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# SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES AND WATER

Senator Josh Becker, Chair

2025 - 2026 Regular

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<b>Bill No:</b>	AB 1960	<b>Hearing Date:</b>	June 23, 2026
<b>Author:</b>	Bennett		
<b>Version:</b>	April 8, 2026 Amended		
<b>Urgency:</b>	No	<b>Fiscal:</b>	Yes
<b>Consultant:</b>	Edith Hannigan		

**Subject:** Wildfire Prevention Grants Program: identified cohesive fire communities

## SUMMARY

This bill would authorize the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection to disburse funds appropriated for the Wildfire Prevention Grants Program to identified cohesive fire communities that partner with fire safe councils to use for activities related to hazardous fuel reduction, wildfire prevention planning, and wildfire prevention education. This bill would require the Department, commencing with the 2028-29 fiscal year, to prioritize disadvantaged cohesive fire communities.

## BACKGROUND AND EXISTING LAW

**Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Department).** The Department, in accordance with a plan approved by the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection, is responsible for the prevention and suppression of forest fires (Public Resources Code (PRC) §§4113, 4114).

**Office of the State Fire Marshal (OSFM).** In the mid-1990s, the OSFM was moved from the State and Consumer Services Agency to the Department. The State Fire Marshal (SFM) is established as a Chief Deputy Director of Forestry and Fire Protection in the Department (Health and Safety Code (HSC) §13100). The mission of the OSFM is to “[protect] life and property through the development and application of fire prevention, engineering, training and education, and enforcement.”

**Wildfire Prevention Grants.** Administered by the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Department), the Wildfire Prevention Grants Program funds projects in and near fire threatened communities to improve public health and safety while reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

**Wildfires.** Wildfires in California have been increasing in frequency and intensity, resulting in loss of life and damage to public health, property, infrastructure, and ecosystems.

California’s landscapes are among the most naturally fire-dependent on Earth. One study suggests that prior to 1800, approximately 4.5 million acres of the state burned annually. Native Americans were likely responsible for a significant portion of this acreage. With colonization, many of these practices were significantly reduced or eliminated, fundamentally altering fire scope and intensity across the state.

Low-intensity fires have clear ecological benefits, such as creating habitat and assisting in the regeneration of certain species of plants and trees. Low-intensity fire also reduces surface fuel, which decreases future wildfire intensity.

A century of suppressing low-intensity fires, logging of older growth and more fire-resistant trees has increased the size and severity of California's fires. Climate change has also contributed to wildfire risk by reducing humidity and precipitation and increasing temperatures.

**Home hardening.** The Department and California Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) are authorized to enter into a joint powers agreement to administer a Wildfire Mitigation Financial Assistance Program, known as the California Wildfire Mitigation Program (CWMP), that:

- 1) Encourages cost-effective structure hardening and retrofitting that creates fire-resistant homes, businesses, and public buildings.
- 2) Facilitates vegetation management, the creation and maintenance of defensible space, and other fuel modification activities that provide neighborhood or communitywide benefits against wildfire (Government Code (GOV) §8654.4).

CWMP is required to submit a report to the Legislature by July 1, 2028 regarding the implementation of the program including:

- The cost effectiveness of the program, compared to similar programs.
- Evaluation of the overall risk mitigation achieved statewide.
- Information regarding barriers to completing the work.

Existing law sunsets CWMP on July 1, 2029.

## **PROPOSED LAW**

This bill would:

- 1) Define an "identified cohesive fire community" as a community, as defined in GOV §65302.10(a)(1), that has reached a certain percentage of homes certified by a home hardening certification program pursuant to a home hardening certification program 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, inclusive, 10 percent of homes certified as hardened.
  - b) In the 2030–31 to 2032–33 fiscal years, inclusive, 30 percent of homes certified as hardened.
  - c) In the 2033–34 and 2034–35 fiscal years, inclusive, 50 percent of homes certified as hardened.

- 2) Require a state agency, if they adopt a home hardening certification program, to adopt timeframes and minimum percentage thresholds that are comparable to the timeframes and minimum percentage thresholds described above.
- 3) Specify that a community that qualified as an identified cohesive fire community pursuant to a third-party certification program shall retain its status as such upon the development of a certification program by a state agency.
- 4) Authorize the Department, commencing with the 2028-29 fiscal year, to disburse funds appropriated for the 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) Specify that, for the purposes of the Wildfire Prevention Grants Program distribution, a fire safe council shall be the entity the applies to the department for grant funding and receives and manages any awarded funding.
- 6) Require the Department, commencing with the 2028-29 fiscal year, prioritize disadvantaged identified cohesive fire communities in its evaluation of applicants for the Wildfire Prevention Grants program.

### ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT

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 a certain number 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 OPPOSITION

None received.

### COMMENTS

***Incentivizing individual home hardening.*** This bill would provide an incentive for individual homeowners to undertake work to harden their home, by providing for a hardened community to be eligible for grants that may further protect their neighborhood from wildfire.

***Committee amendments.*** The committee may wish to amend this bill to improve clarity. These amendments:

- Specify that a home hardening certification program developed by either the state or private entities shall be based on publicly available science.
- Clarify that, in order to be an identified cohesive fire community, 50% of the homes must be certified in the fiscal year 2033-34 and following fiscal years.
- Reduce duplicative language in Section 4124.9(a)(4).

- Authorized disadvantaged identified cohesive fire communities to be prioritized as other disadvantaged communities are in the Department’s grant programs.

Additionally, the California Department of Insurance provided technical assistance on this bill and recommended an amendment that clarifies that this program shall not apply to the business of insurance, and does not establish actuarial justification for insurance changes, absent additional supporting evidence. **[SEE Amendment #1]**

***Committee amendments will be taken in the Senate Emergency Management Committee.***

Due to time constraints, if the committee wishes to amend the bill and the bill is passed out of this committee with the author’s commitment, the amendments will be taken in the Senate Emergency Management Committee’s hearing on this bill.

***Related Legislation***

AB 1934 (Bennett, 2026) would require, on or before January 1, 2029, the SFM to establish the home hardening certification program and implement the program consistent with the recommendations made by the Wildfire Mitigation Advisory Committee. This bill is pending hearing in the Senate Emergency Management Committee.

SB 1270 (Richardson, 2026) would have required the CWMP to expand to additional counties. This bill was held in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

**SUGGESTED AMENDMENTS**

**AMENDMENT 1**

Amend Section 4124.9 as follows:

4124.9 (a)

[...]

(2) In order to qualify as an identified cohesive fire community, a community shall, until or unless a state agency develops a home hardening certification program, reach the following minimum percentage of homes certified pursuant to a home hardening certification program developed by an independent, 501(c)(3) nonprofit scientific research and communications organization supported by property insurers, reinsurers, and affiliated companies. State and private certification programs shall be based upon objective, verifiable, and periodically reviewed wildfire-mitigation criteria supported by publicly available methodology and data:

(A) In the 2028–29 and 2029–30 fiscal years, 10 percent of homes certified as hardened.

(B) In the 2030–31 to 2032–33 fiscal years, inclusive, 30 percent of homes certified as hardened.

(C) In the 2033–34 and following 2034–35 fiscal years, 50 percent of homes certified as hardened.

[...]

(4) Upon the development of a home hardening certification program by a state agency as described in paragraph (3), a community that was previously certified qualified as an identified cohesive fire community pursuant to paragraph (2), by meeting the thresholds described in subparagraphs (A) to (C), inclusive, of paragraph (2) pursuant to certification conducted to any home hardening certification program developed by an independent, 501(c)(3) nonprofit scientific research and communications organization supported by property insurers, reinsurers, and affiliated companies, shall retain that qualification.

[...]

~~(d) The department shall, commencing with the 2028–29 fiscal year, prioritize disadvantaged~~ Disadvantaged identified cohesive fire communities shall be awarded preference pursuant to the department’s established procedures for prioritizing disadvantaged applicants in their ~~in its~~ evaluation of applicants for the Wildfire Prevention Grants Program.

(e) An identified cohesive fire community, pursuant to this section, does not apply to the business of insurance, and does not establish actuarial justification for insurance rate adjustments, catastrophe-model modifications, underwriting changes, or mitigation credits absent supporting empirical and statistical evidence.

**SUPPORT**

- California Fire Chiefs Association
- Consumer Watchdog
- Fire Aside, INC
- Fire Districts Association of California
- Matador Fire
- Megafire Action
- Orange County Fire Authority
- Sierra Club (if amended)

**OPPOSITION**

None received

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