The California Legislature convened for its 2012 session on January 4. In the first two days of its new session it activated two bad bills which were introduced but went nowhere in 2011, viz., AB 890 and SB 620. These bills, which are opposed by CNPS, would create new exemptions from the Environmental Impact Report requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). They have been given expedited treatment because the 2012 legislative calendar sets January 31 as the last day for each house to pass bills introduced in it in 2011.

AB 890 would, until January 1, 2015, exempt from CEQA requirements a project or activity of a city or county to improve public safety within an existing road right-of-way. This bill has been set for hearing before the Assembly Natural Resources Committee on January 9.

SB 620 would, until January 1, 2015, exempt from CEQA requirements qualified projects that consist of the alteration of vacant retail structures that existed prior to 2009 and are not more than 120,000 square feet in area. Hearing on this bill was scheduled for January 6, but was cancelled at the request of the author (i.e., Senator Correa).

These bills are part of a pattern of state and federal bills that consider only the need to create jobs as soon as possible and ignore the long term economic and other damage that CEQA and the federal Environmental Policy Act are designed to prevent. Unfortunately, both the California Legislature and Congress tend to evaluate bills of this type in a vacuum and do not consider the disastrous cumulative effect of creating numerous exemptions from the environmental protection laws.

Hopefully, these bills will fare no better in 2012 than they did in 2011.

To get the status and full, official version of any bill, including the Legislative Counsel's digest, google "california legislature bills" and enter the bill number or copy and paste the following: http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/bilinfo.html into your web browser.