

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Bill No: SB 1079
Author: Stern (D), et al.
Amended: 8/21/26
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

SENATE FLOOR: 33-0, 5/22/26

AYES: Archuleta, Arreguín, Ashby, Blakespear, Cabaldon, Caballero, Cervantes, Choi, Cortese, Dahle, Durazo, Gonzalez, Grayson, Grove, Jones, Laird, Limón, McGuire, McNerney, Menjivar, Ochoa Bogh, Pérez, Reyes, Richardson, Rubio, Seyarto, Smallwood-Cuevas, Strickland, Umberg, Valladares, Wahab, Weber Pierson, Wiener

NO VOTE RECORDED: Allen, Alvarado-Gil, Becker, Hurtado, Niello, Padilla, Stern

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: Passed, 8/31/26

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

SOURCE: Author

DIGEST: This bill would establish the Fire Innovation Unit at the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

Assembly Amendments make clarifying amendments regarding the authorities and requirements of the Fire Innovation Unit.

ANALYSIS:

Existing law establishes the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Public Resources Code [PRC] § 701)

This bill:

- 1) Establishes the Fire Innovation Unit (FIU) within the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (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) Specifies that the FIU is not precluded from collaborating with California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (CalOES), FIRESCOPE, or other entities.
- 5) Specifies that the creation of the FIU does not limit, supersede, or otherwise affect the authorities of CalOES.
- 6) 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.
- 7) Authorizes the FIU to establish and administer a Wildfire Innovation Grant Program.
- 8) 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.
- 9) 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.

- 10) 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.
- 11) 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.
- 12) Authorizes the FIU to provide technical assistance to local, state, tribal, federal, and international fire agencies to facilitate deployment of wildfire-related technologies.
- 13) 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.
- 14) 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.
- 15) 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.
- 16) Requires that information, data, or predecisional materials exchanged during activities conducted pursuant to the bill be treated as nonprocurement sensitive and not be used as a basis to exclude or disadvantage any participant in future competitive procurement.
- 17) 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.
- 18) 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.
- 19) Authorizes the Department to reorganize existing positions and resources to fulfill the purposes of the bill.
- 20) Sunsets these provisions on January 1, 2033.

Background

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.

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.

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

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee analysis on a previous version of this bill:

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 8/24/26)

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 8/24/26)

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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