

Date of Hearing: July 29, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Rhodesia Ransom, Chair

SB 973 (Becker) – As Amended June 9, 2026

SENATE VOTE: 37-0

SUBJECT: Wildfire County Coordinator Program

SUMMARY: Codifies the Wildfire County Coordinator Program and requires the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CALFIRE) to take actions to address wildfire risk and resilience, as specified. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Defines California Fire Safe Council (CFSC) as a non-profit entity that supports communities across the state in wildfire preparedness and resiliency through grant funding, programmatic support, and technical assistance.
- 2) Requires CAL FIRE to do all of the following:
 - a. Establish recommended guidance for the use of available wildfire risk modeling and analysis tools by organizations, including, but not limited to, fire departments, local department units, local fire safe councils, resource conservation districts, tribal entities, counties, cities, special districts, communities, and mitigation practitioners, that seek to support the work of the Wildfire County Coordinator Program, in consultation with the Risk Modeling Advisory Workgroup within the department. Prohibits this guidance from applying to or affecting the regulation, or use of catastrophe or wildfire risk models used by insurers for ratemaking filings under Insurance Code Section 1861.05.
 - b. Develop guidance and tools to support county-level wildfire risk assessments, the identification of high-risk communities, prioritization of mitigation activities, and evaluation of quantifiable risk reduction outcomes.
 - c. Support the development, updating, or procurement of county-level wildfire risk assessments.
 - d. Maintain oversight authority for program implementation, performance, and alignment with community wildfire protection plans and the department's unit fire plans, and ensure, to the extent feasible, that the activities conducted align with those relevant plans and existing applicable state and local fire agency standards in order to avoid duplicative planning and reporting requirements, reduce administrative burden, and improve coordination.
 - e. In coordination with the Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation, develop guidance and templates for the creation or revision of county-level wildfire resilience prioritization and implementation plans, along with accompanying guidance for integrating these plans with county and local Community Wildfire Protection Plans, regional resilience plans, and related wildfire resilience programs.

- 3) Requires CALFIRE to establish the Wildfire County Coordinator Program and enter into an agreement with the CFSC to administer and deliver the program.
- 4) Establishes the purpose of the Wildfire County Coordinator Program is to support county-level coordination of and capacity for wildfire mitigation, prevention, preparedness, and recovery activities, including, but not limited to, evacuation and resilience planning, data collection, public education and outreach, smoke mitigation, home hardening, defensible space, fuels reduction, and community-scale mitigation.
- 5) Requires the Wildfire County Coordinator Program to do all of the following:
 - a. Establish capacity in participating counties to plan and execute community- and county-level wildfire prevention, preparedness, mitigation, and recovery activities in support of the Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan.
 - b. Support the use of the risk assessment tools and guidance developed by CALFIRE per this bill to enhance county-level risk assessment, wildfire planning, and project prioritization, including the integration with community wildfire protection plans.
 - c. Facilitate local coordination on priority wildfire resilience planning and implementation with federal, local, and regional wildfire resilience partners, as specified.
 - d. Develop and disseminate educational materials and programming on wildfire and smoke mitigation and preparedness, including targeted outreach to high-risk communities and populations.
 - e. Provide information on available local, state, and federal financial resources to support wildfire resilience planning and implementation.
 - f. Support local capacity to access and implement state or federal wildfire resilience funding programs.
 - g. Support the planning and implementation of home hardening, defensible space, and related mitigation activities, through activities such as the following:
 - i. Implementing cost-reduction strategies, standardized implementation practices, contractor or workforce development, and data collection to evaluate program effectiveness.
 - ii. Implementing strategies to lower the cost of home hardening and defensible space, including bulk-purchasing agreements, shared procurement, and other logistical efficiencies.
 - iii. Establishing clear guidelines, standardized scopes of work, and cost estimates for common retrofits.
 - iv. Identifying, training, and creating a centralized list of wildfire mitigation practitioners.

