
SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

Senator Blakespear, Chair

2025 - 2026 Regular

Bill No: AB 2410
Author: Ellis and Gallagher
Version: 4/22/2026
Urgency: No
Consultant: Alyssa Poletti
Hearing Date: 6/24/26
Fiscal: Yes

SUBJECT: Wildfire safety: fuels reduction projects: California Environmental Quality Act: California Coastal Act

DIGEST: This bill exempts specified critical wildfire prevention projects from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the California Coastal Act (Coastal Act).

ANALYSIS:

Existing law:

- 1) CEQA requires lead agencies with the principal responsibility for carrying out or approving a project to prepare a negative declaration (ND), mitigated negative declaration (MND), or environmental impact report (EIR) for the project, unless the project is exempt from CEQA. (Public Resources Code (PRC) §21000 et seq.). If a project may have a significant effect on the environment, the lead agency must prepare a draft EIR. (CEQA Guidelines §15064(a)(1), (f)(1))
- 2) Establishes the California Coastal Act which:
 - a) Requires any person wishing to perform or undertake any development in the coastal zone, in addition to obtaining any other permit required by law from any local government or from any state, regional, or local agency, to obtain a coastal development permit (CDP).
 - b) Requires, after a local coastal plan (LCP) is certified, all development review to be delegated to the local government, except for development on any tidelands, submerged lands, or on public trust lands; any development proposed or undertaken within ports; or, any development within any state university or college within the coastal zone.
 - c) Defines “development” to mean, among other things, the placement or erection of any solid material or structure on land or in water. “Structure”

includes, but is not limited to, any building, road, pipe, flume, conduit, siphon, aqueduct, telephone line, and electrical power transmission and distribution line.

- d) Provides specified CDP exemptions for emergency work. Provides further specified CDP exemptions for specific categories of projects.
 - e) Authorizes, to promote greater efficiency with planning, public works plans (PWP) as an alternative to project-by-project CDP review for public works projects carried out by public agencies. (Public Resources Code (PRC) § 30000 *et seq.*):
- 3) Defines “high fire threat district” as areas identified as tier 2 (elevated) or tier 3 (extreme) fire risk on the fire-threat map maintained by the Public Utilities Commission (PUC). (Public Utilities Code § 3280 (j))
 - 4) Requires the State Fire Marshal to identify areas in the state as moderate, high, and very high fire hazard severity zones based on fuel loading, slope, fire weather, and other relevant factors including areas where winds have been identified by the Office of the State Fire Marshal as a major cause of wildfire spread. (Government Code (GOV) § 51178)
 - 5) Requires a local agency to designate moderate, high, and very high fire hazard severity zones based recommendations from the State Fire Marshal. (Government Code (GOV) § 51179)

This bill:

- 1) Exempts from CEQA a critical fuels reduction project conducted in a community located in a high fire threat district as determined by the PUC, or very high fire hazard severity zone (VHFHSZ) as identified by the State Fire Marshal or as designated by a local government 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, including CAL-FIRE Unit Fire Plans or community wildfire protection plans.
 - 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.
 - f) Maintains previously established fuel breaks or fuel modification projects.
- 2) Provides that specified projects are eligible for the exemption only if the vegetation removed for the critical fuels reduction project meets all of the following requirements:
 - a) The vegetation is a nonnative species;
 - b) The vegetation is 12 inches or less in diameter; and,
 - c) The vegetation is a common species.
 - 3) Specifies that projects eligible for the exemption must comply with the best management practices under 2025 Statewide Fuels Reduction Environmental Protection Plan prepared by the California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA) and the California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA)
 - 4) Sunsets the CEQA exemption on January 1, 2030.
 - 5) Exempts from the Coastal Act a critical fuels reduction project 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, including CAL-FIRE Unit Fire Plans or community wildfire protection plans.
 - 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 using cultural traditional ecological knowledge for cultural burning or prescribed fire treatments or both of those types of treatments for fuels reduction projects.
 - e) Removes vegetation around electric utility lines, poles, and rights-of-way to reduce the risk of wildfire and fire-related service outages.

