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CEQA NEEDS YOUR HELP!

On August 5, 2013 the California Legislature reconvened after its summer recess. It must now deal with a mass of pending bills before its scheduled September 13 adjournment. At the beginning of the year, legislative leaders said that major changes to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) were under consideration. Although many bills to amend CEQA were introduced, the only one still alive is Senator Steinberg’s SB 731.

In its present form SB 731 has elicited little interest and only a “Watch” position by CNPS. CEQA is still threatened, however! Formidable industry and developer interests are lobbying hard to get the legislature to make last minute amendments to SB 731 (or another pending bill) that would weaken CEQA’s provisions protecting the environment and the public’s right to notice of and participation in CEQA proceedings. That could be accomplished by the outrageous method of “gut and amend.” Under that method new provisions replace the original bill but the number and status of the original remain. The gutted and amended bill can then be voted on during the hectic last days of the legislative session with little or no notice to the public, or even all members of the legislature. A proposed constitutional amendment to prohibit the “gut and amend” practice (discussed in the June, 2013 Pipevine) remains in committee.

CEQA is vitally important for, among other things, the protection of our native plants and ecosystems. To help ward off a disastrous, last minute “gut and amend,” please write or telephone your state senator and assemblyperson and give them the message: “Please do not allow amendments to weaken CEQA’s environmental protections and the right of public participation.” Local and Sacramento addresses and telephone numbers can be found in the “government officials” pages of your telephone directory.

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