

Date of Hearing: March 23, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

Isaac G. Bryan, Chair

AB 1891 (Connolly) – As Introduced February 12, 2026

SUBJECT: Forestry: Beneficial Fire Capacity Program

SUMMARY: Establishes the Beneficial Fire Capacity Act.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Pursuant to Public Resources Code (PRC) 4477:
 - a) Requires the State Fire Marshal (SFM), with the involvement of the Statewide Training and Education Advisory Committee, to develop a curriculum for, or amend into an existing curriculum, a certification program for burn bosses, who possess authority to engage in a prescribed burning operation and to enter into the necessary contracts related to a prescribed burning operation. The curriculum shall provide for the initial certification as well as the continuing education of burn bosses.
 - b) Requires the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) to develop a training program for prescribed fire users to certify professionals in any agency or organization as burn bosses. Requires CAL FIRE to certify these individuals to a common standard.
 - c) Requires the SFM to post and update on its internet website the number of burn bosses with an active burn boss certification.
- 2) Declares cooperation by CAL FIRE with a person desiring to use prescribed burning as a means of converting brush-covered lands into forage lands or to help meet wildland management goals, which has as its objective the prevention of high intensity wildland fires, watershed management, range improvement, vegetation management, forest improvement, wildlife habitat improvement, restoring ecological integrity and resilience, community wildfire protection, carbon resilience, enhancement of culturally important resources a public purpose. (PRC 4491)
- 3) Authorizes a person, firm, or corporation, or a group or combination of persons, firms, corporations, or groups, that owns or controls brush-covered land, forest lands, woodland, grassland, shrubland, or any combination thereof within a state responsibility area (SRA) to apply to CAL FIRE for permission to utilize prescribed burning for those public purposes in PRC 4491. (PRC 4492)
- 4) Requires, upon receipt of an application, CAL FIRE to inspect the land in company with the applicant to determine whether a permit shall be granted; to prescribe the manner in which the site for the prescribed burning shall be prepared; and, to require any precautions to be taken by the applicant as may be considered reasonable to prevent damage to the property of others by reason of the burning. (PRC 4493)

- 5) Authorizes the director of CAL FIRE to enter into an agreement with the owner or any other person who has legal control of any property, any public agency with regulatory or natural resource management authority over any property that is included within any wildland, or any nonprofit organization to conduct joint prescribed burning operations that serve the public interest and are beneficial to the state. Requires the agreement to establish guidelines for the cooperative management of joint prescribed burning operations and requires the completion of a project agreement for each prescribed burn. (PRC 4497)
- 6) Defines “burn boss” as a person certified pursuant to PRC 4477 to conduct prescribed burning operations and to enter into contracts related to prescribed burning operations; or, a person qualified for the National Wildfire Coordinating Group position title of “Prescribed Fire Burn Boss Type 1” or “Prescribed Fire Burn Boss Type 2.” (PRC 4500 (a))
- 7) Establishes the Prescribed Fire Liability Pilot Program to increase the pace and scale of the use of prescribed fire and cultural burning and to reduce barriers for conducting prescribed fires and cultural burning. (PRC 4500 (b))
- 8) Establishes the Prescribed Fire Claims Fund (Fund) to support coverage for losses from prescribed fires and cultural burning by nonpublic entities, such as cultural fire practitioners, private landowners, and nongovernmental entities. (PRC 4500 (c)(1))
- 9) Requires \$165 million to be appropriated from the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF) in the annual Budget Act each year through the 2023–24 fiscal year to CAL FIRE for healthy forest and fire prevention programs and projects that improve forest health and reduce greenhouse gas emissions caused by uncontrolled wildfires. Requires \$35 million to be appropriated from GGRF in the annual Budget Act each year through the 2023–24 fiscal year to CAL FIRE to complete prescribed fire and other fuel reduction projects through proven forestry practices consistent with the recommendations of the Forest Carbon Plan, including the operation of year-round prescribed fire crews and implementation of a research and monitoring program for climate change adaptation. (Sec. 45 of SB 901 (Dodd), Chapter 626, Statutes of 2018)
- 10) Requires the annual proceeds of the GGRF to be continuously appropriated, until FY 2028–29, to CAL FIRE as follows: \$200 million for healthy forest and fire prevention programs, and \$35 million for the completion of prescribed fire and other fuel reduction projects through proven forestry practices consistent with the recommendations of the California Forest Carbon Plan, including the operation of year-round prescribed fire crews and implementation of a research and monitoring program for climate adaptation. (Health and Safety Code (HSC) 39719 (b)(4))
- 11) Requires, after specified amounts are fully allocated, as determined by the Department of Finance, moneys in GGRF to be continuously appropriated, without regard to fiscal year, so that \$200 million goes to CAL FIRE as follows: 82.5% for healthy forest and fire prevention programs and projects that improve forest health and reduce emissions of greenhouse gases caused by uncontrolled wildfires, and 17.5% for the completion of prescribed fire and other fuel reduction projects through proven forestry practices consistent with the recommendations of the California Forest Carbon Plan, including the operation of year-round prescribed fire crews and implementation of a research and monitoring program for climate adaptation. (HSC 37919.4 (c)(1)(E))