- f) Maintains previously established fuel breaks or fuel modification projects.
- g) Provides that specified projects are eligible for the exemption only if the vegetation removed for the critical fuels reduction project meets all of the following requirements:
 - i) The vegetation is a nonnative species;
 - ii) The vegetation is 12 inches or less in diameter; and,
 - iii) The vegetation is a common species.
- 6) Sunsets the Coastal Act exemption on January 1, 2030.
- 7) Provides that no reimbursement is required by this act pursuant to Section 6 of Article XIII B of the California Constitution.
- 8) Requires the California Coastal Commission, on or before January 1, 2028, to report to the Legislature the following information from between January 1, 2020 to December 31, 2026 inclusive:
 - a) The number of coast development permit applications for fuel modification received annually by the commission;
 - b) The acreage of fuel modification or reduction projects approved annually;
 - c) The average time annually for a coastal development permit to be approved by the commission for a fuel modification or reduction project after submission of an application; and
 - d) The number of fuel modification or reduction projects requested under a public works plan.

Background

- 1) *The A, B, C's of CEQA*. CEQA is designed to (a) make government agencies and the public aware of the environmental impacts of a proposed project, (b) ensure the public can take part in the review process, and (c) identify and implement measures to mitigate or eliminate any negative impact the project may have on the environment. CEQA is enforced by civil lawsuits that can challenge any project's environmental review. Nonprofits, private individuals, public agencies, advocacy groups, and other organizations can all file lawsuits under CEQA.

Under CEQA, projects (unless they have a specific exemption) must undergo environmental analysis. This process starts with an initial study which determines what level of further environmental review is needed for a given project. If a project has no significant effects on the environment, or if those effects can be fully mitigated, the project can move forward with a negative declaration (ND) or mitigated negative declaration (MND). If the initial study finds that the project has potential significant effects on the environment, then a full EIR is conducted.

An EIR provides thorough environmental review of a proposed project, analyzing the significant direct and indirect environmental impacts of a proposed project on water quality, transportation, air quality and greenhouse gas emissions, terrestrial and aquatic biological resources, surface and subsurface hydrology, land use and agricultural resources, aesthetics, geology and soils, recreation, public services and utilities such as water supply and wastewater disposal, and cultural resources, among other factors. The EIR also includes proposed mitigation measures for any significant effects that it identifies and considers alternatives to the proposed project.

- 2) *California wildfire risk and management*. In 2025, CalFire reports that there were 2,353 wildfires and more than 76,000 acres impacted.¹ Since the beginning of 2026, California has already had 2,087 wildfires and more than 60,000 acres affected. Climate change is worsening wildfires throughout the state due to extreme heat, drought, and low precipitation.² More than 2.3 million acres of land have been designated as high or very high fire hazard severity zones by the State Fire Marshal.³

Fuel reduction, the removal of flammable vegetative material, is one strategy to reduce wildfire risk. In response to the growing wildfire risk in California, Governor Newsom issued an emergency proclamation to expedite fuel reduction projects.⁴ CNRA and CalEPA developed the “Statewide Fuels Reduction Environmental Protection Plan” to provide best practices for fuel removal projects.⁵ The best practices include but are not limited to: maintaining inspection access for state agencies, consulting with appropriate state agencies

¹ CalFire (2026) *Our Impact: Statistics*. <https://www.fire.ca.gov/our-impact/statistics>

² CARB. *Wildfires & Climate Change*. <https://ww2.arb.ca.gov/wildfires-climate-change>

³ Cart, J. (2025) *More than 2 million acres of local land in California designated as ‘high’ or ‘very high’ fire danger areas*, CalMatters. <https://calmatters.org/environment/wildfires/2025/02/california-wildfires-high-hazard-new-maps/>

⁴ CalEPA (2025) *Emergency Proclamations, Executive Orders, and Secretarial Suspensions: Wildfire Risk – Fast-Tracking Critical Fuels Reduction Projects* <https://calepa.ca.gov/disaster/emergency-proclamations-and-executive-orders/>

⁵ CNRA & CalEPA (2025) *Statewide Fuels Reduction Environmental Protection Plan*. <https://mrca.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Statewide-Fuels-Reduction-Environmental-Protection-Plan.pdf>

such as the California Department of Fish and Wildlife or CalFire as needed, ensuring certified or license supervision of the project, mitigating impacts to sensitive resources (e.g. a tribal cultural resource, a coastal zone sensitive habitat, riparian and water quality, habitat for fish and wildlife species, geological hazards, etc.), sanitizing equipment to prevent the spread of invasive plant species, and protecting public safety.

