Date of Hearing: April 23, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT
Rhodesia Ransom, Chair
AB 1960 (Bennett) – As Amended April 8, 2026

SUBJECT: Wildfire Prevention Grants Program: identified cohesive fire communities

SUMMARY: This bill would allow the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) to disburse funds appropriated to the Wildfire Prevention Grants Program to communities that have reached a percentage of homes certified as hardened, as described, by the Office of the State Fire Marshall (OSFM) for activities related to hazardous fuels reduction, wildfire prevention planning, and wildfire prevention education. Specifically, **this bill**:

1. Defines "identified cohesive fire community" as a community that has reached the applicable percent of homes certified by a home hardening certification program, as specified.

2. Requires identified cohesive fire communities, until or unless a state agency develops a home hardening certification program, to reach the following minimum percentage of homes certified pursuant to a home hardening certification program developed by an independent, 501(c)(3) nonprofit scientific research and communications organization supported by property insurers, reinsurers, and affiliated companies:

    a. In the 2028–29 and 2029–30 fiscal years, 10 percent of homes certified as hardened.

    b. In the 2030–31 to 2032–33 fiscal years, inclusive, 30 percent of homes certified as hardened.

    c. In the 2033–34 and 2034–35 fiscal years, 50 percent of homes certified as hardened.

3. Requires a state agency that adopts a home hardening certification program to adopt timeframes and minimum percentage thresholds that are comparable to the timeframes and minimum percentage thresholds, as described above.

4. Upon the development of a home hardening certification program by a state agency as described in paragraph (3), a community that previously qualified as an identified cohesive fire community by meeting the thresholds described in subparagraphs (A) to (C), inclusive, of paragraph (2) pursuant to certification conducted pursuant to any home hardening certification program developed by an independent, 501(c)(3) nonprofit scientific research and communications organization supported by property insurers, reinsurers, and affiliated companies, shall retain that qualification.

5. Authorizes CAL FIRE to, commencing with the 2028–29 fiscal year, disburse funds appropriated for the Wildfire Prevention Grants Program to identified cohesive fire communities to use for activities related to hazardous fuels reduction, wildfire prevention planning, and wildfire prevention education, among other activities.

6. Requires the fire safe council to apply to the department for grant funding on behalf of an individual or group of individuals affiliated with an identified cohesive fire community.

7. Requires the fire safe council as the entity that receives and manages any grant funding awarded to an identified cohesive fire community pursuant to the Wildfire Prevention Grants Program. Requires the fire safe council to determine how to use the funds in the identified cohesive fire safe community for hazardous fuels reduction, wildfire prevention planning, and wildfire prevention education, among other activities.

8. Requires applications, commencing with the 2028–29 fiscal year, from disadvantaged identified fire cohesive communities to be prioritized when evaluating applicants for the Wildfire Prevent Grants Program.

EXISTING LAW:

1. Existing law authorizes the Office of the State Fire Marshal to allow certification of contractors who conduct defensible space, home hardening, fuel reduction, roadside clearance, and other contracting activities for wildlife resiliency efforts and who have completed specified training programs. (Health and Safety Code § 13159.5)

2. Requires the Office of State Fire Marshal (OSFM) to develop and make available on its internet website a Wildland-Urban Interface Fire Safety Building Standards Compliance training intended for use in the training of local building officials, builders and the fire service. (Health and Safety Code § 13159.5)

3. Requires the OFSM to develop and update a Wildland-Urban Interface Products listing of products and construction assemblies that comply with Chapter 7A for the following (Health and Safety Code § 13159.5):

    a. Exterior wall siding and sheathing;

    b. Exterior windows, skylights, and doors;

    c. Vents, including eave and cornice vents;

    d. Decking;

    e. Treated lumber and ignition-resistant materials;

    f. Roofing materials; and

    g. Emergency battery power backup for automatic garage door openers.