THIS BILL:

- 1) Finds and declares that increased use of beneficial fire is an essential component of reducing the risk of catastrophic wildfire and related emissions of greenhouse gases from the state's forests and other ecosystems. Investment in training, organizational capacity, and project implementation is critical to meeting and sustaining this longer-term goal, regardless of the immediate quantification of emission reductions.
- 2) Establishes in CAL FIRE the Beneficial Fire Capacity Program (Program) to expand training, organizational capacity, and support for community-led beneficial fire programs, including those developed by California Native American tribes, nongovernmental organizations, universities and colleges, resources conservation districts, volunteer fire districts, and other local or special districts.
- 3) Requires CAL FIRE to use not less than 10% of funding continuously appropriated to CAL FIRE from the GGRF, HSC 39719 (b)(4), or HSC (c)(1)(E) to implement the Program.
- 4) Requires the Program to do both of the following:
 - a) Support and implement community-led beneficial fire programs, including training, building and maintaining capacity, and implementing beneficial fire projects. Requires those programs to be funded using direct awards from CAL FIRE, including block grants, and may involve subawards. Organizations with demonstrated effectiveness developing or leading beneficial fire programs shall be prioritized; and,
 - b) Establish a competitive grant program for beneficial fire implementation, capacity building, research, innovation, and training.
- 5) Requires at least 25% of the Program funds to be awarded to California Native American tribes or tribally led or indigenous-led organizations.
- 6) Requires CAL FIRE to collaborate with other relevant state agencies, beneficial fire practitioners, and organizations currently engaged in beneficial fire programs to establish guidelines governing the program and the administration of the funding.
- 7) Requires CAL FIRE to do all of the following:
 - a) Provide technical assistance to enhance capacity and assist in the development of projects;
 - b) Assist grantees in identifying potential funding sources for additional beneficial fire projects;
 - c) Reduce grant application and reporting requirements and reduce reliance on acres treated metrics to the maximum extent feasible; and,
 - d) Use grant terms of five years or more.
- 8) Requires CAL FIRE to publish and update on its internet website all of the following information related to implementation of the Program:

- a) A list of entities funded by the Program;
- b) The outcomes of any block grant, including a summary of the benefits, such as the number of people trained or certified or both trained and certified to engage in prescribed fire, cultural burning, and wildfire managed for resource benefit; the number of project plans developed; the number of projects conducted; and how increasing capacity has facilitated increased burn-day utilization and larger or higher priority projects, as applicable; and,
- c) A description of the estimated need for additional funding for similar work to help meet the state's goals for beneficial fire as they change and increase over time.

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS:

1) **Author's statement:**

AB 1891 sets aside 10% of the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund allocated to CalFire for wildfire resiliency and forest health to support beneficial fire, with 25% of that dedicated specifically to tribes and tribal organizations. Beneficial fire has been a proven practice utilized by California's first peoples for thousands of years. The evidence is clear, beneficial fire projects help our ecosystems foster biodiversity, reduce wildfire risk, and preserve natural habitats and forests. It is time we expand these practices and give California another tool to help make our state more resilient to wildfires and natural disasters.

2) **Wildfires.** Wildfires in California have been increasing in frequency and intensity, resulting in loss of life and damage to public health, property, infrastructure, and ecosystems.

California's landscapes are among the most naturally fire-dependent on Earth. One study suggests that prior to 1800, approximately 4.5 million acres of the state burned annually. Native Americans were likely responsible for a significant portion of this acreage. With colonization, many of these practices were significantly reduced or eliminated, fundamentally altering fire scope and intensity across the state.

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 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.

