

Date of Hearing: June 30, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Rhodesia Ransom, Chair

SB 326 (Becker) – As Amended June 23, 2025

SENATE VOTE: 39-0

SUBJECT: Wildfire safety: The California Wildfire Mitigation Strategic Planning Act

SUMMARY: Requires the Deputy Director of Community Wildfire Preparedness and Mitigation within the Office of the State Fire Marshal (OSFM), in consultation with the State Hazard Mitigation Officer, to prepare a Wildfire Risk Mitigation Planning Framework, a Wildfire Risk Baseline and Forecast, and a Wildfire Mitigation Scenarios Report, as specified. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Makes legislative findings and declarations regarding, among other things: catastrophic wildfire losses; increase of wildfire risk driven by climate change; the threat of more frequent, larger, high severity wildfires; detrimental impact of wildfire smoke; the need for utilities, land managers, state and federal entities to invest in wildfire resilience, and the need for greater collaboration for entities that manage wildfire risk to meet the complex challenges of the wildfire crisis.
- 2) Requires the Deputy Director, in consultation with the State Hazard Mitigation Officer, on or before January 1, 2027, and every three years thereafter, to prepare a Framework sufficient to quantitatively evaluate wildfire risk mitigation actions as determined by the Deputy Director, as specified.
- 3) Requires the Framework to allow for geospatial evaluation and comparison of wildfire risk mitigation actions sufficient to direct coordinated mitigation efforts and long-term collaborative mitigation planning.
- 4) Provides that the Framework may incorporate, for each wildfire mitigation action, including near-term and long-term estimates and projections, as determined to be appropriate by the Deputy Director, all of the following:
 - a. The entity or entities responsible for the wildfire risk mitigation action.
 - b. Risk events and consequences targeted, including cost and other appropriate metrics of unmitigated damages.
 - c. Cost of the wildfire risk mitigation action.
 - d. Methodologies for evaluating and estimates of risk to spend efficiency of the wildfire risk mitigation action.
 - e. Geographic areas to which the wildfire risk mitigation action applies.
 - f. Interactions, co-benefits, and joint impacts with other wildfire risk mitigation activities.
 - g. Interactions and joint impacts with climate change, drought, past wildfires, and other environmental factors and metrics, as appropriate.
 - h. Effects on stakeholders and other affected parties.
 - i. Personnel requirements to effectuate the wildfire risk mitigation action.
 - j. Other factors as determined to be appropriate by the Deputy Director.

- 5) Requires the Deputy Director to make the Framework available as a planning tool for all entities included in the Report required by this bill, as specified.
- 6) Requires the Deputy Director, in consultation with the State Hazard Mitigation Officer, on or before April 1, 2027, and every three years thereafter, to prepare the Forecast for the State of California, in coordination with the wildfire mitigation and local hazard mitigation plans, delineated on a statewide level and by county, and to include geographic specificity as determined by the Deputy Director to be sufficient to evaluate targeted wildfire risk mitigation actions.
- 7) Requires the Forecast to accomplish all of the following:
 - a. Contain, at a minimum, estimates of current ignition risk and an evaluation of the consequences of potential ignitions to human life and safety, structures and critical infrastructure, cultural and historic resources, public health, ecosystems and ecosystem services, and any other material consequences as determined by the Deputy Director.
 - b. Establish key risk metrics for wildfire risk for the state as a whole, by county, and by geographic location.
 - c. Establish reasonable levels of unmitigated planned risk for the state to assume and manage through fire suppression.
 - d. Include an estimated wildfire risk and consequence, in one-year, three-year, and 10-year projections, assuming implementation and extension of current wildfire risk mitigation actions.
 - e. Include targets for wildfire risk reduction for the State of California in one, three, and 10 years.
 - f. Beginning January 1, 2030, evaluate current wildfire risk relative to targets established, as specified.
- 8) Provides that the Framework may take into account the contribution to wildfire risk and consequence created by all of the following factors:
 - a. Weather.
 - b. Fuel type and fuel loading.
 - c. Historic fire regimes and changing fire patterns.
 - d. Climate change.
 - e. Human population and population density.
 - f. Development patterns.
 - g. Electric infrastructure.
 - h. Other factors as determined to be relevant by the Deputy Director.
- 9) Requires the Deputy Director to provide recommendations in the report on how to achieve better coordination, risk to spend efficiency, and overall cost-effectiveness, in specific regions and statewide, between utility-related wildfire mitigation investments made pursuant to a wildfire mitigation plan and nonutility wildfire mitigation investments.

