

Date of Hearing: April 13, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Rhodesia Ransom, Chair

AB 2013 (Bennett) – As Amended April 6, 2026

**SUBJECT:** High and very high fire risk areas: community water systems: preparedness and resiliency

**SUMMARY:** Requires certain community water systems located in a high or very high fire hazard severity zone to include an annex to its disaster preparedness plans regarding the resiliency and preparedness of their water systems during a wildfire. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires a community water system that services more than 100 customers that are located in a high or very high fire hazard severity zone to include an annex to its disaster preparedness plans with information regarding system preparedness and resiliency during a wildfire, including any applicable emergency response plan required by the federal Safe Drinking Water Act, as specified.
- 2) Authorizes a community water system to develop the annex in coordination with any local office of emergency services and fire department with jurisdiction in the area served by the community water system.
- 3) Requires the annex be submitted to the county board of supervisors.
- 4) Requires the annex be reviewed at least once every three years, and updated as necessary, beginning January 1, 2028.
- 5) Requires updates be submitted to the county board of supervisors or a county agency or department designated by the county board of supervisors.
- 6) Requires the annex to include, but not be limited to, the following:
  - a. An assessment of the minimum water tank levels necessary to maintain average daily system capacity during a fire; the assessment is required to consider water quality standards and actions necessary to maintain water quality.
  - b. An assessment that identifies the minimum number of and type of water pumps that are necessary to maintain average daily capacity, including, but not limited to, the operation of fire hydrant systems at the rated capacity; the assessment is required to identify the number of water pumps servicing high or very high fire hazard severity zone that have emergency backup energy sources, and those servicing the same zones without emergency backup energy sources, as specified.
  - c. An assessment of system resiliency in the event of a loss of power, including, but not limited to, an accounting of backup energy generation, alternative water sources, or any other method that maintains average daily capacity.
  - d. An assessment of the fire risk status and fire hardening measures for each water pump, any backup electrical generation equipment, applicable pipelines, and any

other infrastructure elements that the community water system deems to be a critical point of failure, as specified.

- e. Provides that the annex requirements does not change the confidentiality level for any information provided in the assessment of the minimum water tank levels necessary to maintain average daily system capacity during a fire, as specified.
- f. Provides that no information provided in the annex shall enlarge or diminish any existing liability, nor demonstrate, on its own, a substantial cause of any damages resulting from a wildfire.
- g. Requires a community water system that is already required to prepare and submit an emergency response plan to the Public Utilities Commission to also include the annex required by this bill.

#### **EXISTING LAW:**

- 1) Requires, commencing July 1, 2030, a Ventura County water supplier, as specified, to have access to sufficient backup energy sources to operate critical fire suppression infrastructure needed to supply water for at least 24 hours for fire suppression in high or very high fire hazard severity zones (HFHSZ or VHFHSZ) in Ventura County, as specified, or have access to alternative sources of water supplied by a different water supplier or agency, as specified. (Water Code § 7080)
- 2) Authorizes a Ventura County water supplier, in order to meet the above requirements, to use mobile backup energy sources or procure an energy source via an established mutual aid agreement provided the backup energy source can provide power within 12 hours of the National Weather Service alerting the region of a red flag warning and provide power for at least 24 hours after a loss of power and within 60 minutes of a loss of power. (Water Code § 7080)
- 3) Requires the water supplier to identify and provide to the Ventura County Office of Emergency Services (VC OES) no later than May 1, 2026, all critical fire suppression infrastructure or alternative sources of water. (Water Code § 7080)
- 4) Requires, by January 1, 2027, the Ventura County Fire Department (VCFD), in consultation with water suppliers and local fire departments, to develop minimum fire safety standards for the purpose of fire hardening critical fire suppression infrastructure and backup energy sources located in the HFHSZ or VHFHSZ. (Water Code § 7080)
- 5) Requires VCFD to annually inspect critical fire suppression infrastructure and backup energy sources in the HFHSZ or VHFHSZ to ensure critical fire suppression infrastructure and backup energy sources located in those zones meet the fire safety standards developed by VCFD, as specified, and requires the water supplier to annually inspect critical fire suppression infrastructure and backup energy sources serving those zones, but are not located within the zone, to ensure functionality. (Water Code § 7080)
- 6) Requires a water supplier to establish, in coordination with VC OES and VCFD, an emergency preparedness plan, as specified, for response to major power outages or emergencies that pose a potential threat to providing water service. (Water Code § 7080)