3) **Prescribed burning.** Science strongly points to the need to re-establish more frequent fire across a significant part of the state. In significant parts of California, reintroduction of fire in controlled circumstances can limit the scope of catastrophic wildfire and improve ecosystem resilience. In many ecosystems, beneficial fire may be the only restoration tool available.

Prescribed burning is the controlled application of fire to the land to reduce wildfire hazards, clear downed trees, control plant diseases, improve rangeland and wildlife habitats, and restore natural ecosystems. Prescribed fires are typically conducted in compliance with a written prescribed fire plan that outlines the conditions necessary for the burn to be “within prescription.” Recent researchⁱ on California’s 2020 wildfire season found prescribed fires decreased wildfire burn severity by 16% and led to a net reduction of 14% in smoke emissions.

California’s *Strategic Plan for Expanding the Use of Beneficial Fire*ⁱⁱ (March 2022) estimates that between 10 and 30 million acres in California would benefit from some form of fuel reduction treatment and sets a target for deploying beneficial fire on 400,000 acres annually.

Last year, the Air Resources Board released data on California’s Natural and Working Lands Carbon Inventory that show the carbon impacted by prescribed fire is more than ten times of wildfires emissions on average.

According to the *Strategic Plan*, approximately 125,000 to 150,000+ acres are treated with prescribed burning in California annually by state and federal agencies. According to the Wildfire Forest Resilience Task Force Dashboardⁱⁱⁱ, 188,000 acres were treated with beneficial burns in 2024. While this rate is increasing to manage wildfire hazards, it remains far below the long-term goal of 400,000 acres annually and the roughly 4.5 million acres that burned annually before the year 1800.

Prescribed burns are safe: the US Forest Service reported in 2022 that 99.84% of prescribed burns operate as planned without incident.

- 4) **Beneficial Fire Capacity Program.** This bill establishes the Program at CALFIRE to expand training, organizational capacity, and support for community-led beneficial fire programs, including those developed by California Native American tribes, nongovernmental organizations, universities and colleges, resources conservation districts, volunteer fire districts, and other local or special districts.

Funding from GGRF would be used to support and implement community-led beneficial fire programs, and to create a competitive grant program for beneficial fire implementation, capacity building, research, innovation, and training. At least 25% of the Program funds would be awarded to California Native American tribes or tribally led or indigenous-led organizations.

Under the Program, CAL FIRE would be required to provide technical assistance to enhance capacity and assist in the development of projects, assist grantees in identifying potential funding sources for additional beneficial fire projects, and reduce grant application and reporting requirements and reduce reliance on acres treated metrics to the maximum extent feasible.

- 5) **Funding.** Recognizing the importance of prescribed fire, SB 901 established the precedent for appropriating \$200 million to CAL FIRE from the GGRF through FY 2023–24 fiscal year, including \$35 million to complete prescribed fire and other fuel reduction projects through proven forestry practices consistent with the recommendations of the Forest Carbon Plan.

SB 155 (Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review), Chapter 258, Statutes of 2021, extended SB 901's continuous appropriations to CAL FIRE through FY 2028-29 for those same forest health, fire prevention, and fuel reduction projects.

The \$35 million appropriation has been part of CAL FIRE's broader wildfire resilience and forest health funding from California Climate Investments. Some dollars are folded into larger programs like fuels reduction crews and forest health projects.

That said, a primary use of the \$35 million allocation has been to establish and operate dedicated prescribed fire crews. For example, early budget plans under SB 901 projected using this funding to create additional prescribed fire staffing and support administrative and technical roles needed to carry out burns on SRAs. In FY 20/21, funds were used to complete prescribed fire and other fuel reduction projects consistent with the recommendations of the Forest Carbon Plan, including the operation of year-round prescribed fire crews and implementation of a research and monitoring program for climate change adaptation. That included funding full-time crews (beyond seasonal firefighters) and associated support personnel assigned to conduct controlled burns and related fuel reduction tasks.

Part of the appropriation has also been directed toward research and monitoring initiatives tied to prescribed fire's role in climate adaptation. Some funds have been used to provide training for burn bosses and crew members, and support planning, mapping, and coordination needed for larger scale prescribed fire operations consistent with SB 901's intent.

The Governor has proposed trailer bill language^{iv} (TBL) this year to strike the earmarked percentages enacted pursuant to SB 155 for forest projects and prescribed fire, and instead allocate CAL FIRE's \$200 million for *any* project listed.

This bill requires CAL FIRE to use no less than 10% of its continuously appropriated funding from GGRF to implement the Beneficial Fire Capacity Program – which is 7.5% less than the current earmarks in SB 901 and SB 155, but a maintained earmark.

