

Date of Hearing: July 14, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

Isaac G. Bryan, Chair

SB 629 (Durazo) – As Amended July 3, 2025

**SENATE VOTE:** 29-3

**SUBJECT:** Wildfires: fire hazard severity zones: defensible space, vegetation management, and fuel modification enforcement

**SUMMARY:** Requires the State Fire Marshal (SFM) to identify areas burned in a wildfire based on specified criteria; requires those areas, among others, to be considered when developing the fire hazard severity zone (FHSZ) maps; and, requires local government to enforce compliance with specified fire risk reduction regulations in those areas burned in a wildfire.

**EXISTING LAW:**

- 1) Establishes the SFM as an entity within the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) to foster, promote, and develop ways and means of protecting life and property against fire and panic. (Health & Safety Code (HSC) 13100 – 13100.1)
- 2) Requires the SFM to identify areas in the state as moderate, high, and very high FHSZs based on consistent statewide criteria and based on the severity of fire hazard that is expected to prevail in those areas. Requires FHSZs to be based on fuel loading, slope, fire weather, and other relevant factors including areas where winds have been identified by the SFM as a major cause of wildfire spread. (Government Code (GC) 51178)
- 3) 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 that is covered with flammable material, which area or land is within a very high FHSZ (VHFHSZ) 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. Requires the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection to adopt regulations for an ember-resistant zone for the elimination of materials that would likely be ignited by embers. (GC 51182)
- 4) Requires the SFM, by regulation, to designate FHSZs and assign to each zone a rating reflecting the degree of severity of fire hazard that is expected to prevail in the zone. Provides that no designation of a zone and assignment of a rating shall be adopted by the SFM until the proposed regulation has been transmitted to the board of supervisors of the county in which the zone is located at least 45 days before the adoption of the proposed regulation and a public hearing has been held in that county during that 45-day period. (Public Resources Code (PRC) 4203)
- 5) Requires the SFM to periodically review zones and, as necessary, revise FHSZs or their ratings or repeal the designation of FHSZs. (PRC 4204)
- 6) Requires a person who owns, leases, controls, operates, or maintains a building or structure in, upon, or adjoining a mountainous area, forest-covered lands, shrub-covered lands, grass-

covered lands, or land that is covered with flammable material, 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. (PRC 4291.5)

- 7) Requires specified building standards to apply to buildings located in VHFHSZ and other areas designated by a local agency following a finding supported by substantial evidence in the record that the requirements of the building standards are necessary for effective fire protection within the area. (HSC 13108.5 (b)(1))

**THIS BILL:**

- 1) Establishes the Keeping Communities Safe from Wildfire Act of 2025.
- 2) Requires the SFM to identify areas in the state as FHSZs based on:
  - a) Areas where winds have been identified by the SFM as a major cause of wildfire spread;
  - b) Areas burned in a wildfire, as defined;
  - c) Areas at risk for an urban conflagration that accounts for the potential for structures to serve as a fuel source that extends the ember cast outside of wildland areas; and,
  - d) Areas where agricultural land affects fire hazard.
- 3) Requires the SFM, at least 60 days before finalizing the FHSZ designations, to publish the model and methodology used to develop the FHSZs on its internet website.
- 4) Requires the SFM to update the designations and publish the model and methodology in the next review and all subsequent reviews.
- 5) Defines the following terms:
  - a) “Area burned in a wildfire” as any land area included within the perimeter of a wildfire, as shown on an incident map posted on CAL FIRE’s internet website that meets any one of the following conditions: the wildfire burned 1,000 or more acres; the wildfire destroyed 10 structures or more; or, the wildfire resulted in one or more fatalities.
  - b) “Post-wildfire safety area” as an area burned in a wildfire as designated pursuant to this bill.
  - c) “State fire protection standards” as all of the following, or their successor provisions: Chapter 7A of the California Building Code (Title 24 of the California Code of Regulations (CCR)); Chapter 49 of the California Fire Code; Section R337 of the California Residential Code; Chapter 12-7A of the California Referenced Standards Code; Subchapter 2 of Chapter 7 of Division 1.5 of Title 14 of the CCR; Article 3 of Subchapter 3 of Chapter 7 of Division 1.5 of Title 14 of the CCR; and, regulations implementing an ember-resistant zone pursuant to GC 51182 (c)(2).
- 6) Requires, for wildfires occurring on or after January 1, 2025, the SFM to designate any area burned in a wildfire as a post-wildfire safety area and transmit a map of the post-wildfire safety area to any local agency with jurisdiction over the territory in the designated area

within 90 days of the wildfire reaching 100% containment, or by May 1, 2026, whichever is later.

