

ASSEMBLY THIRD READING

AB 1431 (Frazier)

As Amended May 3, 2021

Majority vote

SUMMARY

Establishes specified state goals for fuel treatment and vegetation management contained in the California Forest Carbon Plan (Plan). Requires, on or before January 1, 2023, the Natural Resources Agency (NRA) and the California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA) to submit a report to the appropriate policy and budget committees of the Legislature on the positions and resources needed to achieve the state goals.

Major Provisions

- 1) Establishes as state goals for fuel treatment and vegetation management all of the following:
 - a) Increase forest restoration and fuels treatment from 17,500 acres to 60,000 acres per year by 2030 to 100,000 acres per year by 2025;
 - b) Increase the area reforested annually by 25% above 2018 levels;
 - c) By 2025, expand areas of high priority habitat by 5% above current levels, as provided in the "State Wildlife Action Plan."
 - d) Increase vegetation management to 500,000 acres per year on nonfederal lands by 2025;
 - e) Urge the federal government to achieve similar treatment levels on federal lands;
 - f) Expand wood products manufacturing in the state;
 - g) Increase carbon storage through increased use of durable wood products in buildings;
 - h) Streamline the planning and permitting for forest restoration and forest health projects;
 - i) Develop a comprehensive program to assist private forest landowners;
 - j) Increase by 10% the acreage of forest land protected by conservation easements that include specified management objectives. Specifies that conservation easements are required to focus on areas that can effectively sequester and store resilient carbon while providing wildfire habitat, protecting watershed values, and supporting other forest ecosystem benefits.
 - k) By 2030, significantly increase California's urban tree canopy, targeting disadvantaged and low-income communities and low-canopy areas.
- 2) Requires all vegetation management goals established in this article be for activities that improve the fire resiliency of the landscape where they are conducted and reduce the fire spread, duration, and intensity, fuel ignitability, or ignition of tree crowns, as applicable.

- 3) Requires, on or before January 1, 2023 and annually thereafter, the NRA and CalEPA to submit a report to the appropriate policy and budget committees of the Legislature on the positions and resources needed to achieve the state goals.

COMMENTS

Wildfires in California are continuing to increase in frequency and intensity, resulting in loss of life and damage to public health, property, infrastructure, and ecosystems. In 2020, wildfires burned more than 4.1 million acres. The August Complex Fire in northern California, the largest fire in California's modern history, burned over one million acres. In total, wildfires caused 33 deaths and destroyed over 10,000 structures in 2020. The land area burned in 2020 more than doubled the previous record, roughly 1.8 million acres, which was set in 2018. Furthermore, seven of the state's deadliest fires have occurred since 2017, with over 100 fatalities in 2017 and 2018.

Fire has always been present in California landscapes, either ignited by lightning strikes or by Native American tribes to preserve certain useful plants and prevent larger fires. Low-intensity fires have clear ecological benefits, such as creating habitat and assisting in the regeneration of certain species of plants and trees. Low-intensity fire also reduces surface fuel, which decreases future wildfire intensity.

A century of suppressing low-intensity fires, logging of older growth and more fire-resistant trees, and a significant five-year drought has increased the size and severity of California's fires. Climate change has also contributed to wildfire risk by reducing humidity and precipitation and increasing temperatures.

The use of targeted mechanical vegetation management, prescribed fire, and managed wildfire reduces the accumulated high fuel loads, promoting healthier, more resilient forests, reducing the risk of high-severity wildfires.

SB 901 (Dodd), Chapter 626, Statutes of 2018, committed \$1 billion for CAL FIRE's Forest Health Grant Program and Fire Prevention Grant Program and dedicated fuel reduction crews over five years. The funds are meant to be used to do significant fuel reduction work near communities and in forested watersheds, and many projects will include a biomass utilization component. Approximately half of this commitment has already been spent.

On January 8, 2021, the Governor's Budget proposed \$1 billion to support the Forest Management Task Force's Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan; the plan included early action items and an extension of the SB 901 funding commitment for an additional five years, until Fiscal Year 2028-29. The wildfire early action expenditure plan contained in SB 85 (Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review, 2021) appropriated \$536 million to 15 different state agencies for fire prevention activities.

According to the Author

In 2018, a broad representation of local, state and federal agencies finalized the California Forest Carbon Plan to set goals for the treatment of California's forests to prevent and reduce greenhouse gas emissions from high severity wildfires while promoting carbon sequestration in forests and wildlands. The Plan is the result of several years of careful collaboration and includes vegetation management and fuels treatment strategies such as prescribed fire,

mechanical thinning and woody biomass utilization, all of which have been widely scientifically recognized to reduce greenhouse gas emissions associated with high severity wildfires.

While often cited as a roadmap for reducing emissions from California's devastating wildfires, the California Forest Carbon Plan has no statutory authority behind it and has not been nearly as effective as it could in helping California meet its greenhouse gas reduction goals. By codifying various goals of the California Forest Carbon Plan, AB 1431 would stress the urgency of reducing greenhouse gas emissions from wildfires while placing accountability on the agencies responsible for implementing programs and projects to meet those goals. AB 1431 would also allow the Legislature greater oversight by requiring NRA and CalEPA to report annually on the progress of meeting the goals outlined in the Plan.

Arguments in Support

The Rural County Representatives of California, in support of the bill, writes by codifying various goals included in the Plan, including targets for forest management, biomass utilization, forest restoration, and conservation easements, AB 1431 lends accountability to the Plan that currently does not exist. AB 1431 also requires the NRA and the CalEPA to report annually to the Legislature on the progress of those goals to further the accountability of meeting the state's greenhouse gas emissions reduction goals through the actions established in the Plan, while furthering California's forest management and wildfire prevention needs.

Arguments in Opposition

None received

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee, annual reporting costs for NRA and CalEPA of approximately \$75,000 for each agency (General Fund or special fund).

VOTES

ASM NATURAL RESOURCES: 11-0-0

YES: Luz Rivas, Flora, Chau, Friedman, Cristina Garcia, Mathis, McCarty, Muratsuchi, Seyarto, Stone, Wood

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 16-0-0

YES: Lorena Gonzalez, Bigelow, Calderon, Carrillo, Chau, Megan Dahle, Davies, Fong, Gabriel, Eduardo Garcia, Levine, Quirk, Robert Rivas, Akilah Weber, Holden, Luz Rivas

UPDATED

VERSION: May 3, 2021

CONSULTANT: Michael Jarred / NAT. RES. / (916) 319-2092

FN: 0000693