

Date of Hearing: April 1, 2019

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION
Jim Frazier, Chair
AB 998 (Aguiar-Curry) – As Introduced February 21, 2019

SUBJECT: State scenic highways: State Route 128

SUMMARY: Designates State Route (SR) 128 as a route in the state scenic highway system.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Establishes the State Scenic Highway Program and requires the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) to administer the program.
- 2) Designates certain SRs on the state's highway system as part of the state scenic highway system.
- 3) Authorizes Caltrans to revoke designation of a scenic highway if specific standards are not maintained, such as regulating land use and controlling outdoor advertising.

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS: The Legislature established the State Scenic Highway Program in 1963 under Caltrans' purview and required that a "Master Plan" be adopted that lists highways that are eligible for scenic designation. The highways deemed eligible are currently in statute and were selected by Caltrans based upon five factors: (1) intrinsic scenic value and experiences that the route would provide; (2) the diversity of experience, such as the transition between different landscape regions or climatic areas that travel on the route would furnish; (3) the degree to which the route would link specific scenic, historical, and recreational points or areas of interest; (4) the relationship of these routes to urban areas, taking into account the opportunities for weekend and one-day sightseeing trips by large numbers of people; and, (5) the opportunities for bypassing, or leaving periodically, major trans-state or inter-regional routes.

The purpose of the Scenic Highway Program is to protect and enhance the natural scenic beauty of California highways and adjacent corridors, through special conservation treatment. Upon receiving designation, program benefits include: protecting the scenic corridor from encroachment of incompatible land uses such as junkyards, dumps, concrete plants, and gravel pits; mitigating activities within the corridor that detract from its scenic quality by proper siting, landscaping, or screening; and, prohibiting billboards and regulating on-site signs so that they do not detract from scenic views.

A local agency (such as a city or county) that possesses a scenic highway eligible corridor within its jurisdiction may prepare a corridor management plan that describes the land use and other relevant planning actions that it will implement to retain the area's scenic quality. If this plan meets specific criteria, Caltrans will designate the identified portion of the route as "scenic" and include special signs along designated routes and also identify the routes on maps produced by the California Office of Tourism. Upon formal designation, current law requires local agencies to take actions that may be necessary to protect the scenic appearance of the corridor - the band of land generally adjacent to the highway right of way - including, but not limited to: (1)

regulation of land use and intensity of development; (2) detailed land and site planning; (3) control of outdoor advertising; (4) careful attention to and control of earthmoving and landscaping; and, (5) the design and appearance of structures and equipment.

SR 128 is roughly 140 miles long from the coast just south of Mendocino through multiple wine areas including Napa and Sonoma Counties to Winters in Yolo County. According to the author, “Highway 128 is nestled against coastal mountains and passes through world class wineries, historic sites, state and national parks, and scenic landscapes. The corridor is known for its picturesque beauty; it goes through rich farmland, lush vineyards, and stately orchards, as well as notable sites like the Old Ornbau Hot Springs, Putah Creek, and the Vaca Mountains. There are also many Michelin Star restaurants and world class resorts, from spas to rustic Bed and Breakfasts, where drivers can stop and enjoy local cuisine and comforts. Local groups and agencies are excited by the prospect of Highway 128 becoming a Scenic Highway. A conglomeration of local organizations created a website dedicated to showcasing the beauty of and the tourist attractions along Highway 128.”

According to supporters, this bill is important because “A scenic highway designation will protect the pristine natural beauty of the corridor from incompatible land uses that might detract from scenic views, such as dumps and junkyards. It also serves to spur the local economy by attracting visitors to the corridor that will likely take time during the drive to stop at some of the many food, wine, and retail businesses along the way.”

Previous legislation: SB 169 (Emerson), Chapter 173, Statutes of 2013, removed a 37-mile segment on Interstate 10 in Riverside County from eligibility from the state scenic highway system.

SB 1036 (Perata), Chapter 101, Statutes of 2005, designated a 5.3 mile segment of SR 13 in Alameda County as a state scenic highway.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

City of Winters
Green River Brewing and Taproom
Sonoma County Tourism
Visit Mendocino County
Visit Napa Valley
Visit Yolo!
Winters Chamber of Commerce
Yolo County

Opposition

None on file.

Analysis Prepared by: Eric Thronson / TRANS. / (916) 319-2093