

Date of Hearing: April 14, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON WATER, PARKS, AND WILDLIFE

Diane Papan, Chair

AB 2513 (Petrie-Norris) – As Amended April 6, 2026

SUBJECT: Wildfire: Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program: local assistance grant program: regional landscape grants

SUMMARY: Authorizes regional landscape block grants to be awarded to regional entities to implement regional priority strategies and authorizes grants to be awarded for fire prevention activities in non-forest ecosystems. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Defines various terms for the purposes of this bill:
 - a) “Fire prevention activities” as lawful activities that reduce wildfire risk, including but not limited to mechanical and manual vegetation management and modification, prescribed grazing, prescribed burns, creation of defensible space, creation of fuel breaks, ignition prevention, replacement of ignition-prone nonnative flashy fuels with heavier and less flammable native vegetation, technologies that improve detection and assessment of new fire ignitions, and retrofitting of structures to increase fire resistance.
 - b) “Ignition prevention” as lawful activities that reduce the likelihood of wildfire ignition, including replacement or modification of ignition-prone nonnative flashy fuels to less flammable native vegetation, hardening of infrastructure, including primary roadways, utility corridors, and public access points, to prevent fire ignition and spread, use of ignition-resistant materials, and community education or planning programs that reduce human-caused ignitions.
 - c) “Nonnative flashy fuels” as nonnative or invasive plant species including grasses, mustard, and other annual plants, and pine needles and leaves, that dry or cure rapidly, ignite easily, and spread fire quickly, significantly increasing wildfire risk.
- 2) Authorizes the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) to award regional landscape block grants to regional entities to implement regional priority strategies.
 - a) Requires WCB to establish guidelines for funding these regional landscape block grants.
 - b) Exempts the development of these guidelines from the Administrative Procedure Act (Government Code § 11340 *et seq.*).
- 3) Authorizes the Director of the Department of Conservation (DOC) to award regional landscape block grants to regional entities to implement regional priority strategies.
 - a) Requires DOC to establish guidelines for funding these regional landscape block grants.
 - b) Exempts the development of these guidelines from the Administrative Procedure Act (Government Code § 11340 *et seq.*).

- 4) Provides that vegetation modification and ignition prevention activities are eligible activities for the local assistance grant program administered by the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Cal Fire).
- 5) Removes the July 1, 2025 expiration date on the authority of DOC to make advance payments on grants awarded under the Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program.
- 6) Authorizes Cal Fire to award grants for activities that improve ecosystem health on chaparral, shrubland, grassland, and coastal sage scrub lands, including but not limited to replacement of ignition-prone nonnative flashy fuels with heavier and less flammable native vegetation.
- 7) Authorizes Cal Fire to award regional landscape block grants to regional entities to implement regional priority strategies.
 - a) Requires Cal Fire to establish guidelines for funding these regional landscape block grants; and
 - b) Exempts the development of these guidelines from the Administrative Procedure Act (Government Code § 11340 *et seq.*).
- 8) Makes various technical and conforming changes.
- 9) Makes findings and declarations regarding varied wildfire behavior throughout the state, local wildfire resilience capacity, and WCB, and states the intention of the Legislature to match funding levels to the scale of the problem, and the scale of regionally developed plans and practices.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Establishes WCB to acquire, restore, and maintain areas that can sustain wildlife and that will provide adequate and suitable recreation [Fish and Game Code (FGC) § 1300 *et seq.*].
- 2) Authorizes WCB to award grants or loans to nonprofit organizations, local governmental agencies, federal agencies, state agencies, and California Native American tribes for the purposes of fish and wildlife habitat restoration, enhancement, management, protection, and improvement of riparian resources, and for development of compatible public access facilities (FGC § 1350).
- 3) Establishes DOC to oversee mines and geology, oil and gas, and soil conservation [Public Resources Code (PRC) § 600 *et seq.*].
- 4) Establishes within DOC the Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program to support regional leadership and to build local and regional capacity to create fire adapted communities and landscapes by improving ecosystem health, community wildfire preparedness, and fire resilience; authorizes DOC to issue block grants to regional entities under the program; and authorizes DOC to authorize advance payments on grants until July 1, 2025 (PRC § 4208.1).
- 5) Defines “regional entity” as a state conservancy, local government, tribal government, resource conservation district, joint powers authority, or nongovernmental organization with a history of implementing related projects, demonstrated capacity to work across regional

partners, and ability to serve as fiscal administrators of the Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program (PRC § 4208).

