

ASSEMBLY THIRD READING

AB 1891 (Connolly)

As Amended May 18, 2026

Majority vote

SUMMARY

Requires the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) to use at least 10% of funding continuously appropriated to it from the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF) for specified beneficial fire projects.

Major Provisions

- 1) Requires, on an annual basis, CAL FIRE to use not less than 10% of funding continuously appropriated to CAL FIRE from GGRF to support and implement community-led beneficial fire programs, including training, building and maintaining capacity, and implementing beneficial fire projects, beneficial fire capacity training, research, innovation, or training.
- 2) Requires at least 25% of the funds to be awarded to California Native American tribes or tribally led or indigenous-led organizations.
- 3) Requires CAL FIRE to collaborate with other relevant state agencies, beneficial fire practitioners, and organizations currently engaged in beneficial fire programs in the administration of the funding.
- 4) Requires, to the extent feasible under grants, programs, and other mechanisms, CAL FIRE to do allow awarded funds to be used to pay California Native American tribes or tribally designated individuals for consultation or engagement on programs or projects; reduce application and reporting requirements and reliance on acres-treated metrics; and, allow for longer grant or award terms.

COMMENTS

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.

California's *Strategic Plan for Expanding the Use of Beneficial Fire* (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. Prescribed burns are safe: the US Forest Service reported in 2022 that 99.84% of prescribed burns operate as planned without incident.

Recognizing the importance of prescribed fire, SB 901 (Dodd), Chapter 626, Statutes of 2018, 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.

This bill ensures a specified amount of GGRF funding is used 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.

According to the Author

AB 1891 sets aside 10% of the GGRF allocated to CAL FIRE 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.

Arguments in Support

Audubon California writes that allowing for controlled burns also provides a beneficial renewal of the land, which becomes a boon for birds and wildlife. Prescribed burns helps to stimulate growth and renewal of our landscapes, creating more vibrant and healthier habitats for California's migratory birds. Protecting and promoting the health of migratory birds, will ultimately translate into tangible benefits for California's landscapes and communities.

Arguments in Opposition

None on file

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee:

- 1) By requiring CAL FIRE to use at least 10% of its GGRF funding to implement the priorities enumerated in the bill, this bill creates ongoing cost pressures of an unknown amount on the department's GGRF allocation to the extent the proposed set-aside in the bill diverts resources away from projects that would otherwise have received funding from the department. According to CAL FIRE, its grant programs are consistently oversubscribed. It is not clear to the committee the extent to which CAL FIRE's existing GGRF expenditures overlap with the requirements of this bill. For example, the bill states that funding to implement beneficial fire projects count towards meeting the 10% requirement. Given CAL FIRE's ongoing work to support and fund beneficial fire projects, it is possible the department is already complying with the set-aside proposed in the bill. Further, according to the Legislative Analyst's Office, recently proposed amendments to the cap-and-invest program regulations would, if adopted, reduce GGRF revenues by roughly half and likely leave no funding for CAL FIRE's statutory wildfire allocation.
- 2) The Air Resources Board (ARB) estimates ongoing annual staff workload costs of approximately \$391,000 (GGRF) to assist with bill implementation. Current law requires ARB to develop quantification methodologies and reporting materials and provide ongoing guidance for agencies administering GGRF programs. ARB is also responsible for

conducting outreach in disadvantaged communities, including within lands under the control of federally recognized tribes, to inform community members about investment opportunities. ARB contends it could not absorb within existing resources the workload necessary to perform these tasks for the Program. As part of the Governor's proposed budget for fiscal year (FY) 2026-27, ARB has submitted a budget change proposal (BCP) requesting approximately \$3.6 million and 10 positions in FY 2026-27 and ongoing (GGRF and Cost of Implementation Account) to implement the updated regulations and program requirements for the reauthorized cap-and-invest program. It is not clear if ARB could utilize a portion of these resources for implementation of this bill, should the Legislature approve its BCP.

VOTES

ASM NATURAL RESOURCES: 14-0-0

YES: Bryan, Ellis, Alanis, Connolly, Garcia, Haney, Hoover, Kalra, Macedo, Muratsuchi, Pellerin, Schultz, Wicks, Zbur

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 11-0-4

YES: Wicks, Aguiar-Curry, Calderon, Caloza, Fong, Mark González, Krell, Pacheco, Pellerin, Sharp-Collins, Solache

ABS, ABST OR NV: Hoover, Dixon, Ta, Tangipa

UPDATED

VERSION: May 18, 2026

CONSULTANT: Paige Brokaw / NAT. RES. /

FN: 0002771