- 7) Exempts the designation of a post-wildfire safety area by the SFM from the Administrative Procedures Act.
- 8) Requires a local agency, within 10 business days of receiving the map from the SFM, to post a notice at the office of the county recorder, county assessor, and city or county planning agency identifying the location of the post-wildfire safety area. Requires the map of the post-wildfire safety area to also be posted on the internet website of the local agency.
- 9) Requires the designation of a post-wildfire safety area to trigger the application of the state fire protection standards in a post-wildfire safety area 30 days following the transmission of the map by the SFM.
- 10) Requires a city or county with territory in a post-wildfire safety area to comply with its housing element according to the schedule provided in that subdivision.
- 11) Defines the following terms:
  - a) “Adequate progress” as the enforcing agency is taking progressive steps reasonably calculated to achieve funding and implementation of the wildfire community safety program by the specified date.
  - b) “Enforcing agency” as the local or state fire authority or designee authorized to enforce vegetation management requirements.
- 12) Requires, beginning January 1, 2027, an enforcing agency to establish, fund, and implement a wildfire community safety program to educate community members and verify ongoing compliance, within the enforcing agency’s jurisdiction, with the defensible space, vegetation management, and fuel modification requirements established pursuant to the following or their successor provisions of the fire protection standards.
- 13) Authorizes the enforcing agency to charge a fee sufficient to cover the costs of administering the program and providing any inspections conducted by the enforcing agency.
- 14) Requires the enforcing agency to educate community members and inspect and document compliance for each affected property or structure at least once annually. Provides that if access to an affected property is limited or an inspection is deemed an act of trespassing on private property, the enforcing agency may provide notice to the affected property and may use alternative methods to conduct the inspection, including, but not limited to, the use of aerial imagery or other technologies.
- 15) Requires the enforcing agency to submit information on implementation of the wildfire community safety program, including data on defensible space inspections and compliance to the defensible space and home hardening assessment reporting platform.
- 16) Authorizes an enforcing agency that adopts a finding, based on substantial evidence in the record and before January 1, 2027, that demonstrates adequate progress to delay compliance with the requirement to document compliance annually until no later than January 1, 2029.

- 17) Requires, upon the next revision of the housing element, the safety element to be reviewed and updated as necessary to address the risk of fire for land classified as a post-wildfire safety area.
- 18) Provides that no reimbursement is required by this act pursuant to Section 6 of Article XIII B of the California Constitution.
- 19) Provides that, if the Commission on State Mandates determines that this act contains other costs mandated by the state, reimbursement to local agencies and school districts for those costs shall be made.

**FISCAL EFFECT:** According to the Senate Appropriations Committee:

- CAL FIRE reports total costs of \$146 million in year one, \$125 million in year two, and \$116 million in year three and ongoing (General Fund) for a significant number of additional staff and equipment to conduct defensible space inspections of private property within the SRA and to collect and analyze data on damaged and destroyed structures. Other costs include contracting costs with risk modeling vendors and staff time to review and respond to local ordinances.
- Unknown state reimbursable mandate costs ranging from minor to potentially significant (General Fund). By requiring cities or counties to designate, by ordinance, any area burned in a wildfire in its jurisdiction as a very high FHSZ within a specified timeframe, this bill creates a state-mandated local program. To the extent the Commission on State Mandates determines that the provisions of this bill create a new program or impose a higher level of service on local agencies, local agencies could claim reimbursement of those costs.
- Unknown, potentially significant costs for local enforcing agencies to ensure compliance with defensible space, vegetation management, and fuel modification requirements. However, the bill authorizes enforcing agencies to charge a fee sufficient to cover their administrative and investigatory costs, so these costs are not considered reimbursable by the state.

