
SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Sabrina Cervantes, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

AB 2410 (Ellis) - Wildfire safety: fuels reduction projects: California Environmental Quality Act

Version: July 9, 2026

Urgency: No

Hearing Date: August 3, 2026

Policy Vote: E.Q. 6 - 0, N.R. & W. 7 - 0

Mandate: Yes

Consultant: Ashley Ames

Bill Summary: This bill would exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) critical fuels reduction projects that target extremely flammable species, take place in communities within high fire threat districts or very high fire hazard severity zones, and remove specified nonnative or common species, as provided.

Fiscal Impact:

- The Department of Parks and Recreation (State Parks) estimates ongoing costs of roughly \$3.2 million in the first year and \$2.7 million annually thereafter (General Fund) to navigate project review, work with utility companies, and conduct assessments related to proposed projects in and near State Parks managed lands. This bill would significantly increase the number of critical fuels reductions projects in and adjacent to State Parks, which would require significant engagement from State Parks staff to avoid and minimize detrimental impacts to the State Park System. State Parks notes that, while the specific exemption in this bill would sunset on January 1, 2030, there would be a continued need for these positions as these types of projects will continue to increase throughout the state.
- The Department of Conservation (DOC) estimates ongoing costs of about \$1.4 million in the first year and \$1.1 million annually thereafter (Timber Regulation and Forest Restoration Fund [TRFRF]) to provide program leadership; liaison with applicants and partner agencies; oversee implementation of the review program conduct project reviews, site inspections, compliance and performance monitoring, technical analyses, and reporting; and provide project geospatial tracking analysis, field data processing, analysis and validation, and data management; among other things.
- The Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) estimates ongoing costs of \$672,000 in the first year and \$645,000 annually thereafter (TRFRF or General Fund) to consult with lead agencies and handle workload associated with potential increases in discretionary permitting activities.
- The California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA) estimates ongoing costs of approximately \$265,000 (General Fund) annually to coordinate the work of various departments and agencies to implement the requirements of this bill.
- The State Water Board anticipates ongoing annual costs of approximately \$250,000 (TRFRF or General Fund) for staff to issue permits to critical fuels reduction projects, conduct inspections, ensure water quality is protected from these activities, and to support CalEPA in developing the annual report.

- The California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA) estimates ongoing costs of \$240,000 annually (TRFRF or General Fund) to manage the regulatory suspension process, offer integrated resource management guidance, coordinate efforts across agencies to bolster wildfire resilience projects, audit project records, issue recommendations to improve implementation, and report to the Legislature. CNRA's responsibilities would span intake, review, and approval of suspension requests, development of standardized procedures, risk assessment, management of complex cases, and serving as the main point of contact for both applicants and the public.

Background: CEQA already exempts a range of vegetation management work, including three exemptions added by SB 131 (Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review, Chapter 24, Statutes of 2025) for evacuation-route clearance, home hardening and defensible space within 200 feet of a structure in a high or very high fire hazard severity zone (VHFHSZ), and fuel breaks extending up to 200 feet from structures. Categorical exemptions in the CEQA guidelines cover related maintenance and minor alteration work (14 CCR §§15301, 15304). The California Vegetation Treatment Program (CalVTP), developed by the Board of Forestry, offers streamlined CEQA compliance for wildland-urban interface fuel reduction, but only to public agencies — private applicants bear their own review costs.

In the Coastal Zone, the Coastal Commission's public works plans (PWP) overlay CalVTP so that compliance satisfies both CEQA and the Coastal Act, eliminating the cost and delay of individual coastal development permits. PWP authorize streamlined review for 10 years, can be completed faster than a typical local CDP, and allow work to start within 30 days of certification without local review — roughly 350,000 acres have been certified since 2021.

Following the January 2025 Los Angeles wildfires, Governor Newsom suspended CalEPA and CNRA requirements to expedite critical fuels reduction projects, extending the proclamation through March 1, 2026 with applications accepted through May 1, 2026. Covered work includes hazardous tree removal, strategic fuel breaks, community defensible space, roadway clearance, cultural burning and prescribed fire treatments, and maintenance of existing fuel breaks. The exemptions carry ongoing administrative workload: entities must obtain an eligibility determination from CNRA, CNRA and CalEPA departments must post approved exemptions on their websites, and projects must still comply with the state Environmental Protection Plan.

The California Earthquake Authority's April report, prepared under a 2025 legislative directive, recommends putting fast-track permitting authority for these short-term projects into statute.

Proposed Law: This bill would:

1. Exempt from CEQA, until January 1, 2030, critical fuels reduction projects that address extremely flammable species, are conducted in communities located in high fire threat districts or very high fire hazard severity zones, and remove specified nonnative or common species.

2. Require projects exempt under this provision to comply with the best management practices in the 2025 Statewide Fuels Reduction Environmental Protection Plan.
3. Require a lead agency carrying out an exempt project to consult with the Department of Fish and Wildlife and, within 90 days of project completion, submit a notice of project completion and a final compliance determination regarding the 2025 Statewide Fuels Reduction Environmental Protection Plan to the Secretary of the Natural Resources Agency and the Secretary for Environmental Protection.
4. Require the Secretary of the Natural Resources Agency, on or before March 1, 2028, and annually thereafter, in consultation with the Secretary for Environmental Protection, to submit a report to the Legislature summarizing implementation of these provisions during the preceding calendar year.
5. Impose a state-mandated local program, because lead agencies would be required to determine whether a project qualifies for the exemption.
 - a. Provide that no reimbursement would be required because lead agencies have the authority to levy service charges, fees, or assessments sufficient to cover costs.

Related Legislation:

SB 1370 (Stern) would allow expedited authorization for wildfire mitigation projects under 3,000 acres and completed in less than 2 years.

AB 2102 (DeMaio, 2026) would exempt wildfire fuel reduction activities from CEQA when conducted by property owners on private property.

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 similar to portions of this bill. It died in this committee.

AB 623 (Dixon, 2025) would have provided 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.

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