

Date of Hearing: April 13, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Rhodesia Ransom, Chair

AB 1893 (Gallagher) – As Introduced February 12, 2026

SUBJECT: Wildfire prevention: local assistance grant program: eligible activities

SUMMARY: This bill adds to the list of activities eligible for funding under the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection’s (CAL FIRE) local assistance grant program for fire prevention and home hardening education activities in California to also include projects involving a local government acquiring or installing mobile rigid tip tanks or similar mobile and permanent infrastructure that is capable of providing helicopter-accessible water supplies for firefighting response or suppression purposes in very high fire and high fire hazard severity zones.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Establishes the State Fire Marshal (SFM) as a component of the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) to foster, promote, and develop ways and means of protecting life and property against fire and panic. (Health & Safety Code Section 13100 – 13100.1)
- 2) Requires the SFM to identify areas in the state as moderate, high, and very high fire hazard severity zones based on consistent statewide criteria and based on the severity of fire hazard that is expected to prevail in those areas. (Government Code Section 51178 & Public Resources Code (PRC) Section 4202)
- 3) Requires CAL FIRE to establish the local assistance grant program for fire prevention and home hardening education activities in California, determines group eligibility, as specified, and authorizes CalFIRE to establish a cost-share requirement, as specified. (PRC Section 4124.5 (a))
- 4) Requires the local assistance grant program to establish a robust year-round fire prevention effort in and near fire-threatened communities that focuses on increasing the protection of people, structures, and communities and specifies grants be designed to be durable and adaptively managed, as specified, and directs CAL FIRE to .prioritize projects that are multiyear efforts. (PRC Section 4124.5 (b)(1))
- 5) Defines “fire-threatened communities” as communities in high and very high fire hazard severity zones, as specified. (PRC Section 4124.5 (b)(2))
- 6) Specifies activities and projects eligible for the grant program to include, but not be limited to, the following: (PRC Section 4124.5 (c))
 - a. Development and implementation of public education and outreach programs. Programs may include technical assistance, new technologies, game elements to enhance and accelerate the education of property owners, workforce recruitment and training, and equipment purchases;
 - b. Fire prevention activities, as defined;

- c. Projects to improve compliance with defensible space requirements;
- d. Technical assistance to local agencies to improve fire prevention and reduce fire hazards;
- e. Creation of additional “Firewise USA” communities in the state or other community planning or certification programs deemed as appropriate by CAL FIRE;
- f. Projects to improve public safety, including, but not limited to, access to emergency equipment and improvements to public evacuation routes;
- g. Vegetation management along roadways and driveways to reduce fire risk;
- h. Public education outreach regarding making homes and communities more wildfire resilient, including training on defensible space and prescribed grazing;
- i. Projects to reduce the flammability of structures and communities to prevent their ignition from wind-driven embers;
- j. Development of a risk reduction checklist for communities that includes defensible space criteria, structural vulnerability potential, and personal evacuation plans; and,
- k. Projects involving the application of prescribed grazing, which may include the installation of fencing or watering improvements.

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown. A fiscal committee has not yet heard this bill.

COMMENTS:

Author Statement: “Wildfire prevention must include every effective tool available. AB 1893 ensures that mobile rigid dip tanks, permanent dip tanks, and similar helicopter-accessible water supplies—proven to reduce response times and save lives—can qualify for wildfire prevention grants. This targeted clarification strengthens local firefighting capabilities without imposing new mandates or additional spending.”

Equity Statement: “Many very high and high fire hazard severity zones overlap with lower-income, rural, tribal, and historically underserved communities (e.g., Paradise after the Camp Fire, parts of Los Angeles County affected by recent fires). Faster aerial firefighting response through helicopter-accessible water supplies can reduce fire spread, protect homes, and save lives in areas where residents often have fewer resources to evacuate, rebuild, or recover. The bill would enable local water agencies in fire-prone, disadvantaged communities to access existing wildfire prevention grants, helping close the gap in firefighting infrastructure compared to wealthier areas.”