4. Requires the OSFM to establish the State Fire Marshal's Wildfire Mitigation Advisory Committee to provide a public forum to solicit and consider public input on programs and activities, as specified, and to advise the Deputy Director of Community Wildfire Preparedness and Mitigation in developing and implementing these programs and activities (Public Resources Code § 4209.4)

5. Authorizes the OSFM, in researching and developing the products listing and the educational and training provisions, to expend funds from the Building Standards Administration Special Revolving Fund, upon appropriation by the Legislature. (Health and Safety Code § 13159.5)

6. Requires the State Fire Marshal to biennially prepare and publish listings of construction materials and equipment and methods of construction and of installation of equipment, together with the name of any person, firm, corporation, association, or similar organization designated as the manufacturer, representative, or supplier, which are in conformity with building standards relating to fire and panic safety adopted and published in the State Building Standards Code. (Health and Safety Code § 13144.1)

7. Requires the Office of Emergency Services to enter into a joint powers agreement with the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, until July 1, 2029, to develop and administer a comprehensive wildfire mitigation program to, among other things, encourage cost-effective structure hardening and retrofitting to create fire-resistant homes, businesses, and public buildings. (Government Code § 8654.4)

8. Requires the SFM to identify cost effective building retrofits and structure hardening measures for site or structure fire risk reduction that are eligible for financial assistance under the wildfire mitigation program (Government Code § 8654.5)

9. Require the department of Forestry and Fire Protection to identify cost effective defensible space, vegetation management, and fuel modification activities to reduce wildfire risk for entire neighborhoods and communities that are eligible for financial assistance under the wildfire mitigation program (Government Code § 8654.5)

10. Specifies areas eligible for financial assistance under the wildfire mitigation program to include local responsibility areas located within a very high fire hazard severity zone, state responsibility areas located within any fire hazard severity zone, and any other lands designated by the joint powers authority, as specified. (Government Code § 8654.6)

11. Requires the joint powers authority to develop eligibility criteria for property owners, community organizations, and local governments that may receive financial assistance under the wildfire mitigation program. (Government Code § 8654.8)

12. Defines "fire-threatened communities" as communities in high and very high fire hazard severity zones, identified by the State Fire Marshal pursuant to Government Code § 5117, Article 9 (commencing with Public Resource Code § 4201), or on the "Fire Risk Reduction Community" list maintained by the Board of Forestry pursuant to Public Resource Code § 4290.1 (Public Resource Code § 4124.5)

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown. This bill has not been analyzed by a fiscal committee.

COMMENTS:

<u>Author's Statement:</u> "Last year, we watched entire communities destroyed by ferocious wildfires. As California continues to grapple with more frequent, intense, and destructive wildfires, we need to ensure whole neighborhoods won't be decimated. AB 1960 allows CAL FIRE to disperse Wildfire Prevention Grant funding to communities that have reached at least 50% of homes hardened. This bill incentivizes California's communities to reduce risk together, rather than one home at a time. Through strategic planning, retrofitting, and engagement, Californians will decrease property loss and become more resilient in the face of climate change."

Equity Statement: "While stakeholders may argue that this bill will impact funding for projects in low-income areas, it would ultimately be up to CAL FIRE's discretion as to how much, if any, of the 20% of funds in the Wildfire Prevention Grants Program would go to communities that have achieved 50% home hardened. Secondly, wildfires have a disproportionate effect on vulnerable communities from environmental impacts to rebuild and displacement issues. UCLA's data brief explores how redlining in Altadena created disproportionate impacts on the Black community during the Eaton Fire. [1] The brief found that nearly half of Black households were destroyed or damaged compared to the 37% experienced by non-Black households. This bill's community-level hardening incentive may help prevent wildfires from decimating entire neighborhoods of vulnerable communities."

Home Hardening: Home hardening refers to modifying a building's exterior with fire-resistant materials and construction techniques to prevent ignition from embers, radiant heat, and direct flames during wildfires. One of the most common causes of ignition is ember entry, which home hardening activities can be mitigated with.[2] Wildfire home hardening includes retrofitting homes with fire-resistant materials and creating defensible space around homes and communities. Home modifications include replacing the roof with metal, clay, or tile, installing metal gutters, and upgrading to dual-paned windows with one pane of tempered glass.

