
SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Anna Caballero, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

AB 367 (Bennett) - Water: County of Ventura: fire suppression

Version: July 10, 2025

Policy Vote: N.R. & W. 6 - 1, L. GOV. 5 - 1

Urgency: No

Mandate: Yes

Hearing Date: August 18, 2025

Consultant: Ashley Ames

Bill Summary: This bill would require, beginning July 1, 2027 water suppliers, as defined, to meet specified requirements relating to wildfire resilience.

Fiscal Impact:

- One-time and ongoing costs of an unknown amount to Ventura OES to establish procedures for a water supplier to identify critical infrastructure, and to Ventura Fire to develop minimum fire safety standards for critical infrastructure, among other things. These combined one-time and ongoing costs are likely in excess of \$150,000. If the Commission on State Mandates determines this bill's requirements to be a reimbursable state mandate, the state would need to reimburse these costs to Ventura County (General Fund).
- To the extent this bill requires a local water district to make infrastructure updates and develop specified lists and plans, such districts generally have the authority to levy service charges, fees, or assessments to pay for the mandated program or level of service, so resultant costs are likely non-reimbursable by the state.

Background: Most Californians receive water from one of approximately 2,850 community water systems in the state. Of these, roughly 1,160 of them are operated by public agencies, principally cities, counties, or special districts. Locally elected boards oversee these agencies: "independent" special districts have elected boards, while the city council or county board of supervisors retains authority over city- or county-run departments or "dependent" special districts that are a creation of a city or county. The remainder are privately owned and operated as investor-owned utilities regulated by the California Public Utilities Commission, mobile home parks, customer-owned systems such as mutual water companies, or other types.

These water systems can range in size from the smallest community water systems that serve as few as 25 connections (or smaller for water systems that don't qualify as community water systems under state law) to the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, which serves over 700,000 connections.

Fire Hazard Severity Zones. The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CALFIRE) provides wildland fire protection on non-federal lands outside cities. To meet this duty, the State Board of Forestry and Fire Protection (Board) designates the State Responsibility Area (SRA) every five years. The State Fire Marshal within CALFIRE designates moderate, high, and very high fire hazard severity zones (FHSZs). After the 1991 Oakland-Berkeley firestorm, the Legislature required CALFIRE to also designate the very high FHSZ in the Local Responsibility Area (LRA). These maps

must be updated every five years. The State Fire Marshal recently completed updated designations of these zones in 2024 and 2025.

Water supply challenges during California Wildfires. A 2021 report titled *Wildfire & Water Supply in California*, by the California Institute for Water Resources at University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources, and the Luskin Center for Innovation at the University of California, Los Angeles describes the impacts of wildfire on water systems and best practices for mitigating those impacts. The report notes:

“Water supply failures have several negative impacts during a wildfire. Emergency firefighting teams rely in part on operable water pumps, and have to take more ad hoc measures to secure water supply if pumps fail, as occurred in the Woolsey Fire of 2018 (Griffith 2018). Loss of water service to local hospitals and other vital facilities can compound the impacts of wildfire on a community. ... Keeping water systems operable during a wildfire emergency can be difficult, as fire may damage water system infrastructure, spreading fire can leave key parts of water system infrastructure inaccessible, and backup power generators may fail.”

Lack of available water supply has been an issue in several recent wildfires:

- *Tubbs Fire.* During the 2017 Tubbs fire in Sonoma County, the fire hydrants in the hilltop community of Fountaingrove in Santa Rosa repeatedly lost pressure. Firefighters were forced to travel to the valley of Santa Rosa, where water pressure was stronger, and then return to the hilltop to fight the fire.
- *Thomas Fire.* During the 2017 Thomas Fire in Ventura County, power outages caused by the fire and heavy winds left some water pumping stations inoperable, so that water couldn't reach fire hydrants. In Ojai, the fire caused direct damage to the infrastructure, rendering the water system inoperable.
- *Carr Fire.* During the 2018 Carr Fire in Shasta County, California, wildfire destroyed a system's main office and two pump stations. Power outages combined with undersized generators led to treatment process disruptions for some systems.
- *Mountain Fire.* During the 2024 Mountain Fire in Ventura County, two water pumps in the Camarillo foothills became inactive during the firefight, halting or slowing the process to refill hillside water tanks that supply high-elevation fire hydrants. One pump was completely destroyed in the blaze, while another lost power during Southern California Edison's planned electricity shutoffs.
- *Palisades Fires.* During the Palisades Fire in January 2025, the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power reported that water use spiked to four times the normal level for over 15 hours, leaving some hydrants dry. Investigations are ongoing to assess these water system failures.

The author wants to ensure the availability of water to fight wildfire in Ventura County.

Proposed Law: This bill would:

1. Beginning July 1, 2027, require a water-supplier, as defined, to have access to sufficient backup energy sources to operate fire suppression infrastructure, as

defined, needed to supply water for at least 24 hours for the purpose of fire suppression in-high or very high fire hazard severity zones in the County of Ventura, as provided.

2. Require the water supplier to take various actions, including annually inspecting critical fire suppression infrastructure and backup energy sources and notifying the Ventura County Office of Emergency Services within 3 business days of any reduction in its water delivery capacity that could substantially hinder firefighting operations or significantly delay the replenishment of reservoirs.
3. Require, if any fire damages and makes uninhabitable more than 10 residential dwellings within the service area of a water supplier, a report be made by the Ventura County Fire Department in cooperation with the water supplier, as specified.
4. By levying new requirements on the Ventura County Fire Department, this bill would create a state-mandated local program. Provide that, if the Commission on State Mandates determines that the bill contains costs mandated by the state, reimbursement for those costs shall be made pursuant to statutory provisions noted.

Related Legislation: AB 372 (Bennett), of the current legislative session, would establish the Rural Water Infrastructure for Wildfire Resilience Program in CalOES for the distribution of state matching funds to urban wildland interface communities in HFHSZ or VHFHSZ, to improve water system infrastructure, for purposes consistent with improvements to aid in the protection of property from fire.

Staff Comments: The California Constitution requires the state to reimburse local governments for the costs of new or expanded state mandated local programs. Because AB 367 imposes new duties on local agencies, Legislative Counsel says it imposes a new state mandate. The measure states that if the Commission on State Mandates determines that the bill imposes a reimbursable mandate, then reimbursement must be made pursuant to existing statutory provisions.

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