

## Newsom's package of bills to advance environmental goals alarms environmentalists (ironic, isn't it?)

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Last month, Governor Newsom attempted to turbocharge California's efforts to combat climate change: he proposed a package of no less than eleven bills to speed up the approval of clean energy, water, and transportation projects focused on achieving the State's climate goals. That sounds good, right?

Unfortunately, the bills amount to a significant rollback of the State's environmental laws, including the **California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)**. Moreover, in an effort to fast-track the bills through the legislature, the Governor proposed them as "trailer bills" to the budget, which would minimize the opportunity for review and comment.

The bills would do the following:

- Reduce the length and cost of CEQA lawsuits challenging projects by: (1) shrinking the scope of administrative record that must be compiled before briefing can commence; (2) streamlining the process for compiling the record; and (3) for specified projects, requiring CEQA lawsuits to be resolved within nine months of certification of the record.
- Authorize and direct state agencies to obtain federal funding for climate change projects in California, pursuant to the federal Inflation Reduction Act.
- For specified projects, streamline the approval of projects by the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) and the Department of Water Resources; and authorize Caltrans to contract directly with a private high-speed rail company to implement specified mitigation measures.
- For specified projects, continue the delegation of federal environmental review to the State.
- Eliminate duplicative statutes for the protection of at-risk species.

Newsom's proposal quickly incited a bit of a civil war among California environmentalists. Some, like the Governor, believe that the bills are urgently needed to achieve California's extremely ambitious

goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and address the climate emergency. Others, like the Sierra Club, are concerned the bills might go too far in reducing environmental review and need "a lot of work."

As a result, the bills are not going anywhere fast. Shortly after they were submitted, legislators rejected the Governor's request to include the bills in the expedited budget process. Despite this setback, the bills will almost certainly be back later this summer.

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