- 10) Requires the Deputy Director, each year the Framework and Forecast are completed, to submit a copy of each to the Legislature, OEIS, and the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) for review and consideration, as specified.
- 11) Requires the Deputy Director, on or before August 1, 2027, and updated annually, to prepare the Report, which shall contain all of the following information:
 - a. Identification of a reasonable range of possible scenarios for overall wildfire risk mitigation spending over the next one-year and three-year periods.
 - b. Planned and likely statewide wildfire risk mitigation actions of: state agencies; federal agencies; electric utilities; municipalities and local governments; nongovernmental organizations and private actors seeking state funding; and other stakeholders as determined appropriate by the Deputy Director.
 - c. Quantification of the overall risk reduction achieved via implementation of all planned and potential wildfire risk mitigation actions relative to the baseline level of unmitigated risk contained in the most recent Forecast.
 - d. Quantification of the risk-spend efficiency of all planned wildfire risk mitigation actions using the Framework.
 - e. Using the Framework, identification and description, in detail, of one or more cost-effective statewide wildfire risk reduction strategies that are approximately equal in cost to planned spending by all entities identified in the Report and that achieve maximum estimated reduction in overall wildfire risk and consequences for the State of California.
 - f. Recommendations on how to achieve better coordination, risk to spend efficiency, and overall cost-effectiveness, in specific regions and statewide, between utility-related wildfire mitigation investments made pursuant to a wildfire mitigation plan and nonutility wildfire mitigation investments.
- 12) Requires the Deputy Director, each year upon its completion, to submit a copy of the Report to the Legislature and the CPUC for review and consideration, as specified.
- 13) Requires the Deputy Director, to the maximum extent practicable, to make available to the public on its internet website the factual and analytical bases for the Forecast, Framework, and Report.
- 14) Authorizes the Deputy Director to contract with a private consultant or a public university with special expertise in the quantitative assessment of wildfire risk and risk mitigation to conduct quantitative wildfire and community risk modeling and for preparation of reports in order to accomplish the purposes of this bill.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Establishes the OSFM, within the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Cal FIRE), and establishes the Deputy Director of Community Wildfire Preparedness and Mitigation (Deputy Director) within the OSFM, as specified.
- 2) Makes the Deputy Director responsible for fire preparedness and mitigation missions of Cal FIRE, as specified.

- 3) Requires electrical corporations to annually prepare and submit a wildfire mitigation plan to the Wildfire Safety Division, within the Office of Energy Infrastructure Safety (OEIS) for review and approval, as specified.
- 4) Provides that any report required or requested by law be submitted by a state or local agency to a committee of the Legislature or the Members of either house of the Legislature generally, to instead be submitted as a printed copy to the Secretary of the Senate, as an electronic copy to the Chief Clerk of the Assembly, and as an electronic or printed copy to the Legislative Counsel, as specified.
- 5) Under the California Emergency Services Act, establishes the California Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) within the office of the Governor for the purpose of mitigating the effects of natural, manmade, or war-caused emergencies.
- 6) Requires the Office of Emergency Services to enter into a joint powers agreement with the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, until July 1, 2025, 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.
- 7) 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.
- 8) Establishes, under Section 404 of the Stafford Act, the HMPG, which is administered by FEMA and provides grants to States and local governments to implement long-term hazard mitigation measures after a major disaster declaration.
- 9) Establishes the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program to finance up to 75% of the cost of hazard mitigation measures determined to be cost effective and that substantially reduce the risk of, or increase resilience to, future damage, hardship, loss, or suffering in any area affected by a major disaster, or any area affected by a fire for which assistance was provided under specified federal law.