Wildfires: Wildfires are a severe and growing threat to lives, property, and infrastructure in California. The confluence of a changing climate, urbanization, and constraints on forest management increases the urgency to address this threat. According to data from CAL FIRE, 18 of California’s 20 most destructive fires have occurred in the past decade. Collectively, these

fires have resulted in 231 deaths and the loss of 66,810 structures (homes, outbuildings, and commercial properties).

While fewer wildfires threatened California in 2023 due to the increased number of weather events and atmospheric rivers, the vegetative growth from the significant rainfall contributed to devastating wildfires in 2024 and 2025. In 2024, the Park Fire became the fourth-largest fire in California's history. Despite aggressive initial attack suppression efforts, the fire rapidly expanded, ultimately consuming 429,603 acres across Butte and Tehama counties. The Park Fire led to the destruction of 713 structures and damage to 57 others, prompting widespread evacuations and the temporary closure of Lassen Volcanic National Park.

In 2025, Los Angeles County experienced two of the most destructive wildfires in history (discussed below). As the state continues adapting to climate change, including the increasing likelihood of extreme Fire Weather Index conditions, it will be essential to establish programs and policies that help reduce the risk of loss during a fire.

2025 Los Angeles Fires: In January 2025, Los Angeles County experienced the second and third most destructive fires in California history: the Palisades Fire and Eaton Fire. The University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) estimated the fires' total property and capital losses could range between \$76 billion and \$131 billion, with insured losses estimated up to \$45 billion.¹ At its height, the fires placed an estimated 331,335 people on an evacuation advisory, with nearly 192,000 residents facing mandatory evacuation and roughly 140,000 subject to warnings. The Eaton Fire resulted in 9,413 buildings being destroyed, 1,074 structures damaged, and 19 confirmed civilian fatalities. The Palisades Fire resulted in 6,833 structures destroyed, 973 structures damaged, and 12 confirmed civilian fatalities. The blazes burned a combined 37,728 acres and leveled entire communities in the Pacific Palisades and Altadena neighborhoods of LA County.

As firefighters were battling the largest conflagrations, additional fires broke out in the Los Angeles area. Crews were able to stop the forward spread and contain the blazes. These fires included the Lidia, Archer, Woodley, Sunset, Kenneth, Hurst, and Auto fires, which burned close to 2,400 acres between them. Two weeks after the initial fires, the Hughes Fire began near Castaic Lake in northern Los Angeles County on January 22 and grew to over 10,000 acres. Firefighters fully contained the fire on January 30 after covering 10,425 acres.

Wildfires and Public Water Systems: Wildfires across California have repeatedly exposed vulnerabilities in public water systems, especially in high and very high severity zones. During the 2025 Palisades Fire, extreme demand caused by firefighting overwhelmed the system, leaving some hydrants dry. In Ventura County's 2024 Mountain Fire, power outages delayed pump operations and disrupted hillside water supply, echoing similar failures during the 2017 Thomas Fire and leaving high-elevation hydrants without water. Likewise, during the 2017 Tubbs Fire, firefighters in Santa Rosa's Fountaingrove neighborhood lost access to water due to low pressure and had to travel long distances to refill, delaying response efforts. It is important to note that even when operating at their maximum efficiency, public water systems are currently not designed for catastrophic wildfires.

¹ Economic Impact of the Los Angeles Wildfires, <https://www.anderson.ucla.edu/about/centers/ucla-anderson-forecast/economic-impact-los-angeles-wildfires>

Mobile Dip Tanks: Firefighting helicopters can use dip tanks when other water sources are not an option. Deployed dip tanks may shorten the distances helicopters must travel to the nearest body of water, provide access when local water sources are not sufficiently deep, or alleviate environmental concerns associated with using local water sources. Dip tanks come in many sizes and shapes and are mobile, allowing them to be strategically positioned for optimal access and effectiveness during a fire incident.

This bill specifically identifies mobile rigid dip tanks. According to the United States Forest Service Technology & Development Program's *Helicopter Dip Tank Capabilities and User's Guide*, "[r]igid tanks are made with heavy aluminum or steel and do not collapse. These tanks are rectangular with wheels attached to the bottom and only can be moved by a large truck or tractor. These tanks resemble an open top trailer. Due to their size, they are usually positioned next to roads or parking lots. Collapsible tanks can be placed in more remote locations." The estimated cost of a mobile rigid dip tank ranges from \$65,000 to \$95,000.

