
SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES AND WATER

Senator Josh Becker, Chair

2025 - 2026 Regular

Bill No:	SB 973	Hearing Date:	March 24, 2026
Author:	Becker		
Version:	February 4, 2026	Introduced	
Urgency:	No	Fiscal:	Yes
Consultant:	Edith Hannigan		

Subject: Wildfire County Coordinator Program

SUMMARY

This bill would require the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection to (1) establish recommended standards for wildfire risk modeling and analysis tools, (2) develop guidance and tools related to wildfire risk assessments, (3) support the development, updating, or procurement of county-level wildfire risk assessments, (4) develop guidance and templates for the creation or revision of county-level wildfire resilience prioritization and implementation plans, and accompanying guidance for integrating these plans with related wildfire resilience programs, as provided, and (5) enter into an agreement with the California Fire Safe Council to administer and deliver the Wildfire County Coordinator Program.

BACKGROUND AND EXISTING LAW

Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Department). The Department, in accordance with a plan approved by the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection, is responsible for the prevention and suppression of forest fires (Public Resources Code (PRC) §§4113, 4114).

Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task Force (Task Force). Governor Edmund G. Brown, Jr, signed Executive Order No. B-52-18 on May 10, 2018, and established the Task Force to oversee its implementation. The Executive Order authorized state agencies to improve forest health and restoration, provide regulatory relief, reduce barriers to prescribed fire boost education and outreach to landowners, and support wood products innovation.

The Task Force issued a “Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan” (Action Plan) in January 2021, and the Legislature required the Task Force to establish an implementation strategy by January 2022, which they did (PRC §4771). The Task Force is required to update the Action Plan every five years (PRC §4771(f)).

California Fire Safe Council (CFSC). CFSC is a California non-profit organization established in 1993 as part of the Department to address the state’s growing wildfire challenges. Over the years, CFSC moved out of the Department and became an independent non-profit organization, focusing on channeling federal, state, and private funds to support wildfire preparedness, mitigation, and resiliency across California.

Wildfire County Coordinator Program (County Coordinators). Established in 2021, the Wildfire County Coordinator Program seeks to educate, encourage, and develop countywide community collaboration and coordination among wildfire mitigation groups.

The program, powered by a partnership between the CFSC and the Department, has provided funding to 52 of California's 58 counties to hire a Wildfire County Coordinator and establish critical local capacity to plan and implement wildfire resilience strategies on the ground.

Existing law:

- 1) Establishes the Department (PRC §701).
- 2) Establishes the Task Force (PRC §4005).
- 3) Requires the Task Force to update the Action Plan every five years, beginning March 1, 2026 (PRC §4771(f)).
- 4) Requires the implementation strategy include specific actions:
 - a) Increasing the pace and scale of wildfire and forest resilience activities (PRC §4771(c)(1));
 - b) Strengthening the protection of communities and reducing their fire risk (PRC §4771(c)(2));
 - c) Creating a sustainable wood products market in California (PRC §4771(c)(3);
 - d) Sustaining and expanding outdoor recreation on forestland (PRC §4771(c)(4));
 - e) Protecting and expanding urban canopy and forestry (PRC §4771(c)(5)); and
 - f) Driving innovation and measuring progress in achieving the above goals (PRC §4771(c)(6)).

PROPOSED LAW

This bill would:

- 1) Require the Department to
 - a) Establish recommended standards for wildfire risk modeling and analysis tools;
 - b) Develop guidance and tools to support county-level wildfire risk assessments; the identification of high-risk communities; prioritization of mitigation activities; and evaluation of risk reduction outcomes;
 - c) Coordinate with the Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation (LCI) to develop guidance and templates for county-level wildfire resilience prioritization and implementation plans.
- 2) Establish the Wildfire County Coordinator Program within the Department, and requires the Department to enter into an agreement with CFSC to administer the program.
 - a) Establishes the purpose of the program as to support county-level coordination of and capacity for wildfire mitigation, prevention, preparedness, and recovery activities.
- 3) Require the Wildfire County Coordinator Program to:
 - a) Establish capacity in participating counties to plan and execute community- and county-level wildfire prevention, preparedness, mitigation, and recovery activities in support of the Action Plan.

