
THIRD READING

Bill No: SB 1079
Author: Stern (D), et al.
Amended: 4/28/26
Vote: 21

SENATE NATURAL RES. & WATER COMMITTEE: 7-0, 4/7/26
AYES: Becker, Seyarto, Allen, Blakespear, Cabaldon, Grove, Stern

SENATE EMERGENCY MGT. COMMITTEE: 9-0, 4/21/26
AYES: Stern, Seyarto, Allen, Ashby, Blakespear, Dahle, Grayson, Pérez, Rubio

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE: 7-0, 5/14/26
AYES: Cervantes, Seyarto, Cabaldon, Dahle, Grayson, Richardson, Wahab

SUBJECT: Department of Forestry and Fire Protection: Fire Innovation Unit

SOURCE: Megafire Action

DIGEST: This bill establishes the Fire Innovation Unit (FIU) in the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Department), under the direction of a Deputy Director of Wildfire Innovation.

ANALYSIS:

Existing law establishes the Department. (Public Resources Code (PRC) §701).

This bill:

- 1) Establishes the FIU within the Department, under the direction of a Deputy Director of Wildfire Innovation reporting to the Director of the Department.
- 2) Codifies the FIU as the Department's innovation arm and the state's principal hub for wildfire technology, research, coordination, procurement, and deployment.
- 3) Codifies programs under the FIU and their purposes, including:

- a) Office of Wildfire Technology Research and Development (OWTRD)
- b) Innovation, Outreach, and Coordination (IOC)
- c) Rapid Acquisition and Deployment Program (RADP)
- 4) Authorizes the FIU to enter into memoranda of understanding, cooperative research and development agreements, contracts, and grant agreements with public agencies, private sector entities, nonprofit organizations, educational and research institutions, tribal governments, and philanthropic partners.
- 5) Authorizes the FIU to establish and administer a Wildfire Innovation Grant Program.
- 6) Authorizes the FIU to administer or monitor pilot, prototype, or demonstration projects involving public agencies, private technology companies, nonprofit organizations, educational institutions, tribal governments, and philanthropic partners to evaluate, mature, and validate wildfire-related technologies.
- 7) Authorizes the FIU to collaborate with public and private educational and research institutions on wildfire technology and innovation and enter into partnerships, memoranda of understanding, or cooperative research agreements to support wildfire technology and innovation.
- 8) Authorizes the FIU to provide technical expertise, operational data, field testing environments, and appropriated funding to ensure the technologies developed in the collaborations are transitioned into wildfire operations.
- 9) Authorizes the FIU to establish testbeds to test or evaluate emerging technologies. The FIU shall establish or designate testbeds where technologies can be safely deployed and evaluated under real-world conditions.
- 10) Authorizes the FIU to provide technical assistance to local, state, tribal, federal, and international fire agencies to facilitate deployment of wildfire-related technologies.
- 11) Authorizes the FIU to maintain a publicly available resource, including, but not limited to, an information bulletin, to provide visibility into technologies evaluated, piloted, or deployed pursuant to this article.
- 12) Authorizes the FIU opportunities to participate in demonstrations, pilot programs, and field testing pursuant to this article. The FIU shall seek operational feedback from participating local, state, tribal, federal, and international fire agencies, and where appropriate, state agencies.
- 13) Establishes that participation by a private entity in any FIU-authorized pilot, prototype, testing, demonstration, or research activity pursuant to the bill does not by itself constitute a conflict of interest, create an unfair competitive

- advantage, be considered a gift of public funds, or disqualify the private entity from any simultaneous or subsequent procurement, solicitation, or contracting opportunity with the state or a local agency.
- 14) Requires that information, data, or pre-decisional materials exchanged during activities conducted pursuant to the bill be treated as non-procurement sensitive and not be used as a basis to exclude or disadvantage any participant in future competitive procurement.
 - 15) Requires the Department, on or before January 1, 2028, and annually thereafter, to submit to the Governor and the appropriate fiscal and policy committees of the Legislature a report.
 - 16) Requires the Director of the Department to implement the bill upon an appropriation by the Legislature for its purposes in the annual Budget Act or another statute.
 - 17) Authorizes the Department to reorganize existing positions and resources to fulfill the purposes of the bill.
 - 18) Sunsets these provisions on January 1, 2033.

Background

Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Department). The Department, in accordance with a plan approved by the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection, is responsible for the prevention and suppression of forest fires (Public Resources Code (PRC) §§4113, 4114). There are several innovation units in the Department, but they are not codified in statute.

Fire Innovation Unit (FIU). In partnership with FireWERX and supported by philanthropic organizations including the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, the FIU serves as the Department's hub for innovation, bringing together public, private, academic, tribal, and philanthropic partners to advance solutions that enhance firefighter safety and operational efficiency.

Innovation, Outreach, and Coordination Unit (IOC). The IOC engages directly with the Department's programs, units, and regions to define operational needs and gather technical requirements. IOC staff work closely with partners to ensure that new technologies address true field challenges, leveraging operational experience to guide research and development efforts.

Office of Wildfire Technology, Research, and Development (OWTRD). OWTRD serves as the Department's technical and research backbone. OWTRD evaluates potential solutions, conducts research and field testing alongside the IOC, documents results, and provides recommendations for adoption. OWTRD ensures that every innovation meets CAL FIRE's operational standards, supports the Department's mission, and is ready for practical deployment across the state.

Codifying, Clarifying, and Specifying Existing Department Programs. There is within the Department a FIU, IOC, and OWTRD. This bill codifies these programs in statute, adds the new RADP to the FIU, and imbues them with specific authorities and limitations to most efficiently deploy effective, innovative technology to the fire front.

Related/Prior Legislation

AB 1891 (Connolly) would establish the Beneficial Fire Capacity Program in the Department, which would fund grants for beneficial fire implementation, capacity building, research, innovation, and training. This bill is currently on the Assembly floor.

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

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee analysis:

While the bill's provisions would be contingent upon an appropriation, it could result in General Fund cost pressures in the hundreds of thousands of dollars each year for Cal Fire to administer the FIU. There could be additional costs that are likely to be significant, to the extent that the FIU elects to implement a Wildfire Innovation Grant Program as authorized by the bill. It specifies that the program shall fund early-stage, mature, or dual-use technology projects that enhance wildfire readiness, mitigation, or response. However, the bill does not specify the number or size of the grants to be awarded.

SUPPORT: (Verified 5/14/26)

Megafire Action (sponsor)

Calforests

California Association of REALTORS (if amended)

California Fire Safe Council

California Forward

Climate Resolve

Del Norte Fire Safe Council
Fire Aside
Firewerx
Napa Communities Firewise Foundation
Net-zero California
Orange County Fire Authority
Pacific Forest Trust
Rain
Rockrose Risk
Safe Community Project
San Bernardino County Fire Protection District
The Tahoe Fund

OPPOSITION: (Verified 5/14/26)

None received

ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT: According to the author, “Last year, Angelenos experienced firsthand that California wildfires are becoming more destructive and deadlier with increasingly extreme weather. It is critical we prioritize programs with innovative technology and research to properly equip our emergency management personnel who keep our communities safer in the face of disaster. SB 1079 creates the [FIU] under [the Department], giving California a formal mechanism to identify firefighter needs, source technologies, prototype solutions, and move successful technologies from pilot to scale. By establishing a robust and permanent unit to test and deploy new firefighting technology, protecting Californians from future megafire disasters becomes not just an aspiration, but a coordinated priority for the state.”

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