FISCAL EFFECT: According to the Senate Committee on Appropriations, “The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) reports costs of approximately \$108 million in year one, \$113 million in year two, and \$99 million in year three and ongoing to meet the mandates of this bill (General Fund). This estimate includes costs for approximately 440 new positions, of which CAL FIRE notes 292 would be permanent.”

COMMENTS:

Purpose of the bill: According to the author, “Preventing catastrophic wildfire requires strong coordination between all of our investments, Building on current efforts, this bill would create a planning structure to maximize the effectiveness of California's work to reduce the impacts of wildfire. As California spends more to prevent catastrophic wildfire, we should also make sure that these investments go as far as possible in keeping residents safe. This bill creates a planning structure that does just that and ensures that all our efforts are well coordinated.”

Equity impact: According to the author's staff, "There are no known equity impacts resulting from enactment of SB 326."

Community Wildfire Preparedness and Mitigation. The OSFM's Community Wildfire Preparedness and Mitigation Division collaborates with federal, state, and local agencies, tribes, non-profit entities, and stakeholders to prepare California communities against wildfires. Cal FIRE develops strategies, conducts hazard inspections, and provides education and grants for wildfire prevention efforts, fostering prepared and resilient communities. Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs) are collaboratively developed plans that focus on reducing wildfire risk to identified values. The California CWPP Toolkit provides guidance and resources for CWPP development and implementation.

California's Wildfire Forecast & Threat Intelligence Integration Center (WFTIIC). The WFTIIC serves as the state's integrated central organizing hub for wildfire forecasting, weather information, threat intelligence gathering, analysis, and dissemination. Established by SB 209 (Dodd, 405, Statutes of 2019), the WFTIIC also coordinates wildfire threat intelligence and data sharing among federal, state, local agencies, tribal governments, utilities, other service providers, academic institutions, and nongovernmental organizations. WFTIIC's website includes real-time data on active weather watches and incidents, forecasts, and threat indices. The WFTIIC's mission is to prevent

Wildfire Risk Mitigation Planning Framework. This bill requires the Deputy Director, in consultation with the State Hazard Mitigation Officer, or before January 1, 2027 (and every three years thereafter), to prepare the Framework. The Framework serves as the strategic tool for quantitatively evaluating various wildfire mitigation actions and is designed to facilitate geospatial analysis of mitigation efforts. It will detail critical elements such as the responsible entities, cost estimates, risk reduction efficiencies, and potential interactions with environmental and climate factors, thereby guiding coordinated efforts among multiple stakeholders. The Framework is intended to support long-term planning and effective allocation of resources in wildfire risk reduction.

Wildfire Risk Baseline and Forecast. On or before April 1, 2027 (and every three years thereafter), this bill requires the Deputy Director, in consultation with the State hazard Mitigation Officer, to prepare the Forecast for the State of California to provide a detailed, quantitative assessment of current wildfire risks and future projections across the state. The Forecast will delineate wildfire risks on both a statewide and county level, incorporating geographic specificity to assess potential impacts. It will include estimates of current ignition risks, evaluate potential consequences to life, property, and ecosystems, and establish key risk metrics with projections over one-year, three-year, and ten-year periods, serving as a benchmark for targeted mitigation strategies.

Wildfire Mitigation Scenarios Report. By August 1, 2027 (and annually thereafter), this bill requires the Deputy Director, in consultation with State Hazard Mitigation Officer, to prepare the Report focused on providing a comprehensive overview of potential future spending and strategic responses to mitigate wildfire risks. The Report will outline a range of scenarios for wildfire mitigation expenditures, detailing the planned actions by state agencies, utilities, local governments, and private actors. It will quantify the overall reduction in wildfire risk achieved through these actions and evaluate the cost-effectiveness of investments, offering

recommendations to enhance coordination and maximize risk-spend efficiency across diverse mitigation initiatives.