- h. Coordinate with the California Wildfire Mitigation Program Joint Powers Authority to improve access to and streamline financial assistance for home hardening and defensible space in high-risk communities.
- i. Support activities to increase community resilience to smoke, including, but not limited to, increasing community access to indoor clean air spaces, distribution of high efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters, educational initiatives, and improved communication of planned prescribed burns. Authorizes County coordinators to disseminate the latest information from air districts, public health departments, and other partners to support outreach and education efforts.
- j. Collect data on local mitigation and preparedness activities, including costs and quantifiable risk reduction outcomes.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Establishes within the Office of the State Fire Marshal (OSFM) a Deputy Director Community Wildfire Preparedness and Mitigation to be responsible for fire preparedness and mitigation missions of the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE). (Public Resources Code (PRC) 4209)
- 2) Requires the OSFM to establish the Wildfire Mitigation Advisory Committee to provide a public forum to solicit and consider public input on programs and activities and to advise the Deputy Director in developing and implementing programs and activities. (PRC 4209.4)
- 3) Defines the California Wildfire Mitigation Program Joint Powers Authority (WMP JPA) as the agency or entity designated or created pursuant to a joint powers agreement between the Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) and CAL FIRE to develop and administer a comprehensive wildfire mitigation program. (Government Code 8654.2, 8654.4)
- 4) Establishes, pursuant to Executive Order No. B-52-18, a Forest Management Task Force, now known as the Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task Force (Task Force), involving specified state agencies to create the action plan for wildfire and forest resilience. (PRC 4005)
- 5) Requires the Task Force to develop a Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan (Action Plan) as a strategy to integrate recommendations from existing state and federal plans that tackle various aspects of the state's forest health and wildfire crisis. (PRC 4771)
- 6) Defines "Community Wildfire Protection Plan" as a plan for an at-risk community that (a) is developed within the context of the collaborative agreements and the guidance established by the Wildland Fire Leadership Council and agreed to by the applicable local government, local fire department, and state agency responsible for forest management, in consultation with interested parties and the federal land management agencies managing land in the vicinity of the at-risk community; (b) identifies and prioritizes areas for hazardous fuel reduction treatments and recommends the types and methods of treatment on federal and non-federal land that will protect one or more at-risk communities and essential infrastructure; and, (c) recommends measures to reduce structural ignitability throughout the at-risk community. (16 United States Code 6511(3))

FISCAL EFFECT: According to the Senate Appropriations Committee:

- LCI estimates one-time costs of \$870,000 spread over two years for two limited-term positions to develop the wildfire resilience guidance, templates, and implementation guidance as required by the bill.
- Unknown, but potentially significant ongoing costs (General Fund) for CAL FIRE to implement the provisions of this bill.
- Unknown, but potentially significant ongoing cost pressures (General Fund and other funds) to continue providing funding for home hardening certification and the County Coordinator Program after 2027.

COMMENTS:

Author Statement: “SB 973 establishes a statewide framework to strengthen community wildfire resilience by directing CAL FIRE to develop standardized wildfire risk assessment guidance and tools. This bill establishes in statute the Wildfire County Coordinator Program, which the CFSC has been successfully delivering in partnership with CAL FIRE since 2021 to increase county-level coordination of wildfire prevention, preparedness, mitigation, and recovery activities, by supporting a County Coordinator position for each participating county. This bill expands the program to provide more tools and resources to the Coordinators and establishes a pathway to scale home hardening and defensible space activities through the program.”

California Fire Safe Council: The CFSC was originally housed within CALFIRE as a project designed to address the challenges associated with California’s ever-growing wildfires. CFSC ultimately became a nonprofit organization, no longer under the direction of CALFIRE, where they focus on directing funds to community-based organizations that further wildfire resiliency. CFSC helps over 300 local fire safe councils and communities throughout the state through grant funding efforts, programmatic support, education, and technical assistance. According to CFSC, they have distributed more than \$140 million in grant funding to more than 1,200 different projects.

Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task Force (Task Force): Established in 2018 by Governor Newsom the Task Force (previously named the Forest Management Task Force), was established to develop a framework for establishing healthy and resilient forests that can withstand and adapt to wildfire, drought and a changing climate. It grew out of the state’s Tree Mortality Task Force, which was established in 2015 by Governor Brown in response to the massive die-off of trees across the state due to an extreme drought. This Task Force is tasked with introducing a more holistic, integrated approach toward effective forest management. This is achieved by collaborative efforts to align the activities of federal, state, local, public, private and tribal organizations in order to support programs and projects tailored to the unique priorities and risks of each region.

California’s Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan (Action Plan): In January of 2021, the Task Force issued recommendations in the Action Plan. According to the Task Force, “California is facing a growing forest and wildfire crisis. Decades of fire suppression, coupled with the increasing impacts of climate change, have dramatically increased wildfires’ size and

intensity throughout the state. The 2020 fire season broke numerous records. Five of California's six largest fires in modern history burned at the same time, destroying thousands of buildings, forcing hundreds of thousands of people to flee their homes, and exposing millions of residents to dangerously unhealthy air. More than 4 million acres burned across the state, double the previous record."

The Action Plan included the following goals:

1. Increase the Pace and Scale of Forest Health Projects
2. Strengthen Protection of Communities
3. Manage Forests to Achieve the State's Economic and Environmental Goals
4. Drive Innovation and Measure Progress

As part of the first goal to enhance forest health, the Action Plan committed to significantly expanding the use of prescribed fire across the state and stated Cal FIRE would expand its fuels reduction and prescribed fire programs to treat up to 100,000 acres by 2025, and the California Department of Parks and Recreation (State Parks) and other state agencies will also increase the use of prescribed fire on high-risk state lands.

Wildfire County Coordinator Program: Established in 2021, the Wildfire County Coordinator Program was launched following the release of the Action Plan in order to apply this plan to the county level. CFSC and CALFIRE act as partners in this program, which seeks to educate, encourage, and develop countywide community collaboration and coordination among wildfire mitigation groups. This program provided funding to 52 of California's 58 counties to hire a Wildfire County Coordinator and establish critical local capacity to plan and implement wildfire resilience strategies on the ground.

The Wildfire County Coordinators are the local resource to secure funding, implement mitigation projects, engage vulnerable populations, and build resilience in high-risk communities. As of September 2025, county coordinators have secured more than \$104 million for local mitigation and preparedness projects; coordinated with over 10,000 organizations, provided educational opportunities to over 970,000 participants, established over 100 new FireWise Communities and Fire Safe Councils, and hosted over 4,100 related community events.

The 2025-2026 Budget Act of 2025 provided for a community hardening program at CAL FIRE that includes home hardening certification and a Wildfire County Coordinator Program, authorizing \$12.5 million dollars for it through 2027, and required the county coordinators to prioritize home hardening, defensible space, planning, and education for community-level wildfire mitigation efforts. Additionally, the program receives funds through the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund.

Enhancing California's Resiliency to Natural Catastrophes: Senate Bill 254 (2025) Study Report: SB 254 (Becker-2025) required CEA, the administer of the Wildfire fund to complete a report that evaluates and sets forth recommendations on new models or approaches that mitigate damage, accelerate recovery, and responsibly and equitably allocate the burdens from natural catastrophes, across stakeholders, to complement or replace the fund. Within this report, CEA advocates for supporting community mitigation planning and implementation through programs like the Wildfire County Coordinator Program in order to help achieve a community-wide wildfire mitigation strategy.

