

Date of Hearing: April 6, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

Isaac G. Bryan, Chair

AB 2517 (Calderon) – As Introduced February 20, 2026

SUBJECT: Fire safety: fire hazard severity zones

SUMMARY: Establishes a process for public engagement for the State Fire Marshal's (SFM) development of fire hazard severity zone (FHSZ) maps.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Requires the SFM to identify areas in the state as moderate, high, and very high FHSZ based on consistent statewide criteria and based on the severity of fire hazard that is expected to prevail in those areas. Requires moderate, high, and very high FHSZs to be based on fuel loading, slope, fire weather, and other relevant factors including areas where winds have been identified by the SFM as a major cause of wildfire spread. (Government Code (GC) 51178)
- 2) Requires a local agency to designate, by ordinance, moderate, high, and very high FHSZs in its jurisdiction within 120 days of receiving recommendations from the SFM pursuant to GC 51178. (GC 51179 (a))
- 3) Authorizes a local agency, at its discretion, to include areas within the jurisdiction of the local agency, not identified as very high fire hazard severity zones (VHFHSZ) by the SFM, as VHFHSZ following a finding supported by substantial evidence in the record that the requirements of GC 51182 are necessary for effective fire protection within the area. (GC 51179 (b))
- 4) Requires the SFM to periodically review the areas in the state identified as VHFHSZs, and as necessary, make recommendations relative to VHFHSZs. Requires this review to coincide with the review of state responsibility area (SRA) lands every five years and, when possible, fall within the time frames for each county's general plan update. Any revision of areas included in a very high fire hazard severity zone shall be made in accordance with Sections 51178 and 51179. (GC 51181)
- 5) Requires, pursuant to regulations adopted by the State Board of Forestry and Fire Protection, a person who owns, leases, controls, operates, or maintains an occupied dwelling or occupied structure within a VHFHSZ designated by a local agency pursuant to GC 51179 to maintain specified defensible space requirements. (GC 51182)

THIS BILL:

- 1) Requires the SFM, no fewer than 180 days before finalizing the FHSZ designations, to do all of the following:
 - a) Post draft maps of preliminary designations on its public internet website to ensure the preliminary designations are available for public review and comment;

- b) Post the data inputs, model, and methodology used to develop the preliminary designations on its public internet website;
 - c) Conduct regional, public workshops on the draft maps before initiating the public comment period to receive oral public comments. Provide at least one online virtual option for public participation in a workshop. Consider, within 30 days of a public regional workshop, all oral public comments received;
 - d) Host a 30-day public comment period for interested stakeholders to provide written comment on the draft maps. Requires the SFM to respond to, within 30 days of the end of the public comment period, all written comments received from local agencies regarding land use and zoning matters; and,
 - e) Coordinate with other state agencies to help educate the public during the public workshops on the following topics related to the preliminary designations:
 - i) Mitigation activities;
 - ii) Fire insurance; and,
 - iii) Other related maps and models.
- 2) Requires the SFM to finalize the FHSZ designations and transmit the maps identifying the FHSZs to the appropriate local agency.
 - 3) Authorizes a local agency, at its discretion, to increase the level of fire hazard severity applicable to a parcel in its jurisdiction if a parcel contains two or more designations, so that the higher level of fire hazard severity would apply to the entire parcel.
 - 4) Requires the SFM to publish, within 60 days, the adopted local ordinances designating FHSZs on its internet website to ensure they are publicly available.
 - 5) Requires, on or before January 1, 2030, and every five years thereafter, the SFM to review the local responsibility areas (LRA) lands, including areas identified as moderate, high, and very high fire FHSZs, and, as necessary, recommend changes. Requires review of LRA lands to coincide with the review of SRA lands every five years.

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS:

1) Author's statement:

Wildfires are an increasing reality for communities across California, and the way we plan for that risk matters. When the state updates fire hazard severity zone maps, local governments and residents deserve a clear understanding of what those changes mean and a chance to share their input. Assembly Bill 2517 helps make this process more transparent by requiring advance notice, public workshops, and opportunities for communities to provide feedback before maps

are finalized. By improving communication and collaboration, we can help ensure communities are better informed and better prepared for wildfire risk.

- 2) **Fire Hazard Severity Zones.** FHSZs are categorized as moderate, high, and very high based on consistent statewide criteria and based on the severity of fire hazard that is expected to prevail in those areas. FHSZ maps evaluate “hazard” based on the physical conditions that create a likelihood and expected fire behavior over a 30 to 50-year period without considering mitigation measures such as home hardening, defensible space, vegetation management, or fuel reduction efforts. The fire hazard severity model for wildland fire has two key elements: probability of an area burning and expected fire behavior under extreme fuel and weather conditions.

Classification of each zone is based on the average hazard across the zone, which have a minimum size of 200 acres. In wildlands, hazard is a function of modeled flame length under the worst conditions and annual burn probability. Both these factors generally increase with increasing hazard level, but there may be instances where one value is ‘very high’ and the other is low, pushing the overall hazard into a more intermediate ranking. On average, both modeled flame length and burn probability increase by roughly 40-60% between hazard classes. Classification outside of wildland areas is based on the fire hazard of the adjacent wildland and the probability of flames and embers threatening buildings.

