

Date of Hearing: July 7, 2025

**ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES**

Isaac G. Bryan, Chair

SB 514 (Cabaldon) – As Amended June 25, 2025

**SENATE VOTE:** not relevant

**SUBJECT:** Wildfire prevention: qualified entities: assessments

**SUMMARY:** Eliminates the sunset date on the statewide program to allow qualified entities to support and augment CAL FIRE in its defensible space and home hardening assessment; adds nonprofit entities focused on wildfire resiliency and contractors who conduct specified wildfire resiliency activities to the list of qualified entities; and, authorizes qualified entities to additionally assess compliance with defensible space requirements applicable to local responsibility areas (LRA).

**EXISTING LAW:**

- 1) Requires the director of the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) to establish a statewide program to allow qualified entities to support and augment CAL FIRE in its defensible space and home hardening assessment and education efforts. Requires qualified entities to be authorized by the director to conduct defensible space assessments to assess compliance within the state responsibility area (SRA), educate property owners about wildfire safety improvements that may be undertaken to harden a structure and make it more resistant to fire, and assess whether wildfire safety improvements have been completed in or on a structure. (Public Resources Code (PRC) 4291.5 (b))
- 2) Requires the director to establish a common reporting platform that allows defensible space and home hardening assessment data, collected by the qualified entities, to be reported and establish any necessary quality control measure to ensure that the assessment data is accurate and reliable. (PRC 4291.5 (c)(1))
- 3) Requires CAL FIRE to annually report to the Legislature all defensible space data collected. The report may include information on the proportion of unique parcels that were inspected, the degree of compliance with requirements, any enforcement actions that may have been taken for noncompliant parcels, and the proportion of parcels that were found to be in compliance across jurisdictions. At minimum, requires the report to include data with sufficient detail to facilitate comparisons of community compliance between local governmental entities qualified to conduct defensible space assessments pursuant to this section and local governmental entities that are not. Sunsets the reporting requirement on January 1, 2026. (PRC 4291.5 (h)(1))
- 4) Requires CAL FIRE to develop and implement a training program to train individuals to support and augment the department in its defensible space and home hardening assessment and public education efforts. Sunsets this training program on January 1, 2026. (PRC 4291.6)
- 5) Requires a person who owns, leases, controls, operates, or maintains an occupied dwelling or occupied structure in, upon, or adjoining a mountainous area, forest-covered land, shrub-

covered land, grass-covered land, or land in the LRA that is covered with flammable material, which area or land is within a very high fire hazard severity zone designated by the local agency to, at all times, maintain a defensible space of 100 feet from each side and from the front and rear of the structure, as provided. (Government Code (GC) 51182)

- 6) Defines “property owner” as a person who owns, leases, controls, operates, or maintains a building or structure in the state responsibility area (PRC 4291) and as a person who owns, leases, controls, operates, or maintains an occupied dwelling or occupied structure within a very high fire hazard severity zone (FHSZ) designated by the local agency. (GC 51182 (a))

**THIS BILL:**

- 1) Expands the definition of “qualified entity” to include nonprofit entities focused on wildfire resiliency and contractors who conduct defensible space, homehardening, fuel reduction, roadside clearance, and other contracting activities for wildfire reiliency efforts.
- 2) Requires the qualified entities participating in the program to be authorized by the director to additionally assess compliance with the defensible space requirements in the LRA.
- 3) Requires data obtained voluntarily from a property owner to be anonymized and kept confidential if requested by the property owner, and prohibits the data from being used for compliance or enforcement purposes associated with ordinances that directly relate to defensible space and home hardening investigations unless specifically requested by the property owner.
- 4) Requires CAL FIRE’s annual reporting to the Legislature on defensible space compliance to additionally include defensible space compliance in the LRA.
- 5) Finds and declares that the amendments to PRC 4291.5 impose a limitation on the public’s right of access to the meetings of public bodies or the writings of public officials and agencies within the meaning of Section 3 of Article I of the California Constitution.
- 6) Eliminates the January 1, 2026, sunset date on CAL FIRE’s defensible space training program.

**FISCAL EFFECT:** Unknown

**COMMENTS:**

**1) Author’s statement:**

As California’s wildfire season lengthens, and the number of residential areas considered high risk grows, it’s more critical than ever that property owners maintain defensible space around their homes. Existing ordinances and regulations require them to do so, but research suggests that many do not – either because they lack the resources or don’t fully understand the risk that fire poses to their property. The state has left defensible space rules largely unenforced with an average inspection rate of just 17 percent. Nonetheless, fear of enforcement can make homeowners reluctant to seek technical assistance on how to create defensible space. SB 514 will help by encouraging property owners to voluntarily

comply. The bill lets those who request defensible space inspections keep their data confidential and ensures the information won't be used for enforcement against them. It also allows wildlife resiliency non-profits and qualified contractors to do inspections. Finally, it removes the sunset from the defensible space data reporting platform, which allows the state to gather information about compliance, helping California further understand how our homes can be protected.

