

Few environmental bills make it out of California Legislature

By Paul Rogers, San Jose Mercury News

Environmental groups and their supporters hoping for a new wave of green laws from the Legislature this year ended up with barely a ripple.

From a statewide effort to ban plastic bags, to limits on foam food packaging, most of the top environmental bills of the 2012 session died.

Environmental groups did score a few wins. They beat back an effort by industry to rewrite the California Environmental Quality Act, or CEQA, the landmark law that requires environmental studies of major projects. And lawmakers passed a bill over the furious objections of hunters to ban the use of dogs in bear and bobcat hunting.

But for the most part environmentalists came away disappointed when the Legislature adjourned for the year early Saturday morning.

“We had some modest success. But I felt like we were playing defense more than offense,” said Ann Notthoff, California advocacy director for the Natural Resources Defense Council.

Considering that Democrats control both the Senate and Assembly, polls show the public generally supports tough environmental standards, and Gov. Jerry Brown has spent 40 years as an advocate for renewable energy and conservation rules, what happened?

Three things, experts say: the bad economy, the huge state budget deficit and newly drawn political districts.

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