With so much attention paid to the presidential race, it's easy to overlook the fact that California's fiscal future is on the ballot tomorrow, with consequences for the environment. Proposition 30 represents Governor Jerry Brown's attempt to stave off harsh cuts to the state budget, a situation brought on by declining tax revenues in the aftermath of the global financial crisis and a legacy of annual budget deficits inherited from his predecessor.

Brown's solution is to ask voters to increase personal income tax on annual earnings over $250,000 for seven years and increase the sales and use tax by ¼ cent for four years. If voters reject the measure (and the polling doesn't look great), the legislature has locked in automatic "trigger" cuts to cover the shortfall. (A competing measure, Prop 38, doesn't look likely to pass.) These trigger cuts include over $5 billion for K-12 education and community colleges and $250 million each from the University of California and California State University systems (obvious disclosure: I work for the UC system).

While the education cuts rightly deserve the public attention, the failure of Proposition 30 would also affect the environment via the trigger cuts:

- $15 million from the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, reducing the agency's firefighting capabilities and emergency air response program and closing fire stations, which could hurt the ability to manage and prevent wildfires.
- $6.6 million from flood control programs in the Department of Water Resources, reducing channel and levee maintenance and floodplain mapping.
- $5.5 million combined from reducing the number of the state's public safety officers in the departments of Parks and Recreation (park rangers) and Fish and Game (wardens), as well as eliminating beach lifeguards.

The state's fee-based environmental programs would not be affected by a Prop 30 loss, as the measure does not affect fee revenues. These programs include efforts to address hazardous waste and air pollution, among others.

While pure speculation at this point, additional environmental consequences could come in a post-election negotiation over the trigger cuts. If Proposition 30 fails, the governor and legislature may come back to the bargaining table to avert the cuts with a revenue deal. As with the last effort to negotiate with Republican legislators in 2011, environmental laws like the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) could be on the table. Democrats seem to be willing to offer CEQA concessions in

exchange for the few Republican votes needed for a two-thirds supermajority to raise taxes. State Senator Michael Rubio’s recent proposal to limit CEQA and the subsequent “CEQA dialogue” process set in motion by Senate President pro Tem Darrell Steinberg have left CEQA opponents well-positioned for such a negotiation, although they’ve vowed to continue the fight into next year regardless of Prop 30’s fate.

Certainly the presidential and congressional elections will have the greatest effect on environmental policies, but state measures like Proposition 30 (and Proposition 39 to fund clean energy and energy efficiency programs) will also be important for those interested in environmental issues here in California. Let the voting begin!