Wildfire Prevention Grants: California's Wildfire Prevention Grants Program, administered by CAL FIRE, provides competitive funding for projects in and near fire-threatened communities that are intended to reduce wildfire risk while advancing public health and safety goals. [3] The program is funded through California Climate Investments, which uses proceeds from the state's cap-and-trade program for projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and generate co-benefits. [4] Eligible wildfire prevention activities include hazardous fuels reduction, wildfire prevention planning, and public education efforts designed to improve community resilience before disasters occur. CAL FIRE materials note that these projects emphasize protection of people, structures, and communities, particularly in areas facing elevated wildfire exposure.

California also uses statutory planning tools to identify communities with heightened wildfire risk. Fire Hazard Severity Zones are mapped areas classified according to factors such as fuels, terrain, weather, and fire history, and are commonly used to guide planning and mitigation priorities. Separately, Public Resources Code section 4290.1 requires creation of the Fire Risk Reduction Community List, which identifies local agencies located in a State Responsibility Area or a Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone that meet best practices for local fire planning. The Board of Forestry and Fire Protection is responsible for developing and updating the list, with the first iteration issued by July 1, 2022, and updates required every two years thereafter. Placement on the list may help demonstrate local readiness and alignment with statewide wildfire risk-reduction strategies. [5]

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[1] LA Wildfires: Impacts on Altadena's Black Community, https://bunchecenter.ucla.edu/reports/la-wildfires-impacts-on-altadenas-black-community/
[2] Fire Safe Communities Program, https://cafiresafecouncil.org/grants-and-funding/cfsc-grant-programs
[3] Wildfire Prevention Grants, https://www.fire.ca.gov/what-we-do/grants/wildfire-prevention-grants
[4] California Climate Investments, https://www.caclimateinvestments.ca.gov/
[5] Fire Risk Reduction Community List, https://bof.fire.ca.gov/projects-and-programs/fire-risk-reduction-community-list/

California Wildfire Mitigation Program: In 2019, AB 38 (Wood, 2019) directed Cal OES to create the California Wildfire Mitigation Program (CWMP) along with Cal FIRE via a joint powers agreement to strengthen community-wide resilience against wildfires. This included developing a state home hardening initiative to retrofit, harden, and create defensible space for homes at high risk of wildfires, focusing on high socially vulnerable communities, and providing financial assistance for low- and moderate-income households. The effort is meant to encourage designed to encourage cost-effective structure hardening and retrofitting and facilitate vegetation management, the creation and maintenance of defensible space, and other fuel modification activities. This includes a community hardening approach to achieve wildfire resilience, low-cost retrofits with ignition-resistant materials to bring homes up to the standard of the California Building Code Chapter 7A, community and homeowner wildfire education on defensible space and home retrofitting and providing financial assistance to support home hardening work for qualifying homeowners.

In coordination with state and local partners, Cal OES and Cal FIRE also established a state Wildfire Community Hardening Framework that can be modeled throughout vulnerable California communities. The framework provides the opportunity for California communities to leverage state and federal resources and develop local wildfire home hardening programs that address community resiliency needs. To help expedite local wildfire home hardening program development and inform the build-out of the state's framework, Cal OES and Cal FIRE provide state funding, resources, and support for demonstration communities to implement community wildfire home hardening projects in areas with high social vulnerability and wildfire risk.

Wildfire Mitigation Advisory Committee: The Wildfire Mitigation Advisory Committee was established through AB 9 (Wood, 2021) to act in an advisory capacity on the programs and activities of the Community Wildfire Preparedness and Mitigation Division. The Wildfire Mitigation Advisory Committee (WMAC) provides a means of communication between the OSFM, representatives of industry, state agencies, the fire service, and other stakeholders. The Committee provides a forum for addressing wildfire preparedness and mitigation issues of statewide concern, shares best practices, seeks comments and specific input on programs and technical issues, and informs local agencies and the public of applicable new laws and regulations.

