



ASSEMBLYMEMBER JOAQUIN ARAMBULA, M.D. 31ST ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

AB 2528 Water-Constrained Land for Renewables FAQ

What does this bill do?

AB 2528 will address California's climate and groundwater goals by facilitating the siting and permitting of renewable energy projects on water-constrained lands. The bill aims to provide relief to landowners and local communities, offering alternative economic opportunities for farmers facing challenges due to groundwater limitations, while addressing land use constraints for renewable energy projects.

What are California's energy goals?

SB 100 (Chapter 312, Statutes of 2018) created the state's landmark clean energy policy, requiring that renewable and zero-carbon energy resources supply 100 percent of electric retail sales to customers by 2045. To achieve this goal, California must add 145 GW of new zero-emitting resources to the grid by 2045, including 70,000 Megawatts of utility-scale solar.

What are California's decarbonization goals?

SB 1020 (Chapter 361, Statutes of 2022) accelerated the decarbonization goal in SB 100 by establishing mandatory grid decarbonization targets of 90% by 2035, 95% by 2040 and 100% by 2045, with no less than 60% of the state's electricity to come from renewable energy. Without creative solutions to find land to site these projects, California will miss all of these critical goals.

What is the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA)?

Enacted in 2014, SGMA established a statewide framework which mandates local water management agencies to bring groundwater use to sustainable levels

¹ [Solar Energy and Groundwater in the San Joaquin Valley - Public Policy Institute of California \(ppic.org\)](https://www.ppic.org/publications/solar-energy-and-groundwater-in-the-san-joaquin-valley/)

by the early 2040s. Basins in overdraft must achieve groundwater sustainability by 2040 or 2042, predicated on the completion of groundwater management plans. If deadlines aren't met, the State Water Resources Control Board can intervene and establish an interim management plan.

What is the California Land Conservation Act (Williamson Act)?

The California Land Conservation Act, (otherwise known as The Williamson Act) is a 60-year-old farmland conservation policy designed to prevent urban sprawl and keep lands in agricultural production. Existing law allows counties to sign 10-year contracts with ranchers and growers to keep land in agriculture or open space in exchange for reduced property taxes.

Which counties have WA contracts and how many acres are under contract in California?

According to the Department of Conservation, more than 16 million of California's 31.4 million acres of farm and ranch land have participated in the WA program. Of California's 58 counties, 52 have executed contracts with landowners. Only Del Norte, Inyo, Los Angeles and Yuba do not participate in the program.

How many acres of agricultural lands under SGMA are proposed for retirement?

While it is difficult to project the totality of lands that will need to be taken out of production as a result of Groundwater Management Plans, the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) projects a half million acres in the San Joaquin Valley alone will need to be retired.¹

What is the current process to cancel a WA contract?

The current Williamson Act cancellation process is a lengthy and cumbersome process. A local government



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must make specific findings and hold public hearings. Alternatively, the local jurisdiction can initiate a very lengthy 9-year non-renewal process.

How will AB 2528 streamline the WA cancellation process?

AB 2528 would simplify and clarify the findings a local jurisdiction has to make in order to cancel a contract, while maintaining the discretion of the Board of Supervisors and City Council to approve or deny a contract cancellation. The streamlined process is available for solar, wind, and storage projects and their associated transmission lines.

What is the lifespan of a renewable energy project on farmland and what happens to the land after these projects are decommissioned?

A typical renewable energy contract is 30 years. In most cases, the land remains under local landowner control, leased to a renewable energy developer, and decommissioning activities are carried out by the project owner as required by the local jurisdiction.

What benefits does AB 2528 provide farmers?

AB 2528 provides a streamlined Williamson Act cancellation option to facilitate the faster siting of energy infrastructure on former agricultural parcels. Lands that are no longer viable for agricultural production could be leased for renewable energy development, providing lease payment options to the landowner.

How will AB 2528 benefit local communities?

A renewable energy project on formerly productive agricultural land provides several benefits, from dust mitigation to increased local construction jobs and increased tax revenues. Local governments currently subsidize the tax benefit that landowners receive through Williamson Act contracts. Once lands are no longer under contract, local jurisdictions will reassess

the land and those properties will then pay full property tax. On average, every 100MWs of utility-scale solar generates roughly \$25 million in property tax dollars over the life of the project.

Will this bill benefit workers?

Renewable energy development – solar in particular— is a key driver of clean energy jobs in California. According to the National Solar Jobs Census, California ranked first in 2022 with the number of solar jobs in the nation with a total of 78,116 in the state.²

For More Information

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² [U.S. Solar Market Insight | SEIA](#)