

SENATE BILL SB-44

Introduced by Senator Dave Cortese (D-15)

An act relating to Rural Wildfire Reduction Act.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

SB-44, Dave Cortese (D-15). Rural Wildfire Reduction Act.

Existing law provides for wildfire prevention and vegetation management through the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. Existing law allows vegetation management projects that are meant to reduce wildfire risk.

This bill would require state agencies to prioritize fuel reduction in rural areas with high wildfire risk when considering vegetation management projects. These efforts may include creating strategic fuel breaks, removing dead or dry vegetation, thinning overgrown vegetation, controlled burning, or other methods used to reduce wildfire fuel. The goal is to break up large areas of flammable vegetation and help slow how quickly and how far wildfires can spread through rural areas.

Vote: Majority. **Appropriations/fiscal:** yes. **Local program:** no.

THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA DO ENACT AS FOLLOWS:

SECTION 1. Section 4743 of the Public Resources Code is amended to read:

4743.

(c) For a grant program that funds an environmentally sensitive vegetation management project, a state public entity shall consider incorporating into its funding guidelines all of the following criteria:

1. Follows the principles of integrated pest management as defined in section 11401.7 of the Food and Agricultural Code.
2. Implements measures to support native plant health and biodiversity.
3. Maximizes long-term risk reduction of catastrophic wildfire.
4. Uses monitoring plans, as determined by the funding entity, and incorporates monitoring before, during, and after vegetation management treatments.
5. Uses methods that mimic natural disturbance processes to maintain rare habitats.
6. Times vegetation management to minimize the potential impacts to wildlife and minimize the reproduction of invasive plants.
7. Minimizes erosion impacts from vegetation management.
8. Includes consultation with native plant botanists and land management experts.
9. Leaves buffers around bodies of water to protect watershed health.
10. Uses prescribed grazing, as defined in section 4004.5, where applicable.
11. Avoids habitat type conversion.
12. Implements measures to avoid impacts to rare or sensitive habitats, in consultation with relevant agencies.
13. *Prioritizes fuel reduction projects in rural areas with high wildfire risk where large amounts of continuous vegetation increase the risk of a wildfire spreading quickly. These projects shall do all of the following:*
 - a. *Create and maintain strategically placed fuel breaks in areas where continuous vegetation creates a high risk of wildfire spread.*
 - b. *Reduce excessive wildfire fuel through methods including the removal of dead or dry vegetation, thinning of overgrown vegetation, prescribed burning, or prescribed grazing.*
 - c. *Prioritize areas near rural communities, evacuation routes, and other locations where rapidly spreading wildfires could create greater risk to residents.*
 - d. *Maintain fuel reduction areas as needed to prevent excessive combustible vegetation from building up again.*
 - e. *Carry out fuel reduction in a way that limits unnecessary damage to native plants, wildlife habitats, and waterways.*

SECTION 2. Worker Safety and Labor Protections

(a) All wildfire prevention and vegetation management projects funded pursuant to this act shall comply with applicable state and federal labor laws, including workplace safety standards and prevailing wage requirements where applicable.

(b) Employers shall ensure that workers receive appropriate safety training and necessary personal protective equipment before performing wildfire prevention or vegetation management activities.

(c) All work performed pursuant to this act shall be conducted in a manner that protects the health and safety of workers while supporting wildfire prevention efforts.

SECTION 3. Funding For Rural Wildfire Prevention

(a) The sum of five million dollars (\$5,000,000) is hereby appropriated from the General Fund to the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) for the purpose of supporting wildfire prevention and vegetation management projects in rural communities designated as high wildfire risk areas.

(b) In addition to the funds appropriated under this section, the department may utilize existing wildfire prevention funding to carry out the purposes of this act, provided that such funds are used in accordance with applicable state and federal laws and funding requirements.

(c) Priority shall be given to rural communities that face significant wildfire risks and lack sufficient resources to implement effective wildfire prevention measures.