- 3) *Existing CEQA exemptions for vegetation management.* There are more than a dozen statutory exemptions to CEQA in PRC § 21080 (among other stand-alone statutory exemptions), including the following exemptions approved in SB 131 (Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review, Chapter 24, Statutes of 2025):
- a) A project consisting of “defensible space” fire clearance of up to 100 feet, as measured from the center line of the roadway, for a public roadway identified as an egress and evacuation route for a subdivision or community of 30 or more dwelling units, to remove flammable vegetation or trees of less than 12 inches in diameter as measured at chest height;
 - b) A project consisting of the establishment or enhancement of residential home hardening or defensible space for wildfire risk reduction within 200 feet of a legal structure located in a high or VHFHSZ; and
 - c) A project consisting of a fuel break that extends up to 200 feet from structures, including the clearance of flammable vegetation and trees less than 12 inches in diameter as measured at chest height.

The CEQA guidelines (Title 14, Division 6, Chapter 3 of the California Code of Regulations (CCR)), provide categorical exemptions for vegetation management projects, including:

- d) Class 1 exemption covers the repair, maintenance, or minor alteration of existing public or private facilities, or topographical features, such as maintenance of existing landscaping, and involving negligible or no expansion of existing or former use. (14 CCR § 15301)
- e) Class 4 exemption is for minor public or private alterations which do not involve removal of healthy, mature, scenic trees except for forestry or agricultural purposes. This includes, but is not limited to, fuel management activities within 30 feet of structures to reduce the volume of flammable vegetation. (14 CCR § 15304)

Additionally, the California Vegetation Treatment Program (CalVTP) – a CEQA-compliant program for wildfire resilience projects— was developed by the Board of Forestry to reduce hazardous vegetation around communities in the wildland-urban interface, to construct fuel breaks, and to restore healthy ecological fire regimes. This streamlined CEQA compliance program is only available to public agencies.

- 4) *Vegetation management in the Coastal Zone.* To complement CalVTP, the Commission developed the use of public works plans (PWP) to streamline fuel reduction projects in the Coastal Zone. The PWP functions like an overlay to CalVTP, so that following the PWP guarantees both CEQA and Coastal Act compliance. This approach allows applicants to safeguard sensitive biological resources and improve forest health without having to apply for individual CDPs. PWP authorize projects with streamlined review and without the need for additional coastal permits over 10 years. PWP can be completed in less time than a typical local CDP, and once certified, work can proceed within 30 days and no local review is required. Since 2021, approximately 350,000 acres in the Coastal Zone has been certified for wildfire vegetation treatment under PWP across the coastal zone.
- 5) *Governor’s emergency proclamation.* In response to the January 2025 wildfires that burned multiple communities in Los Angeles, Governor Newsom issued an emergency proclamation ordering a suspension of all laws, regulations, rules, and requirements that fall within the jurisdiction of boards, departments, and offices within the California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA) and the California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA) for expediting critical fuels reduction projects initiated in 2025. On December 31, 2025, Governor Newsom extended the emergency proclamation to March 1, 2026, and through this extension, project streamlining applications are being accepted through May 1, 2026.

For the purposes of the Governor’s emergency proclamation, critical fuels reduction projects included:

- a) Removal of hazardous, dead, and/or dying trees;
- b) Removal of vegetation for the creation of strategic fuel breaks as identified by approved fire prevention plans, including without limitation CAL FIRE Unit Fire Plans or Community Wildfire Preparedness Plans;
- c) Removal of vegetation for community defensible space;

- d) Removal of vegetation along roadways, highways, and freeways for the creation of safer ingress and egress routes for the public and responders and to reduce roadside ignitions;
- e) Removal of vegetation using cultural traditional ecological knowledge for cultural burning and/or prescribed fire treatments for fuels reduction; or,
- f) Maintenance of previously-established fuel breaks or fuels modification projects.

Under the proclamation's exemptions, there is a process established for use of the exemptions. Entities are required to ask CNRA to make a determination that the activities are eligible under the proclamation, and all of the departments and agencies under CNRA and CalEPA will post on their respective websites the approved CEQA and Coastal Act exemptions. Further, any activity conducted under the temporary exemptions is still required to comply with the state Environmental Protection Plan.

