

- **Board of Directors**
Communications and Legislation Committee

May 10, 2005 Board Meeting

8-6

Subject

Express support and seek amendments to AB 1466 (Laird, D-Santa Cruz) concerning the control or eradication of tamarisk

Description

Tamarisk (also known as saltcedar) is a deep-rooted, deciduous shrub or tree that can reach up to 25 feet in height. This fast-growing, invasive weed easily displaces native species and contributes to the salinization of surrounding soil making it difficult for native plants to compete.

Tamarisk also consumes large quantities of water. According to one estimate, the water lost to the western United States due to tamarisk has been estimated to be up to 2.4 million acre-feet per year. The evapotranspiration rates for one acre of tamarisk range from 4.3 to 5.3 acre-feet per year. Some research has suggested that, in extreme cases, one acre of tamarisk can use up to 200 gallons of water a day during the summer season. The estimated amount of water lost every year by the transpiration of tamarisk on the Lower Colorado River is between 1 million and 1.5 million acre-feet.

AB 1466, authored by Assemblymember John Laird (D-Santa Cruz) would direct the Department of Water Resources, in collaboration with the Department of Food and Agriculture, the Department of Fish and Game, and the Colorado River Board of California to develop a program to control or eradicate tamarisk plants in the Colorado River watershed. These state agencies would develop this program in collaboration with specified federal agencies for the treatment of tamarisk along the Colorado River watershed. The program would also be developed in cooperation with the other states in the watershed and affected water agencies. Finally, the bill would require that the program include the reestablishment of native vegetation. A copy of AB 1466 is included as [Attachment 1](#).

Metropolitan staff believes that greater focus on control and eradication of tamarisk would likely benefit users of Colorado River water. Moreover, it should be noted that tamarisk removal would have general environmental benefits – given that the plant has relatively little habitat value and crowds out native vegetation. Staff notes, however, that the Department of Fish and Game may be the more appropriate lead agency to undertake the program. Fish and Game already owns or manages lands along the Colorado River and is expected to play a role in the Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Plan that will include replacement of saltcedar with native vegetation. Implementation of the program by Department of Fish and Game could avoid administrative costs that would otherwise be borne by the Department of Water Resources for complying with the California Environmental Quality Act and the California Endangered Species Act.

For these reasons, Metropolitan staff recommends seeking amendments that would allow the Schwarzenegger Administration to designate either the Department of Fish and Game or the Department of Water Resources as the lead agency for purposes of the proposed tamarisk control program.

Policy

Metropolitan Water District Administrative Code Section 4210: Water Conservation

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)

CEQA determination for Option #1:

The proposed action is not defined as a project under CEQA because it involves continuing administrative activities, such as general policy and procedure making (Section 15378(b)(2) of the State CEQA Guidelines). In addition, where it can be seen with certainty that there is no possibility that the proposed action in question may have a significant effect on the environment, the proposed action is not subject to CEQA (Section 15061(b)(3) of the State CEQA Guidelines).

The CEQA determination is: Determine that the proposed action is not subject to CEQA pursuant to Sections 15378(b)(2) and 15061(b)(3) of the State CEQA Guidelines.

CEQA determination for Option #2:

None required

Board Options/Fiscal Impacts

Option #1

Adopt the CEQA determination and support AB 1466 and seek amendments as noted above.

Fiscal Impact: None

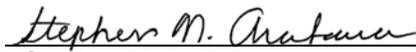
Option #2

Take no position on AB 1466.

Fiscal Impact: None

Staff Recommendation

Option #1



Stephen N. Arakawa
Manager, Water Resource Management

4/28/2005



Dennis B. Underwood
CEO/General Manager

4/28/2005

Date

Attachment 1 – Assembly Bill No. 1466

BLA #3688

AMENDED IN ASSEMBLY APRIL 21, 2005

CALIFORNIA LEGISLATURE—2005—06 REGULAR SESSION

ASSEMBLY BILL

No. 1466

Introduced by Assembly Member Laird
(Coauthors: Senators Battin and Ducheny)

February 22, 2005

An act to add Part 11 (commencing with Section 12999) to Division 6 of the Water Code, relating to water.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 1466, as amended, Laird. Tamarisk plant control.

Existing law grants to the Department of Water Resources various duties relating to the supervision of the state's water resources.

This bill would require the department, *in collaboration with other entities*, to ~~undertake~~ *develop* a program to control or eradicate tamarisk plants in the Colorado River watershed.

Vote: majority. Appropriation: no. Fiscal committee: yes.
State mandated local program: no.

The people of the State of California do enact as follows:

- 1 SECTION 1. The Legislature finds and declares all of the
- 2 following:
- 3 (a) Tamarisk is a small tree or large shrub that was imported
- 4 from Eastern Europe in the 1800s for use as windbreaks and
- 5 erosion control.
- 6 (b) Tamarisk is spreading across the West, including covering
- 7 hundreds of thousands of acres in the Colorado River Basin,
- 8 almost entirely along waterways.

AB 1466

— 2 —

1 (c) Tamarisk easily outcompetes native habitat, such as
2 willows and cottonwoods, and has very little habitat value
3 compared to native vegetation.

4 (d) Because of its delicate and expansive leaf structure,
5 tamarisk on a per-acre basis, takes up and evaporates
6 substantially more water than native vegetation.

7 (e) Colorado River flows have been very low for the last six
8 years because of increasing human uses and very low rainfall,
9 and because tamarisk is taking up significantly more water than
10 the native vegetation that it replaces.

11 (f) If low river flows continue, dwindling reservoir storage
12 will be insufficient to continue historical levels of diversions and
13 diversions will have to be curtailed, with substantial impacts to
14 the economies of the seven states in the Colorado River
15 watershed.

16 (g) Controlling tamarisk entails a large and costly task, but if it
17 is not undertaken, there will be significant economic and
18 environmental consequences for California and the other basin
19 states.

20 SEC. 2. Part 11 (commencing with Section 12999) is added
21 to Division 6 of the Water Code, to read:

22

23 PART 11. TAMARISK PLANT CONTROL

24

25 ~~12999. The department shall undertake a program to control~~
26 ~~or eradicate tamarisk plants in the Colorado River watershed.~~
27 ~~The program shall include the reestablishment of native~~
28 ~~vegetation. The program shall be undertaken in cooperation with~~
29 ~~the other states in the watershed, affected water agencies, and the~~
30 ~~federal government.~~

31 *12999. The Department of Water Resources, in collaboration*
32 *with the Department of Food and Agriculture, the Department of*
33 *Fish and Game, and the Colorado River Board of California,*
34 *shall develop a program to control or eradicate tamarisk plants*
35 *in the Colorado River watershed. These state agencies shall*
36 *develop this program in collaboration with federal agencies,*
37 *including, but not limited to, the United States Bureau of*
38 *Reclamation and the United States Bureau of Land Management,*
39 *for the treatment of tamarisk along the Colorado River*
40 *watershed. This program shall also be developed in cooperation*

1 *with the other states in the watershed and affected water*
2 *agencies. This program shall include the reestablishment of*
3 *native vegetation.*

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