
SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Anna Caballero, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

AB 1380 (Elhawary) - Wildland firefighters: Formerly Incarcerated Firefighter Certification and Employment Program

Version: May 23, 2025

Policy Vote: N.R. & W. 7 - 0, PUB. S. 6 - 0

Urgency: No

Mandate: No

Hearing Date: August 18, 2025

Consultant: Ashley Ames

Bill Summary: This bill would direct the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CalFire) to implement a standardized process to ensure that all individuals who complete the department's firefighting training program while incarcerated receive official written certification before their release; require the Department to award hiring preference to qualified formerly incarcerated individuals; and track incarcerated individuals who have completed the firefighting training program and report to the Legislature the effectiveness of the program

Fiscal Impact:

- Unknown but potentially significant ongoing costs (General Fund) to CalFire and the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) to implement a standardized process to ensure that all individuals who complete the department's firefighting training program (FFT program) while incarcerated receive official written certification before their release, as specified; to award hiring preferences; and to track data, develop and implement policies and procedures, and report to the Legislature, among other things.

Background: The Legislature created the California Conservation Camp program to provide for the training and use of inmates and wards assigned thereto to perform public conservation projects, including, but not limited to, forest fire prevention and control, forest and watershed management, recreation, fish and game management, soil conservation, and forest and watershed revegetation (PRC § 4951). Conservation Camps receive prisoners committed to the custody of CDCR and are supervised by employees of the Department (PRC § 4952).

January 2025 Los Angeles Wildfires. Fourteen wildfires burned across Southern California in January. The two most notable – the Palisades and the Eaton fires – began burning on the same day, scorching over 37,000 acres, destroying over 18,000 structures, and tragically claiming the lives of 30 people. At one point, over 1,100 incarcerated hand crew members were in Southern California supporting the wildfire response – nearly the entire program. The incarcerated crew members were praised while the program received some scrutiny over the crews' pay. The Pine Grove Youth Conservation Camp was recently honored on the Senate Floor for their work protecting communities during the Southern California Wildfires.

Ventura Training Center. The Department received an appropriation of \$18.8 million in the Budget Act of 2018 to renovate the Ventura Training Center (VTC) and open an enhanced firefighter training and certification program. Developed by the Department,

CDCR, the California Conservation Corps (CCC), and in partnership with the Anti-Recidivism Coalition, VTC provides formerly-incarcerated hand crew members an opportunity to continue using the skills and knowledge they worked to achieve while participating in the Conservation Camp Program.

Proposed Law: This bill would:

- 1) Require the Department, within six months of the operative date of this bill, and in partnership with CDCR, to implement a standardized process to ensure incarcerated firefighters receive official written certification before their release from prison.
- 2) Require the Department, on or before January 1, 2027, to award hiring preference under Category Placement 2 to qualified formerly incarcerated firefighters who apply for positions with the Department.
- 3) Require the Department, in partnership with CDCR, to track the number of incarcerated individuals who have completed firefighting training program and are set to be released from prison within 90 days of completing the firefighting training program.
- 4) Require the Department to develop and implement policies and procedures to track and report the outcomes of this bill, including but not limited to:
 - a) The number of participants hired,
 - b) Retention rates, and
 - c) Career advancement opportunities.
- 5) Require the Department, for three years from the date this bill becomes operative, to submit an annual report to the Legislature on the implementation and effectiveness of this bill.
- 6) Establish that this bill shall only become operative upon an appropriation by the Legislature for its purpose.

Related Legislation:

AB 247 (Bryan) would require an incarcerated individual hand crew member, in addition to receiving credits, to be paid an hourly wage equal to \$19 while assigned to an active fire incident.

AB 619 (Ransom) would require CAL FIRE and CDCR to jointly evaluate the Ventura Training Center and report to the Legislature on its evaluation.

AB 409 (Weber, 2023) was nearly identical to this bill. That bill was referred to the Natural Resources Committee, but pulled by the author.

SB 936 (Glazer, 2021) would have required, upon an appropriation, the director of the CCC to establish a forestry training center in northern California in partnership with CAL FIRE and CDCR to provide enhanced training, education, work experience, and job

readiness for entry-level forestry and vegetation management jobs. This bill was vetoed by the Governor.

AB 2126 (Eggman), Chapter 362, Statutes of 2018, requires the CCC to establish a forestry corps program to accomplish certain objectives including developing and implementing forest health projects, as provided, and establishing forestry corps crews.

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