While there are no current statewide mandated home hardening certification programs, the Wildfire Mitigation Advisory Committee has begun conversations about home hardening certifications, with research support from the Insurance Institute for Business & Home Safety (IBHS).[6,7] Research by IBHS has explored how building materials, design features, and nearby fuel influences whether homes ignite or survive during wildfire. [8] Post-fire assessments and experimental testing have found that homes incorporating multiple home hardening measures such as noncombustible exterior wall cladding or Class A roof coverings, are more likely to avoid damage than homes with fewer mitigation features. [9,10]

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[6] Hardening Your Home, https://www.readyforwildfire.org/prepare-for-wildfire/hardening-your-home
[7] Home Hardening, CAL FIRE https://www.fire.ca.gov/home-hardening
[8] Wildfire, https://ibhs.org/risk-research/wildfire/
[9] IBHS study highlights home hardening as key to wildfire risk mitigation in LA, https://www.insurancebusinessmag.com/us/news/catastrophe/ibhs-study-highlights-home-hardening-as-key-to-wildfire-risk-mitigation-in-la-559752.aspx

Wildfire Safety Protection Frameworks, Programs, and Models: Department of Insurance (CDI): In 2022, CDI announced the "Safer from Wildfires" framework, which directs insurers to provide discounts to consumers and businesses if they take specified mitigation measures. In crafting this regulation, CDI worked with emergency preparedness agencies in the Governor's Administration, including CAL FIRE, Cal OES, the Governor's Office of Planning and Research, and the California Public Utilities Commission. The framework provides a list of home and community wildfire mitigation measures that consumers and businesses can take to provide protection for structures and the community. Under the regulation, the more "Safer from Wildfires" steps a consumer takes, the more they may be able to save on their insurance. Steps a consumer can take to help mitigate their property under this framework include class-A fire rated roofs; 5-foot ember resistant zone; ember and fire-resistant vents; non-combustible 6 inches at the bottom of exterior walls; enclosed eaves; upgraded windows; cleared vegetation; removal of combustible sheds and other outbuildings; and defensible space compliance.

In 2025, AB 888 established the "California Safe Homes" grant program to reduce local and statewide wildfire losses by encouraging mitigation. The California Safe Act protects homes and access to insurance by establishing a new grant program within CDI to assist qualifying residents in obtaining new or replacement fire-safe roofs and implementing fire-safe mitigation measures within "Zone Zero", the area within five feet of their homes.

In 2025, SB 429 (Cortese, 2025) was signed into law, establishing the California Wildfire Public Model Act. The law enhances community safety and education by allowing CDI to issue grants for establishing the nation's first publicly available wildfire loss catastrophe model. The public model will facilitate assessments of wildfire risk, educate the public, and ensure greater transparency so communities and homeowners can plan effectively.

Arguments in Support: The Orange County Fire Authority (OCFA) writes in support, "OCFA appreciates your approach to home hardening standardization and incentives for homeowners and communities for doing so. By allowing these communities access to CAL FIRE grant funding, more and more communities will lean into home hardening measures. The more homes that are hardened, the more lives and property will be saved during wildfire activity."

Fire Aside, also writing in support, states "we support AB 1960 because the pace and scale of wildfire prevention efforts are directly constrained by available funding, while the need for mitigation continues to grow. In our work with fire agencies across California, we consistently see strong local commitment—but limited resources to expand programs to the level required for meaningful risk reduction. AB 1960 would help address this gap by enabling agencies to scale inspection programs, strengthen resident engagement, and provide financial support for home hardening improvements that are often cost-prohibitive for homeowners."

ROCKWOOL North America writes in support, stating "California must accelerate home hardening and community-wide wildfire risk reduction. AB 1960 takes an important, practical step by creating a designation for communities that achieve greater than 50% of homes certified by any SFM-approved home hardening program, and by allowing CAL FIRE to allocate up to 20% of Wildfire Prevention Grant Program funds to designated communities that partner with a local fire safe council. Communities that coordinate defensible space work under Chapter 7A

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[10] The 2025 LA Conflagrations, https://matt-piccarello-n5tr.squarespace.com/s/FINAL-The-2025-LA-Conflagrations-IBHS-ExecSummary.pdf

and adopt home hardening measures—such as those in the Department of Insurance's Safer from Wildfire regulations—substantially reduce ignition risk and increase resistance to embers, radiant heat, and flame impingement. AB 1960 rewards collective action to manage wildfire risk, improves community safety, and can help lower homeowners' insurance costs."

