

SUBJECT: Authorizing eradication of Carrizo cane along the Rio Grande

COMMITTEE: Agriculture and Livestock — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 4 ayes — T. King, Cyrier, González, Springer
0 nays
3 absent — C. Anderson, Rinaldi, Simpson

SENATE VOTE: On final passage, April 28 — 29-2 (Nelson, Nichols)

WITNESSES: No public hearing

BACKGROUND: Agriculture Code, ch. 201 establishes the State Soil and Water Conservation Board. The board is responsible for implementing constitutional provisions and state laws relating to the conservation and protection of soil resources.

DIGEST: SB 1734 would require the State Soil and Water Conservation Board to develop and implement a program to eradicate Carrizo cane along the Rio Grande.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2015.

SUPPORTERS SAY: SB 1734 would require the State Soil and Water Conservation Board to take steps to eradicate Carrizo cane, a non-native invasive species along the Rio Grande that poses an ecological threat and provides cover for individuals seeking to cross the border illegally into the United States.

Carrizo cane is a bamboo-like plant that poses a serious ecological threat to lowlands, rivers, and other waterways because it forms large colonies that quickly overwhelm the river bank. These plants block access for wildlife and livestock and, because they consume large amounts of water

compared to native vegetation, can worsen the water shortage in the Rio Grande Basin. The board already has local programs to eradicate other resilient and harmful plant life such as salt cedar. With the proper funding, the board could use its knowledge and skill to effectively remove Carrizo cane with the least ecological impact on the surrounding ecosystem.

This bill would support efforts by federal border patrol agents and the Department of Public Safety to control the border. Carrizo cane can grow up to 30 feet tall and forms an interlocking network of subterranean roots. Due to the plant's size and density, Carrizo cane reduces visibility and provides ample cover for illegal activities, including cover for individuals attempting to illegally cross the border. Controlling this plant is essential for border protection.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

SB 1734 may not help to eradicate Carrizo cane effectively from the Rio Grande region because the root system of the plant is resilient and extremely difficult to remove. Pulling Carrizo cane's roots from the ground can stop the plant from growing, but this is difficult to accomplish because the roots grow in interlocking networks and are difficult to cut and remove. The three methods generally used to remove Carrizo cane — mechanical, herbicidal, or biological using insects — have not proved effective thus far in eliminating this plant species. The Legislature should not authorize a program that could cost nearly \$5 million per year with no guarantee of success.

NOTES:

The Legislative Budget Board's fiscal note estimates that the bill would have a negative impact of \$9.8 million on general revenue related funds during fiscal 2016-17.