

Date of Hearing: May 6, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

AB 2410 (Ellis) – As Amended April 22, 2026

Policy Committee: Natural Resources

Vote: 11 - 0

Urgency: No

State Mandated Local Program: Yes

Reimbursable: No

**SUMMARY:**

This bill exempts certain wildfire prevention projects from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the California Coastal Act until 2030.

Specifically, this bill:

- 1) Exempts from CEQA and the requirement to obtain a coastal development permit (CDP) from the California Coastal Commission (Commission), until January 1, 2030, a “critical fuels reduction project” conducted in a community located in a high fire threat district that does at least one of the following: (a) removes hazardous, dead, or dying trees; (b) removes vegetation for the creation of strategic fuel breaks as identified by approved fire prevention plans, as specified; (c) removes vegetation along roadways, highways, and freeways for the creation of safer ingress and egress routes for the public and first responders and to reduce roadside ignitions; (d) removes vegetation around electric utility lines, poles, and rights-of-way to reduce the risk of wildfire and fire-related service outages; (e) removes vegetation using cultural traditional ecological knowledge for cultural burning or prescribed fire treatments or both of those types of treatments for fuels reduction projects; and (f) maintains previously established fuel breaks or fuel modification projects.
- 2) For items b) and c), above, the exemptions apply only if the vegetation removed for the project is a nonnative species, is 12 inches or less in diameter, and is a common species.
- 3) Requires exempt projects to comply with the best management practices under the 2025 Statewide Fuels Reduction Environmental Protection Plan as prepared by the California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA) and the California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA).
- 4) Provides that for a critical fuels reduction project (as defined above), development review authority shall be exercised by the Commission, regardless of whether there is a certified Local Coastal Program where the project occurs.
- 5) Requires the Commission to submit a report to the Legislature by January 1, 2028, with specified information, including the acreage of fuel modification or reduction projects approved annually under CDPs from January 1, 2020, to December 31, 2026.

**FISCAL EFFECT:**

As discussed in the background, this bill partially codifies a 2025 emergency proclamation (EP) that suspends all statutes, regulations, rules, and requirements that fall under the jurisdiction of CalEPA and CNRA for critical fuels reduction projects. This bill limits the exemptions to CEQA and the Coastal Act and, like the EP, requires exempt projects to comply with an environmental protection plan. While there is significant overlap in the types of projects eligible for the exemptions, there are some differences; for example, the bill includes (whereas the EP does not) projects that remove vegetation around electric utility lines, poles, and rights-of-way to reduce the risk of wildfire and fire-related service outages. Also, while the EP explicitly requires CNRA or CalEPA to make a determination about project eligibility, the bill does not. Regardless, it is reasonable to assume CalEPA and CNRA – and their respective boards, departments, and offices, as applicable – will need to evaluate, track, and monitor proposed and approved projects.

- 1) CNRA estimates annual General Fund costs of \$240,000 until 2030 for one senior environmental scientist specialist to help manage the regulatory suspension process, offer integrated resource management guidance, coordinate efforts across agencies, develop standardized procedures, review suspension requests, and serve as the primary point of contact for both applicants and the public. While the bill largely continues workload created by the EP, CNRA asserts it has had to divert staff from other important duties to implement the EP, which is unsustainable on an ongoing basis.
- 2) The Commission estimates annual General Fund costs of about \$1.5 million for three years for six positions to (a) review proposed fuels reduction projects – including project location, purpose, methods, targeted species, and plant size – throughout the coastal zone to determine and document whether each project meets the criteria for exemption from the Coastal Act and (b) gather and review Commission and local government permit records for fuel modification or reduction projects in the coastal zone from 2020 through 2026, and synthesize data from these records for the required report to the Legislature.

