

SENATE THIRD READING

SB 709 (Dahle)

As Amended April 5, 2021

Majority vote

SUMMARY

Authorizes up to two 2-year extensions for a timber harvest plan (THP) approved between January 1, 2014, and December 31, 2015, if specified conditions are met.

Major Provisions

- 1) Eliminates a soon to be obsolete provision that allows for two 2-year extensions for a THP approved between January 1, 2010, and August 31, 2012.
- 2) Authorizes up to two 2-year extensions for a THP approved between January 1, 2014, and December 31, 2015, if specified conditions are met.
- 3) Makes other technical and clarifying changes.

COMMENTS

According to the sponsors of this legislation, the unprecedented wildfires that have occurred in California over the past few years have caused commercial timber companies to shift to salvage logging – the removal of dead or dying trees in wildfire-affected areas – rather than harvesting green trees under approved THPs. Another factor is the state's mill capacity is not robust or large enough to handle the expected volume of material generated through salvage operations. In addition, the COVID 19 pandemic has likely contributed to reduced capacity at timber mills. Ultimately, this means that many landowners will be unable to find a mill that can process their timber. This has meant a delay in harvesting timber under already approved THPs. According to state data, CAL FIRE approved 528 THPs between January 1, 2014 and December 31, 2015, covering 236,319 acres and 431 of those operations wrapped up within the five-year term and 97 were granted a two-year extension. Presumably, a subset of the 97 will finish operations within the first extension, leaving the remainder eligible for the second two-year extension, if this bill becomes law and they meet other eligibility requirements.

While this bill is a targeted way to address the subset of THPs that will expire soon, it is worth considering longer-term solutions. Should the state and federal government promote or incentivize new small diameter mills and other biomass utilization to find a beneficial use for the increasing amount of material being removed from the forest in order to improve forest health and reduce the severity of fires? In addition, providing funding for workforce training would increase capacity to do forestry work in a timely manner. SB 85 (Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review), Chapter 14, Statutes of 2021, appropriated \$536 million to 15 different state agencies for fire prevention activities. This included \$25 million for forest sector economic stimulus, including market developments, loans for biomass utilization facilities, and workforce training. In the May Revise, the Governor proposes \$51 million in additional funding for forest sector economic stimulus. These may be prudent investments to address this issue in the long term.

According to the Author

Timber harvesting is an excellent, scientifically acknowledged forest stewardship practice that should be encouraged when discussing wildfire mitigation practices and overall forest health. SB 709 is a common sense measure to reduce wildfire fuels by allowing operators to remove dead trees in unburned areas without intervention. It also provides for wildlife protection of any endangered species and will ensure that basic forestry management practice standards are upheld. Timber harvest plans are essential to helping our State's millions of acres of forest land. If they expire, timber operators will be inundated with the cost of emergency repairs to find a mill with the capacity to process green timber. Recovery from wildfires starts with prevention and fuel reduction. By simply allowing a one-time extension of timber harvest plans for landowners, our state can begin to heal from devastating and destructive wildfires.

Arguments in Support

The California Forestry Association, in support of the bill, states Senate Bill 709 will allow California's industrial timber companies and small landowners to complete important salvage logging operations and emergency repairs to fire ravaged lands, without losing the opportunity to complete operations approved under existing Timber Harvest Permits (THPs) that will expire in 2021 and 2022.

Arguments in Opposition

None received

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee, minor state costs.

VOTES**SENATE FLOOR: 37-0-3**

YES: Allen, Archuleta, Atkins, Bates, Becker, Borgeas, Bradford, Cortese, Dahle, Dodd, Durazo, Eggman, Glazer, Gonzalez, Grove, Hertzberg, Hueso, Hurtado, Jones, Kamlager, Laird, Leyva, McGuire, Melendez, Min, Newman, Nielsen, Ochoa Bogh, Pan, Portantino, Roth, Rubio, Skinner, Umberg, Wieckowski, Wiener, Wilk

ABS, ABST OR NV: Caballero, Limón, Stern

ASM NATURAL RESOURCES: 11-0-0

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

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 14-0-2

YES: Lorena Gonzalez, Bigelow, Bryan, Calderon, Carrillo, Chau, Megan Dahle, Davies, Fong, Gabriel, Levine, Quirk, Holden, Akilah Weber

ABS, ABST OR NV: Eduardo Garcia, McCarty

UPDATED

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