- 2) **Defensible space.** Defensible space is the buffer created between a building on a property and the grass, trees, shrubs, or any wildland area that surrounds it. This space is needed to slow or stop the spread of wildfire, and it helps protect structures from catching fire. A 2019 analysis done by CAL FIRE of the relationship between defensible space compliance and destruction of structures during the seven largest fires that occurred in California in 2017 and 2018 concluded that the odds of a structure being destroyed by wildfire were roughly five times higher for noncompliant structures compared to compliant ones. The same statistic applied to homes in the 2018 Camp Fire and the 2022 Oak fire in Mariposa County.

Current state law requires the Board of Forestry to establish defensible space requirements for structures in the SRA and very high FHSZs in the LRAs in California. (There are estimated to be about 768,000 structures in the SRA and roughly 700,000 structures in very high FHSZs in the LRA.) Under the existing regulations, homeowners in these areas must meet specific requirements on their properties within two zones: (1) certain requirements within 100 feet of structures and (2) additional, more stringent requirements within 30 feet of structures. These regulations include requirements related to maintenance of live vegetation (trees, shrubs, and grasses), clearance of dead vegetation, and the location and storage of wood piles and other flammable items near the structures.

Home owners are responsible for maintaining defensible space around their property. According to a 2021 Legislative Analyst's Office report, researchers have explored – mostly using survey data and interviews – some of the barriers homeowners typically face related to completing defensible space work, including prohibitive costs and/or time constraints, inadequate motivation to comply, and incomplete understanding of the nature of the risk to their home.

- 3) **Statewide training program.** In 2023, the Office of the State Fire Marshal (OSFM) established a statewide program to allow qualified entities to support CAL FIRE in its defensible space and home hardening assessment and education efforts. Qualified entities include the California Conservation Corps, California Volunteers, Resource Conservation Districts, Fire Safe Councils, Firewise, University of California Fire Advisors, Registered Professional Foresters, and local agencies, and who, once certified, can then provide nonregulatory assistance to homeowners to reduce fire risk and achieve compliance with defensible space requirements within the SRA. This includes educating property owners about wildfire safety improvements that may be undertaken to harden a structure and make it more resistant to wildfire and assessing whether wildfire safety improvements have been completed on or around a structure.

A pilot program was established using trained personnel from the El Dorado County Fire Safe Council with the first Defensible Space and Home Hardening Assessor course being taught in April 2023. The California Conservation Corps hosted a training for its

Corpsmembers and staff in the fall of 2023. As of May 2025, there were 214 trained assessors under the program.

- 4) **This bill.** CAL FIRE acknowledges that the training program will create more face-to-face interaction and educational opportunities between homeowners and individuals who are trained in defensible space and home hardening. By expanding the program to the LRA, this bill will have a farther reach to more properties across the state to provide greater wildfire resilience.

Further, SB 514 expands the list of qualified entities to include nonprofits and contractors, boosting the workforce that can skillfully inform and educate residents living in more urban areas in the LRA.

The Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness, and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024 (Proposition 4) authorizes \$1.5 billion for a variety of activities related to wildfire and forest resilience, including \$25 million is available to create a Defensible Space Financial Assistance Program under CAL FIRE, providing direct financial assistance to implement defensible space and best practices.

Should the bill advance, the author may wish to work with CAL FIRE to appropriately clarify jurisdiction over inspections in each responsibility area.

5) **Related legislation:**

- a) AB 261 (Quirk Silva) authorizes the SFM to confer with entities and members of the public on wildfire safety improvements and other actions that may impact the degree of fire hazard in an area or the area's recommended FHSZ designation, and authorizes the SFM to provide a written response to an entity on actions that may impact the degree of fire hazard, and would require this written response to be posted on the SFM's internet website. This bill is referred to the Senate Governmental Organization and Natural Resources & Water Committees.
- b) AB 1143 (Bennett) requires, on or before January 1, 2027, the SFM's Wildfire Mitigation Advisory Committee to develop a home hardening certification program that identifies home hardening measures, including defensible space, that can be implemented during renovation or property improvement projects, or both, to substantially reduce the risk of loss during a fire and bring existing building stock into alignment with state building standards for wildland-urban interface areas. This bill is referred to the Senate Governmental Organization and Natural Resources & Water Committees.
- c) AB 1457 (Bryan) requires the CAL FIRE training program to additionally provide training consistent with the "Home Ignition Zone/Defensible Space Inspector" course plan in order to ensure that individuals are trained to conduct home ignition zone inspections. This bill is referred to the Senate Natural Resources & Water Committee.
- d) SB 326 (Becker) requires the deputy director of CAL FIRE to prepare a framework sufficient to quantitatively evaluate wildfire risk mitigation actions as determined by the deputy director; to prepare a Wildfire Risk Baseline and Forecast 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; and, to prepare a Wildfire Mitigation Scenarios Report, to be updated annually. This bill is referred to the Assembly Natural Resources Committee.

**REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:****Support**

Napa Communities Firewise Foundation  
Napa County

**Opposition**

None on file

**Analysis Prepared by:** Paige Brokaw / NAT. RES. /