
UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Bill No: SB 653
Author: Cortese (D), et al.
Amended: 6/25/25 in Assembly
Vote: 21

SENATE NATURAL RES. & WATER COMMITTEE: 5-0, 4/22/25
AYES: Limón, Allen, Grove, Laird, Stern
NO VOTE RECORDED: Seyarto, Hurtado

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE: 5-0, 5/23/25
AYES: Caballero, Cabaldon, Grayson, Richardson, Wahab
NO VOTE RECORDED: Seyarto, Dahle

SENATE FLOOR: 36-0, 5/29/25
AYES: Allen, Alvarado-Gil, Archuleta, Arreguín, Ashby, Becker, Blakespear, Cabaldon, Caballero, Cervantes, Choi, Cortese, Dahle, Durazo, Gonzalez, Grayson, Grove, Hurtado, Jones, Laird, McGuire, McNerney, Menjivar, Ochoa Bogh, Padilla, Pérez, Richardson, Rubio, Seyarto, Smallwood-Cuevas, Stern, Strickland, Umberg, Wahab, Weber Pierson, Wiener
NO VOTE RECORDED: Limón, Niello, Reyes, Valladares

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 71-1, 9/3/25 - See last page for vote

SUBJECT: Wildfire prevention: environmentally sensitive vegetation management

SOURCE: Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District

DIGEST: This bill requires a state public entity to consider incorporating into its funding guidelines for a grant program that funds an environmentally sensitive vegetation management project specified criteria, and defines environmentally sensitive vegetation management as vegetation management that reduces catastrophic wildfire risk over the long term while supporting native wildlife and biodiversity, among other provisions, as provided.

Assembly Amendments of 6/25/25 specify that state public entities consider adding specified criteria into a grant program's funding guidelines instead of requiring the specified criteria be prioritize when implementing environmentally sensitive vegetation management projects, clarify the definition of type conversion, and make additional minor and conforming changes.

ANALYSIS:

Existing law:

- 1) Establishes the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) and the State Board of Forestry and Fire Protection (State Board) in the California Natural Resources Agency. The Office of the State Fire Marshal is located within CAL FIRE.
- 2) Requires the State Fire Marshal to identify areas in the state as moderate, high, and very high fire hazard severity zones in the local responsibility areas (subject to approval by local ordinance) based on consistent statewide criteria and based on the severity of fire hazard that is expected to prevail in those areas. Requires moderate, high, and very high fire hazard severity zones be based on fuel loading, slope, fire weather, and other relevant factors including areas where winds have been identified by the Office of the State Fire Marshal as a major cause of wildfire spread. (Government Code §§51178, 51179) Requires the State Fire Marshal to make similar identifications in the state responsibility area. (Public Resources Code (PRC) §4202)
- 3) States legislative intent that additional consideration be provided in the State Board's vegetation management environmental impact report for chaparral and coastal sage scrub plant communities that are being increasingly threatened by fire frequency in excess of their natural fire return patterns due to climate change and human-caused fires.
 - a) Requires that prescribed burning, mastication, herbicide application, mechanical thinning, or other vegetative treatments of chaparral or sage scrub occur only if the activity will not cause "type conversion" away from the chaparral and coastal sage scrub currently on site.
 - b) Authorizes CAL FIRE to order remediation for any type conversion caused, as provided. (PRC §4483)
- 4) Provides that projects conducted under Good Neighbor Authority agreements be designed, to the extent feasible, to prevent "type conversion" and the spread of invasive plants and grasses.

