



SB 361 – DODD

Water Resources – Stream Gages

Summary

This bill directs the State Water Resources Control Board (Water Board) and the Department of Water Resources (DWR) to, upon appropriation, reactivate, upgrade, and install new stream gages, and develop a plan to fund their long-term maintenance.

This bill also requires DWR and the Water Board to identify the gaps in the network of weather stations and other water data infrastructure to ensure accurate and comprehensive data collection.

Background

California must prepare for extreme climate change-related events including increases in both droughts and floods. It is critical that the State effectively manage water across all year types to maximize the benefits of limited water supply. To do so, California needs to understand how much water flows down rivers and streams and when those flows occur. Stream gages and other water data infrastructure are critical tools in gathering this information.

Currently, there is a lack of transparency, consistency and access associated with the quality and accuracy of various sources of water data. More than 3,200 local watersheds in California (over 70%) have no history of stream gaging, and of the 1,076 active gages in California, less than half provide data on key metrics for water management such as temperature and sedimentation. In addition, many of the active gages do not provide real-time reporting.

Without robust water data, it is difficult, time consuming, and costly for the State and water

managers to appropriately plan for and mitigate water management, economic, climate change, ecological, and other uncertainties.

Comprehensive streamflow information and other water data are essential to manage water to meet multiple needs, including protection of threatened and endangered aquatic species, critical freshwater ecosystems, senior water rights, and water transfers.

Existing Law

Senate Bill 19 (Dodd, Chapter 361, Statutes of 2019) required the State Water Board and DWR to develop a plan to deploy a network of stream gages in order to address significant gaps in information necessary for water management and the conservation of freshwater species. The bill also required DWR and the Water Board to determine funding needs and opportunities for modernizing and reactivating existing gages and deploying new gages. Pursuant to Senate Bill 19, the California Stream Gaging Prioritization Plan was released in 2022.

Additionally, Assembly Bill 1755, the Open and Transparent Water Data Act (Dodd, Chapter 506, Statutes of 2016) required the DWR, in consultation with the California Water Quality Monitoring Council, the Water Board, and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, to create, operate, and maintain a statewide integrated water data platform; and to develop protocols for data sharing, documentation, quality control, public access, and promotion of open-source platforms and decision support tools related to water data.



This Bill

This bill would improve California's water data infrastructure to allow the state to better understand the movement of water and manage water supplies more effectively for multiple benefits. Specifically, this bill would require DWR and the Water Board to reactivate, upgrade, and install new stream gages. The bill would require DWR and Water Board to use the recommendations and data provided in the California Stream Gaging Prioritization Plan to complete specified actions by 2030.

Additionally, this bill would improve transparency, consistency, and access to water data to allow the State to make the most efficient and effective water management decisions to meet multiple needs. Finally, it would require DWR and the Water Board to adopt a set of standards and processes for assessing, tracking, and reporting the accuracy of critical data inputs for water management, and to develop a plan to identify the gaps in the network of automated weather stations and eddy covariance towers to ensure accurate and comprehensive data collection.

Support

Environmental Defense Fund (Co-Sponsor)
The Nature Conservancy (Co-Sponsor)

Opposition

None received.

Contact

Les Spahn
Capitol Director, Senator Dodd
916-651-4505
Leslie.Spahn@sen.ca.gov