



# County of Monterey

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE

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DATE: May 11, 2026

TO: Legislative Committee

Cc: The Honorable Assemblymember Gail Pellerin  
Nicole Coburn, County Administrative Officer, Santa Cruz County of Monterey  
Esperanza Colio Warren, County Administrative Officer, San Benito County of Monterey  
Susan Blich, County Counsel  
Eric Morgan, General Manager, Monterey Peninsula Regional Park District  
Norm Groot, Executive Director, Farm Bureau  
Monterey County Agricultural Advisory Committee

FROM: Nicole Hollingsworth, Legislative Program Manager

RE: AB 1548 (Pellerin): Monterey Bay Stewardship Authority Act

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## **RECOMMENDATION:**

- a. Receive a presentation on AB 1548 (Pellerin) from Nicole Hollingsworth, Legislative Program Manager;
- b. Consider staff recommendation of an "Oppose Unless Amended" position due to concerns related to debt, governance structure, equity related to public access, and sustainability; and,
- c. Consider a recommendation to the Board of Supervisors.

## **BACKGROUND:**

Legislation has been introduced by Assemblymember Pellerin to establish the Monterey Bay Area Stewardship Authority to serve the counties of Monterey, San Benito, and Santa Cruz. Together, these three counties encompass some of California's most iconic landscapes, a global highly productive agricultural region, and communities that deeply value the benefits of environmental conservation. The region faces mounting climate impacts and issues related to wildfires, drought, flooding, and coastal storms, while state investment has been difficult to obtain or sustain over the long term. The stated purpose of the Authority is to create a regional framework for securing and allocating funding and other resources to protect natural and working lands, strengthen climate resilience, and support the well-being of local communities.

## **POTENTIAL BENEFITS:**

The author's intent in establishing a Monterey Bay Area Stewardship Authority would be to give Monterey, San Benito, and Santa Cruz counties a regional framework for attracting, managing, and generating funding for conservation, working lands, and climate resilience projects. The legislation is intended to create an entity which could provide support for wildfire recovery, water and habitat restoration, agricultural sustainability, and expanded access to open space, while ensuring resources are distributed fairly across the three counties. This legislation is modeled generally on a similar approach which has proven successful in the San Francisco Bay Area. The San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority, created in 2008, now coordinates more

than 100 projects across nine counties. It generates \$25 million annually from a voter-approved parcel tax and has leveraged additional state bond funding, including \$85 million from Proposition 4 and \$20 million from Proposition 68.

**DISCUSSION/ISSUES OF CONCERN:**

Assemblymember Pellerin has introduced legislation to establish a tri-county joint powers authority. The purpose of this new Authority is to raise and allocate public and private funds for the restoration, enhancement, protection, long term stewardship, and enjoyment of open space and natural and working lands across Monterey, San Benito, and Santa Cruz counties.

County staff has met on several occasions with the author's staff and with staff from Santa Cruz and San Benito Counties. During these discussions, the County of Monterey staff have identified several significant concerns with the legislation as currently drafted:

Debt Issuance/Finance: Due to provisions in the bill which would authorize debt financing by the JPA, Monterey County staff have sought preliminary input from the County's financial advisors, KNN consulting. The initial preliminary review by KNN is attached to this staff report. In general, KNN suggests other financing options which could be considered in the bill to give the JPA additional financing tools, but the overarching recommendation from KNN is that more analysis should be performed, both by KNN and bond counsel in order to fully understand potential impacts to the County. (Attachment A)

Governance Structure: As proposed the JPA would have a governing board made up of elected and non-elected individuals. Given the disparity in size from a geographic, population and tax base perspective, staff recommends that a weighted voting structure be considered as part of the Legislative Committee and Board of Supervisors deliberation on the bill. Also, the desirability of a mixed elected and non-elected JPA Board is also an area that should be analyzed if further analysis of the JPA financing provisions is undertaken

Eligible Land Definitions: Section 66725(a)(2)(A) of the proposed bill currently limits eligible projects to natural, working, or open space lands, which would exclude urban forestry, urban vegetation, and climate resiliency work contemplated in the County's upcoming Community Climate Action & Adaptation Plan. The County recommends amending this language to read 'natural, working, open space lands, or public green space' to address this gap.

Agricultural Considerations and Representation: While this bill explicitly includes "working lands" (agricultural and ranching lands) as a core focus, as drafted its governance structure does not include representatives from any major agriculture organizations or agricultural conservation organizations. This raises questions about whether agricultural perspectives on working-lands stewardship are adequately addressed. The Monterey County Agricultural Advisory Committee met recently to review this bill. Their comments and suggestions for amendment are included as Attachment B. Staff believe that representatives from agriculture will be present at the Legislative Committee meeting to speak regarding their concerns with the bill.

Public Access Considerations: If the JPA is formed and assists in the acquisition of open space lands, it is unclear what type of public access will be allowed on those lands, particularly for the County's underserved communities.

**OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT:**

County staff have had several discussions regarding this bill with the author's staff as well as staff from Santa Cruz and San Benito Counties. The Monterey County Agricultural Advisory Committee recently reviewed the bill and recommends amendments, which are contained in Attachment B. The bill has been reviewed by three Assembly committees: Natural Resources, Local Government, and Appropriations. The Assembly Appropriations Committee analysis is attached as Attachment C. The Assembly Local Government Committee analysis is attached as Attachment D.

**FINANCING:**

At present there is no impact to the General Fund as a result of this legislation. However, a full understanding of the potential financial impacts of the legislation, would require the type of financial analysis described in the previous section of this staff report.

Attachments:

- A – KNN Draft Analysis
- B – Recommendations from Monterey County Agricultural Advisory Committee
- C – Assembly Appropriations Analysis
- D – Assembly Local Government Committee Analysis