

Bill eases road to restoration

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Gov. Jerry Brown has signed into law Assembly Bill 2193, the first statewide effort to accelerate voluntary restoration on private lands through the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Authored by Assemblyman Richard Gordon, who represents much of San Mateo County, the Habitat Restoration and Enhancement Act establishes a simplified permitting process through the Department of Fish and Wildlife. It empowers landowners, government agencies and conservation organizations to take on small-scale, voluntary habitat restoration across California.

AB 2193, ultimately enables the Department of Fish and Wildlife to significantly boost the number of critical restoration projects it authorizes each year in California.

The law makes it easier for landowners to restore habitat for endangered species, reduce sediment and pollutants in urban and rural waterways, increase native vegetation, and restore fish habitat in streams and rivers. The legislation also aligns the Department of Fish and Wildlife's permitting process with those of other state agencies.

"The bipartisan nature of AB 2193, which passed through the legislative process without a single 'no' vote, exemplifies the strength of California's Legislature when it unites to address issues impacting the state," Gordon said in a prepared release.

Currently, more than 350 species of wildlife and plants in California are considered threatened or endangered under state and federal law, and many others are experiencing declining numbers. Populations of the state's salmon, steelhead and other native fish have reached lows across the state.

More than two-thirds of the assessed lakes, rivers and other water bodies in California fail clean-water standards. Sponsors say AB 2193 will make it easier to carry out restoration projects that boost water quality by protecting waterways from sediment, and restore wetlands and floodplains, which are natural pollutant buffers.

"AB 2193 is poised to help landowners who want to restore land and waterways and boost the populations of endangered species, and do their part to improve water quality," said Karen Buhr, executive director of the California Association of Resource Conservation Districts, which oversees the efforts of the state's nearly 100 Resource Conservation Districts in working with landowners to implement restoration and conservation projects statewide.