

SENATE THIRD READING
SB 326 (Becker and Laird)
As Amended September 02, 2025
Majority vote

SUMMARY

Requires the deputy director of Community Wildfire Preparedness within the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE), to prepare a Wildfire Risk Mitigation Planning Framework (Framework), a Wildfire Risk Baseline and Forecast (Forecast), and a Wildfire Mitigation Scenarios Report (Report), with a private consultant. Requires, contingent upon an appropriation, CAL FIRE to provide local assistance to local governments to achieve wildfire risk reduction consistent with the aforementioned plans, for defensible space inspections, and to facilitate compliance with forthcoming ember-resistant zone (known as zone zero) regulations.

Major Provisions

- 1) Establishes, and defines as specified, the California Wildfire Mitigation Strategic Planning Act and makes related definitions.
- 2) Requires, on or before January 1, 2027, and every three years thereafter, the deputy director, in consultation with the state hazard mitigation officer, to prepare a Framework sufficient to quantitatively evaluate wildfire risk mitigation actions as determined by the deputy director, as specified.
- 3) Requires, on or before April 1, 2027, and every three years thereafter, the deputy director, in consultation with the state hazard mitigation officer, to prepare a Forecast for the State of California delineated on a statewide level and by county, and to include geographic specificity as determined by the deputy director to be sufficient to evaluate targeted wildfire risk mitigation actions, as specified.
- 4) Requires, on or before August 1, 2027, the deputy director, in consultation with the state hazard mitigation officer, to prepare a Wildfire Mitigation Scenarios Report, to be updated annually, as specified.
- 5) Requires CAL FIRE to develop and update the Framework, Forecast, and Report with a private consultant and administer additional local assistance grants, as specified.
- 6) Requires, contingent upon an annual appropriation by the Legislature in the annual Budget Act for the purposes of the Framework, Forecast, and Report, beginning in the 2029–30 fiscal year and extending to the 2044–45 fiscal year, inclusive, CAL FIRE to allocate funds for programs to be implemented by local governments to achieve wildfire risk reduction in a cost-effective manner that is maximally consistent with the Framework.
- 7) Authorizes, for fiscal years 2025–2026 to 2028–2029, inclusive, a local agency to submit an application to the deputy director to fund wildfire inspector positions sufficient to conduct inspections in VHFHSZs. As a condition of receiving funds, requires a local agency to adopt, by an ordinance that is applicable to existing structures in VHFHSZs, the zone zero regulations as well as other requirements, as specified.

- 8) Requires, contingent upon an appropriation by the Legislature, in the annual Budget Act, beginning in the 2025–26 fiscal year and extending to the 2028–29 fiscal year, inclusive, CAL FIRE to allocate funds to facilitate early implementation of zone 0 regulations for existing commercial and residential structures, and for other allowable purposes.
- 9) Requires the SFM to propose to extend the applicability of the building standards adopted pursuant to this section to all reconstruction of all buildings destroyed within the perimeters of a wildfire that occurs on and after July 1, 2026.
- 10) Expands the eligible activities under CAL FIRE's local assistance grant program for projects that plan and carry out risk-targeted wildfire prevention work within a local government's jurisdiction, as specified.
- 11) Requires the application of the ember-resistant zone regulation to take effect for: (a) an existing structure not used as a rental property, the requirement for an ember-resistant zone applies either upon the sale of that structure or three years after the regulatory effective date for a new structure, whichever comes first; and (b) an existing structure that is used as a rental property, the requirement for an ember-resistant zone applies on the same date as the effective date for a new structure.

COMMENTS

Proponents of this bill point to the ongoing crises of affordability electricity and the availability and affordability of homeowners insurance in California due to wildfires. They argue that given the importance and direct nexus to wildfire risk reduction and affordability, CAL FIRE should invest more in optimizing wildfire mitigation projects. The bill has two main components which focus on planning and early implementation of measures to reduce the loss of homes. "Because spending on wildfire risk reduction is limited to need, expanding some resources to ensure that investments are maximally effective and cost-effective is warranted."

Wildfire Risk Mitigation Planning Framework. This bill requires the Deputy Director, in consultation with the State Hazard Mitigation Officer, or before January 1, 2027, to prepare the Framework. The Framework serves as the strategic tool for quantitatively evaluating various wildfire mitigation actions and is designed to facilitate geospatial analysis of mitigation efforts. It will detail critical elements such as the responsible entities, cost estimates, risk reduction efficiencies, and potential interactions with environmental and climate factors, thereby guiding coordinated efforts among multiple stakeholders. The Framework is intended to support long-term planning and effective allocation of resources in wildfire risk reduction.

Wildfire Risk Baseline and Forecast. On or before April 1, 2027 this bill requires the Deputy Director, in consultation with the State Hazard Mitigation Officer, to prepare the Forecast for the State of California to provide a detailed, quantitative assessment of current wildfire risks and future projections across the state. The Forecast will delineate wildfire risks on both a statewide and county level, incorporating geographic specificity to assess potential impacts. It will include estimates of current ignition risks, evaluate potential consequences to life, property, and ecosystems, and establish key risk metrics with projections over one-year, three-year, and ten-year periods, serving as a benchmark for targeted mitigation strategies.

