
SENATE COMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT
Senator Henry Stern
Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular

Bill No: SB 973 **Hearing Date:** 4/21/2026
Author: Becker
Version: 4/13/2026 Amended
Urgency: No **Fiscal:** Yes
Consultant: Cassie Royce

SUBJECT: Wildfire County Coordinator Program

SUMMARY: Directs the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) to implement specified wildfire risk and resilience related activities and formalizes CAL FIRE's partnership with the California Fire Safe Council (CFSC) to administer and deliver the Wildfire County Coordinator Program (WCC Program).

ANALYSIS:

Existing law:

- 1) Establishes CAL FIRE as the state agency responsible for wildfire prevention, mitigation, preparedness, and requires the Office of the State Fire Marshal within CAL FIRE to update Fire Hazard Severity Zones every five years.
- 2) Establishes the Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task Force (Task Force) and requires the Task Force to update the Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan (Action Plan) every five years.
- 3) Provides funding to CAL FIRE to make available to the CFSC for the WCC Program, and requires the county coordinators to prioritize home hardening, defensible space, planning, and education for community-level wildfire mitigation efforts.

This bill:

- 1) Requires CAL FIRE to implement the following activities relating to wildfire risk and resilience:
 - a) Establish recommended standards for wildfire risk modeling and analysis tools as specified;

- 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 quantifiable risk reduction outcomes;
 - c) Coordinate with the Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation to develop guidance and templates for county-level wildfire resilience prioritization and implementation plans as specified.
- 2) Establishes the WCC Program within CAL FIRE, and requires CAL FIRE to enter into an agreement with the CFSC to administer the program.
- 3) States that the purpose of the WCC Program is to support county-level coordination of, and capacity for, wildfire mitigation, prevention, preparedness, and recovery activities.
- 4) Requires the WCC Program to do all of the following:
- 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, including the integration with community wildfire protection plans.
 - c) Facilitate local coordination on priority wildfire resilience planning and implementation with federal, local, and regional wildfire resilience partners as specified.
 - d) Develop and disseminate educational materials and programming on wildfire and smoke mitigation and preparedness as specified.
 - 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 as specified.
 - 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, public health departments and other partners to support activities to increase community resilience to smoke as specified.

- j) Collect data on local mitigation and preparedness activities, including costs and quantifiable risk reduction outcomes.

Background

Author's statement. According to the author, "SB 973 establishes a statewide framework to strengthen community wildfire resilience by directing CAL FIRE to develop standardized wildfire risk assessment guidance and tools. This bill establishes in statute the Wildfire County Coordinator Program, which the California Fire Safe Council has been successfully delivering in partnership with CAL FIRE since 2021 to increase county-level coordination of wildfire prevention, preparedness, mitigation, and recovery activities, by supporting a County Coordinator position for each participating county. This bill expands the Program to provide more tools and resources to the Coordinators and establishes a pathway to scale home hardening and defensible space activities through the Program."

CFSC and the WCC Program. The CFSC is an independent non-profit organization whose aim is to channel federal, state, and private funds to support wildfire preparedness, mitigation, and resiliency across California. The Program, powered by a partnership between the CFSC and CAL FIRE, 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.

According to the Task Force, investments in community capacity through the Program have already produced the following substantial mitigation and resiliency benefits:

- a) Secured over \$85M in funding for local wildfire mitigation projects;
- b) Coordinated with over 10,000 organizations to increase collaboration, break down silos, and leverage resources for community mitigation;
- c) Hosted over 3,800 events for community engagement and education;
- d) Educated and empowered over 800,000 residents to take action for wildfire resilience; and
- e) Established more than 100 new FireWise Communities and Fire Safe Councils.

The Budget Act of 2025 via AB 102 (Gabriel), Chapter 5, Statutes of 2025, allocated \$9.5M to the CFSC through CAL FIRE to support the WCC Program through 2027.

This bill places the WCC Program in statute to establish a consistent mission, solidify funding, and set forth goals and quantifiable outcomes for the Program's success.

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

SUPPORT:

California Fire Safe Council (co-sponsor)
Megafire Action (co-sponsor)
40 Acres Fire Safe Council
Alpine Viejas Fire Safe Council
Butte County Fire Safe Council
California Building Industry Association
California Forward
California State Association of Counties
Colusa County Resource Conservation District
Community Wildfire Planning Center
County of Mendocino
County of Mono
County of Monterey
County of Nevada
County of Sacramento
County of San Luis Obispo
County of San Luis Obispo Board of Supervisors
County of Trinity
Del Mar Mesa Fire Safe Council
Del Norte Fire Safe Council
Diablo Firesafe Council Executive Committee
Elevate California
Escondido Fire Safe Council
Eucalyptus Hills Landowner's Association
Fire Safe Council of San Diego County
Fire Safe Council of Siskiyou County
Fire Safe Marin
FireGeneration Collaborative
FireWERX
Insurance Institute for Business & Home Safety
Inyo County Board of Supervisors
Irvine Ranch Conservancy
Kern Fire Safe Council
Lassen Fire Safe Council

Mariposa Fire Safe Council
Mattole Restoration Council
Mendocino County Fire Safe Council
Mercury Insurance
Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District
Modoc Fire Safe Council
Neighborhood Partnership Housing Services, Inc.
Net-Zero California
Nevada County Board of Supervisors
Ojai Valley Fire Safe Council
Orange County Fire Authority
Pacific Forest Trust
Pacific Gas and Electric Company
Palomar Mountain Fire Safe Council
Resource Conservation District of Tehama County
Rural County Representatives of California
Sacramento County Board of Supervisors
Safe Community Project
Santa Barbara County Fire Safe Council
Santa Clara County Firesafe Council
Sierra Business Council
Southern Humboldt Fire Safe Council
Sunnyslope Firewise Committee
The Nature Conservancy
Town of Mammoth Lakes
Trinity County Resource Conservation District
Tulare County Board of Supervisors
United Policyholders
University City Fire Safe Council
Ventura Regional Fire Safe Council
Via Crest Fire Safe Council of San Diego County
Yolo County Resource Conservation District

OPPOSITION:

None on file

ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT: In support of this bill, the co-sponsors, the CFSC and Megafire Action, write that, “SB 973 builds on the demonstrated success of the Wildfire County Coordinator Program by establishing a durable statewide framework to strengthen county-level coordination, improve risk-informed

planning, and accelerate the implementation of community wildfire resilience projects.”

DUAL REFERRAL: Senate Natural Resources and Water and Senate Emergency Management Committee