

Date of Hearing: April 29, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

AB 2513 (Petrie-Norris) – As Amended April 16, 2026

Policy Committee:	Natural Resources	Vote:	14 - 0
	Water, Parks and Wildlife		13 - 0

Urgency: No State Mandated Local Program: No Reimbursable: No

SUMMARY:

This bill amends various state grant programs to authorize administering agencies to directly award regional landscape grants to regional entities.

Specifically, this bill, among other things:

- 1) Authorizes the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) to award regional landscape grants to regional entities (as defined) to implement regional priority strategies developed pursuant to the Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program (RFFC); requires WCB, before it issues these grants, to, in collaboration with the Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task Force (Task Force), establish guidelines for funding regional landscape grants to help achieve the goals of California’s Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan, as specified; and exempts the development and adoption of these guidelines from the Administrative Procedure Act.
- 2) Expands eligible activities under the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection’s (CAL FIRE) local assistance grant program to include manual vegetation management and modification, ignition prevention activities, creation of fuel breaks, replacement of ignition-prone nonnative flashy fuels with heavier and less flammable native vegetation, and technologies that improve detection and assessment of new fire ignitions.
- 3) Strikes the July 1, 2025, sunset date on the Department of Conservation’s (DOC) ability to authorize advance payments on a grant awarded under the RFFC program, authorizes the director of DOC to directly award regional landscape grants to regional entities to implement regional priority strategies developed pursuant to the RFFC program, and requires the director of DOC to establish guidelines consistent with the process described in item 1, above.
- 4) Authorizes CAL FIRE, as part of its Forest Health Grants program, to provide grants that improve ecosystem health, and requires moneys appropriated to CAL FIRE for landscape-scale projects to additionally be allocated for (a) activities that improve ecosystem health on chaparral, shrubland, grassland, and coastal sage scrub lands, including replacement of ignition-prone nonnative flashy fuels with heavier and less flammable native vegetation and (b) regional landscape grants that CAL FIRE may directly award to regional entities to implement regional priority strategies developed pursuant to the RFFC program.
- 5) Requires CAL FIRE to establish guidelines consistent with the process described in item 1, above.

FISCAL EFFECT:

- 1) Cost pressures of an unknown amount (General Fund, special fund, or bond funds) to WCB's grant programs to award regional landscape grants to implement regional priority strategies developed pursuant to RFFC. The magnitude of this cost pressure may vary based on the board's interpretation of the language. If the author's intent is for WCB to establish a new program or increase the pace and scale of disbursing regional grants, the cost pressure may be relatively high. On the other hand, if the intent is for WCB to issue regional landscape grants utilizing its existing programs and consistent with its current processes, WCB asserts it already has the authority and ability to issue these types of block grants, so cost pressure would be relatively low. For example, WCB provided several block grants using General Fund dollars it received in 2022, including a grant for meadow restoration across a broad landscape. And while WCB does not play an active role in the RFFC program, it collaborates with DOC and CAL FIRE to fund priority forest health projects that support biodiversity.
- 2) By expanding the scope of and eligibility for CAL FIRE's local assistance and forest health grant programs, this bill creates cost pressures of an unknown but potentially significant amount for CAL FIRE to fund the new project types enumerated in the bill summary above, as well as continue to fund the project types currently eligible for funding (General Fund, special fund such as the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF), or bond funds).

According to CAL FIRE, the department has awarded more than \$639 million from fiscal year (FY) 2019-20 to FY 2025-26 in wildfire prevention (or local assistance) grants to more than 677 projects (both competitive and direct awards) across the state. For FY 2025-26, CAL FIRE has granted \$62.7 million for 84 wildfire prevention grants, ranging from \$63,000 to \$949,000; the average grant amount was \$750,000. The department notes this program continues to be oversubscribed. Since 2017, CAL FIRE has awarded more than \$750 million in Forest Health grants.

- 3) To date, DOC has awarded \$142 million through the RFFC program (General Fund and GGRF). Traditionally, DOC has funded development of regional priority strategies and implementation of demonstration projects on a limited scale. By requiring DOC to directly award regional landscape grants to regional entities on a larger scale to implement regional priority strategies developed pursuant to the RFFC program, this bill creates cost pressures of an unknown but potentially significant amount for DOC (General Fund, special fund such as GGRF, or bond funds).