- 6) Establishes Cal Fire with responsibility for fire protection, fire prevention, maintenance, and enhancement of the state's forest, range, and brushland resources, contract fire protection, associated emergency services, and assistance in civil disasters and other non-fire emergencies, and for enforcing forest and fire laws (PRC § 700 *et seq.*).
- 7) Authorizes Cal Fire to provide grants to, or enter into contracts or other cooperative agreements with, entities, including private or nongovernmental entities, Native American tribes, or local, state, and federal public agencies, for the implementation and administration of projects and programs to improve forest health and reduce greenhouse gas emissions (PRC § 4799.05).
- 8) Defines "fire prevention activities" as lawful activities that reduce the risk of wildfire in California, including but not limited to mechanical vegetation management, prescribed grazing, prescribed burns, creation of defensible space, and retrofitting of structures to increase fire resistance (PRC § 4124).
- 9) Requires the Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task Force (Task Force) to update the state's Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan (Action Plan) on or before March 1, 2026 and every five years thereafter, and to report annually to the Legislature on the progress towards achieving the goals and key actions therein (PRC § 4771).

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown. This bill is keyed fiscal.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **Purpose of this bill.** According to the author, "[This bill] addresses two critical gaps in our efforts to achieve the goals of California's [Action Plan]. First, the bill ensures that Regional Forest and Fire Capacity grantors can distribute funds for wildfire mitigation projects in the flammable shrubland ecosystems typical of Southern California, reflecting the full range of ecosystems at risk of catastrophic wildfire across the state. Second, [this bill] increases the pace and scale of grant distribution by authorizing [DOC] and [WCB] to distribute regional landscape grants to local entities."
- 2) **Background.** Wildfires threaten communities and landscapes across California, but with the variety of ecosystems throughout the state come a variety of types of wildfire. Fires in chaparral and shrubland are distinct from fires in conifer forests, and these lands require different management strategies. As recent fires in Southern California shrublands have shown, protecting California communities relies on a wildfire strategy that considers not only conifer forests, but also chaparral and shrublands. Chaparral fires are frequently higher-intensity, weather-driven fires, with less dependence on fuel load than fires in forested ecosystems. While vegetation treatment may be efficacious in reducing wildfire intensity and impacts in the northern part of the state, landscape-scale vegetation management may be less beneficial in the southern part of the state, where fires are wind-driven and vegetation

thinning may result in type conversion from native shrublands to nonnative-dominated grasslands.¹

Over the past several years, California has developed more statewide and local planning infrastructure for wildfire resilience and recovery. Currently, California's wildfire strategy is organized around the state's Action Plan and implemented through grant programs at a variety of agencies, including programs at DOC and Cal Fire.

Task Force and Action Plan. The Task Force was established in 2018 to oversee the implementation of Executive Order B-52-18 and to develop and implement an interagency framework for establishing healthy and resilient forests and communities that can withstand and adapt to wildfire, drought, and a changing climate. In addition to the Task Force's executive committee composed of representatives of state, local, federal, and tribal governments, the Task Force organizes several interagency and stakeholder-driven working groups focused on key deliverables set in the Action Plan. An early action of the Task Force was to release the first edition of the Action Plan in 2021; an update to the Action Plan is now required every five years, along with an annual progress report (see Existing Law #9). The 2021 Action Plan set 99 Key Actions across four goals: (1) increase the pace and scale of forest health projects, (2) strengthen protection of communities, (3) manage forests to achieve the state's economic and environmental goals, and (4) drive innovation and measure impacts. An update to the Action Plan was due on March 1, 2026.

Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program. To support local capacity, the Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program was created within DOC by AB 9 (Wood), Chapter 225, Statutes of 2021, to provide block grants to regional entities to develop and implement "regional priority strategies" consistent with the goals in the Action Plan and to coordinating entities to provide technical assistance to regional entities. Since the inception of the program, DOC has awarded \$140 million in block grants to regional and coordinating entities operating statewide and regionally in the Northern, Central, Southern, and Sierra-Cascade-Inyo regions. In addition to supporting plan development, funding has supported local capacity building, training, and technical assistance work.

Forest Health and Wildfire Prevention Programs. Cal Fire administers the Forest Health Program, funding grants that support landscape restoration projects to improve forest resilience, sequester carbon, and protect communities. As of 2024, Cal Fire had distributed \$630 million in Forest Health funding to 137 projects covering over 460,000 acres. These are large landscape-scale (greater than 800 acres) projects focused on forested wildland areas, such as fuels reduction, cultural burning, and reforestation projects.

Cal Fire's Wildfire Prevention Program is similarly targeted at forest ecosystems, with a focus on smaller-scale actions that reduce the risk of wildfire in forested and forest-adjacent communities. Cal Fire has distributed \$566 million to 575 projects under the Wildfire Prevention Program across the project areas of hazardous fuels reduction, wildfire prevention planning, and wildfire prevention education.

¹ Jon Keeley and Alexandra Syphard, "Twenty-first century California, USA, wildfires: fuel dominated vs. wind-dominated fires," *Fire Ecology* 15, no. 24 (2019).

These programs face difficult funding decisions. For fiscal year 2025–26, the Wildfire Prevention Program received nearly \$284 million in grant requests from approximately 400 applicants and was able to fund only \$62.7 million to approximately 90 recipients. With the focus on forest ecosystems provided in statute for landscape-scale projects [PRC § 4799.05 (c)], the Forest Health Program has predominantly focused on forested areas, rather than grassland, shrubland, or chaparral ecosystems. This has made it more difficult for some fire-threatened communities, particularly in Southern California, to obtain funding through these programs.

The role of WCB. Created by the Wildlife Conservation Law of 1947, WCB is a state grant-making agency within the Department of Fish and Wildlife, dedicated to safeguarding California's spectacular biological diversity and wild spaces by working in partnership with tribes, conservation organizations, and government agencies to acquire lands and design and implement habitat restoration and public access projects statewide through a variety of programs. According to WCB's 2026 General Grant Guidelines, all WCB-funded projects must provide protected or restored biodiversity, climate change action, and/or expanded public access to nature. The guidelines also suggest that projects that improve forest health, reduce wildfire danger, or mitigate the effects of wildfires on water quality and supply could be eligible for funding. This bill would provide the same authority to issue regional landscape grants to WCB as is provided to DOC and Cal Fire.

- 3) **Proposed committee amendments.** This bill defines a number of types of fuels as “nonnative flashy fuels,” but some of those types of fuels are native plant species in parts of the state. *The Committee may wish to consider the following amendments, as proposed by the Assembly Natural Resources Committee, which separate the definitions of nonnative and flashy fuels.*

PRC § 4124. For the purposes of this article, the following definitions shall apply:

(a) “Fire prevention activities” means those lawful activities that reduce the risk of wildfire in California, including, but not limited to, mechanical and manual vegetation management and modification, prescribed grazing, prescribed burns, creation of defensible space, creation of fuel breaks, ignition prevention, replacement of ignition-prone *nonnative fuels or* flashy fuels with ~~heavier and~~ less flammable ~~native~~ vegetation, technologies that improve detection and assessment of new fire ignitions, and retrofitting of structures to increase fire resistance.

(b) “Flashy fuels” means shrubs, grasses, and foliage such as pine needles and leaves, that dry or cure rapidly, ignite easily, and spread fire quickly, significantly increasing wildfire risk.

