
SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Sabrina Cervantes, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

AB 1891 (Connolly) - Forestry: Beneficial Fire Capacity Program

Version: June 25, 2026

Urgency: No

Hearing Date: August 3, 2026

Policy Vote: N.R. & W. 7 - 0

Mandate: No

Consultant: Ashley Ames

Bill Summary: This bill would require the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CalFire), to annually allocate at least 10% of its appropriated funding for local assistance and other grant programs where prescribed or beneficial fire is an eligible activity — consistent with the terms of the appropriation — toward expanding training, organizational capacity, and support for community-led beneficial fire programs, including those run by California Native American tribes, nongovernmental organizations, universities and colleges, resource conservation districts, volunteer fire districts, and other local or special districts. At least 25% of that allocation would have to go to California Native American tribes or tribally led or Indigenous-led organizations, except as specified.

Fiscal Impact:

- CalFire estimates ongoing costs of \$354,000 in the first year, \$392,000 in the second, and \$371,000 annually thereafter (Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund [GGRF]) to implement the provisions of this bill.
- The California Air Resources Board (CARB) estimates ongoing costs of \$391,000 annually (GGRF) to develop quantification and reporting materials specific to the new projects for agencies administering California Climate Investments (CCI) programs; conduct additional outreach in disadvantaged communities, including within lands under the control of federally recognized tribes, to inform community members about investment opportunities available through CCI; provide ongoing guidance, including quantification guidance and support; and assist with outreach and engagement, especially to tribes and indigenous-led organizations.
- By requiring CalFire to use at least 10% of its funding appropriated for local assistance and other grant programs where prescribed or beneficial fire is an eligible activity to implement the Beneficial Fire Capacity Program, this bill would create ongoing cost pressures of an unknown amount on the department's funding 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 CalFire, its grant programs are consistently oversubscribed.

Background: Recognizing the importance of prescribed fire, SB 901 (Dodd, Statutes of 2018) established the precedent for appropriating \$200 million to the Department from the GGRF through the 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 the Department through FY 2028-29 for those same forest health, fire prevention, and fuel reduction projects. The \$35 million appropriation has been part of CalFire's broader wildfire resilience and forest health funding. 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 state responsibility areas. In FY 2020-21, 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.

Proposed Law: This bill would:

1. Require CalFire, on an annual basis, to allocate not less than 10% of the funding appropriated to it for local assistance and other grant programs where prescribed or beneficial fire is an eligible activity, consistent with the terms of the appropriation, 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, resource conservation districts, volunteer fire districts, and other local or special districts.
 - a. Because the set-aside would be drawn from funds already appropriated rather than from a new appropriation, it would likely redirect a share of existing grant capacity rather than increase total program funding. However, this would still create a cost pressure to provide additional funds for these activities as well as the other activities that would otherwise be funded absent this bill.
2. Require that not less than 25% of that allocation be awarded to California Native American tribes or tribally led or Indigenous-led organizations.
3. Authorize CalFire to award less than the minimum allocation only where the total funding requested by qualified applicants falls short of that minimum — a safety valve limiting the risk that funds go unspent or unmatched to demand.

4. Authorize the allocation to be delivered through grants, programs, and other mechanisms, including direct awards, block grants, and subawards.
5. Establish two categories of qualifying activities:
 - a. Funding to support and implement community-led beneficial fire programs, including training and building and maintaining capacity, with priority to organizations demonstrating effectiveness in developing or leading beneficial fire programs.
 - b. Funding to implement beneficial fire projects or projects involving beneficial fire capacity building, research, innovation, or training.
6. Require CalFire to collaborate with other relevant state agencies, beneficial fire practitioners, and organizations currently engaged in beneficial fire programs in establishing guidelines governing implementation and administration of the funding — an ongoing administrative workload absorbed within existing departmental resources.
7. Require CalFire, to the extent feasible, to do all of the following in administering the allocation:
 - a. Allow awarded funds to be used to pay California Native American tribes or tribally designated individuals for consultation or engagement on programs or projects, making consultation an allowable grant cost.
 - b. Reduce application and reporting requirements, which would lower administrative burden for both applicants and CalFire but also reduce the documentation available for program oversight.
 - c. Develop metrics for program success other than acres treated, such as the number of people trained in beneficial fire and the number of new certified burn bosses, and evaluate program success on those metrics — a new measurement and tracking obligation.
 - d. Use the maximum flexibility provided by law to allow longer grant or award terms supporting long-term capacity and planning, which would extend encumbrance and liquidation periods across multiple fiscal years.
8. Authorize CalFire to prescribe rules, guidelines, procedures, or other guidance to carry out these provisions, and exempt that guidance from the Administrative Procedure Act (Government Code §11340 et seq.), avoiding the cost and delay of formal rulemaking while reducing public notice and comment opportunity.

Related Legislation:

AB 1699 (Rogers, 2026) would establish the Good Fire Act to indefinitely extend the Prescribed Fire Liability Program, eliminate the requirement for the Department approval for a plan reviewed and approved by a burn boss, and exempt from CEQA specified actions taken by the Department 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.

AB 2184 (Wilson, 2026) would have required, 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 was held on the Assembly Appropriations Suspense File.

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