
SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Sabrina Cervantes, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

SB 973 (Becker) - Wildfire County Coordinator Program

Version: April 13, 2026

Urgency: No

Hearing Date: May 4, 2026

Policy Vote: N.R. & W. 7 - 0, E.M. 9 - 0

Mandate: No

Consultant: Ashley Ames

Bill Summary: This bill would direct the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CalFire) to implement specified wildfire risk and resilience related activities and formalizes CalFire's partnership with the California Fire Safe Council (CFSC) to administer and deliver the Wildfire County Coordinator Program (WCC Program).

Fiscal Impact:

- The Governor's Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation (LCI) estimates one-time costs of \$870,000 spread over two years for two limited-term positions to develop the wildfire resilience guidance, templates, and implementation guidance as required by the bill.
- The California Air Resources Board (CARB) estimates ongoing costs of \$600,000 annually (General Fund) to serve as a liaison to and coordinate with the WCC Program and all county coordinators, among other things.
- Unknown but potentially significant ongoing costs (General Fund) for CalFire to implement the provisions of this bill.
- Unknown but potentially significant ongoing cost pressures (General Fund and other funds) to continue providing funding for home hardening certification and the WCC Program after 2027.

Background:

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.

Codifying the WCC Program. 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.

Proposed Law: This bill would:

1. Require CalFire 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. Establish the WCC Program within CalFire, and require CalFire to enter into an agreement with the CFSC to administer the program.
3. State 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. Require 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.

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.

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.

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.

Staff Comments: The Budget Act of 2025 provided for a community hardening program at CalFire that includes home hardening certification and a wildfire county coordinator program, authorized \$12.5 million dollars for it through 2027, and required the county coordinators to prioritize home hardening, defensible space, planning, and education for community-level wildfire mitigation efforts.