

ASSEMBLY THIRD READING

AB 1960 (Bennett)

As Amended April 8, 2026

Majority vote

SUMMARY

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" that partner with fire safe councils to use for certain wildfire prevention activities and requires CAL FIRE to prioritize disadvantaged identified cohesive fire communities in its evaluation of applicants for the program.

Major Provisions

- 1) Defines an identified cohesive fire community as a community that has reached the applicable percentage of homes certified by a home hardening certification program.
- 2) Requires a community, in order to qualify as an identified cohesive fire community as a community, to, until or unless a state agency develops an home hardening certification program, reach specified minimum percentage of homes certified by an independent, 501(c)(3) nonprofit scientific research and communications organization supported by property insurers, reinsurers, and affiliated companies.
- 3) Requires a state agency, if it adopts an home hardening certification program to adopt timeframes and minimum percentage thresholds that are comparable to the aforementioned specified timeframes and minimum percentage thresholds.
- 4) Authorizes CAL FIRE, commencing with the 2028–29 FY, to disburse funds appropriated for the department's wildfire prevention grants program to identified cohesive fire communities that partner with fire safe councils to use for activities related to hazardous fuels reduction, wildfire prevention planning, and wildfire prevention education, among other activities.
- 5) Requires, for purposes of CAL FIRE's wildfire prevention grant program monies, a fire safe council to be both the entity that applies to CAL FIRE for grant funding on behalf of an individual or group of individuals affiliated with an identified cohesive fire community and the entity that receives and manages any grant funding awarded to an identified cohesive fire community; and requires the fire safe council to determine how to use the funds for hazardous fuels reduction, wildfire prevention planning, and wildfire prevention education, among other activities.
- 6) Requires CAL FIRE, commencing with the 2028–29 FY, to prioritize disadvantaged identified cohesive fire communities in its evaluation of applicants for the wildfire prevention grants program.

COMMENTS

There are various measures that reduce wildfire risk in a fire hazard severity zone (FHSZ), and in conjunction with one another, multiply risk reduction. Implementation of defensible space requirements works best when applied to all or the majority of structures in the areas where the

requirements are intended to be applied. The Legislative Analyst's Office 2021 report on defensible space explains, "While homeowners benefit from defensible space on their properties, the benefits extend to others, as well. For example, when homeowners maintain defensible space, their homes are less likely to ignite other nearby homes, overwhelm firefighters, and ultimately threaten larger communities with wildfire disasters. As such, an individual homeowner's decision to create and maintain defensible space can help protect communities, governments, and insurers from the significant costs of wildfire disasters."

There currently is no dedicated home hardening inspection and certification program. AB 1934 (Bennett) requires, by January 1, 2028, the SFM's Wildfire Mitigation Advisory Committee to develop a home hardening certification program that identifies home hardening measures that can be voluntarily implemented. Until a state home hardening certification program is adopted, this bill allows identified cohesive fire communities to be certified by qualified nonprofits with relevant certification.

CAL FIRE's Wildfire Grants Program is a broad set of competitive grants to fund wildfire prevention and related activities, which includes the wildfire prevention grants funded by California Climate Investments (cap-and-trade funds) and other state appropriations. These grants enable local organizations like fire safe councils, to implement activities that address the hazards of wildfire and reduce wildfire risk to communities, including hazardous fuels reduction, wildfire planning, education and outreach, and other ecosystem-based activities that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and protect public health. Identified cohesive fire communities that achieve specified home hardening percentages could apply for funding through that program via a Fire Safe Council.

Fire Safe Councils are grassroots community-based organizations in California that share the objective of making communities less vulnerable to catastrophic wildfire. Fire safe councils use education programs and projects such as shaded fuel breaks or firebreaks to protect area residents against an oncoming wildfire and to provide firefighters with a place to fight the oncoming fire. Under this bill, if a community is awarded funding, the Fire Safe Council would implement the vegetation management projects to support that community.

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. AB 1960 allows CAL FIRE to disperse Wildfire Prevention Grant funding to communities that have reached at least 50% of homes hardened. 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.

Arguments in Support

Fire Aside writes, "We support AB 1960 because grant programs that reach communities most exposed to wildfire risk are among the highest-leverage tools available to fire agencies ... Fire Aside supports this bill because it aligns with our experience that community-level action, properly resourced and coordinated, produces measurable improvements in the defensible space and home hardening outcomes that ultimately determine whether homes survive a wildfire."

Arguments in Opposition

None on file

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee, 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, 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.

VOTES**ASM NATURAL RESOURCES: 14-0-0**

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

ASM EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT: 5-2-0

YES: Ransom, Arambula, Bains, Bennett, Calderon

NO: Hadwick, DeMaio

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 14-1-0

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

NO: Tangipa

UPDATED

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