

Date of Hearing: May 19, 2021

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Lorena Gonzalez, Chair

AB 1255 (Bloom) – As Amended April 19, 2021

Policy Committee: Natural Resources

Vote: 8 - 1

Urgency: No

State Mandated Local Program: No

Reimbursable: No

**SUMMARY:**

This bill requires, the Natural Resources Agency, on or before July 1, 2023, in collaboration or consultation with specified state agencies, to develop a guidance document that describes goals, approaches, opportunities, and best practices in each region of the state for ecologically appropriate, habitat-specific fire risk reduction.

This bill also requires CalFire to consider input from regarding priority fire prevention activities within the county and ensure the local priorities of a contract counties are considered before awarding grants to support fire prevention activities the contract county has assumed for the state.

Lastly, this bill eliminates the sunset date of January 1, 2024 for CalFire's authority to provide advanced payments.

**FISCAL EFFECT:**

- 1) One-time costs of \$500,000 to \$750,000 for the Natural Resources Agency to conduct a public process and develop the regions specific guidance document (General Fund).
- 2) CalFire costs are likely absorbable.

**COMMENTS:**

**Background and Purpose.** SB 901 (Dodd), Chapter 626, Statutes of 2018, committed \$1 billion for CalFire's Forest Health Grant Program and Fire Prevention Grant Program and dedicated fuel reduction crews over the next five years. Approximately half of this commitment has already been spent.

On January 8, 2021, the Governor's Forest Management Task Force released a comprehensive action plan to reduce wildfire risk for vulnerable communities, improve the health of forests and wildlands, and accelerate action to combat climate change.

In April, the Legislature enacted the *Wildfire and Forest Resilience Early Action Package for 2020-21* (SB 85, Chapter 14, Statutes of 2021), which provides \$536 million to address wildlife prevention and resilience issues, including \$155 million for the Forest Health Grant Program and \$123 million for the Fire Prevention Grant Program.

This bill aims to create habitat specific fire risk reduction activities to address the diverse landscapes of California. A review of CAL FIRE's Forest Health Grant Program and Local Fire Prevention Grant Program has shown that a majority of the funding has been awarded to forested landscapes of the north coast, northern California, and the Sierra Nevada. While southern California has received less than 10% of the awards. The bill requires NRA to provide guidance to state agencies who are funding fire risk reduction on how to identify habitat specific fire risk reduction activities for all landscapes of the state.

In addition, the bill attempts to recognize that the six contract counties (Marin, Kern, Los Angeles, Santa Barbara, Ventura, and Orange) assume all the fire prevention responsibilities for the state in those counties and should play a larger role in deciding how local fire prevention grants are allocated.

Lastly, after only two years, the author proposes to extend on advance payments indefinitely. This sunset was put in place with other safeguards to protect state coffers. The author may wish to extend rather than eliminate the sunset since the advance payments have not been in existence long enough to be evaluated for effectiveness or risk.

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