

THIRD READING

Bill No: SB 973
Author: Becker (D) and Stern (D), et al.
Amended: 5/14/26
Vote: 21

SENATE NATURAL RES. & WATER COMMITTEE: 7-0, 3/24/26
AYES: Becker, Seyarto, Allen, Cabaldon, Grove, Laird, Stern

SENATE EMERGENCY MGT. COMMITTEE: 9-0, 4/21/26
AYES: Stern, Seyarto, Allen, Ashby, Blakespear, Dahle, Grayson, Pérez, Rubio

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE: 5-0, 5/14/26
AYES: Cervantes, Cabaldon, Grayson, Richardson, Wahab
NO VOTE RECORDED: Seyarto, Dahle

SUBJECT: Wildfire County Coordinator Program

SOURCE: California Fire Safe Council; Megafire Action

DIGEST: This bill would require the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Department) 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.

ANALYSIS:

Existing law:

- 1) Establishes the Department (PRC §701).

- 2) Establishes the Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task Force (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)).

This bill:

- 1) Requires 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) Establishes 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) Requires 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) Support activities to increase community resilience to smoke.
- j) Collect data on local mitigation and preparedness activities, outcomes, and costs.

Background

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 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/Prior Legislation

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 was held in the Senate Appropriations 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.

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

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee analysis:

- 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.
- 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.

SUPPORT: (Verified 5/14/26)

California Fire Safe Council (co-sponsor)
 Megafire Action (co-sponsor)
 Butte County Fire Safe Council
 California Building Industry Association
 California Forward
 California State Association of Counties

California State Association of Counties
 Colusa County Resource Conservation District
 Community Wildfire Planning Center
 County of Kern
 County of Mendocino
 County of Mono

County of Monterey	Palomar Mountain Fire Safe
County of Nevada	Council
County of Sacramento	Resource Conservation District of
County of San Luis Obispo	Tehama County
County of Trinity	Rural County Representatives of
Escondido Fire Safe Council	California
Fire Safe Council of San Diego	Sacramento County Board of
County	Supervisors
Fire Safe Marin	Sacramento; County of
Firewerx	Santa Barbara County Fire Safe
Ibhs - Insurance Institute for	Council
Business & Home Safety	Santa Clara County Firesafe
Inyo County Board of Supervisors	Council
Irvine Ranch Conservancy	Sierra Business Council
Lassen Fire Safe Council	Southern Humboldt Fire Safe
Mattole Restoration Council	Council
Mendocino County Fire Safe	Sunnyslope Firewise Committee
Council	The Nature Conservancy
Midpeninsula Regional Open	Town of Mammoth Lakes
Space District	Trinity County Resource
Modoc Fire Safe Council	Conservation District
Monterey; County of	Tulare County Board of
Nevada County Board of	Supervisors
Supervisors	United Policyholders
Ojai Valley Fire Safe Council	Ventura Regional Fire Safe Council
Orange County Fire Authority	Yolo County Resource
Pacific Gas and Electric Company	Conservation District

OPPOSITION: (Verified 5/14/26)

None received

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.”

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