For example, the Crescenta Valley Water District owns two mobile rigid dip tanks that, when needed, are shared with other local jurisdictions. These rigid dip tanks were deployed as part of the Eaton Fire response in 2025.

Permanent Water Tank Infrastructure: This bill would also make permanent helicopter-accessible water supply infrastructure eligible for grant funding. Heli-hydrants, also known as rapid aerial water supply tanks, are becoming an increasingly popular choice for local water districts to provide a reliable water source and reduce response time to firefighting helicopters during wildfires. A heli-hydrant (helicopter-hydrant) is a strategically placed, large stationary tank, integrated into a local jurisdiction's water system, that can rapidly fill, and refill, with water, often upon a remote activation. Exact size, capacity, and fill time vary. The estimated cost of a heli-hydrant ranges from \$300,000 - \$500,000.

For example, Yorba Linda Water District has two heli-hydrants that support firefighting helicopters with a tank capacity ranging from 350 to 3000 gallons: a 12-foot wide, 3-foot deep, 2,400-gallon water tank that can be remotely activated to fill within 6 minutes and a 15-foot wide, 7-foot deep, 5,000-gallon water tank that can be filled at a rate of 850 gallons per minute. Additionally, the Jurupa Community Services District has completed construction on the first of four planned permanent heli-hydrants – an innovative solution to ensure a firefighting helicopter will never have to navigate around either of the freeways that divide the district into four parts. The completed heli-hydrant is a 15-foot wide, 10,000-gallon, remote-controlled water tank that allows firefighting helicopters to refill in under seven minutes. According to the district, "At the recent Baine Fire in Jurupa Valley, JCSD's heli-hydrant provided the water supply for approximately 20 aerial water drops, significantly reducing response time and limiting the fire's progression." Additional water districts with these systems include the Fallbrook Public Utility District, Rainbow Municipal Water District, and San Geronio Pass Water Agency,

CAL FIRE Local Assistance Grant Program: The Wildfire Resilience Program pursuant to PRC 4124.5 is tasked with assisting nonindustrial timberland owners with wildfire resilience efforts by providing technical and financial assistance for their forest management needs. The Wildfire Resilience Program includes several state forestry assistance programs within CAL FIRE that share the goal of improving the health and productivity of private forest lands and reducing the threat posed from wildland fires. According to CAL FIRE, over the last six years, CAL FIRE has

awarded more than \$566 million in Wildfire Prevention Grants to more than 575 projects across the state.

The Wildfire Prevention Grants Program is funded as part of the state's Wildfire and Forest Resilience Strategy, in part with Cap-and-Invest auction proceeds administered with Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund moneys. For FY 2025-26, CAL FIRE's granted Wildfire Grant Prevention \$62.7 million for 84 grants, ranging from \$63,000 to \$949,000; the average grant amount was \$750,000.

This bill makes mobile rigid dip tanks and helicopter-accessible water supply infrastructure as eligible for future wildfire prevention grant funding opportunities and programs.

Office of the State Fire Marshal's Community Wildfire Preparedness and Mitigation Division: This division collaborates with federal, state, and local agencies, tribes, non-profit entities, and stakeholders to prepare California communities against wildfires. CAL FIRE develops strategies, conducts hazard inspections, and provides education and grants for wildfire prevention efforts, fostering prepared and resilient communities

CAL FIRE Aviation Program: CAL FIRE's aviation program is critical in wildfire response, deploying a fleet of air tankers, helicopters, and uncrewed aerial systems (UAS) to support ground crews, enhance situational awareness, and improve firefighting efficiency. With over 60 fixed-wing and rotary aircraft, CAL FIRE operates the world's largest civil aerial firefighting fleet, responding to thousands of fires each year while aiming to contain 95% of wildfires to 10 acres or less.