Related Legislation:

SB 899 (Grove, 2026) would require the Action Plan consider smoke impacts on public health, and quantify the benefits to public health of various wildfire mitigation activities. (Assembly Appropriations)

SB 1404 (Stern, 2026) would require the statewide framework supporting local and regional community fire risk reduction and adaptation programs and projects include quantified risk-based planning and outcomes-based performance metrics. (Held in Senate Appropriations)

SB 1162 (Alvarado-Gil, 2026) would require the Department to identify ways to prioritize state efforts identified in the Action Plan to reduce wildfire hazards in those ZIP codes that have seen the largest increase in FAIR Plan policies. (Held in Senate Appropriations)

SB 101 (Weiner, Budget Act of 2025, Chapter 4, Statutes of 2025) authorized 12.5 million dollars towards a community home hardening program that includes home hardening certification and a wildfire county coordinator program.

Arguments in Support: According to CFSC, Megafire Action, and others: “Through their County Coordinators, counties can effectively translate statewide wildfire resilience goals into coordinated, on-the-ground action aligned with regional landscape resilience efforts. By placing this program into statute, SB 973 ensures stability, accountability, and long-term impact—while requiring no new appropriation to support this program this year beyond existing funding.

The bill also strengthens the effectiveness and consistency of mitigation investments by directing CAL FIRE to develop standardized wildfire risk assessment guidance and planning tools to support the work of the Wildfire County Coordinators and other similar efforts. This approach helps ensure limited public resources are targeted to the highest-risk areas and most impactful projects, while preserving flexibility for locally informed decision-making. By advancing proactive, science-informed planning and locally delivered implementation, SB 973 helps reduce the scale and severity of catastrophic wildfires—protecting natural resources, watersheds, wildlife habitat, and working lands while avoiding higher long-term costs associated with emergency response, ecosystem damage, and post-fire recovery.”

Double Referral: This bill was first referred to the Assembly Natural Resources Committee, where it passed with a 14-0-0 vote.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**Support**

40 Acres Fire Safe Council
Alpine Viejas Fire Safe Council
American Property Casualty Insurance Association
Butte County Fire Safe Council
California Building Industry Association
California Forward
California State Association of Counties
CDP Rural Caucus
Colusa County Resource Conservation District

Community Wildfire Planning Center
County of Kern
County of Monterey
CWMPA
Del Mar Mesa Fire Safe Council
Del Norte Fire Safe Council
Diablo Firesafe Council Executive Committee
Elevate California
Escondido Fire Safe Council
Eucalyptus Hills Landowner's Association
Fire Safe Council of San Diego County
Fire Safe Council of Siskiyou County
Fire Safe Marin
Fire Safe Sonoma
Firegeneration Collaborative
Firewerx
IBHS - Insurance Institute for Business & Home Safety
Insurance Commissioner Ricardo Lara / California Department of Insurance
Irvine Ranch Conservancy
Kern Fire Safe Council
Lassen Fire Safe Council
Mariposa Fire Safe Council
Mattole Restoration Council
Mendocino County Fire Safe Council
Mercury Insurance
Michael J. Gollner, Ph.d.
Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District
Modoc Fire Safe Council
Monterey; County of
National Association of Mutual Insurance Companies
Neighborhood Partnership Housing Services INC
Net-zero California
Nevada County Board of Supervisors
Ojai Valley Fire Safe Council
Pacific Association of Domestic Insurance Companies
Pacific Forest Trust
Pacific Gas and Electric Company
Palomar Mountain Fire Safe Council
Personal Insurance Federation of California
Resource Conservation District of Tehama County
Rural County Representatives of California
Sacramento County Board of Supervisors
Safe Community Project
San Bernardino County
San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors
Santa Barbara County Fire Safe Council
Santa Clara County Firesafe Council
Shasta County Fire Safe Council
Sierra Business Council

Southern Humboldt Fire Safe Council
The Nature Conservancy
Trinity County Resource Conservation District
University City Fire Safe Council
USGBC California
Ventura Regional Fire Safe Council
Via Crest Fire Safe Council of San Diego County
Yolo County Resource Conservation District

Opposition

None on file.

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