Finally, this bill authorizes the Deputy Director to contract with private consultants or a public university with special expertise in the quantitative assessment of wildfire risk and risk mitigation to conduct quantitative wildfire and community risk modeling.

Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP): FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program provides funding to state, local, tribal and territorial governments so they can develop hazard mitigation plans and rebuild in a way that reduces, or mitigates, future disaster losses in their communities. This grant funding is available after a presidentially declared disaster. In this program, homeowners and businesses cannot apply for a grant. However, a local community may apply for funding on their behalf. All state, local, tribal and territorial governments must develop and adopt hazard mitigation plans to receive funding for hazard mitigation project application.

Eligible Risk Reduction Projects under the HMGP: Hazard mitigation includes long-term efforts to reduce risk and the potential impact of future disasters. HMGP assists communities in rebuilding in a better, stronger, and safer way in order to become more resilient overall. The grant program can fund a wide variety of mitigation projects. These can include:

- 1) **Planning & Enforcement**: Developing and adopting hazard mitigation plans, which are required for state, local, tribal and territorial governments to receive funding for their hazard mitigation projects. Acquisition of hazard prone homes and businesses which enable owners to relocate to safer areas (acquisition). Post-disaster code enforcement.
- 2) **Flood Protection**: Protecting homes and businesses with permanent barriers to prevent floodwater from entering (levees, floodwalls, floodproofing). Elevating structures above known flood levels to prevent and reduce losses (elevation). Reconstructing a damaged dwelling on an elevated foundation to prevent and reduce future flood losses. Drainage improvement projects to reduce flooding (flood risk reduction projects).
- 3) **Retrofitting**: Structural retrofits to make a building more resistant to floods, earthquakes, wind, wildfire and other natural hazards. Retrofits to utilities and other infrastructure to enhance resistance to natural hazards (utility retrofits).
- 4) **Construction**: Construction of safe rooms for both communities and individual residences in areas prone to hurricane and tornado activity. Slope stabilization projects to prevent and reduce losses to structures.

California's State Hazard Mitigation Plan: The California (CA) State Hazard Mitigation Plan (SHMP) represents the state's primary hazard mitigation guidance document - providing an updated analysis of the state's historical and current hazards, hazard mitigation goals and objectives, and hazard mitigation strategies and actions. The plan represents the state's overall commitment to supporting a comprehensive mitigation strategy to reduce or eliminate potential risks and impacts of disasters in order to promote faster recovery after disasters and, overall, a more resilient state.

Significance of the State Hazard Mitigation Plan (SHMP): The SHMP sets the mitigation priorities, strategies, and actions for the state. The plan also describes how risk assessment and mitigation strategy information is coordinated and linked from local mitigation plans into the

SHMP, and provides a resource for local planners of risk information that may affect their planning area. States are required to review and revise their SHMP and resubmit it for FEMA approval at least every five years to ensure the continued eligibility of Stafford Act funding. This includes eligibility for FEMA's hazard mitigation assistance programs: Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP), Pre-Disaster Mitigation (PDM), and Flood Mitigation Assistance (FMA). This also includes eligibility for the Fire Management Assistance Grant (FMAG) Program and Public Assistance (PA) grants (Categories C-G). Additionally, with an approved and adopted SHMP, the state remains eligible for the reduced cost share for grants awarded under the Flood Mitigation Assistance grant programs.