Like CNRA, the Commission notes that when the Governor declares an emergency that requires action by the Commission, the Commission rearranges its existing staffing capacity to fully comply with the Governor's directive for the duration of the emergency. In the case of the aforementioned EP, the Commission has had to redirect multiple ecology and planning staff from their assigned duties to instead review proposed vegetation management projects as quickly as possible. The Commission notes that this type of temporary rearrangement is feasible for a brief emergency period, but it may come at the cost of the Commission acting expeditiously on its other responsibilities. Therefore, the Commission asserts it will require resources to implement this bill while fulfilling its existing statutory obligations.

It is not clear to the committee the extent to which any reduction in workload or cost savings resulting from the Coastal Act and CDP exemption may offset the Commission's costs associated with this bill.

- 3) The State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) estimates annual costs of \$500,000 (Timber Regulation and Forest Restoration Fund or General Fund) until 2030 to review and inspect exempt critical fuels reduction projects to ensure water quality is protected from these activities, consistent with the 2025 Statewide Fuels Reduction Environmental Protection Plan. Since the EP went into effect, the State Water Board and its Regional Water Quality Control Boards (Regional Water Boards) have reviewed hundreds of applications and have had to redirect staff from other responsibilities (including work related

to the California Vegetation Treatment Program (CalVTP), Timber Harvest Plan reviews and inspections, 401 water quality certifications, and dredge and fill permits). Because projects exempt from CEQA or the Coastal Act under this bill are not exempt from other requirements (such as the Porter-Cologne Act), the State Water Board and Regional Water Boards anticipate increased workload as a result of this bill.

- 4) Costs of an unknown amount to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) to implement this bill (General Fund or special fund). Under the EP, CAL FIRE helps review and approve projects, identify and flag issues with projects, and provide consultation.
- 5) For its part, CalEPA anticipates any costs associated with this bill are likely absorbable within existing resources.

The Legislative Analyst's Office recently warned of General Fund structural deficits of around \$35 billion per year in the 2027-28 fiscal year and ongoing.

#### COMMENTS:

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

With California facing increasingly devastating wildfires year after year, timely wildfire prevention projects have never been more important. CEQA and the Coastal Act have consistently proven to be roadblocks for effective fuels reduction projects, causing costly and time-consuming delays. AB 2410 will exempt targeted fuels reduction projects from the requirements of CEQA and the Coastal Act, ensuring that California is able to prevent and mitigate future wildfires.

- 2) **Background.** There are numerous statutory and categorical exemptions available for certain types of projects related to vegetation management, defensible space, home hardening, fuel breaks, and similar purposes (see the Assembly Natural Resources Committee's analysis of this bill for more details on these exemptions). In addition, CalVTP streamlines CEQA compliance for fuel reduction projects by public agencies. To complement CalVTP, the Commission developed the use of Public Works Plans (PWP) to streamline fuel reduction projects in the coastal zone. A PWP functions like an overlay to CalVTP, so that following the PWP guarantees both CEQA and Coastal Act compliance.

In March 2025, following the devastating Los Angeles fires, the Governor issued an EP ordering a suspension of all statutes, regulations, rules, and requirements (including, but not limited to, CEQA and the Coastal Act) that fall within the jurisdiction of the boards, departments, and offices within CalEPA and CNRA to the extent necessary for expediting critical fuels reduction projects initiated in 2025. In December 2025, the Governor decreed that a project must be initiated by May 1, 2026, to be eligible for the streamlined process. The EP requires an individual or entity who wishes to conduct an activity under the suspension to first request that the appropriate agency secretary or secretary's designee make a determination that the proposed activity is eligible for the suspension and requires the relevant secretary to use "sound direction" in applying this authority to ensure the suspension serves the purpose of accelerating critical fuels reduction projects, while at the same time protecting public health and the environment. The EP requires each agency to maintain on its

website a list of all approved suspensions. The EP requires any activity conducted under the suspension to comply with the state Environmental Protection Plan or a comparable plan, as specified.

In 2025, the Legislature required the California Earthquake Authority (CEA) to conduct a study and report on options to enhance natural catastrophe resiliency. In its report, released in April 2026, the CEA recommends establishing “in statute the authority to facilitate ongoing fast-track environmental permitting for critical, short-term projects” covered under the Governor’s EP.

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