting things done," Brown said.

The senators also called for a water czar to coordinate drought relief efforts among multiple agencies.

They also said the agriculture industry should do more to conserve, though Brown has defended shielding farmers from additional cuts. The senators recommend incentives for planting fewer water-guzzling crops and installing more efficient irrigation systems.

The letter comes after Brown this week called for legislation beefing up enforcement of water restrictions, including \$10,000 fines for the worst water wasters.

Senate President Pro Tem Kevin de Leon, D-Los Angeles, has not commented on that legislation, and the letter does not address that proposal.

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