

Date of Hearing: May 6, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

AB 1960 (Bennett) – As Amended April 8, 2026

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| Policy Committee: | Natural Resources | Vote: | 14 - 0 |
| | Emergency Management | | 5 - 2 |

Urgency: No State Mandated Local Program: No Reimbursable: No

SUMMARY:

This bill authorizes the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) to disburse funds appropriated for the wildfire prevention grants program to “identified cohesive fire communities” (ICFCs) that partner with fire safe councils to use for certain wildfire prevention activities and requires CAL FIRE to prioritize disadvantaged ICFCs in its evaluation of applicants for the program.

Specifically, this bill, among other things:

- 1) Defines an ICFC as a community, as that term is defined in the Government Code, that has reached the applicable percentage of homes certified by a home hardening certification program (HHCP) pursuant to the process described in item 2, below.
- 2) Requires a community, in order to qualify as an ICFC, to, until or unless a state agency develops an HHCP, reach the following minimum percentage of homes certified pursuant to an HHCP developed by an independent, 501(c)(3) nonprofit scientific research and communications organization supported by property insurers, reinsurers, and affiliated companies: (a) in the 2028–29 and 2029–30 fiscal years (FYs), 10% of homes certified as hardened, (b) in the 2030–31 to 2032–33 FYs, inclusive, 30% of homes certified as hardened, and (c) in the 2033–34 and 2034–35 FYs, 50% of homes certified as hardened.
- 3) Requires a state agency, if it adopts an HHCP for purposes of certification as an ICFC, to adopt timeframes and minimum percentage thresholds that are comparable to the timeframes and minimum percentage thresholds described above.
- 4) Provides that, upon the development of an HHCP by a state agency, a community that previously qualified as an ICFC by meeting the thresholds described above pursuant to certification conducted pursuant to any HHCP developed by a nonprofit, shall retain that qualification.
- 5) Authorizes CAL FIRE, commencing with the 2028–29 FY, to disburse funds appropriated for the department’s wildfire prevention grants program to ICFCs that partner with fire safe councils, consistent with item 6, below, to use for activities related to hazardous fuels reduction, wildfire prevention planning, and wildfire prevention education, among other activities.

- 6) For purposes of CAL FIRE's wildfire prevention grant program monies, described above, a fire safe council (FSC) shall be both (a) the entity that applies to CAL FIRE for grant funding on behalf of an individual or group of individuals affiliated with an ICFC and (b) the entity that receives and manages any grant funding awarded to an ICFC pursuant to the wildfire prevention grants program; and requires the FSC to determine how to use the funds in the ICFC for hazardous fuels reduction, wildfire prevention planning, and wildfire prevention education, among other activities.
- 7) Requires CAL FIRE, commencing with the 2028–29 FY, to prioritize disadvantaged ICFCs in its evaluation of applicants for the wildfire prevention grants program.

FISCAL EFFECT:

By authorizing CAL FIRE to provide wildfire prevention grants to ICFCs that partner with fire safe councils and requiring CAL FIRE to prioritize disadvantaged ICFCs in its evaluation of applicants for the program, this bill creates cost pressures of an unknown amount, possibly in the hundreds of thousands to low millions of dollars annually, on the wildfire prevention grant program (General Fund, special fund such as the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF), or bond funds such as the Proposition 4 climate bond) to the extent there is increased demand for funding from eligible communities. CAL FIRE reports its administrative costs to implement this bill are absorbable within existing resources.

According to CAL FIRE, the department has awarded more than \$639 million from FY 2019-20 to FY 2025-26 in wildfire prevention grants to more than 677 projects (both competitive and direct awards) 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 GGRF moneys. For FY 2025-26, CAL FIRE has granted \$62.7 million for 84 wildfire prevention grants, ranging from \$63,000 to \$949,000; the average grant amount was \$750,000.

Proposition 4 allocates \$185 million to CAL FIRE for local fire prevention grants and for grants to conduct workforce development for fire prevention and wildfire resiliency work. Separately, Proposition 4 also allocates \$50 million to the California Natural Resources Agency for grants for, among other things, structure hardening and defensible space.

As part of the Governor's FY 2026-27 budget, CAL FIRE is requesting \$6.2 million ongoing General Fund for 31 positions to perform defensible space inspections (which include home hardening assessments) of parcels within the State Responsibility Area.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **Purpose.** According to the author:

Last year, we watched entire communities destroyed by ferocious wildfires. As California continues to grapple with more frequent, intense, and destructive wildfires, we need to ensure whole neighborhoods won't be decimated... This bill incentivizes California's communities to reduce risk together, rather than one home at a time. Through strategic planning, retrofitting, and engagement, Californians

will decrease property loss and become more resilient in the face of climate change.

- 2) **Background.** According to CAL FIRE, home hardening is a method of utilizing construction features, building materials, and maintenance practices intended to increase a building and structure's resistance to ignition from fire exposure, including direct flame contact, radiant heat, and embers. This bill is focused on community-level hardening. Consumer Watchdog contends this bill will “help reduce large-scale property losses, stabilize insurance availability and affordability in high-risk areas, [and] ensure more efficient use of public funds by prioritizing communities with demonstrated participation.”

Home Hardening Certification. There is currently no dedicated HHCP at the state level. AB 1934 (Bennett) of the current legislative session requires, by January 1, 2028, the State Fire Marshal's Wildfire Mitigation Advisory Committee to develop an HHCP that identifies home hardening measures that can be voluntarily implemented. AB 1934 is pending in this committee. This bill (AB 1960) defines an ICFC as a community that has reached the applicable percentage of homes certified by a HHCP developed by a nonprofit (until a state agency develops its own HHCP) and authorizes CAL FIRE to provide wildfire prevention grants to ICFCs that partner with fire safe councils – with priority granted to disadvantaged ICFCs.

Wildfire Prevention Grants. CAL FIRE's wildfire prevention grants enable local organizations like fire safe councils to implement activities that reduce wildfire risk to communities. Funded activities include hazardous fuel reduction, wildfire prevention planning, and wildfire prevention education.

Fire Safe Councils. The California Fire Safe Council (CFSC) supports communities across the state in wildfire preparedness and resiliency through grant funding, programmatic support, and technical assistance. CFSC notes that it assists a network of over 300 local fire safe councils across the state in their efforts to educate, empower, and mobilize local communities to live safely with wildfire, which is done primarily through outreach and education; landscape, community, and parcel-level mitigation activities; and planning and community-hardening. It is not clear if there is a fire safe council in every community where an ICFC would want to apply for funding.

California Wildfire Mitigation Program (CWMP). The California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) has partnered with CAL FIRE to develop a comprehensive wildfire mitigation program that focuses on cost-effective structure hardening and retrofitting to create fire-resistant homes as well as defensible space and vegetation management activities. The primary goal of the CWMP is to offer financial assistance to vulnerable populations in wildfire-prone areas throughout California. The Proposition 4 climate bond allocates \$135 million for the CWMP.

Analysis Prepared by: Nikita Koraddi / APPR. / (916) 319-2081