



ASSEMBLY MEMBER – DISTRICT 44

Nick Schultz

AB 902 – Connected Communities Act

Summary:

The Connected Communities Act will improve California wildlife and climate resilience by requiring metropolitan planning organizations and regional transportation planning agencies to consider and minimize impacts to wildlife movement and habitat connectivity through their regional planning processes.

Background:

Poorly planned transportation infrastructure impairs animals' abilities to move between habitats to find food, shelter, and unrelated mates. As climate change alters the habitat and movement patterns of animals and plants, wildlife need to shift their ranges in response to changed resource availability. Moreover, wildlife need room to move to survive extreme weather events like wildfire, drought, and floods. All of our state's wildlife, including iconic species, like the California red-legged frog (the State Amphibian), and common species, like mule deer, need connected landscapes to access the resources they need to survive.

It is the policy of the state to protect, restore, and enhance the functioning of fish, wildlife, and habitat connectivity in connection with land use planning. Promoting wildlife connectivity across California requires coordination at all levels of land use planning—local, regional, and state-wide.

California has recently taken crucial steps to protect wildlife connectivity by passing Assembly Bill 2344 (Friedman, 2022), also known as the Safe Roads and Wildlife Protection Act and Assembly Bill 1889 (Friedman, 2024), also known as the Room to Roam Act. These bills require Caltrans and local governments, respectively, to consider and implement measures to protect and improve wildlife connectivity. The Connected Communities Act will extend similar requirements to California's Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) and Regional Transportation Planning Agencies (RTPAs), the regional agencies that influence land use planning and the funding, construction, operation, and maintenance of transportation infrastructure. The Act will require MPOs

and RTPAs to consider wildlife connectivity and to ensure their regional plans maintain connectivity.

Habitat connectivity has broad, bipartisan support. Eighty seven percent of Americans support preserving and improving wildlife connectivity. Considering connectivity in regional planning will help improve species resiliency, protect animals and people from dangerous collisions, and preserve California's remarkable biodiversity. Further, ensuring that all levels of decision makers are working together towards the state's connectivity goals will promote coordinated planning and good governance.

AB 902:

requires MPOs and RTPAs to:

- include in their regional transportation plan or sustainable communities strategy an analysis of connectivity areas and wildlife passage features in their region and a plan to avoid or minimize impacts to connectivity;
- implement these plans through measures through appropriate standards, consider the best available science, and consult with Department of Fish and Wildlife, California Native American tribes, and open-space districts; and
- address barriers to wildlife connectivity in future transportation projects as part of the planning process.

Support:

Center for Biological Diversity (sponsor)
Wildlands Network (sponsor)

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