- b) Support the use of risk assessment tools and guidance to enhance county-level risk assessment, wildfire planning, and project prioritization.
- c) Facilitate local coordination on priority wildfire resilience planning and implementation with federal, local, and regional wildfire resilience partners.
- d) Develop and disseminate educational materials and programming on wildfire and smoke mitigation and preparedness.
- e) Provide information on available local, state, and federal financial resources to support wildfire resilience planning and implementation.
- f) Support local capacity to access and implement state or federal wildfire resilience funding programs.
- g) Support the planning and implementation of home hardening, defensible space, and related mitigation activities.
- h) Improve access to and streamline financial assistance for home hardening and defensible space in high-risk communities.
- i) Coordinate with the State Air Resources Board, air districts, and other partners to undertake activities to increase community resilience to smoke.
- j) Collect data on local mitigation and preparedness activities, outcomes, and costs.

ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT

According to the author, "SB 973 establishes a statewide framework to strengthen community wildfire resilience by directing [the Department] to develop guidance and recommended standards for local entities assessing wildfire risk and prioritizing wildfire mitigation activities, and to expand the Wildfire County Coordinator Program, administered in partnership with the California Fire Safe Council. The program builds county-level capacity to plan, coordinate, and implement wildfire prevention, preparedness, mitigation, and recovery activities aligned with state wildfire strategy."

ARGUMENTS IN OPPOSITION

None received.

COMMENTS

Codifying success. According to the author's office, since 2021, the County Coordinator program has achieved the following results:

- Secured over \$104 million for local mitigation and preparedness projects,
- Reached nearly 1 million residents with wildfire resilience education,
- Established 100+ new Firewise Communities and Fire Safe Councils, and
- Built a durable, statewide network to advance coordinated mitigation efforts.

SB 973 would codify this program into statute, ensuring a consistent mission and program, greater security in funding, and establishing goals and benchmarks for program success.

Related Legislation

SB 899 (Grove, 2026) would require the Action Plan consider smoke impacts on public health, and quantify the benefits to public health of various wildfire mitigation activities. This bill is pending before this committee.

SB 1404 (Stern, 2026) would require the statewide framework supporting local and regional community fire risk reduction and adaptation programs and projects include quantified risk-based planning and outcomes-based performance metrics. This bill is pending before this committee.

SB 1162 (Alvarado-Gil, 2026) would require the Department to identify ways to prioritize state efforts identified in the Action Plan to reduce wildfire hazards in those ZIP codes that have seen the largest increase in FAIR Plan policies. This bill is pending before this committee.

SB 101 (Weiner, Budget Act of 2025, Chapter 4, Statutes of 2025) authorized 12.5 million dollars towards a community home hardening program that includes home hardening certification and a wildfire county coordinator program.

SUGGESTED AMENDMENTS: None

SUPPORT

California Fire Safe Council (co-sponsor)
Megafire Action (co-sponsor)
Butte County Fire Safe Council
California Building Industry Association
California State Association of Counties
Colusa County Resource Conservation District
Community Wildfire Planning Center
County of Monterey
Escondido Fire Safe Council
Fire Safe Marin
FireWerx
Insurance Institute for Business & Home Safety (IBHS)
Irvine Ranch Conservancy
Lassen Fire Safe Council
Mattole Restoration Council
Mendocino County Fire Safe Council
Modoc Fire Safe Council
Nevada County Board of Supervisors
Ojai Valley Fire Safe Council
Pacific Gas and Electric Company
Palomar Mountain Fire Safe Council
Rural County Representatives of California
Sacramento County Board of Supervisors
Santa Barbara County Fire Safe Council

Santa Clara County Firesafe Council
Sierra Business Council
Southern Humboldt Fire Safe Council
Trinity County Resource Conservation District
Yolo County Resource Conservation District

OPPOSITION

None Received

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