
SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Anna Caballero, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

AB 300 (Lackey) - Fire hazard severity zones: State Fire Marshal

Version: May 5, 2025

Urgency: No

Hearing Date: August 18, 2025

Policy Vote: G.O. 15 - 0, N.R. & W. 7 - 0

Mandate: No

Consultant: Janelle Miyashiro

Bill Summary: AB 300 requires the State Fire Marshal (SFM), at least once every five years, to review and update state responsibility areas (SRAs) and non-SRAs fire hazard severity zone (FHSZ) mapping classifications, as specified.

Fiscal Impact: The Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) reports costs of approximately \$2.37 million in year one, \$2.79 million in year two, and \$2.77 million in year three and ongoing (General Fund). Costs include five additional staff to address workload associated with developing and implementing the required changes to the FHSZ review process, evaluating model changes, addressing public comments, and data analysis. Other costs include funding for ongoing data acquisition and external modeling support.

CAL FIRE notes concerns that shortening the review period for its mapping process to five years would create an accelerated timeline that could negatively impact the review process for SRAs and would not allow sufficient time to address discrepancies that may be noted in the review process. To the extent this impact is significant, then there may be additional cost pressures to the department.

Background: The mission of the SFM is to protect life and property through the development and application of fire prevention engineering, education and enforcement. The SFM supports the mission of CAL FIRE by focusing on fire prevention and provides support through a wide variety of fire safety responsibilities. Additionally, the SFM classifies certain lands within the state into FHSZs. Each zone is based on fuel loading, slope, fire weather, and other relevant factors present, including areas where winds have been identified by CAL FIRE as a major cause of wildfire spread. Unlike an insurance company's risk assessment of a house in the woods, which might take into account its composite wood sidings, hazard maps only take into account the lasting facts about a location.

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. Within high FHSZs, newly constructed homes must meet heightened fire-resistant building standards. Anyone hoping to sell a home also has to alert would-be-buyers of the elevated danger with a disclosure form. For those in very high FHSZs, the law requires a 100-foot circle around a property free of brush, dead trees, and other flammable materials. Need subdivisions also need to be carefully designed with multiple evacuation routes, adequate water supply infrastructure, and built-in-fuel breaks in place.

Proposed Law:

- Requires the SFM, at least once every five years, to re-review areas in the state that are not identified as moderate, high, and very high FHSZs and, if applicable, identify those areas as an FHSZ, as specified.
- Requires the SFM to, at least once every five years, review the areas in the state identified as very high FHSZs, and as necessary, make recommendations relative to very high FHSZs, as specified.
- Requires the SFM, at least once every five years, to re-review lands within the SRA that are not classified into FHSZs and, if applicable, classify those areas as FHSZs, as specified.
- Requires the SFM, at least once every five years, to review zones designated and rated pursuant to existing law and, as necessary, revise zones or their ratings or repeal the designation of zones, as specified.

Related Legislation: AB 261 authorizes the SFM, in periods between the SFM's review of SRAs and non-SRAs regarding FHSZs, to confer with entities on actions that may impact the degree of fire hazard in that area and authorizes those entities to provide information to the SFM on wildfire safety improvements, as specified. AB 261 also authorizes the SFM to charge a fee from an entity that confers with the SFM.

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