

SENATE THIRD READING
SB 973 (Becker and Stern)
As Amended August 13, 2026
Majority vote

SUMMARY

Codifies the Wildfire County Coordinator Program (County Coordinator Program) into state statute.

Major Provisions

- 1) Requires the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) to establish the California Wildfire Preparedness Program to do all of the following:
 - a) Establish recommended guidance for the use of available wildfire risk modeling and analysis tools by organizations, including but not limited to fire departments, local department units, local fire safe councils, resource conservation districts, tribal entities, counties, cities, special districts, communities, and mitigation practitioners in consultation with the Risk Modeling Advisory Workgroup or the appropriate interagency technical advisory body within CAL FIRE;
 - 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) Support the development or updating of county-level wildfire risk assessments;
 - d) Maintain oversight authority for County Coordinator Program implementation, performance, and alignment with county-level Community Wildfire Protection Plans and CAL FIRE's Unit Fire Plans, and ensure, to the extent feasible, activities conducted align with those relevant fire agency plans and existing applicable state and local fire agency standards in order to avoid duplicative planning and reporting requirements, reduce administrative burden, and improve coordination; and,
 - e) In coordination with the Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation (LCI), develop guidance and templates for the creation or revision of county-level wildfire preparedness prioritization and implementation plans, along with accompanying guidance for integrating these plans with county and local Community Wildfire Protection Plans, regional resilience plans, and related wildfire resilience programs.
- 2) Requires CAL FIRE to establish the County Coordinator Program and enter into an agreement with the California Fire Safe Council (CFSC) to administer and deliver the County Coordinator Program.
- 3) Establishes that the purpose of the County Coordinator Program is to support county-wide coordination of and capacity for community wildfire mitigation, prevention, preparedness, and recovery activities, including, but not limited to, evacuation and resilience planning, data collection, public education and outreach, smoke mitigation, home hardening, defensible space, fuels reduction, and community-scale mitigation in alignment with CAL FIRE's statewide community wildfire preparedness strategy.

- 4) Specifies the role of the County Coordinator Program.

COMMENTS

Many counties have historically lacked the technical and administrative capacity to assess risk, prioritize projects, and implement mitigation at scale. The County Coordinator Program was established in 2021 as a partnership between the CFSC and CAL FIRE to operationalize recommendations in the Action Plan at the county level. The purpose of the County Coordinator Program is to develop countywide community collaboration and coordination among wildfire mitigation groups and accelerate home hardening, defensible space implementation, and public education. The County Coordinator Program has provided funding to 52 of California's 58 counties to hire a County Coordinator and establish critical local capacity to plan and implement wildfire resilience strategies on the ground.

Since the County Coordinator Program's inception, county coordinators have secured more than \$104 million for local mitigation and preparedness projects; coordinated with more than 10,000 organizations to increase collaboration; and, established more than 100 new FireWise Communities and Fire Safe Councils.

In 2025, the Legislature assigned the California Earthquake Authority (CEA) the task of conducting a study and reporting on options to enhance natural catastrophe resiliency while meeting California's climate change and clean energy goals. The CEA's report, *Enhancing California's Resiliency to Natural Catastrophes: Senate Bill 254 (2025) Study Report*, released April 7, recommends the state support community mitigation planning and implementation through programs like the Wildfire County Coordinator Program to build local capacity for wildfire mitigation.

SB 973 codifies the existing County Coordinator Program in state law to build upon the existing County Coordinator Program infrastructure and create a long-term, sustainable mechanism for community-level execution of state strategy, tailored to meet local needs.

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 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.

Arguments in Support

CFSC writes in support of this bill that through county coordinators, counties can effectively translate statewide wildfire resilience goals into coordinated, on-the-ground action aligned with regional landscape resilience efforts. By placing the County Coordinator Program into statute, SB 973 ensures stability, accountability, and long-term impact—while requiring no new appropriation to support this program this year beyond existing funding.

Arguments in Opposition

None on file

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee:

- 1) 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.
- 2) 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.

VOTES**SENATE FLOOR: 37-0-3**

YES: Allen, Alvarado-Gil, Archuleta, Arreguín, Ashby, Becker, Blakespear, Cabaldon, Caballero, Cervantes, Choi, Cortese, Durazo, Grayson, Grove, Hurtado, Jones, Laird, Limón, McGuire, McNerney, Menjivar, Ochoa Bogh, Padilla, Pérez, Reyes, Richardson, Rubio, Seyarto, Smallwood-Cuevas, Stern, Strickland, Umberg, Valladares, Wahab, Weber Pierson, Wiener
ABS, ABST OR NV: Dahle, Gonzalez, Niello

ASM NATURAL RESOURCES: 14-0-0

YES: Bryan, Ellis, Alanis, Connolly, Garcia, Haney, Hoover, Kalra, Macedo, Muratsuchi, Pellerin, Schultz, Wicks, Zbur

ASM EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT: 6-0-1

YES: Ransom, Hadwick, Arambula, Bennett, Calderon, DeMaio
ABS, ABST OR NV: Bains

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 11-0-4

YES: Wicks, Arambula, Calderon, Caloza, Fong, Mark González, Krell, Pacheco, Pellerin, Sharp-Collins, Solache
ABS, ABST OR NV: Hoover, Dixon, Ta, Tangipa

UPDATED

VERSION: August 13, 2026

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FN: 0003506