**COMMENTS:**

**1) Author's statement:**

SB 629 is one of the 13 bills in the Senate's fire response, recover, rebuilding and prevention package. Following the devastating Los Angeles firestorm and as California continues to face a year-round fire season it is clear that we must harden California's defenses against future disasters. To help do that, SB 629 does three things:

- 1) It requires cities and counties to designate areas that burned in a wildfire within a post-wildfire safety area which triggers the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) building code and defensible space maintenance requirements, as well as other fire safety regulations.

- 2) It directs the State Fire Marshal to include modeling for urban conflagrations in the next update of the fire maps.
  - 3) It mandates that defensible space inspections occur annually for each property in the State Responsibility Area, Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone and post-wildfire safety area to ensure that property owners are taking action to protect their community.
- 2) **Wildfires in California.** Wildfires have been growing in size, duration, and destructivity over the past 20 years. Growing wildfire risk is due to accumulating fuels, a warming climate, and expanding development in the WUI. The Los Angeles fires earlier this year burned an area nearly the size of Washington, D.C., killed 28 people and damaged or destroyed nearly 16,000 structures, according to CAL FIRE.

Research from Stanford University (February 2022) on wildfire shows that vegetation in the West is drying out even faster due to climate change effects and increasing fire risk. The researchers found that a combination of plant and soil dehydration coupled with atmospheric dryness is creating what they've termed 'double-hazard zones.' The researchers identified 18 of these double-hazard zones across the Western U.S., including three in California. Their study further showed that the increased population growth in the WUI is concerning as this landscape is often comprised of grasslands or chaparral, which is highly sensitive to drought, making it also highly vulnerable to extreme fire events. In California, more than 11 million of the state's 40 million residents live in the WUI, which encompasses not only densely forested areas like Paradise, but also parts of the wooded coastal foothills around Silicon Valley, the brush-and-grass covered hills around Santa Barbara and Los Angeles, and neighborhoods in the Oakland Hills.

- 3) **Fire Hazard Severity Zones.** FHSZs are categorized as moderate, high, and very high based on fuel loading, slope, fire weather, and other relevant factors including areas where winds have been identified by the SFM. FHSZs are developed using a science-based and field-tested model that assigns a hazard score based on the factors that influence fire likelihood and fire behavior over a 30 to 50-year period without considering mitigation measures such as home hardening, defensible space, vegetation management, or fuel reduction efforts.

CAL FIRE mapped the three tiered FHSZs for the state responsibility area (SRA) and the VHFHSZ for the lands managed locally in the local responsibility area (LRA), which includes incorporated cities, urban regions, agriculture lands, and portions of the desert where the local government is responsible for wildfire protection. This is typically provided by city fire departments, fire protection districts, counties, and by CAL FIRE under contract. SB 63 (Stern), Chapter 382, Statutes of 2021, requires CAL FIRE to adopt of all three FHSZs in the LRA.

CAL FIRE uses the same modeling data that are used to map the SRA to develop the FHSZs in the LRA. Creating maps is a laborious process that requires scrutinizing detailed data across the state, including small pockets of potentially flammable wildlands within cities, and then coordinating with hundreds of local jurisdictions for validation of the mapping.

This bill requires the FHSZ designations to additionally be based on areas previously burned in a wildfire, areas at risk for an urban conflagration that accounts for the potential for

structures to serve as a fuel source that extends the ember cast outside of wildland areas, and areas where agricultural land affects fire hazard.

The City of La Verne expresses concern that SB 629 introduces problematic criteria and enforcement provisions that are not sufficiently grounded in fire science and fails to recognize that these thresholds are not inherently tied to wildfire behavior in the WUI.

While the maps are currently based on fire science and account for hazard, it can be confusing to tease hazard and risk apart. For instance, fire embers are a critical variable in wildfire spread. The January fires in Los Angeles were fanned by the Santa Ana Winds blowing at hurricane force speeds, spreading embers and igniting structure fires miles beyond the limits of the active wildfires. While risk of urban conflagration due to flying embers is the not *hazard*, the author feels the FHSZ modeling needs to be updated to take more factors into account.

- 4) **Local agency requirements.** Under the bill, the SFM would be required to designate any area burned in a wildfire on and after January 1, 2025, as a post-wildfire safety area and transmit the map to the appropriate local agency, and by January 1, 2027, that local agency will be required to establish, fund, and implement a wildfire community safety program to verify ongoing compliance with all of the state fire protection standards enumerated under that definition and that currently apply to the VHFHSZs.

