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## SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Sabrina Cervantes, Chair  
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

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### **AB 2513 (Petrie-Norris) - Wildfire: Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program: local assistance grant program: regional landscape grants**

**Version:** August 3, 2026

**Urgency:** No

**Hearing Date:** August 10, 2026

**Policy Vote:** N.R. & W. 7 - 0

**Mandate:** No

**Consultant:** Ashley Ames

**Bill Summary:** This bill would expand the kinds of activities eligible for funding from the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) and the Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program (RFFC) to address ecosystem specific concerns in Southern California, among other changes.

#### **Fiscal Impact:**

- Cost pressure of an unknown but potentially significant amount (General Fund, Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund [GGRF], or bond funds) for the Department of Conservation (DOC) to directly award regional landscape grants to regional entities to implement regional priority strategies developed pursuant to the RFFC program. (See staff comments for more information on cost pressures.)
- Cost pressure of an unknown amount (General Fund, GGRF, or bond funds) for the WCB to award regional landscape grants to regional entities to implement regional priority strategies developed pursuant to the RFFC program.
- Cost pressure of an unknown but potentially significant amount (General Fund, GGRF, or bond funds) for the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CalFire) to fund the additional project types made eligible under its local assistance and forest health grant programs as a result of this bill, in addition to currently eligible project types.
- The California Air Resources Board (CARB) estimates ongoing costs of \$391,000 annually (GGRF) to review and update quantification methodologies, calculator tools, and reporting templates for fire prevention and forest health programs; update online resources and guidance documents to reflect expanded eligibility criteria; and update outreach and engagement materials and strategy; among other things.
- The State Water Board estimates ongoing costs of approximately \$2 million annually (Timber Regulation and Forest Restoration Fund [TRFRF]) to coordinate with the Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task Force, WCB, DOC, and CalFire to develop guidelines for funding regional landscape grants; conduct increased inspections, oversight, and enforcement for these projects; and develop new individual or general Waste Discharge Requirements to permit these projects.

**Background:** California funds wildfire resilience and forest health work substantially through state grant programs administered by multiple departments under the umbrella of California's Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan, issued in January 2021 and periodically updated.

*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. While WCB does not play an active role in the RFFC program, it collaborates with DOC and CalFire to fund priority forest health projects that support biodiversity.

*RFFC.* Pursuant to AB 9 (Wood), Chapter 225, Statutes of 2021, DOC launched the RFFC program to build the capacity of regional collaboratives through a common framework of regional forest and community resilience plans. Through RFFC, DOC provides block grants to regional entities to develop regional strategies that develop governance structures, identify wildfire risks, foster collaboration, and prioritize and implement projects within the region to achieve the goals of the program. Block grants are used by recipients to support partner capacity, project readiness, implementation of demonstration projects, and regional priority planning to achieve landscape-level and community wildfire resilience consistent with the Action Plan as well as the California Forest Carbon Plan and Executive Order B-52-18.

Regional block grantees are expected to partner extensively across their region to identify priorities and develop projects. Current block grantees partner heavily with state, federal, tribal, and local governments as well as water agencies, resource conservation districts, fire safe councils, and other nonprofits.

*Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task Force.* The Task Force was established in 2018 to develop a framework for establishing healthy and resilient forests that can withstand and adapt to wildfire, drought and a changing climate. The Task Force developed the Action Plan to integrate recommendations from existing state and federal plans that tackle various aspects of the state's forest health and wildfire crisis. The January 2021 Action Plan is the initial five-year plan for implementing the Agreement for Shared Stewardship of California's Forest and Rangelands (Shared Stewardship Agreement) with the USFS, coordinating the state's forestry efforts with other federal, local, tribal, regional, and private organizations.

*California Climate Investments.* CARB is required by statute to develop quantification methodologies and reporting materials for agencies administering GGRF-funded programs, including methodologies and assessment tools associated with fire prevention and forest health programs.

*Water quality permitting for fuel treatment projects.* The State Water Board's Regional Water Quality Control Boards permit fuel treatment projects, which can require inspections, oversight, enforcement, and the development of individual or general Waste Discharge Requirements.

**Proposed Law:** This bill would:

1. Authorize the WCB to award regional landscape grants to regional entities to implement certain regional priority strategies.

2. Require the WCB to establish guidelines for funding regional landscape grants to contribute to the achievement of the goals of California's Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan (Action Plan).
3. Amend the definition of "fire prevention activities," for the purposes of CalFire's Wildfire Prevention Grants Program, to include:
  - a. The creation of fuel breaks.
  - b. Ignition prevention.
  - c. Replacement of ignition-prone non-native fuels or flashy fuels with less flammable vegetation.
  - d. Technologies that improve detection and assessment of new fire ignitions.
4. Define the term "flashy fuel," for the purposes of the Wildfire Prevention Grants Program, as "shrubs, grasses, and foliage, including, but not limited to, pine needles and leaves, that dry or cure rapidly, ignite easily, and spread fire quickly."
5. Define the term "ignition prevention," for the purposes of the Wildfire Prevention Grants Program, as "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 with less flammable 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."
6. Define the term "non-native fuel," for the purposes of the Wildfire Prevention Grants Program, as "nonnative or invasive plant species, including grasses, shrubs, and other annual plants, and nonnative or invasive woody plant species."
7. Amend eligible activities under the Wildfire Prevention Grants Program to include vegetation modification to reduce wildfire ignition risk and ignition prevention activities.
8. Establish a definition for the term "Director," in the context of the RFFC at the DOC.
9. Specify the director may directly award regional landscape grants to regional entities to implement regional priority strategies to contribute to the achievement of the goals of the Action Plan.
10. Authorize the director to provide grants for projects and programs that improve ecosystem health.
11. Authorize moneys appropriated to the DOC for landscape-scale projects be allocated to activities that improve ecosystem health on chaparral, shrubland, grassland, and coastal sage scrub lands, including the replacement of ignition-prone nonnative fuels or flashy fuels with less flammable vegetation, and for

regional landscape grants to regional entities to implement regional priority strategies.

