PROPOSAL

AB 968 would require the chancellor to develop and implement a pilot program, at a voluntarily participating community college located in a disadvantaged community, that provide a pathway for participating students to become naturalists and achieve careers providing public access to, or preserving, restoring, or enhancing outdoor areas. The bill would require the chancellor to submit a report on the pilot program to the Legislature on or before July 1, 2024.

BACKGROUND

California is known for its beautiful natural resources and prides itself on conservation of those resources. However, there are kids who grow up in communities that do not have access to natural history, parks, or coastline. These children become adults who are not only ignorant of natural history, but who do not care about nature and view it as disposable and unimportant. In order to maintain California’s precious resources and conserve/protect our environment, we must support our future workforce of naturalist and conservationist – especially in our disadvantaged communities where environmental inequities are ubiquitous. California Community Colleges could help support this new workforce and create more access to naturalist career pathways in our disadvantaged communities.

According to EnvironmentalScience.org, a naturalist is a type of biologist who studies the impacts of living species on each other and the environments in which they live. Naturalist work in many different sectors and naturalism is part academic study and part applied science with requirements in many areas.

According to 2015 data, the largest employer of naturalists and all biological sciences was state government with 33%. They will work for state parks and in areas such as conservation, monitoring and public health. This excludes health and education but may include public outreach and local environmental groups funded or employed by state government. Similarly, the Federal government employed 21% of all biological scientists including naturalists. They will work for Federal bodies including the NPS and EPA. 10% worked for scientific and technical consulting services, often on a contract basis and for government - but not employed by the government, for example as specialists for university support work or for public prosecutions. Their specialist knowledge of how ecological change may affect the biological life that lives there can provide expert testimony.

Additionally, 8% worked in research and development in the physical sciences. Many medical treatments come from nature and they may research properties of certain plants, collecting data for genetic analysis (in biotech as well as pharmaceuticals). In this area, they may split their time between working in the field and in labs. 7% worked in education, anything from high schools to technical colleges up to universities as a teacher, research assistant, associate lecturers and professors.

PROBLEM

There are naturalists programs/certification/workforce training opportunities offered in some community colleges.

However, some campuses do not offer the same opportunities to pursue naturalist career pathways. AB 968 would implement a pilot program that would establish direction and standards for a naturalist career pathway in our community colleges.

STATUS

Assembly Higher Education Committee – set for hearing: Tuesday, April 23, 2019

SUPPORT

Community Nature Connection
California Native Plant Society

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