

County of Monterey



COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE INTERGOVERNMENTAL & LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS DIVISION

Date: February 9, 2026
To: Legislative Committee
From: Nicole Hollingsworth, Legislative Program Manager
Re: Monterey Bay Stewardship Authority Act

RECOMMENDATION

- a. Receive a presentation on AB 1548 from Trust for Public Land and consultant Donna Meyers.
- b. Staff recommends continuing to track the progress of this legislation and report back to the LC at a future date.

BACKGROUND:

The Monterey Bay Area Stewardship Authority is being developed 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 agricultural region, and communities that deeply value the benefits of environmental conservation. Yet the region faces mounting climate impacts, from wildfires, drought, flooding, to coastal storms and extreme heat, while state investment has been difficult to obtain or sustain over the long term. The Authority is designed to create a durable regional framework for securing and allocating resources to protect natural and working lands, strengthen climate resilience, and support the well-being of local communities.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS:

Establishing a Monterey Bay Area Stewardship Authority would give Monterey, San Benito, and Santa Cruz counties a durable regional framework for attracting and managing funding for conservation, working lands, and climate resilience projects. Such an entity could provide consistent 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. A similar approach 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. The SF Bay Authority was also instrumental in establishing the SF Restoration Act, which amended existing law to guide US EPA resources to the SF Bay Area under their geographic programs initiative, which in 2023 received over \$50 million for 24 projects. While our region's approach may differ, the Bay Area example shows the power of a dedicated regional authority to unlock resources and accelerate projects that no

single county could achieve on its own.

DISCUSSION:

Assemblymember Gail Pellerin, in partnership with regional leaders and with facilitation support from Donna Meyers and Trust for Public Land, is developing legislation to establish a tri-county entity. The purpose of this new Authority would be 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.

To guide this effort, a Conservation Practitioners Working Group, representing over 25 organizations across the tri-county region, has been meeting regularly to identify regional needs, provide input on draft legislative language, and consider the appropriate scope for such an entity. A subcommittee of this group has reviewed draft legislation in detail and have informed a working draft that is now being shared with a broader set of partners, including local government, agriculture, park agencies, and tribes in the region.

The goal is for Assemblymember Gail Pellerin to introduce legislation in the 2026 session, with submittal targeted for February 20th at the latest.

OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT:

This is a tri-county effort with Santa Cruz and San Benito Counties. All three counties have been involved in the development of the program, legislation, and administration.

FINANCING:

As of now, there is no financial commitment to join this effort. However, county staff time will be required if the Board decides to move forward with this effort.

QUESTIONS/ISSUES IDENTIFIED BY COUNTY STAFF:

There are a few outstanding questions from CAO staff.

1. Responsibilities/potential liabilities in relation to debt issuance.
2. Responsibilities/equity in relation to collecting and distributing revenues.
3. Potential impacts on availability of suitable sites for future housing development.
4. Equity regarding governance and voting structure.