- a) Requires these projects to be based upon the best available science, and provide for ecological restoration and fire resiliency projects appropriate to the landscape and vegetation being treated.
- b) Provides ecologically appropriate treatment for native shrublands, such as chaparral and coastal sage scrub, including the removal of flammable nonnative invasive species and the restoration of native species, where appropriate. (PRC §4812)

This bill:

- 1) States legislative intent to encourage the use of environmentally sensitive vegetation management practices that maintain ecological health and strengthen biodiversity while mitigating wildfire risk.
- 2) Defines “environmentally sensitive vegetation management” as vegetation management that reduces catastrophic wildfire risk over the long term while supporting native wildlife and biodiversity.
- 3) Defines “type conversion” to mean the process of dominant native plant species being significantly reduced or extirpated and nonnative species colonizing an area due to disturbance events such as wildfires, as specified.
- 4) Requires a state public entity to consider incorporating into its funding guidelines all of the following criteria for a grant program that funds an environmentally sensitive vegetation management projects:
 - a) Follows the principles of integrated pest management, as defined.
 - b) Implements measures to support native plant health and biodiversity.
 - c) Maximizes long-term risk reduction of catastrophic wildfire.
 - d) Uses vegetation management monitoring plans before, during, and after treatments, as provided.
 - e) Uses methods that mimic natural disturbance processes to maintain rare habitats.
 - f) Times vegetation management to minimize potential impacts to wildlife and minimize the reproduction of invasive plants.
 - g) Minimizes erosion impacts.
 - h) Includes consultation with relevant experts in botany and land management.
 - i) Leaves buffers around water bodies to protect watershed health.
 - j) Uses prescribed grazing, as defined, where applicable.
 - k) Avoids habitat type conversion.

- l) Implements measures to avoid impacts to rare or sensitive species and habitats, as provided.

[NOTE: See the Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee's analysis for additional information regarding this bill.]

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

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee:

- Should a state agency, such as the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, choose to incorporate the criteria listed in the bill into its funding and granting guidelines, the agency would incur one-time costs of an unknown amount – ranging from minor and absorbable to the tens of thousands or low hundreds of thousands of dollars – to modify and update its guidelines.
- To the extent that applying the criteria listed in the bill to the selection and funding of environmentally sensitive vegetation management projects displaces or otherwise changes the projects that would have been funded absent this bill, this bill would result in cost pressures of an unknown, but potentially significant, amount, to fund those displaced projects.

SUPPORT: (Verified 9/3/25)

Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (sponsor)
Arroyos & Foothills Conservancy
California Association of Local Conservation Corps
California Invasive Plant Council
California Native Plant Society
City of Oakland
Endangered Habitats League
Friends of Ballona Wetlands
Friends of Five Creeks
San Jose Conservation Corps
Santa Barbara Botanic Garden
Sempervirens Fund
The Climate Reality Project – Los Angeles Chapter

OPPOSITION: (Verified 9/3/25)

None received

ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT: According to the author, “Wildfires have been devastating to California communities. As the climate changes, these fires become increasingly dangerous and destructive. Vegetation management is an integral part of reducing wildfire risk in our state, but we must ensure that we manage vegetation responsibly. SB 653 ensures that funding dedicated to environmentally sensitive vegetation management will prevent habitat degradation, enhance biodiversity, improve wildfire resilience, and ensure science-based approaches to vegetation management. This bill is an opportunity to balance our state’s need to reduce dangerous fuels with the importance of protecting biodiversity in our unique and vulnerable natural lands.”

In a group sign-on letter, the sponsor, Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District writes: “As climate change, drought, and the spread of nonnative vegetation intensify wildfire threats, traditional vegetation management methods—such as indiscriminate clearing and heavy mechanical treatments—can have unintended ecological consequences. These practices often lead to habitat type conversion, where native plant communities are replaced by invasive, fire-prone species, further increasing wildfire risks.”

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 71-1, 9/3/25

AYES: Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Alanis, Alvarez, Arambula, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Chen, Connolly, Davies, DeMaio, Dixon, Elhawary, Flora, Fong, Gabriel, Garcia, Gipson, Mark González, Hadwick, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Hoover, Irwin, Jackson, Kalra, Krell, Lackey, Lee, Lowenthal, McKinnor, Muratsuchi, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Ransom, Celeste Rodriguez, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Sanchez, Schiavo, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Ta, Valencia, Wallis, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

NOES: Gallagher

NO VOTE RECORDED: Ahrens, Castillo, Ellis, Jeff Gonzalez, Macedo, Patterson, Tangipa

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