DOC asserts that if the author intends to create a new DOC program focused on regional landscape grants, the department would incur costs to develop and administer the program, although the magnitude of these costs will depend, in part, on the amount of funding appropriated by the Legislature for this purpose. For example, DOC notes, if the Legislature allocates \$30 million for DOC grants, the department would require approximately \$747,000 in year one for four positions (two associate environmental planners, one senior environmental planner, and one attorney) followed by \$696,00 in annual ongoing costs (General Fund, special fund, or bond funds).

The Proposition 4 climate bond allocates \$185 million to DOC for the RFFC program, \$175 million to CAL FIRE for forest health grants, \$185 million to CAL FIRE for fire prevention grants, and \$870 million to WCB for various programs.

- 4) ARB estimates ongoing annual costs of approximately \$391,000 (GGRF) for just under two positions; ARB notes it is required, by statute, to develop quantification and reporting materials for agencies administering GGRF programs. ARB asserts it must review and update its quantification methodologies and assessment tools associated with fire prevention and forest health programs as well as expand outreach and engagement to reflect updated eligibility criteria for CAL FIRE's GGRF-funded programs.

As part of the Governor's budget for FY 2026-27, ARB is requesting \$3.6 million ongoing and 10 permanent positions (Cost of Implementation Account and GGRF) to implement updated regulations and program requirements for the recently reauthorized cap-and-invest program, including new requirements for GGRF. It is not clear to the committee whether ARB could rely on this funding, if approved by the Legislature this year, or utilize existing staff who oversee work related to GGRF, for some or all of its workload associated with this bill.

- 5) The State Water Resources Control Board estimates ongoing annual costs of approximately \$3.3 million (Timber Regulation and Forest Restoration Fund) because of increased workload associated with large landscape-scale projects funded through the grants in this bill. The State Water Board notes its Regional Water Quality Control Boards, which permit fuel treatment projects, would need to coordinate with the Task Force, WCB, DOC, and CAL FIRE to develop guidelines for funding regional landscape grants; conduct increased inspections, oversight, and enforcement for these projects; and potentially develop individual or general Waste Discharge Requirements to permit these projects. The committee notes that the State Water Board's actual costs are likely to vary greatly depending on the number, scope, and scale of any new projects funded as a result of this bill.

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:

AB 2513 addresses two critical gaps in our efforts to achieve the goals of California's Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan. First, the bill ensures that [RRFC] 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, AB 2513 increases the pace and scale of grant distribution by authorizing the Department of Conservation and the Wildlife Conservation Board to distribute regional landscape grants to local entities.

- 2) **Background. RFFC.** Through RFFC, DOC provides block grants to regional entities to support regional leadership to build local and regional capacity and develop, prioritize, and implement strategies and projects that create fire-adapted communities and landscapes by improving ecosystem health, community wildfire preparedness, and fire resilience.

WCB. WCB is a state grant-making agency dedicated to safeguarding California's biological diversity and wild spaces. WCB works in partnership with tribes, conservation organizations, and government agencies to acquire lands and design and implement habitat restoration and public access projects statewide. The board administers nearly 20 programs that support projects across California, and over its nearly 80-year history, has invested over \$3 billion in projects.

Wildfire Prevention Grants. The wildfire prevention grants program, which funds hazardous fuel removal and wildfire prevention planning and education, 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.

Forest Health Grants. Through grants to regionally based partners and collaboratives, CAL FIRE's forest health grant program seeks to significantly increase fuels management, fire reintroduction, treatment of degraded areas, and conservation of forests.

- 3) **Support.** According to a coalition of organizations in support of this bill, for decades, state wildfire policy and funding have focused primarily on forested ecosystems and competitive, project-by-project grants. The coalition argues this approach “misunderstood the distinct risks and management realities of Southern California’s shrub-dominated and chaparral landscapes.” The majority of the state’s wildfire mitigation funding relies on statutory definitions of “forest,” requiring at least 10% tree canopy, which, the coalition argues, is “a threshold that does not reflect the ecological conditions of many high fire-risk areas in the region.” By expanding the eligibility of forest health activities and incorporating clear statutory definitions such as “ignition prevention” into the statute, the coalition contends this bill helps ensure that critical risk-reduction activities in all California environments can be “appropriately authorized, funded, and implemented. This clarification marks an important step toward a more regionally responsive and ecologically grounded approach to wildfire resilience.”

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