Local Hazard Mitigation Planning: Because of the history of disasters throughout California, encouraging communities to adopt Local Hazard Mitigation Plans (LHMPs) is a priority. The Federal Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000 (DMA 2000) requires that states review LHMPs as part of their state hazard mitigation planning process. The intent is three-fold:

- 1) To gather hazard, vulnerability, and mitigation information from the local level for use in state-level planning
- 2) To ensure that state and local hazard mitigation planning is coordinated to the greatest extent practical
- 3) To ensure that local jurisdictions are made aware of the hazards and vulnerabilities within their jurisdiction and to develop strategies to reduce those vulnerabilities

This process ensures that mitigation actions are based on sound planning processes that account for the risks and capabilities of California communities. Mitigation plans form the foundation for a community's long term strategy to reduce disaster losses and break the cycle of disaster damage, reconstruction, and repeated damage.

Double referral: This bill was referred to this committee and the Assembly Committee on Natural Resources.

Arguments in support: The California League of Cities write, "California has the highest wildfire risk in the US. In recent years, the state has experienced a growing number of highly destructive wildfires due to climate change and over a century of logging and fire suppression. The devastating impacts of these wildfires has unfortunately resulted in the destruction of over 57,000 structures in the last decade. SB 326 would require the OSFM to provide a wildfire risk baseline and mitigation framework which will provide important planning tools so that the local governments and individuals would have the most up to date information regarding wildfire risk and mitigation tools. This bill would require the OSFM to provide a comprehensive report on wildfire risk and the mitigations necessary to protect Californians' homes and communities which will allow cities to plan and mitigate against potential risks."

The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors write, "On behalf of the County of Los Angeles, I am pleased to express support for SB 326, which aims to create a comprehensive framework for managing wildfire risks and planning wildfire mitigation investments. SB 326 would mandate the preparation of a Wildfire Risk Mitigation Planning Framework, a Wildfire Risk Baseline and Forecast, and a recurring Wildfire Mitigation Scenarios Report. The Los Angeles County Fire Department (LACoFD) reports that SB 326 aligns with the County's wildfire prevention

initiatives, promoting a coordinated approach to risk mitigation. For these reasons, the County of Los Angeles strongly supports SB 326 and respectfully urges its passage.”

Related legislation: SB 616 (Rubio, 2025) would create an independent Community Hardening Commission within the Department of Insurance, with the goals of developing a unified and centralized fire mitigation standard and creating a wildfire data-sharing platform. (Pending in the Assembly Emergency Management Committee on June 30, 2025)

SB 429 (Cortese, 2025) would establish the Wildfire Safety and Risk Mitigation Program to fund the development, demonstration, and deployment of a public wildfire catastrophe model, as defined, among other provisions. (Set to be heard by the Assembly Insurance Committee on July 9, 2025)

Prior legislation: SB 901 (Dodd, Chapter 626, Statutes of 2018) addresses numerous issues concerning wildfire prevention, response, and recovery, including funding for mutual aid, fuel reduction and forestry policies, wildfire mitigation plans by electric utilities, and cost recovery by electric corporations of wildfire-related damages.

SB 209 (Dodd, Chapter 405, Statutes of 2019) required the Office of Emergency Services (OES) and CAL FIRE to jointly establish and lead the Wildfire Forecast and Threat Intelligence Integration Center, to serve as the state’s integrated central organizing hub for wildfire forecasting, weather information, threat intelligence gathering, analysis, and dissemination.

AB 38 (Wood, Chapter 391, Statutes of 2019) requires OES to enter into a joint powers agreement with CAL FIRE to administer a comprehensive wildfire mitigation program to encourage cost-effective structure hardening and facilitate vegetation management.

AB 9 (Wood, Chapter 225, Statutes of 2021) codified the Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program, created the deputy director of Community Wildfire Preparedness and Mitigation role within the OSFM.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

California Environmental Voters
County of Los Angeles Board of Supervisors
County of San Mateo
Independent Insurance Agents & Brokers of California, INC.
League of California Cities
Marin Clean Energy
Pacific Forest Trust
US Green Building Council
Vibrant Planet, a Public Benefit Corporation

Opposition

None on file.

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