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THIRD READING

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Bill No: AB 372  
Author: Bennett (D)  
Amended: 8/29/25 in Senate  
Vote: 21

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SENATE GOVERNMENTAL ORG. COMMITTEE: 15-0, 6/24/25  
AYES: Padilla, Archuleta, Ashby, Blakespear, Cervantes, Choi, Dahle, Hurtado,  
Jones, Ochoa Bogh, Richardson, Rubio, Smallwood-Cuevas, Wahab, Weber  
Pierson

SENATE NATURAL RES. & WATER COMMITTEE: 7-0, 7/16/25  
AYES: Limón, Seyarto, Allen, Grove, Hurtado, Laird, Stern

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE: 7-0, 8/29/25  
AYES: Caballero, Seyarto, Cabaldon, Dahle, Grayson, Richardson, Wahab

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 79-0, 6/2/25 - See last page for vote

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**SUBJECT:** Office of Emergency Services: state matching funds: water system  
infrastructure improvements

**SOURCE:** Tahoe Water For Fire Suppression Partnership

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**DIGEST:** This bill establishes, contingent on funding being appropriated pursuant to the Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness, and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024 (Prop. 4) the Rural Water Infrastructure for Wildfire Resilience Program (Program) for the distribution of state matching funds to urban wildland interface communities, in high and very high fire hazard severity zones (FHSZ) to improve water system infrastructure, as specified.

**ANALYSIS:**

## Existing law:

- 1) Establishes, within the office of the Governor, the Office of Emergency Services (OES), under the direction of the Director of OES, and charges OES with coordinating various activities within the state.
- 2) Requires OES, contingent upon an appropriation by the Legislature, to enter into a joint powers agreement with the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) to develop and administer a comprehensive wildfire mitigation program relating to structure hardening and retrofitting and prescribed fuel modification activities.

## This bill:

- 1) Establishes the Program, within OES, for the distribution of state matching funds to urban wildland interface communities, in high FHSZs or very high FHSZs designated by the State Fire Marshal (SFM) or by a local agency, to improve water system infrastructure, for purposes consistent with the services and improvements to aid in the protection of property from fire, as specified.
- 2) Requires OES to work in coordination with the Department of Water Resources (DWR), the State Water Resources Control Board, the SFM, and other state entities as OES determines to be appropriate, to achieve the purposes of the Program.
- 3) Requires OES to develop criteria and a scoring methodology to prioritize the distribution of state matching funds provided under the Program to rural communities based upon specified criteria.
- 4) Provides that the operation of this section is contingent upon funding being appropriated by the Legislature to OES for purposes consistent with the Program authorized by this bill.

**Background**

*Author Statement.* According to the author's office, "California has experienced a growing number of wildfires with ten of the largest twenty fires occurring since 2020. Our water systems were designed to provide safe drinking water, however the prevalence of fires in this state demands us to re-examine how we prepare for

fires. The voters of California made clear with their support of Proposition 4 that they want this state to invest in fire suppression and prevention. AB 372 creates the Rural Water Infrastructure for Wildfire Resilience Program so that small water suppliers, many of which serve disadvantaged communities, can invest in upgrading waterlines, installing additional fire hydrants, enhancing water delivery, and backup power generation. These are the types of intelligent, forward-thinking, actions and investments that we need to make in order to reduce loss and save lives.”

*California’s Worsening Wildfire Reality.* The State of California has the main responsibility for wildfire response activities on about one-third of California’s land area. With over 39 million residents, the State of California is the most populous state in the nation and has the third largest land area among the states (163,695 square miles). OES serves as the state’s leadership hub during all major emergencies and disasters. This includes responding, directing, and coordinating state and federal resources and mutual aid assets across all regions to support the diverse communities across the state.

In 2021, the DWR released the *Small Water Systems and Rural Communities Drought and Water Shortage Contingency Planning and Risk Assessment* report. Issued in two parts, the report both identifies the vulnerability of small water systems and rural communities to drought and water shortages (Part II) and offers recommendations for enhancing drought contingency planning in these areas (Part I).

In this report, DWR evaluated the drought and water shortage risks for 2,419 small water suppliers. The findings revealed that 47 out of the state’s 58 counties have small water suppliers ranking in the top 10% for water shortage risk (a total of 240 suppliers). Notably, 61% of these high-risk suppliers (149 in total) are located in zones with high or very high fire hazard severity. This indicates that numerous small and rural communities across the state face a significant risk of water depletion during droughts or other disasters, and that communities in high wildfire-risk areas are particularly vulnerable—potentially compromising their ability to manage fires effectively.

*Fire Hazard Severity Zones.* 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. New subdivisions also need

to be carefully designed with multiple evacuation routes, adequate water supply infrastructure, and built-in-fuel breaks in place.

The Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) is the transition zone where human development meets wildland vegetation. These are spaces where homes and communities directly border forests, grasslands, or brush lands. According to an article in *CalMatters* titled “The LA County fires devastated homes in the wildland urban interface. Here’s what that is” notes that their analysis revealed that as of 2020, nearly 14 million Californians lived in the sprawling seven million acre zone that makes up California’s WUI areas. According to the article, “[w]hile under three percent of the statewide WUI has been affected by wildfire in the last decade, thousands of homes in the zone have been destroyed.”

