
SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Sabrina Cervantes, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

AB 1960 (Bennett) - Wildfire Prevention Grants Program: identified cohesive fire communities

Version: June 25, 2026

Urgency: No

Hearing Date: August 3, 2026

Policy Vote: N.R. & W. 5 - 0, E.M. 7 - 0

Mandate: No

Consultant: Ashley Ames

Bill Summary: This bill would allow the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CalFire) 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.

Fiscal Impact:

- By authorizing CalFire to provide wildfire prevention grants to ICFCs that partner with fire safe councils, and providing that disadvantaged ICFCs receive preference under CalFire's established procedures for prioritizing disadvantaged applicants, this bill would create 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.
- CalFire reports its administrative costs to implement this bill are absorbable within existing resources.

Background:

Home hardening. CalFire describes home hardening as using construction features, building materials, and maintenance practices that increase a structure's resistance to ignition from direct flame contact, radiant heat, and embers. It encompasses fire-resistant building materials, safe landscaping practices, and preventative measures to reduce risk. CalFire's website identifies how individual components — roof, gutters, vents, exterior siding, windows, decks, and fences — create vulnerability, and offers homeowners recommendations for reducing each.

Wildfire Prevention Grants Program. The WPGP funds fire prevention projects in and near fire-threatened communities to increase protection of people, structures, and communities. Eligible activities include hazardous fuel reduction, wildfire prevention planning, and wildfire prevention education, with emphasis on improving public health and safety while reducing greenhouse gas emissions. CalFire works with grantees on strategically located fuel reduction projects in high wildfire-prone communities statewide, projects intended to slow wildfire intensity and give firefighters an anchor point for suppression. Grants support federal, state, and local agencies, Native American tribes, and private nonprofit partners.

The California Wildfire Mitigation Program. AB 38 (Wood, Chapter 391, Statutes of 2019) directs Cal OES and CalFire to jointly create and administer the CWMP to strengthen community-level wildfire hardening. Using FEMA hazard mitigation grant funding, the program has developed a wildfire community hardening framework and established pilot home hardening programs in socially vulnerable, high-risk communities in Lake, San Diego, Shasta, El Dorado, Tuolumne, and Siskiyou counties. The framework draws on lessons from those pilots and is intended as a living document updated throughout the program's duration.

Third-party certification. No statewide home hardening certification program currently exists, though the State Fire Marshal's Wildfire Mitigation Advisory Committee has begun discussing certifications with research support from the Insurance Institute for Business & Home Safety (IBHS). IBHS research has examined how building materials, design features, and nearby fuels affect whether homes ignite or survive, and post-fire assessments and experimental testing indicate that homes combining multiple 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.

Proposed Law: This bill would:

1. Define an "identified cohesive fire community" to mean a community that has reached a certain percentage of homes certified by a home hardening certification program developed by a third-party independent, 501(c)(3) nonprofit scientific research and communications organization. Specify 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. Require a state agency, if the agency adopts a home hardening certification program, to adopt timeframes and minimum percentage thresholds comparable to those described above.
3. Provide that a community that qualified as an identified cohesive fire community pursuant to a third-party certification program would retain that qualification upon the development of a certification program by a state agency.
4. Require 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. Allow CalFire, 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. Provide that, for purposes of the WPGP distribution, a fire safe council would be the entity that applies to CalFire for grant funding and receives and manages any awarded funding.
7. Require CalFire to prioritize disadvantaged identified cohesive fire communities in its evaluation of applicants for the WPGP, as specified.
8. Specify that qualification as an identified cohesive fire community pursuant to this bill would not be used for purposes of the business of insurance, and would not establish actuarial justification for insurance changes, absent additional supporting evidence.

Related Legislation:

AB 1934 (Bennett, 2026) would direct the Wildfire Mitigation Advisory Committee within the SFM to develop an implementation plan for a home hardening certification program by January 1, 2028.

AB 1964 (Bennett, 2026) would require 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.

SB 1270 (Richardson, 2026) would have expanded the CWMP to additional counties with the greatest combined risk of wildfire and social vulnerability. The bill was held on Suspense in this committee.

Staff Comments: According to CalFire, 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, CalFire 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 CalFire 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.

The FY 2026-27 budget adopted in full CalFire requested \$6.2 million ongoing General Fund for 31 positions to perform defensible space inspections (which includes home hardening assessments) of parcels within the State Responsibility Area.

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