Double Referral: This bill was first heard in Assembly Natural Resources Committee on April 8th, 2026. It passed on a 14-0 vote with amendments that revised the identified cohesive fire community eligibility.

Related Legislation:

AB 1143 (Bennet, 2025) would have required the OSFM to develop a home hardening certification program that identifies the best appropriate combination of products and construction assemblies and convene and facilitate a workgroup. (Vetoed)

AB 1934 (Bennet, 2026), of this Session, would require the Office of the State Fire Marshal's (OSFM) Wildfire Mitigation Advisory Committee to develop a home hardening certification program, as specified.

AB 1964 (Bennet, 2026), of this Session, would require a county recorder to maintain construction records related to home hardening. It would also require the OSFM to compile a report concerning homes in moderate, high, and very high fire hazard severity zones in state and local responsibility areas, including the number of homes that meet home hardening criteria and the number of homes that require more home hardening in each responsibility area and county. (Pending in the Assembly Committee on Emergency Management)

AB 1986 (Bennet, 2026), of this Session, would require that, upon request for a premium quote for residential property insurance, an insurer must provide a premium quote that includes the price of insurance if the property is certified as "hardened" by a home hardening certification program established or approved by the State Fire Marshal and a premium quote for the property in its current state. (Pending in the Assembly Committee on Insurance)

SB 190 (Dodd) Chapter 404, Statutes of 2019. Requires the Office of the State Fire Marshal (OSFM) to develop a model defensible space program, online training related to building standards in the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI), and a listing of products and construction assemblies that are in compliance with fire safety building standards.

AB 1457 (Bryan, 2025) would extend the operation of the statewide program that allows indefinitely and require training to be consistent with the "Home Ignition Zone/Defensible Space Inspector" course plan, established by the State Fire Marshal, to ensure that individuals are trained to conduct home ignition zone inspections. (Held at Senate Desk).

AB 888 (Calderon), Chapter 536, Statutes of 2025. Established the California Safe Homes grant program to be developed by CDI to reduce local and statewide wildfire losses by encouraging mitigation.

SB 429 (Cortese) Chapter 541, Statutes of 2025. Establishes the California Wildfire Public Model Act, allowing CDI to issue grants for establishing the nation's first publicly available wildfire loss catastrophe model.

SB 514 (Cabaldon), Chapter 767, Statutes of 2025. Extended the operative date of Cal FIRE's program for individuals to support and augment the department in its defensible and home hardening assessment and public education efforts.

AB 1 (Connolly), Chapter 472, Statutes of 2025. Requires the Department of Insurance to consider whether to update its regulations to include additional building hardening measures for property-level mitigation efforts and communitywide wildfire mitigation programs.

SB 616 (Rubio, 2025) would have established the Community Hardening Commission as an independent unit within the Department of Insurance and require the Insurance Commissioner, beginning January 1, 2026, and at least quarterly thereafter, to convene the commission to perform specified duties, including developing new wildfire community hardening standards to reduce fire risk and improve access to fire insurance. (Vetoed)

AB 38 (Wood), Chapter 391, Statutes of 2019. Requires OES to enter into a joint powers agreement with CAL FIRE to develop and administer a comprehensive Wildfire Mitigation Program to provide financial assistance to create fire-resistant homes, businesses, and public buildings and facilitate vegetation management.

SB 504 (Dodd), Chapter 982, Statutes of 2024. Revises the Fire Prevention Grants Program to make public education/outreach, defensible space compliance, and prescribed grazing eligible for funding.

SB 675 (Limon), Chapter 772, Statutes of 2024. Authorizes grant funding for prescribed grazing projects under the Fire Prevention Grants Program administered by CalFire.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

Consumer Watchdog
Fire Aside, INC
Matador Fire
Orange County Fire Authority (OCFA)
ROCKWOOL North America

Opposition

None on file.

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