The bill defines “areas burned in a wildfire” as any land area included within the perimeter of a wildfire that meets any of the following conditions:

- The wildfire burned 1,000 or more acres;
- The wildfire destroyed more than 10 structures; or,
- The wildfire resulted in one or more fatalities.

While all wildfires vary in terms of their level of destruction, which can be resultant of geography (rural versus urban), fuel load, wind conditions, ember conditions, and so on, quantity of fatalities can much more variable. As the bill is drafted, there could be a fire of any size that results in a single fatality, which could be the consequence of an individual choosing to not evacuate, and then that area is included as a post wildfire burn safety area that results in the applicability all of the state fire protection standards.

While a practical risk-benefit analysis errs in favor of the burden of regulations over the death of a person or the loss of a home, allowing a single fatality to be a stand-alone variable classifying an event as a wildfire, thus requiring compliance with seven different regulations, may be excessive. An alternative approach would be for a wildfire to meet at least two of the conditions to be qualified as an area burned by wildfire.

According to CAL FIRE data on the 20 most destructive fires<sup>i</sup>, the average acres burned is 177,600 acres, the average structure loss is 3,340 structures, and the average number of fatalities is 11 people. It is unknown to the committee what the averages are for all wildfires in the state in recent history. The author may wish to work with CAL FIRE to cull data on all wildfires over the last ten years to identify whether these thresholds should be appropriately adjusted.

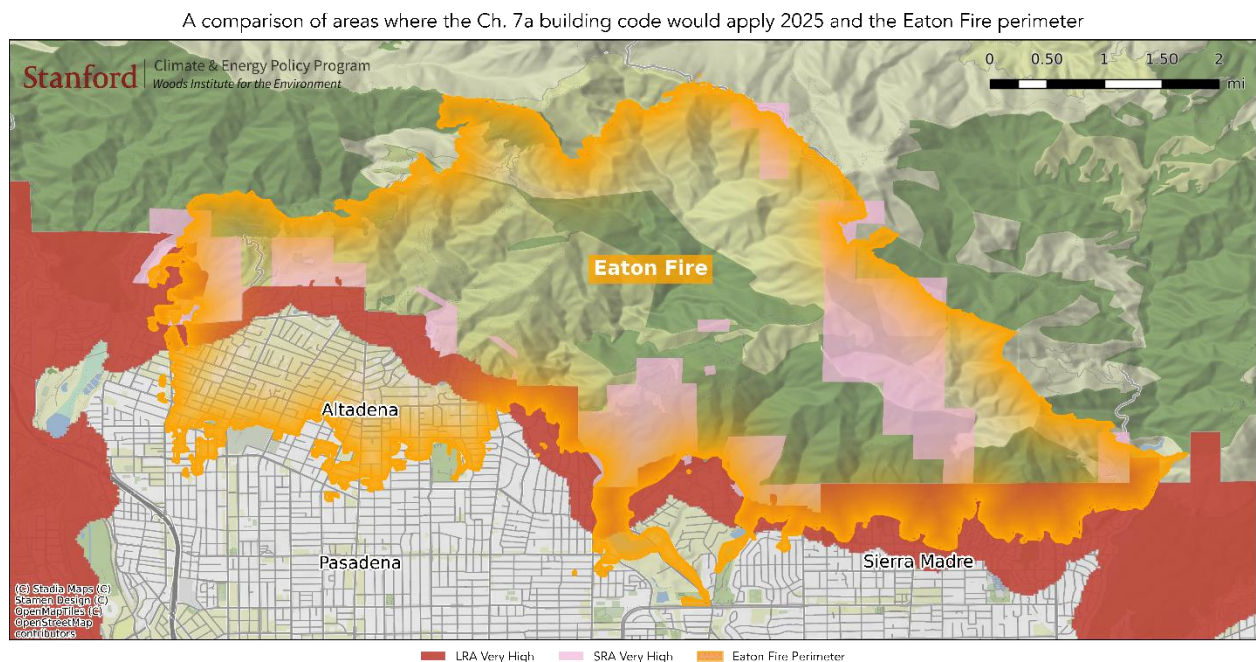
Lastly, under current law, home hardening building standards are required to apply to buildings located in VHFHSZs and other areas designated by a local agency following a finding supported by substantial evidence in the record that the requirements of the building standards are necessary for effective fire protection within the area. To ensure consistency with existing local requirements, the application of the state fire protection standards in the post-wildfire safety areas should take any pre-existing ordinances into consideration.