~~(b)~~ (c) “Ignition prevention” means those lawful activities that reduce the likelihood of wildfire ignitions caused directly or indirectly by human activity or infrastructure, including, replacement or modification of ignition-prone nonnative *fuels or* flashy fuels to less flammable ~~native~~ vegetation, hardening of infrastructure, including primary roadways, utility corridors, and public access points, to prevent fire ignition and spread, use of ignition-resistant materials, and community education or planning programs that reduce human-caused ignitions.

~~(e)~~ **(d)** “Nonnative ~~flashy~~-fuels” means a nonnative or invasive plant species including grasses, ~~shrubs, mustard,~~ and other annual plants, **and nonnative or invasive woody plant species., and pine needles and leaves, that dry or cure rapidly, ignite easily, and spread fire quickly, significantly increasing wildfire risk.**

PRC § 4799.05 (c)(4). For activities that improve ecosystem health on chaparral, shrubland, grassland, and coastal sage scrub lands, including, but not limited to, replacement of ignition-prone nonnative fuels or flashy fuels with ~~heavier and~~ less flammable ~~native~~ vegetation.

PRC § 4799.05 (f). For purposes of this section, the following definitions shall apply:

(1) “Ecosystem” includes forest, chaparral, shrubland, grasslands, and coastal sage ecosystems and natural communities.

(2) “Flashy fuels” means shrubs, grasses, and foliage such as pine needles and leaves, that dry or cure rapidly, ignite easily, and spread fire quickly, significantly increasing wildfire risk.

~~(2)~~ **(3)** “Nonnative ~~flashy~~-fuels” means a nonnative or invasive plant species including grasses, ~~shrubs, mustard,~~ and other annual plants, and **nonnative or invasive woody plant species., and pine needles and leaves, that dry or cure rapidly, ignite easily, and spread fire quickly, significantly increasing wildfire risk.**

~~(3)~~ **(4)** “Regional entities” has the same meaning as defined in Section 4208.

- 4) **Arguments in support.** The California State Association of Counties and League of California Cities write, “[This bill] would strengthen the state’s efforts to reduce catastrophic wildfire risk through expanded and improved grant programs and local capacity building.” Orange County adds, “By expanding the types of eligible grant activities, [this bill] allows jurisdictions with fire-prone landscapes to access funding for hazard-reduction services, helping safeguard our communities from potential disasters.” Irvine Ranch Conservancy concludes, “By expanding the eligibility of forest health activities and incorporating clear statutory definitions such as ‘ignition prevention’ into the [PRC], [this bill] helps ensure that critical risk-reduction activities in all California environments can be appropriately authorized, funded, and implemented.”
- 5) **Dual referral.** This bill was also referred to the Assembly Natural Resources Committee, where it passed by a vote of 14-0 on April 6, 2026.
- 6) **Related legislation.** AB 388 (Connolly) of 2023, would have required DOC to develop guidelines for funding the implementation of regional priority strategies, establish regional investment strategies to identify and align federal, state, local, tribal, and private sector resources, and authorized conservancies, departments, and boards within the Natural Resources Agency to issue block grants to regional entities. AB 388 was held in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

SB 456 (Laird), Chapter 387, Statutes of 2021, requires the Task Force to create an implementation strategy for the Action Plan, provide annual updates to the Legislature, and update the Action Plan every five years.

AB 9 (Wood), Chapter 225, Statutes of 2021, establishes the Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program.

SB 859 (Budget and Fiscal Review), Chapter 368, Statutes of 2016, authorizes Cal Fire to issue landscape-scale grants to improve forest health.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

Irvine Ranch Conservancy (sponsor)
California State Association of Counties
Endangered Habitats League
Escondido Creek Conservancy
League of California Cities
Ojai Valley Fire Safe Council
Orange County Fire Authority
Orange County
Resource Conservation District of Greater San Diego County
Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy
Tijuana Estuary Foundation
Ventura Regional Fire Safe Council

Opposition

None on file

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