
SENATE COMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Senator Henry Stern

Chair

2025 - 2026 Regular

Bill No:	AB 1960	Hearing Date:	6/30/2026
Author:	Bennett		
Version:	6/25/2026 Amended		
Urgency:	No	Fiscal:	Yes
Consultant:	Cassie Royce		

SUBJECT: Wildfire Prevention Grants Program: identified cohesive fire communities

SUMMARY: Allows the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) to disburse funds from the Wildfire Prevention Grants Program (WPGP) to identified cohesive fire communities, as defined, that partner with fire safe councils to use for specified fuels reduction and wildfire prevention activities.

ANALYSIS:

Existing law:

- 1) Provides that CAL FIRE, in accordance with a plan approved by the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection, is responsible for the prevention and suppression of forest fires.
- 2) Establishes the Office of the State Fire Marshal (SFM) within CAL FIRE to protect life and property through the development and application of fire prevention, engineering, training and education, and enforcement.
- 3) Requires the SFM to develop and update a Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) list of products and construction assemblies that comply with prescribed regulations regarding building in a WUI area.
- 4) Requires the California Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) to enter into a joint powers agreement (JPA) with CAL FIRE, until July 1, 2029, to develop and administer a comprehensive wildfire mitigation program (CWMP) to, among other things, encourage cost-effective structure hardening and retrofitting to create fire-resistant homes, businesses, and public buildings.

- 5) Specifies areas eligible for financial assistance under the CWMP to include areas located within fire hazard severity zones and any other lands designated by the JPA, as specified.
- 6) Directs the JPA to develop eligibility criteria for property owners, community organizations, and local governments that may receive financial assistance under the CWMP.
- 7) Requires the CWMP to submit a report to the Legislature by July 1, 2028, regarding the implementation of the program, including the following:
 - a) The cost effectiveness of the program, compared to similar programs.
 - b) Evaluation of the overall risk mitigation achieved statewide.
 - c) Information regarding barriers to completing the work.
- 8) Sunsets the CWMP on July 1, 2029.

This bill:

- 1) Defines an “identified cohesive fire community” to mean a community that has reached a certain percentage of homes certified by a home hardening certification program pursuant to a home hardening certification program developed by a third-party independent, 501(c)(3) nonprofit scientific research and communications organization. Specifies the percentages as follows:
 - 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 fiscal years, 50 percent of homes certified as hardened.
- 2) Requires a state agency, if the agency adopts a home hardening certification program, to adopt timeframes and minimum percentage thresholds that are comparable to the timeframes and minimum percentage thresholds described in 1) above.
- 3) Provides that a community that qualified as an identified cohesive fire community pursuant to a third-party certification program shall retain that qualification upon the development of a certification program by a state agency.
- 4) Requires a home hardening certification program developed by either a state agency or third-party to be based on publicly available methodology and data,

as specified.

- 5) Allows CAL FIRE, commencing with the 2028-29 fiscal year, to disburse funds appropriated for the WPGP 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.
- 6) Provides that, for the purposes of the WPGP distribution, a fire safe council shall be the entity that applies to CAL FIRE for grant funding and receives and manages any awarded funding.
- 7) Requires CAL FIRE to prioritize disadvantaged identified cohesive fire communities in its evaluation of applicants for the WPGP, as specified.
- 8) Specifies that qualification as an identified cohesive fire community pursuant to this bill shall not be used for purposes of the business of insurance, and shall not establish actuarial justification for insurance changes, absent additional supporting evidence.

Background

Author's statement. 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."

Home Hardening. 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. Home hardening includes using fire-resistant building materials, adopting safe landscaping practices, and implementing preventative measures to reduce fire risk and enhance property safety. CAL FIRE has information on its website relating to how various components of a home can be vulnerable to fire, whether it is the roof, gutters and

vents or the exterior siding, windows, and/or a deck and fence, and provides recommendations to homeowners to minimize those risks.

Wildfire Prevention Grants. CAL FIRE's WPGP provides funding for fire prevention projects and activities in, and near, fire threatened communities that focus on increasing the protection of people, structures, and communities. Funded activities include hazardous fuel reduction, wildfire prevention planning, and wildfire prevention education with an emphasis on improving public health and safety while reducing greenhouse gas emissions. CAL FIRE works with grantees on strategically located fuel reduction projects in high wildfire prone communities throughout the state. These projects provide valuable education on wildfire mitigation action, preparedness planning, and hazardous fuel reduction projects that enhance public safety and slow the intensity of wildfires to provide firefighters an anchor point for suppression actions. CAL FIRE works with grantees to complete these projects on a continuous basis. Wildfire prevention grants support the wildfire preparedness and mitigation activities of federal, state, and local agencies, Native American tribes, and private nonprofit partners.

The CWMP. AB 38 (Wood), Chapter 391, Statutes of 2019, directs Cal OES and CAL FIRE to jointly create and administer the CWMP to strengthen community-level wildfire hardening. The program has leveraged hazard mitigation grant funding from the Federal Emergency Management Agency to develop a wildfire community hardening framework and establish pilot home hardening programs in socially vulnerable communities at high risk of wildfires in the counties of Lake, San Diego, Shasta, El Dorado, Tuolumne, and Siskiyou. The framework incorporates lessons learned from the pilot counties and is intended to be a living document that will be continuously updated throughout the duration of the CWMP.

Third-party certification. While there are no current statewide mandated home hardening certification programs, the SFM's Wildfire Mitigation Advisory Committee has begun conversations about home hardening certifications, with research support from the Insurance Institute for Business & Home Safety (IBHS). Research by IBHS has explored how building materials, design features, and nearby fuel influences whether homes ignite or survive during wildfire. Post-fire assessments and experimental testing have found that homes incorporating multiple home hardening measures, such as noncombustible exterior wall cladding or Class A roof coverings, are more likely to avoid damage than homes with fewer mitigation features.

This bill seeks to incentivize community-level home hardening by prioritizing opportunities for wildfire prevention grant funding that may further protect hardened neighborhoods from wildfire.

Prior/Related Legislation

AB 1934 (Bennett) of this session directs the Wildfire Mitigation Advisory Committee within the SFM to develop an implementation plan for a home hardening certification program by January 1, 2028. (Pending in the Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee)

AB 1964 (Bennett) of this session requires the OSFM to, on or before January 1, 2030, compile a report concerning homes in moderate, high, and very high fire hazard severity zones in state and local responsibility areas and report to the Legislature. (Pending in the Senate Emergency Management Committee)

SB 1270 (Richardson) of this session would have expanded the CWMP to additional counties with the greatest combined risk of wildfire and social vulnerability. (Held in Senate Appropriations)

FISCAL EFFECT: Appropriation: No Fiscal Com.: Yes Local: No

SUPPORT:

California Fire Chiefs Association
Fire Districts Association of California
Matador Fire
Megafire Action

OPPOSITION:

None on file

ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT: In support of this bill, Megafire Action writes that, “Home hardening works best when it works collectively. A single hardened structure in a neighborhood of vulnerable homes still faces significant risk from ember cast, radiant heat, and fire spread from adjacent properties. AB 1960 recognizes this reality by creating a formal incentive structure for neighborhood level hardening. Communities that reach defined thresholds of certified hardened homes can qualify as "identified cohesive fire communities," making them eligible for a dedicated funding stream within CAL FIRE's existing Wildfire Prevention Grants Program. By requiring partnerships with fire safe councils - organizations with deep roots in local communities and established program management capacity – this bill ensures that funds are channeled through trusted, mission-aligned entities with demonstrated on-the-ground experience.”

DUAL REFERRAL: Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee and
Senate Emergency Management Committee