Wildfire Mitigation Scenarios Report. By August 1, 2027 this bill requires the Deputy Director, in consultation with State Hazard Mitigation Officer, to prepare the Report focused on providing

a comprehensive overview of potential future spending and strategic responses to mitigate wildfire risks. The Report will outline a range of scenarios for wildfire mitigation expenditures, detailing the planned actions by state agencies, utilities, local governments, and private actors. It will quantify the overall reduction in wildfire risk achieved through these actions and evaluate the cost-effectiveness of investments, offering recommendations to enhance coordination and maximize risk-spend efficiency across diverse mitigation initiatives.

According to the Author

Preventing catastrophic wildfire requires strong coordination between all of our investments. Building on current efforts, this bill would create a planning structure to maximize the effectiveness of California's work to reduce the impacts of wildfire. As California spends more to prevent catastrophic wildfire, we should also make sure that these investments go as far as possible in keeping residents safe. This bill creates a planning structure that does just that and ensures that all our efforts are well coordinated.

Arguments in Support

The County of Los Angeles writes in support, "On behalf of the County of Los Angeles, I am pleased to express support for SB 326, which aims to create a comprehensive framework for managing wildfire risks and planning wildfire mitigation investments. SB 326 would mandate the preparation of a Wildfire Risk Mitigation Planning Framework, a Wildfire Risk Baseline and Forecast, and a recurring Wildfire Mitigation Scenarios Report. These measures will standardize wildfire risk assessments, guide strategic mitigation investments, and improve transparency in planning efforts. The Los Angeles County Fire Department (LACoFD) reports that SB 326 aligns with the County's wildfire prevention initiatives, promoting a coordinated approach to risk mitigation. Establishing clear expectations for risk assessment and mitigation planning will maximize the impact of statewide investments in wildfire preparedness."

The California League of Cities writes, "The League of California Cities (Cal Cities) is pleased to support SB 326 (Becker), which would require the Office of the State Fire Marshall (OSFM) to prepare and regularly update a Wildfire Risk Mitigation Planning Framework, a Wildfire Risk Baseline and Forecast and a Wildfire Mitigation Scenarios Report. This bill would also create a funding program for zone zero implementation and make changes to the implementation of zone zero. California has the highest wildfire risk in the US. In recent years, the state has experienced a growing number of highly destructive wildfires due to climate change and over a century of logging and fire suppression. The devastating impacts of these wildfires has unfortunately resulted in the destruction of over 57,000 structures in the last decade."

Arguments in Opposition

None on file.

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Assembly Committee on Appropriations,

"1) Costs of an unknown amount, potentially in the tens of millions of dollars, to CAL FIRE to develop and update the Framework, Forecast, and Report with a private consultant and administer additional local assistance grants (General Fund).

2) Annual cost pressures of an unknown amount, likely in the tens of millions of dollars, to CAL FIRE to provide additional local assistance grants to achieve wildfire risk reduction

consistent with the Framework and support early compliance with zone zero regulations (General Fund, special fund, or Proposition 4). CAL FIRE notes that the local assistance grant program has been consistently funded since FY 2014-15, at amounts in the tens of millions of dollars to the one hundred million dollar range.

- 3) Annual costs of approximately \$260,000 to OES for at least one staff position to consult with CAL FIRE on the Framework, Forecast, and Report (General Fund). OES notes that costs may increase depending on the nature and evolution of the role.
- 4) Likely minor and absorbable costs to OEIS and the PUC to review and consider the Framework, Forecast, and Report, and the California Building Standards Commission to consider extending fire protection building standards to certain reconstructed buildings."

VOTES

SENATE FLOOR: 39-0-1

YES: Allen, Alvarado-Gil, Archuleta, Arreguín, Ashby, Becker, Blakespear, Cabaldon, Caballero, Cervantes, Choi, Cortese, Dahle, Durazo, Gonzalez, Grayson, Grove, Hurtado, Jones, Laird, Limón, McGuire, McNeerney, Menjivar, Niello, Ochoa Bogh, Padilla, Pérez, Richardson, Rubio, Seyarto, Smallwood-Cuevas, Stern, Strickland, Umberg, Valladares, Wahab, Weber Pierson, Wiener

ABS, ABST OR NV: Reyes

ASM EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT: 5-0-2

YES: Ransom, Arambula, Bains, Bennett, Calderon

ABS, ABST OR NV: Hadwick, DeMaio

ASM NATURAL RESOURCES: 14-0-0

YES: Bryan, Alanis, Connolly, Ellis, Flora, Garcia, Haney, Hoover, Kalra, Muratsuchi, Pellerin, Schultz, Wicks, Zbur

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 11-0-4

YES: Wicks, Arambula, Calderon, Caloza, Elhawary, Fong, Mark González, Ahrens, Pacheco, Pellerin, Solache

ABS, ABST OR NV: Sanchez, Dixon, Ta, Tangipa

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FN: 0001493