The fleet includes Grumman S-2T Airtankers, Bell UH-1H Super Huey Helicopters, Sikorsky S-70i Helicopters, North American OV-10A (& 1 D Model) Bronco Air Tactical Aircraft and C-130 Hercules Airtankers. Strategically stationed at 14 air tanker bases, 10 CAL FIRE helitack bases, and one joint base with the San Diego County Sheriff, these aircraft can reach fires in the most remote State Responsibility Area (SRA) within approximately 20 minutes.

CAL FIRE contracts with vendors that support firefighting aircraft that provide fire suppression through two processes: (1) the Exclusive Use (EU) full contracting process, and (2) Call When Needed (CWN) done through emergency authority. As part of the SB 101, the Budget Act of 2025, CAL FIRE's Exclusive Use (EU) aircraft contracting threshold was increased from \$27.5 million to \$65 million to enhance wildfire response. CAL FIRE stated the increase will allow flexibility to contract with EU aircraft to support its fire suppression operations at the beginning stages of a wildfire, will allow the expansion of resources to expedite fire response times, and continue the "significant positive impact additional firefighting aircraft are having on the Department's fire suppression capabilities."

Modular Aerial Fire Fighting Systems (MAFFS): The Modular Airborne Firefighting System (MAFFS) was established in 1971 as a collaboration between the U.S. Forest Service and the Department of Defense to integrate military C-130 aircraft into national wildfire response efforts. When contracted airtankers are unavailable or fully committed, California can use MAFFS-equipped C-130s to provide additional aerial firefighting support to strengthen wildfire suppression efforts.

Arguments in Support: According to the Crescenta Valley Water District, Paradise Irrigation District, Jurupa Community Services District, and others, "We have all witnessed the devastation

caused by California wildfires over the last several years alone. The conditions responsible for this devastation are widely anticipated to continue intensifying. Communities throughout California, particularly those within the urban-wildland interface areas, are acutely aware of the need to harden infrastructure and prepare for more intense wildfire response activities. Water agencies are well-positioned to provide critical firefighting response support through the acquisition, installation, and operation of infrastructure that makes water supplies for firefighting response more accessible to our first responders. Accessibility to water supplies for aerial firefighting crews is especially critical in those urban-wildland interface areas where conventional water sources are not readily available and accessible.”

They continue, “Mobile and permanent water supply tanks – such as mobile rigid dip tanks, Heli-Hydrant systems, and similarly situated helicopter-accessible water supply infrastructure – are essential to quick firefighting response in many areas throughout the state. This infrastructure has proven essential in significantly reducing response times, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of wildfire suppression efforts.”

Prior Legislation:

SB 90 (Seyarto, 2025) includes in the list of eligible projects under the \$135 million wildfire mitigation grant program, authorized pursuant to Proposition 4, improvements to public evacuation routes in very high and high fire hazard severity zones, mobile rigid dip tanks, as defined, to support firefighting efforts, prepositioned mobile rigid water storage, as defined, and improvements to the response and effectiveness of fire engines and helicopters. This bill was held in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

AB 1956, *Stats. 2018, Ch. 632, Sec. 3*. This bill requires the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CalFire) to establish a local grants program and establishes the criteria for those grants, including prioritizing projects that are multi-year. Grants to local public entities would be prioritized based on those entities’ activities that result in being considered “fire adapted communities” on a list maintained by CalFire.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

Bellflower Somerset Mutual Water Company
 Crescenta Valley Water District
 Cucamonga Valley Water District
 Elsinore Valley Municipal Water District
 Fallbrook Public Utility District
 Jurupa Community Services District
 Kinneloa Irrigation District
 LA Habra Heights County Water District
 Las Virgenes Municipal Water District
 Main San Gabriel Basin Watermaster
 Montebello Land and Water Company
 Orange County Fire Authority
 Paradise Irrigation District
 Pico Water District

Quartz Hill Water District
Rainbow Municipal Water District
Rancho California Water District
Rowland Water District
Rubio Canon Land and Water Association
San Gabriel County Water District
San Gabriel Valley Municipal Water District
San Geronimo PASS Water Agency
Santa Clarita Valley Water Agency
Southern California Water Coalition
Valencia Heights Water Company
Valley County Water District
Walnut Valley Water District
West Valley Water District
Western Municipal Water District

Opposition

None on file.

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