In 2025, the Legislature assigned the California Earthquake Authority (CEA) the task of conducting a study and reporting on options to enhance natural catastrophe resiliency while meeting California's climate change and clean energy goals. The CEA's report, *Enhancing California's Resiliency to Natural Catastrophes: Senate Bill 254 (2025) Study Report*, released April 7 of this year, recommends establishing in statute the authority to facilitate ongoing fast-track environmental permitting for critical, short-term projects covered under the Governor's emergency proclamation.⁶

This bill codifies those exemptions under CEQA and the Coastal Act until January 1, 2030.

Comments

- 1) *Purpose of Bill.* According to the author, "CEQA and the Coastal Act's purpose is to prevent significant environmental damage and to improve the quality of California's environment. However, these statutes have become known to delay or hinder critically needed wildfire prevention projects, such as fuels reductions. With California facing increasingly disastrous wildfires year after year, it is more important than ever to ensure that critical wildfire prevention projects can be carried out in a timely manner. AB 2410 will

⁶ California Earthquake Authority (2026) Enhancing California's Resiliency to Natural Catastrophes Senate Bill 254 (2025) Study Report. <https://www.cawildfirefund.com/sites/wildfire/files/documents/2026/sb-254-natcatresiliencyreprt-4-7-26v3.pdf>

exempt fuels reduction projects in Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones and High Fire Threat Districts from the requirements of CEQA and the Coastal Act. By exempting these projects, AB 2410 ensures that necessary fuels reduction projects are streamlined.”

- 2) *Protecting wildlife.* Undoubtedly wildfires are a threat to ecosystems and endangered species, as well as to the everyday Californian. However, extending emergency provisions without proper considerations of wildlife may exacerbate the problem. Proper wildfire management should not harm the ecosystem before a fire has the chance to. ***The committee may wish to consider the following requirement for CEQA exemption eligibility: the lead agency shall consult with the Department of Fish and Wildlife to ensure that, to the extent feasible, the project is designed to avoid or minimize impacts to rare, threatened, endangered plants and wildlife and wildlife nursery sites, including nesting rookeries, spawning areas, fawning areas, and maternal roosts.***
- 3) *Technical and clarifying amendments.* Understanding that fuel reduction projects may need permits beyond CEQA, ***the committee may wish to consider specifying that a project with this CEQA exemption is still required to obtain any permit required by any state agency pursuant to any other law.***
- 4) *Committee amendments.* ***Staff recommends the committee adopt the bolded amendments contained in comments 2 and 3.***

Due to timing constraints, these changes must be amended into the bill as part of the actions taken by the next committee. Should the author commit to taking these amendments, the motion in this committee will be “do pass” with that understanding.

DOUBLE REFERRAL:

If this measure is approved by the Senate Environmental Quality Committee, the do pass motion must include the action to re-refer the bill to the Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee.

Related/Prior Legislation

SB 1370 (Stern) allows expedited authorization for wildfire mitigation projects under 3,000 acres and completed in less than 2 years. This bill was referred to Assembly Natural Resources.

AB 2102 (DeMaio, 2026) exempts wildfire fuel reduction activities from CEQA when conducted by property owners on private property. The bill was referred to the Assembly Natural Resources Committee and Assembly Emergency Management Committee.

SB 675 (Limón, Chapter 772, Statutes of 2024) establishes a Range Management Advisory Committee to develop guidance for prescribed grazing plans and update the Wildfire Fore Resilience Action Plan and expand eligibility for fire prevention and home hardening education activities.

AB 1227 (Ellis, 2025) was amended last year in the Assembly Natural Resources Committee to contain language identical to the language in sections 1 and 3 of this bill. It was held in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

AB 623 (Dixon, 2025) provides exemptions from CEQA and the Coastal Act for fuel modification projects that maintain defensible space. Additionally exempts electrical grid resilience projects from CEQA. This bill was held in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

SOURCE: Author

SUPPORT:

Association of California Water Agencies (ACWA)
California Association of Realtors
California Farm Bureau Federation
Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC)

OPPOSITION:

None received

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