*California’s Wildfire Mitigation Program.* AB 38 (Wood, Chapter 391, Statutes of 2019) required OES to enter into a joint powers agreement with CAL FIRE to develop and administer a comprehensive wildfire mitigation program to encourage cost-effective structure hardening and retrofitting and to facilitate vegetation management, as specified. Known as the California Wildfire Mitigation Program (CWMP), this effort encourages cost-effective wildfire resilience measures to create fire-resistant homes, businesses, public buildings, and public spaces. Mitigation measures such as home hardening, vegetation management, defensible space, and other fuel modification activities provide neighborhood and community-wide benefits against wildfire. Existing law authorizes the CWMP to establish financial assistance limits and matching funding or other recipient contribution requirements for the program, as specified.

*Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness, and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024.* The Bond Act was placed on the 2024 general election ballot as Proposition 4 by SB 867 (Allen, Chapter 83, Statutes of 2024), and was approved by voters with 59.8% of the 15 million votes cast. Prop. 4 authorizes the issuance of \$10 billion worth of bonds pursuant to the State General Obligation Bond Law to finance projects for safe drinking water, drought, flood, and water resilience, wildfire and forest resilience, coastal resilience, extreme heat mitigation, biodiversity and nature-based climate solutions, climate-smart, sustainable, and resilient farms, ranches, and working lands, park creation and outdoor access, and clean air programs.

Of that \$10 billion, Prop. 4 makes \$135 million available, upon appropriation by the Legislature, to OES for a wildfire mitigation grant program to provide, among other things: loans, direct assistance, and matching funds for projects that: prevent

wildfires, increase resilience, maintain existing wildfire risk reduction projects, reduce the risk of wildfires to communities, or increase home or community hardening.

*Rural Water Infrastructure for Wildfire Resilience Program.* This bill establishes the Program to provide state matching funds for critical water infrastructure improvements in urban wildland interface communities located in high and very high FHSZs. Under the Program, funding may be used for improvements such as upgrading water lines, installing fire hydrants, increasing water delivery capacity, and adding backup power systems. To prioritize limited funds, this bill requires OES to develop criteria based on factors such as small system size, proximity to critical water sources, and alignment with existing wildfire protection or water system plans. The Program is contingent upon funding appropriated by the Legislature pursuant to Prop. 4, approved by the voters in November of 2024.

### **Prior/Related Legislation**

SB 90 (Seyarto, 2025) explicitly specifies certain projects eligible for wildfire mitigation grant program funding from Prop. 4, as specified. (Held in the Senate Appropriations Committee Suspense File)

AB 307 (Petrie-Norris, 2025) would have required \$10 million of the \$25 million made available by Prop. 4 for CAL FIRE to be allocated for purposes of the ALERTCalifornia fire camera mapping system. (Never heard in the Assembly Natural Resources Committee)

SB 1088 (Alvarado-Gil, 2024) would have, contingent upon funding appropriated pursuant to a future bond act, establishes the Rural and Small Community Fire Resilience Program, within OES, for the distribution of state matching funds to communities within the WUI to improve water system infrastructure, as specified. (Held in Assembly Appropriations Committee)

**FISCAL EFFECT:** Appropriation: No Fiscal Com.: Yes Local: No

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee, OES reports annual ongoing costs of approximately \$703,000 for two additional staff to support the proposed program (General Fund or other funds). OES notes it would require at least seven percent of funding to develop and implement the program, as well as provide technical assistance and monitor grants awarded.

Unknown likely significant General Fund cost pressures, ranging in the tens of millions of dollars, to fund the proposed Rural Water Infrastructure for Wildfire Resilience Program.

**SUPPORT:** (Verified 8/29/25)

Tahoe Water For Fire Suppression Partnership (Source)

Association of California Water Agencies

California Association of Environmental Health Administrators

California State Association of Counties

California Water Association

CDP Rural Caucus

El Dorado Irrigation District

Elsinore Valley Municipal Water District

League of California Cities

North Tahoe Public Utility District

Northern California Youth Policy Coalition

Placer County Water Agency

Rural County Representatives of California

Sierra Business Council

South Tahoe Public Utility District

Tahoe City Public Utility District

Upper San Gabriel Valley Municipal Water District

**OPPOSITION:** (Verified 8/29/25)

None received

**ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT:** In support of the bill, the Tahoe Water For Fire Suppression Partnership write that, “[t]his bill will develop a program for the distribution of state matching funds to WUI communities located in designated “High” and “Very High” Fire Hazard Severity Zones 9as classified by the State Fire Marshal), to improve and upgrade rural water systems infrastructure and accelerate the installation of resilient water infrastructure to address community wildfire suppression needs.”

**ASSEMBLY FLOOR:** 79-0, 6/2/25

**AYES:** Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alanis, Alvarez, Arambula, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Castillo, Chen, Connolly, Davies, DeMaio, Dixon, Elhawary, Ellis, Flora, Fong, Gabriel, Gallagher, Garcia, Gipson, Jeff Gonzalez, Mark González, Hadwick, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Hoover, Irwin, Jackson, Kalra,

Krell, Lackey, Lee, Lowenthal, Macedo, McKinnor, Muratsuchi, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Patterson, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Ransom, Celeste Rodriguez, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Sanchez, Schiavo, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Ta, Tangipa, Valencia, Wallis, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

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