- 7) Requires a water supplier to initiate action under the emergency preparedness plan if the National Weather Service alerts the region of a red flag warning. (Water Code § 7080)
- 8) Requires a water supplier to notify VC OES within 3 business days, or as soon as it becomes aware, during a fire event, of any reduction in its water delivery capacity that could substantially hinder firefighting operations or significantly delay the replenishment of reservoirs. (Water Code § 7080)
- 9) Requires VCFD to present a report, as specified, to the Ventura County Board of Supervisors of any fire damages that made more than 10 residential dwellings within the service area of a water supplier uninhabitable. (Water Code § 7080)
- 10) Authorizes the Governor to proclaim a state of emergency and local officials and local governments to proclaim a local emergency, when specified conditions of disaster or extreme peril to the safety of persons and property exist, and authorizes the Governor or the appropriate local government to exercise certain powers in response to that emergency. (Government Code § 8558)
- 11) Establishes the Department of Water Resources (DWR) within the Natural Resources Agency and sets forth its powers and duties relating to water resources (Water Code § 120)
- 12) Requires the State Fire Marshal to classify lands within state responsibility areas into fire hazard severity zones and requires that local agencies also designate fire hazard severity zones in their jurisdiction after receiving recommendations from the State Fire Marshal. These classifications shall be based on fuel loading, slope, fire weather, and other relevant factors (Public Resource Code § 4202-4204, Government Code § 51178)
- 13) Directs a city or county, upon the next revision of the housing element of a general plan on or after January 1, 2014, to include a set of feasible implementation measures designed to carry out specified goals, policies, and objectives, including designing adequate infrastructure if a new development is located in a state responsibility area or in a very high fire hazard severity zone, including water supplies for structural fire suppression (Government Code § 65302).

**FISCAL EFFECT:** Unknown. A fiscal committee has not yet heard this bill.

**COMMENTS:**

Author Statement: “Water systems are not built to put out megafires, and it would be impossible to build out a system that could respond to every catastrophic fire. However, systems should be planning to maximize their existing resources to keep hydrants operable for as long as possible during a wildfire event. In an era of constant Public Safety Power Shutoffs water suppliers should be required to plan for what they will do when wildfire risks are extremely high and when water pumps lose power. In my district, a water pump was destroyed because it was housed in a wooden structure. Finally, firefighters, emergency planners and water district customers should know the extent that these common sense planning measures have been taken, AB 2013 gives fire districts and residents that transparency.”

Equity Statement: “California fires disproportionately put at risk vulnerable communities, especially given the lack of insurance coverage in many parts of the state. Of particular concern is when conflagrations destroy major parts of communities. Media coverage of the Southern California fires often focused attention at the destruction of Pacific Palisades however the Eaton Canyon fire razed a historically Black community, harming decades of built up generational wealth for many California residents. 61% of homes lost in Altadena were Black households. A University of California Los Angeles data brief highlighted the disproportionate impact that the Eaton Canyon fire had on Black residents. Of particular concern is that lack of insurance coverage and rising home prices, mean that unless these residents are able to rebuild and keep their homes, it is unlikely that their children will be able to inherit these properties, or otherwise keep this generational wealth – further exacerbating a growing income divide. Given the loss of structures in Altadena, it seems like moving towards a policy where home owners and communities take comprehensive measures to harden their homes could have reduce both the loss of lives and the loss of property.”