12. Establish definitions for the terms used above:

- a. "Ecosystem" includes forest, chaparral, shrubland, grasslands, and coastal sage ecosystems and natural communities.
- b. "Flashy fuels" means shrubs, grasses, and foliage, including, but not limited to, pine needles and leaves, that dry or cure rapidly, ignite easily, and spread fire quickly.
- c. "Nonnative fuels" means nonnative or invasive plant species, including grasses, shrubs, and other annual plants, and nonnative or invasive woody plant species.
- d. "Regional entity" has the same meaning as defined in Section 4208 of the Public Resources Code.

13. Require the director of DOC, prior to issuing regional landscape grants, to collaborate with the Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task Force to establish guidelines for funding regional landscape grants to contribute to the achievement of the goals of the Action Plan.

14. Delete an obsolete provision that authorized CalFire, until July 1, 2025, to authorize advance payments on local assistance grants in accordance with subdivision (d) of Section 11019.1 of the Government Code.

**Related Legislation:**

SB 675 (Limón, 2024) requires the Range Management Advisory Committee, in consultation with specified entities, to develop guidance for local or regional prescribed grazing plans, and requires the Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task Force to develop a strategic action plan to expand the use of prescribed grazing to support the state's wildfire and forest resilience efforts. The bill requires CalFire to consider and incorporate the guidance, at its discretion, in the local assistance grant program, and DOC to consider and incorporate it, where appropriate, in the RFFC program.

AB 388 (Connolly, 2023) would have required DOC to establish guidelines and regional investment strategies to support the goals and key actions identified in the Action Plan. The bill died in this committee.

AB 9 (Wood, 2021) established the Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program.

**Staff Comments:** This bill would amend three existing grant programs, including (1) CalFire's local assistance grant program for fire prevention and home hardening education activities, (2) the RFFC Program, and (3) CalFire's Forest Health Grants, to explicitly authorize regional landscape grants to be awarded directly to regional entities with regional priority strategies developed pursuant to the RFFC Program. Because this bill would add new CalFire project types or subprograms, it would require CARB to create a new quantification demand. This bill would also authorize WCB to issue regional landscape grants, either as a new program or through its existing infrastructure.

*DOC cost pressure.* To date, DOC has awarded \$142 million through the RFFC program. Traditionally, DOC has funded development of regional priority strategies and implementation of demonstration projects on a limited scale. Allowing DOC to directly award regional landscape grants to regional entities would create cost pressures of an unknown but potentially significant amount.

*CalFire cost pressure.* According to CalFire, the department has awarded more than \$639 million in wildfire prevention (local assistance) grants from fiscal year 2019-20 through 2025-26, across more than 677 competitive and direct awards statewide. For FY 2025-26, CalFire has granted \$62.7 million for 84 wildfire prevention grants, ranging from \$63,000 to \$949,000; the average grant amount was \$750,000. CalFire notes the program continues to be oversubscribed.

Since 2017, CalFire has awarded more than \$750 million in Forest Health Grants. This bill would allow funding from CalFire's local assistance grant program for fire prevention and Forest Health grants to be used for ignition reduction activities, including the replacement or modification of ignition-prone nonnative flashy fuels to less flammable native vegetation.

*WCB cost pressure.* The magnitude of this cost pressure may vary based on the board's interpretation of the bill language. Should WCB establish a new program or increase the pace and scale of disbursing regional grants, its cost pressure could be higher. On the other hand, if WCB issues regional landscape grants utilizing its existing programs and consistent with current processes, cost pressure would likely not be as high.

For example, the Budget Act of 2022 provided significant General Fund allocations for WCB to administer block grants, including the Roots Program (\$26 million) to implement wildlife-friendly restoration across working landscapes; Sierra Meadows Partnership (\$25 million) for climate-smart meadow restoration, planning, and monitoring throughout the Sierra Nevada and Cascade mountains; and the CARCD Climate Habitat Block Grant (\$19.4 million) to fund habitat expansion and carbon farming on both public and private lands.

*Proposition 4 bond monies.* Proposition 4 allocates \$185 million to DOC for the RFFC program, \$175 million to CalFire for forest health grants, \$185 million to CalFire for fire prevention grants, and \$870 million to WCB for various programs. The 2025-26 budget appropriated Proposition 4 funds to these programs, including \$80 million for CalFire's local fire prevention grants, \$80.9 million for the Forest Health Program, and \$10 million to DOC for the RFFC program.

The 2026-27 Budget Act removed the control section that had provided a lump sum of \$2.6 billion in Proposition 4 bond funds and deferred the 2026-27 Proposition 4 expenditure plan until August.

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