- 5) **How much more land will be mapped?** To avoid confusion over having two separate designations – VHFHSZs and post-wildfire safety areas – the bill incorporates the post-wildfire safety areas into the FHSZ mapping.

There are 1.16 million acres of VHFHSZs in the LRA and 16.8 million acres of VHFHSZ in the SRA, for a total of 18 million acres across the state<sup>ii</sup>. According to a compilation of CAL FIRE data, between 2015 and 2023, California wildfires have burned more than 10.4 million acres<sup>iii</sup>.

According to mapped spatial data of the current VHFHSZs in the SRA and the available spatial data of the 2011 VHFHSZs in the LRA layered over the footprints of all wildfires from 2015 until the present (minus federal lands), the acreage of lands that could be classified as ‘post-wildfire safety areas’ outside the VHFHSZs would be 1.2 million in the SRA and 5.4 million in the LRA. It is worth noting that the LRA maps have been recently updated, and local agencies are required to adopt ordinances for VHFHSZs in their jurisdictions which could extend beyond the SFM’s maps, so while the figures in this paragraph solely intended to provide a rough estimate.

The map below, provided by the Stanford University Climate & Energy Program, shows the current areas where CAL FIRE VHFHSZ mapping compared to the area that burned in Altadena during the Eaton Fire. Depending on the damage caused by the Eaton Fire, this bill could be expanding the fire safe regulations to the additional areas in orange outside the VHFHSZs.



As the state pushes for more housing to meet the critical housing shortage, applying these standards to more areas can provide greater wildfire safety for future development.

- 6) **Education and outreach.** Home owners are responsible for maintaining defensible space around their property, but research shows barriers homeowners typically face related to completing defensible space work include prohibitive costs and/or time constraints, inadequate motivation to comply, and incomplete understanding of the nature of the risk to their home. Therefore, inspections coupled with education and outreach to residents is critical for achieving defensible space compliance.

This bill requires an enforcing agency to establish, fund, and implement a wildfire community safety program to educate community members and verify ongoing compliance with the defensible space, vegetation management, and fuel modification requirements in the post-wildfire safety area.

This can also help achieve compliance with AB 38 (Wood), Chapter 391, Statutes of 2019, which requires property transfer inspections in areas designated high and VHFHSZs to verify compliance with applicable defensible space requirements. AB 38, and the frequency in major wildfires over the last handful of years, has increase demand for defensible space inspections.

Current law (HSC 13195.5) establishes a WUI Fire Safety Building Standards Compliance training for local building officials, builders, and fire service personnel. A local enforcing agency may have individuals that have completed that training that would be appropriate to recognize towards compliance in under these programs. Similarly, CAL FIRE provides training provided pursuant to PRC 4291.5 for qualified entities to support and augment CAL FIRE in its defensible space and home hardening assessment and education efforts.

- 7) **Double referral.** This bill was heard in the Emergency Management Committee on June 30 and approved 5-2.
- 8) **Committee amendments:** The Committee *may wish to amend the bill* to make conforming changes to the FHSZ maps in the SRA pursuant to PRC 4202.
- 9) **Related legislation:**
- a) AB 261 (Quirk Silva) authorizes the SFM to confer with entities and members of the public on 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 300 (Lackey) requires the SFM to identify and re-review lands within the SRA as FHSZ, and identify and re-review of areas in the state as moderate, high, and very high FHSZs every five years. This bill is referred to the Senate Governmental Organization and Natural Resources & Water Committees.
  - c) SB 610 (Wiener, 2024) would have eliminated the state's fire hazard severity mapping for the SRA and LRA and requires the SFM to designate Wildfire Mitigation Area



through regulations, for fire mitigation across the state. This bill was held in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

**REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**

**Support**

None on file

**Opposition**

City of La Verne

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

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<sup>i</sup> [top20\\_destruction\\_061925.pdf](#)

<sup>ii</sup> [fire\\_hazard\\_severity\\_zone\\_acres\\_state\\_and\\_local\\_responsibility\\_2024\\_2025.pdf](#)

<sup>iii</sup> [California Wildfires History & Statistics | Frontline Wildfire Defense](#)