Background: Throughout California’s history the state has contended with destructive wildfires impacting communities that were constructed amongst or adjacent to timber and chaparral forests. These areas, commonly referred to as the “wildland urban interface,” have long been considered some of the most fire-prone areas in the state. In the last decade, unprecedented wildfires led to the deadliest wildfire in California’s history. The impacts of these wildfires cannot be understated, many lives were lost, thousands of homes were destroyed, and residents, in some cases entire communities, have been forced to relocate. Billions of dollars in damage was caused to homes, businesses, and infrastructure throughout the state.

In recent years, an increasing number of wildfires have burned outside of wildland areas and into more urban settings. While persons living in forested areas and those in the wildland urban interface, have long faced significant risks from wildfires, as a result of climate change, more Californians face wildfire risks than ever before.

Many of these areas have been classified by the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection as belonging to “very high fire hazard severity zones.” As a result of this designation, the properties within a very high fire hazard zone are subject to the strictest requirements from the building codes, “Fire Safe” regulations, and defensible space requirements. Properties not immediately in the wildland urban interface but subject to fire risks are now characterized as being in “high fire hazard severity zones.”

Wildfires across California have repeatedly exposed vulnerabilities in public water systems, especially in high and very high severity zones. During the 2025 Palisades Fire, extreme demand caused by firefighting overwhelmed the system, leaving some hydrants dry. In Ventura County’s 2024 Mountain Fire, power outages delayed pump operations and disrupted hillside water supply, echoing similar failures during the 2017 Thomas Fire and leaving high-elevation hydrants without water. Likewise, during the 2017 Tubbs Fire, firefighters in Santa Rosa’s Fountaingrove neighborhood lost access to water due to low pressure and had to travel long distances to refill, delaying response efforts. It is important to note that even when operating at their maximum efficiency, public water systems are currently not designed for catastrophic wildfires.

AB 367: Last session, Assemblymember Bennett authored AB 367 which, among other things, requires Ventura County water suppliers to: have backup power, or access to alternative water

sources, capable of supplying water for at least 24 hours for fire suppression in high or very high fire hazard severity zones; annually inspect critical fire suppression infrastructure and backup energy sources and notify significant water delivery reductions, as specified, to the County Office of Emergency Services. AB 367 was originated based on best practices stated by the deputy general manager at Calleguas Municipal Water District, a water supplier in Ventura County, to the Los Angeles Times: “It is best practices for water providers to top off their water tanks, stage backup generators and prepare crews for contingency work during a red flag event or possible fire weather.”

Wildfires: Wildfires are a severe and growing threat to lives, property, and infrastructure in California. The confluence of a changing climate, urbanization, and constraints on forest management increases the urgency to address this threat. According to data from CAL FIRE, 18 of California’s 20 most destructive fires have occurred in the past decade.<sup>1</sup> Collectively, these fires have resulted in 231 deaths and the loss of 66,810 structures (homes, outbuildings, and commercial properties). While fewer wildfires threatened California in 2023 due to the increased number of weather events and atmospheric rivers, the vegetative growth from the significant rainfall contributed to devastating wildfires in 2024 and 2025. In 2024, the Park Fire became the fourth-largest fire in California’s history. Despite aggressive initial attack suppression efforts, the fire rapidly expanded, ultimately consuming 429,603 acres across Butte and Tehama counties. The Park Fire led to the destruction of 713 structures and damage to 57 others, prompting widespread evacuations and the temporary closure of Lassen Volcanic National Park.<sup>2</sup>

In January 2025, Los Angeles County experienced the second and third most destructive fires in California history: the Palisades Fire and Eaton Fire. The University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) estimated the fires’ total property and capital losses could range between \$76 billion and \$131 billion, with insured losses estimated up to \$45 billion. At its height, the fires placed an estimated 331,335 people on an evacuation advisory, with nearly 192,000 residents facing mandatory evacuation and roughly 140,000 subject to warnings. The Eaton Fire resulted in 9,413 buildings being destroyed, 1,074 structures damaged, and 19 confirmed civilian fatalities. The Palisades Fire resulted in 6,833 structures destroyed, 973 structures damaged, and 12 confirmed civilian fatalities. The blazes burned a combined 37,728 acres and leveled entire communities in the Pacific Palisades and Altadena neighborhoods of LA County.

