



Prop 40

By Naomi Lubick, Science Interchange Reporter

(This article has not yet been published.)

You may have noticed that on Tuesday, March 5th, voters will decide on a variety of political issues, from gubernatorial candidates to legislative term limits. What you may not have noticed is the bond measure on the ballot that will raise money for parks and open space preservation throughout California.

Proposition 40 (or Assembly Bill 1602, proposed in 2001) is the California Clean Water, Clean Air, Safe Neighborhood Parks, and Coastal Protection Act of 2002. The bond act would set aside \$2.6 billion to create urban and rural parks and maintain existing open space, including agricultural land, historical sites, and coastal preservation.

Over \$1 billion would go to acquisition of land for urban, regional, and state parks and to improvements and development for those spaces. Another almost \$1.3 billion would go to conservation, restoration, and wildlife habitat protection and acquisition. Grants from the bonds would be earmarked for reducing air emissions from diesel-fueled equipment currently operating in state and local parks.

Proposition 40 may sound like a tall bill to fill, but its supporters argue that now is the time to make this investment in our water quality and public lands. "We consider it essential for us to continue doing our job for the next several years," says Dick Wayman, spokesman for the California Coastal Conservancy. The organization, which would be a recipient of a portion of the funds, is involved in projects along the entire California coast, from restoration of the Los Angeles River to preserving wetlands in the Bay Area. (State and local governments will also benefit.) "People recognize that there's a real need to do that kind of work," Wayman says.

But the California Coastal Conservancy and other supporters of the bill recognize that voters may not be excited to sign up for more debt, given that the economy is down.

Opponents of the bond act are emphasizing those economics, calling the money for conservation projects political "pork." Though no formal opposition to the bond act has been filed, stated opponents of Proposition 40 include the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association, a group that opposes taxation in general. The general bonds that would be sold are supported by taxes and public funds, and the association says that the state's current budget deficit might result in "cuts in services, tax hikes, or both." The group also points to Proposition 12, passed in 2000, which recently gave \$4 billion to water quality and conservation issues.

But distribution of the money from Proposition 12 was like pouring a bucket of water into a parched garden—all of it has been allocated already. "It was sorely needed," says Wayman. "It made up for lack of money for the 12 previous years." During that long dry spell, the California Coastal Conservancy and other organizations could not proceed with their projects. But at the end of last

month, for example, the California Coastal Conservancy was able to grant \$5.75 million to the Audubon Society for purchase of 641 acres of the Bahia property for conservation purposes. "Most of that money will come from Prop 12," said Wayman. "We really need a new act now to keep the momentum going."

Supporters of Proposition 40 argue that low interest rates during this trough in the economy will make paying off general bonds easier in the future. Borrowing the money now, they say, allows projects sidetracked by lack of funds to finally continue. It's a question of investing now for future gains.

RESOURCES

For a breakdown on how the bond money would be allocated and its impact on state debt:
www.lao.ca.gov/initiatives/2002/40_03_2002.htm

Sites supporting Proposition 40: www.voteyeson40.org and the Planning and Conservation League: www.pcl.org

Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association: www.hjta.org

California chapter of the League of Women Voters: ca.lwv.org, or go to www.smartvoter.org to find information on Prop. 40 for your zip code.