

Date of Hearing: August 5, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

SB 973 (Becker) – As Amended June 9, 2026

|                   |                      |       |        |
|-------------------|----------------------|-------|--------|
| Policy Committee: | Natural Resources    | Vote: | 14 - 0 |
|                   | Emergency Management |       | 6 - 0  |

Urgency: No                      State Mandated Local Program: No                      Reimbursable: No

**SUMMARY:**

This bill codifies the Wildfire County Coordinator Program (WCCP), to be jointly administered by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) and the California Fire Safe Council (CFSC), and requires CAL FIRE to develop standardized wildfire risk assessment guidance and tools.

Specifically, this bill, among other things:

- 1) Requires CAL FIRE to (a) establish recommended guidance for the use of available wildfire risk modeling and analysis tools by organizations seeking to support the work of the WCCP, as specified; (b) develop guidance and tools to support county-level wildfire risk assessments, identification of high-risk communities, prioritization of mitigation activities, and evaluation of risk reduction outcomes; (c) support the development, updating, or procurement of county-level wildfire risk assessments; (d) maintain oversight authority for implementation and performance of the WCCP, as provided; and (e) in coordination with the Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation (LCI), develop guidance and templates for county-level wildfire resilience prioritization and implementation plans and their integration with related wildfire resilience planning, as provided.
- 2) Requires CAL FIRE to establish the WCCP and enter into an agreement with the CFSC to administer and deliver the WCCP to support county-level coordination of and capacity for wildfire mitigation, prevention, preparedness, and recovery activities, as specified.
- 3) Specifies numerous requirements for the WCCP, such as providing information on available financial resources to support wildfire resilience planning and implementation and supporting the planning and implementation of home hardening, defensible space, and related mitigation activities.

**FISCAL EFFECT:**

- 1) Since its inception in 2021, the WCCP has received \$10.9 million from the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (through a wildfire prevention grant from CAL FIRE) and, more recently, \$9.5 million from the General Fund in the 2025 Budget Act, which funds the program through October 2027. By codifying the WCCP in statute, this bill creates ongoing cost pressure of an unknown amount, likely in the millions of dollars, to continue providing funding for the program after 2027 (General Fund, special fund, or bond funds).

- 2) CAL FIRE estimates General Fund costs of approximately \$1.4 million in year one, \$1.8 in year two, and \$1.7 million in year three and ongoing to hire four positions to implement this bill.

Tasks include, among other things, developing and maintaining statewide wildfire risk modeling standards, guidance, and analytical tools in coordination with the Risk Modeling Advisory Workgroup; overseeing statewide implementation support, including interagency coordination, technical assistance to counties, and integration of local planning with state wildfire resilience strategies; facilitating county-level wildfire mitigation implementation; coordinating with local, tribal, and regional entities; managing administration of the WCCP, including oversight of data collection, reporting, program performance evaluation, and coordination with the CFSC; and other associated tasks.

CAL FIRE's estimate includes the cost of three vehicles and a long-term vehicle lease for site visits and meetings with stakeholders and local agencies throughout the state.

- 3) LCI estimates one-time General Fund costs of \$870,000 over two years for two limited-term positions to develop the wildfire resilience guidance, templates, and implementation guidance as required by the bill.

#### COMMENTS:

- 1) **Purpose.** 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 [WCCP], which the CFSC 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.

- 2) **Background.** Established in 2021, the WCCP seeks to educate, encourage, and develop countywide community collaboration and coordination among wildfire mitigation groups. The program, which is a partnership between CFSC and CAL FIRE, has provided funding to 52 of California's 58 counties to hire wildfire county coordinators and establish local capacity to plan and implement wildfire resilience strategies on the ground. The program, among other accomplishments, has secured over \$104 million in additional funding for local mitigation and preparedness projects.

CFSC was established in 1993 as a project within CAL FIRE to address the state's growing wildfire challenges. CFSC notes that over the years, it evolved into an independent nonprofit organization, focusing on channeling critical funding directly into the hands of community-based organizations dedicated to wildfire mitigation and resilience.

Writing in support of this bill, CFSC and a coalition of organizations assert:

Proven, proactive strategies – such as home hardening, defensible space, fuels reduction, evacuation planning, and community education – significantly reduce wildfire risk. However, many communities lack the technical and administrative capacity needed to plan, prioritize, and implement these solutions at scale.

SB 973 addresses this challenge by establishing a statewide framework that pairs standardized, state-led guidance for assessing wildfire risk and prioritizing the mitigations that matter with locally delivered implementation capacity. Importantly, the bill codifies and expands the [WCCP], a proven initiative delivered in partnership between CAL FIRE and the [CFSC] since 2021.

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