Public Water Access Overwhelmed in the Palisades Fire: In the early days of the 2025 catastrophic Palisades Fire, extreme winds made it impossible for aerial firefighting to continue, putting a significant strain on the public water system. According to Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, water use spiked to four times the normal level for over 15 hours, leaving some hydrants dry. While there was no overall water shortage, the sheer demand overwhelmed the system, preventing water tanks from refilling fast enough to maintain the pressure needed to reach higher-elevation areas in the Palisades.

Ventura County Water Access Issues: During the Mountain Fire in November 2024, some of Ventura County’s water providers experienced a significant delay in restoring operations after losing power. According to Calleguas Municipal Water District, the utility pump was without electricity for several hours and did not receive a generator until late that evening, resulting in

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<sup>1</sup> Statistics, CAL FIRE <https://www.fire.ca.gov/our-impact/statistics>

<sup>2</sup> Park Fire Incident <https://www.fire.ca.gov/incidents/2024/7/24/park-fire>

water supply challenges. The Mountain Fire also disrupted firefighting efforts in the Camarillo foothills, where two water pumps went offline during active fire suppression. This interruption delayed the refilling of hillside water tanks, which are critical for maintaining water pressure in high-elevation fire hydrants. This eventually led to the fire hydrants running dry. During the 2017 Thomas Fire, similar disruptions occurred when several water pumping stations lost power. In Ojai, the fire caused direct damage to the infrastructure, rendering the water system inoperable.

Tubbs Fire and Public Water Inaccessibility: During the initial hours of the 2017 Tubbs fire, the fire hydrants in the hilltop community of Fountaingrove in Santa Rosa repeatedly lost pressure. Firefighters were forced to travel to the valley of Santa Rosa, where water pressure was stronger, and then return to the hilltop to fight the fire.

UCLA Report Recommendations: In a 2021 briefing report titled *Wildfire & Water Supply in California*, the authors recommend investing in remote-operable water infrastructure and backup power systems—such as solar panels and battery storage—to help maintain water service during wildfires while reducing risk to utility personnel. They also highlight the importance of fire-resistant building materials and site design to protect critical water system assets in high-risk areas. However, they caution that widespread adoption of these innovations may be limited by cost, access to technology, and the expertise required to implement them—particularly for smaller water systems.

Small water suppliers and rural communities: Pursuant to AB 1668 (Friedman, Chapter 15, Statutes of 2018), the Department of Water Resources (DWR) issued the Small Water Systems and Rural Communities Drought and Water Shortage Contingency Planning and Risk Assessment in 2021. This report, released in two parts, identified small water systems and rural communities at risk of drought and water shortage vulnerability (Part II) and made recommendations for improving drought contingency planning for those areas (Part I).

DWR examined the relative risk of drought and water shortage for 2,419 small water suppliers in the report. The results show that a vast majority of the state's counties (47 of the 58 counties) have small water suppliers in the top 10% of risk scores (240 suppliers) for water shortage. Of those in the top 10%, over half (61% or 149 suppliers) are located in high or very high fire hazard severity zones. In other words, there are many small and rural communities across the state that are at high risk of running out of water during a drought or other disaster. Also, many communities located in areas with a high risk for wildfire are at high risk of water shortage, which could impact their capacity to suppress fires when they occur.

The report recommended that the state support small community water systems to install additional infrastructure to improve drought and water shortage preparedness and response. The report noted that most water systems under 1,000 connections have difficulty ensuring water supplies during natural disaster events, regardless of the development of planning materials, due to their inherent lack of economies of scale to finance needed infrastructure improvements and the high cost of emergency response activities.

According to CAL FIRE, water delivery infrastructure does pose a challenge for some of the communities in CAL FIRE service areas, as some hydrant systems cannot support fire operations at the required flow rate and volume. In some cases, using an older hydrant has caused water

pipes to collapse, which can cutoff water delivery to that specific neighborhood in the aftermath of an incident.