The Legislature will be negotiating both the GGRF spending plan and the Governor's proposed FY 2026-27 budget proposal, so the author may wish to work with the Assembly Budget Committee on funding for this proposed program.

6) **Related legislation:**

AB 1699 (Rogers) establishes the Good Fire Act to indefinitely extend the Prescribed Fire Liability Program, eliminate the requirement for CAL FIRE approval for a plan reviewed and approved by a burn boss, and exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) specified actions taken by CAL FIRE to assist in the implementation of prescribed fire or cultural burning projects that do not otherwise require compliance with CEQA, among other things to facilitate beneficial fire. This bill is referred to the Assembly Natural Resources Committee.

AB 2184 (Wilson) requires, after the amounts in HSC 39719 (a)-(b) and HSC 39719.4 are fully allocated as determined by the Department of Finance, the remaining moneys in the GGRF, up to \$300 million, to be appropriated from the GGRF in the annual Budget Act each FY from the 2027–2028 through the 2045–46 fiscal year, inclusive, to achieve nature-based

climate solutions, as specified. This bill is referred to the Assembly Natural Resources Committee.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

All Hands Ecology	Friends of the Lost Coast
Amah Mutsun Tribal Band	Friends of the River
American Rivers	Hamey Woods
Audobon California	Humboldt County Prescribed Burn Association
Biswell Forestry	Humboldt Fire Resilience Institute
Briceland Volunteer Fire Department	Hybrid Incident Support
California Association of Local Conservation Corps	Klamath Forest Alliance
California Cattlemen's Association	Mak-warép Ohlone Land Conservancy
California Environmental Voters	Mattole Restoration Council
California Forward	Mid Klamath Watershed Council
California Indian Environmental Alliance	Mount Hermon Northwest
California Native Plant Society	Mount Madonna Center
Calwild	Mt. Madonna Challenge
Campfire Restoration Project	National Audubon Society
Camptonville Community Partnership	Nevada County Resource Conservation District
Central Coast Prescribed Burn Association	Nourishing Futures
Colusa County Resource Conservation District	Pacific Forest Trust
Community Environmental Council	Plumas County Fire Safe Council
Community Wildfire Planning Center	Plumas Underburn Cooperative
County of Yuba - Office of Emergency Services	Prometheus Fire Consulting LLC
Cross Contour LLC	Rain
Cultural Fire Management Council	Resource Conservation District of Monterey County
Ecoflight	Resource Renewal Institute
El Dorado Amador Prescribed Fire Association	Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition
Environmental Defense Fund	Salmon River Restoration Council
Environmental Protection Information Center	San Benito Resource Conservation District
Fave Trainings	San Luis Obispo Prescribed Burn Association
Feather River College	Sandhills of Quail Hollow Firewise
Fire Resilience Institute	Santa Clara County Firesafe Council
Firefighters United for Safety, Ethics, and Ecology (FUSEE)	Santa Clara Valley Habitat Agency
Firegeneration Collaborative	Santa Monica Mountains Fire Safe Council
First Rain Land Stewardship Services	Save Mount Diablo
Forestscapes LLC	Save the Redwoods League
Forevergreen Forestry	Scott River Watershed Council
Friends of Plumas Wilderness	Semillas for Safe Soil
Friends of the Inyo	Sierra Business Council
	Sierra Nevada Alliance
	Sonoma Land Trust

South Bay Prescribed Burn Association
Spey Conservation INC.
Storm King Mountain Technologies, INC.
Sustainable Tahoe
Terra Fuego Resource Foundation
The Adidam Holy Domains
The Fire Restoration Group
The Hatchet Emergency Response INC.
The Lookout
The Wilderness Society
Transition Habitat Conservancy

Tribal Ecorestoration Alliance
Trinity County Resource Conservation
District
Trout Unlimited
Tuolumne Prescribed Burn Association
Ventura County Resource Conservation
District
Volcano Land Company
Yosemite Gateway Prescribed Burn
Cooperative

Opposition

None on file

Analysis Prepared by: Paige Brokaw / NAT. RES. /

ⁱ Kelp, M., Burke, M., Qiu, M., Higuera-Mendieta, I., Liu, T., and Diffenbaugh, N.S. (2025)

ⁱⁱ [california-strategic-plan-for-prescribed-fires.pdf](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ [Interagency Tracking System](#)

^{iv} [RN2608676 v3](#)