In 2007, CAL FIRE mapped the three tiered FHSZs for the SRA and the VHFHSZ for the lands managed locally in the LRA, which includes incorporated cities, urban regions, agriculture lands, and portions of the desert where the local government is responsible for wildfire protection.

SB 63 (Stern), Chapter 382, Statutes of 2021, required CAL FIRE to adopt of the FHSZs in the LRA. The maps – including updated maps for the SRA – were released last year. Approximately 1.2 million acres are now mapped as VHFHSZ – a 35% increase from the old maps published between 2007 and 2011. There are 1.4 million covered acres in the high and very high FHSZs combined. Including all three zones, a total of 6.8 million acres across the state are mapped in a FHSZ. Approximately one in four residential structures in California is located within or near high or very high FHSZ under the new maps.

CAL FIRE uses the same modeling data that are used to map the SRA to develop the FHSZs in the LRA. Creating maps is a laborious process that requires scrutinizing detailed data across the state, including small pockets of potentially flammable wildlands within cities, and then coordinating with hundreds of local jurisdictions for validation of the mapping.

The FHSZs are used for several purposes, including to designate areas where California’s defensible space standards and wildland urban interface (WUI) building codes are required.

- 3) **SFM process for developing the FHSZs.** The SFM designates the FHZS maps based on science and measured fire hazard. Many factors are included such as fire history, vegetation, flame length, blowing embers, proximity to wildland, terrain, and weather. How local governments have zoned their jurisdictions in the LRA is not a determining factor for identifying fire hazard. Neither are impacts on the real estate market, local businesses, or defensible space compliance costs. The maps are simply an indication of fire hazard that subsequently informs how new structures are built, which defensible space requirements may

apply, local evacuation planning, and other safety elements for mapped communities. However, local governments' zoning and land use information may elucidate the current vegetation status of a parcel or area that the SFM's technologies may not have current information about.

This bill requires the SFM, at least 180 days before finalizing the FHSZ maps, to post draft maps online, make available their models and methodologies used for designating the maps, and conduct public workshops to solicit public comments. Further, the bill requires the SFM to respond to all written comments received from local agencies regarding land use and zoning matters.

Development of the FHSZ maps are not subject to the Administrative Procedures Act, which means there is no opportunity for local governments to actively track or participate in the maps' development. Without insight into that process, local governments can feel challenged complying within 120 days with adoption of their own ordinance that accurately reflects their districts.

To prevent creating a public process that could potentially frustrate and/or delay adoption of the maps due to irrelevant comments that shouldn't influence the fire hazard designation, the bill could be tailored to local government input that is germane to the lands being assessed for fire hazard.

- 4) **Local maps.** Once the SFM finalizes the FHSZ designation, it transmits the maps identifying the FHSZs along with a model ordinance to the governing body of a local agency for adoption.

Under current law, local agencies have 120 days from receipt of the state's recommendations to designate FHSZs by ordinance. A local agency may, at its discretion, increase the level of FHSZ identified by the SFM, or include areas within its jurisdiction into its FHSZ ordinance, but a local agency may not decrease the level of FHSZ identified by the SFM.

The SFM's regulations¹ require, within 30 days of adopting a local ordinance designating VHFHSZ, a local agency to transmit a copy of the ordinance and a map to the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection (Board) and any information about the decision to include areas within the jurisdiction as VHFHSZ that were not identified as such by SFM.

This bill creates redundancy with the SFM's requirements to transmit the maps identifying the FHSZs to the appropriate local agency, but also makes an important clarification in local FHSZ mapping by requiring a local agency to increase the level of fire hazard severity applicable to a parcel in its jurisdiction if a parcel contains two or more designations, so that the higher level of fire hazard severity would apply to the entire parcel.

- 5) **Double referral.** This bill is also referred to the Assembly Emergency Management Committee.
- 6) **Committee amendments.** The *committee may wish to consider* amending the bill to eliminate redundancies, truncate the public process to require one online public workshop, and clarify the relevant stakeholders submitting comments to the SFM.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

American Planning Association, California Chapter	
California Association of Realtors	City of Rocklin
California Building Officials	City of Rolling Hills Estates
California State Association of Counties	City of San Clemente
California Water Association	City of Stanton
City of Artesia, California	City of Thousand Oaks
City of Belmont	City of Tracy
City of Brentwood	City of Ventura
City of Buena Park	City of Vista
City of Carpinteria	City of Walnut Creek
City of Folsom, California	City of Whittier
City of Glendora	City of Laguna Beach
City of LA Quinta	City of Mission Viejo
City of LA Verne	City of Murrieta
City of Laguna Niguel	City of Palm Springs
City of Lakeport	City of Paso Robles
City of Lomita	League of California Cities
City of Los Alamitos	Redwood Empire Division, League of California Cities
City of Moorpark	Riverside County, California
City of Paso Robles Fire Department	West Hollywood/Hernan Molina,
City of Pittsburg	Governmental Affairs Liaison
City of Rancho Santa Margarita	

Opposition

None on file

Analysis Prepared by: Paige Brokaw / NAT. RES. /

ⁱ California Code of Regulations, Title 14, sec. 1280.02 (a)