Double Referral: Should this bill be approved, it will be referred to the Assembly Committee on Environmental Safety and Toxic Materials.

Arguments in Support: According to the Orange County Fire Authority, “Requiring local water districts to have detailed emergency plans will benefit water customers and also first responders. The preparation and implementation of these plans will require interaction between fire agencies and water districts, leading to collaborative approaches for how to best service customers and first responders during potential or actual emergency situations.”

Arguments in Opposition: The Association of California Water Agencies (ACWA), California Chamber of Commerce, California Water Association, and several other undersigned organizations, write in opposition unless amended, “AB 2013 would set a new and unrealistic standard on public water suppliers and would increase legal liability following a wildfire event.” Outlining the following points, they state that AB 2013 “Misrepresents the Role of Public Water Systems,” is “Operationally Impractical,” “Increases Legal Liability,” “Creates Significant Financial Burden on Ratepayers,” is a “Public Safety and Security Risk,” and that “SB 1153 (Caballero) Provides a More Practical and Effective Approach.”

Prior and Related Legislation:

AB 1873 (Bennett, 2026) would extend current requirements (per AB 367 below) for a Ventura County water supplier to provide backup power during an emergency, required Ventura County water suppliers to notify the Ventura County Office of Emergency Services if backup power is not available within 90 minutes, sets a deadline for when the water supplier emergency plans must be completed, adds a new assessment requirement to existing reporting requirements, and makes other clarifying changes. (Pending in Assembly Committee on Utilities and Energy)

AB 367 (Bennett. Chapter 690, Statutes of 2025) requires Ventura County water suppliers to: have backup power, or access to alternative water sources, capable of supplying water for at least 24 hours for fire suppression in high or very high fire hazard severity zones; annually inspect critical fire suppression infrastructure and backup energy sources and notify significant water delivery reductions, as specified, to the County Office of Emergency Services. This bill also requires the Ventura County Fire Department, in cooperation with the water supplier, to issue a report, as specified, after significant fire damage within a service area, as specified

AB 372 (Bennett, 2025) would, contingent on funding being appropriated pursuant to a bond act, establish the Rural Water Infrastructure for Wildfire Resilience Program within the California Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) for the distribution of state matching funds to communities within the Wildland Urban Interface in designated high fire severity zones or very high fire hazard severity zones to improve water system infrastructure. (Inactive File on Senate Floor)

**REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**

**Support**

Orange County Fire Authority

## Opposition

Association of California Water Agencies (ACWA)  
 Bella Vista Water DistrictBurbank/Burbank  
 Redevelopment Agency; City of  
 California Association of Mutual Water  
 Companies  
 California Chamber of Commerce  
 California Municipal Utilities Association  
 California Special Districts Association  
 California Water Association  
 Camrosa Water District  
 Crestline-lake Arrowhead Water Agency  
 East Valley Water District  
 Eastern Municipal Water District  
 El Dorado Irrigation District  
 El Dorado Water Agency  
 Elsinore Valley Municipal Water District  
 Georgetown Divide Public Utility District  
 Hidden Valley Lake Community Services  
 District  
 Las Virgenes - Triunfo Joint Powers  
 Authority

Las Virgenes Municipal Water District  
 Mesa Water District  
 Mid-peninsula Water District  
 North Marin Water District  
 Olivenhain Municipal Water District  
 Palmdale Water District  
 Paradise Irrigation District  
 Public Water Agencies Group  
 Rancho California Water District  
 Regional Water Authority  
 San Diego County Water Authority  
 San Juan Water District  
 Tahoe City Public Utility District  
 Three Valleys Municipal Water District  
 Union Public Utility District  
 United Water Conservation District  
 Valley Center Municipal Water District  
 Walnut Valley Water District  
 West Valley Water District  
 Western Municipal Water District

**Analysis Prepared by:** Ryan Fleming / E.M. / (916) 319-3802