

Date of Hearing: May 12, 2021

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Lorena Gonzalez, Chair

AB 697 (Chau) – As Introduced February 16, 2021

Policy Committee: Natural Resources

Vote: 8 - 2

Urgency: No

State Mandated Local Program: No

Reimbursable: No

SUMMARY:

This bill revises and recasts the statute governing the Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) fund in the state treasury. Specifically, this bill requires CalFire, under an agreement with the federal government, to establish a program to conduct ecological restoration and fire resiliency projects on national forest lands. This bill requires priority to be given to forest restoration and fuels reduction projects that are landscape scale, focused on ecological restoration, based on best available science and emphasize the use of prescribed fire. This bill also requires priority for projects that include community fire protection and protection of water and other infrastructure.

FISCAL EFFECT:

There is no direct fiscal impact from this bill, however absent the availability of federal funds, this bill may put cost pressures on CalFire to fund GNA programs. This is not likely, given the other existing programs at CalFire and the likelihood of the availability of federal funds.

COMMENTS:

Background and Purpose. The GNA allows the United States Department of Agriculture's Forest Service to enter into agreements with state forestry agencies to do the critical management work to keep our forests healthy and productive.

In 2018, Congress expanded authorities for forest management projects related to the GNA, setting the stage for more growth in cooperative forest management.

There are 33 million acres of forestland in California. The federal government owns and manages 57% of forestland, while 40% is owned by private companies, families, individuals or Native American tribes. The remaining 3% is owned and managed by state and local governments.

Major wildfires have started on federal forestlands then spread to and damaged communities throughout our state. The health of federally managed forests has a significant impact on all Californians, because healthy forests provide clean air, clean water, carbon storage and recreational opportunities. High-intensity wildfires threaten all of these forest benefits.

California recently entered into a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the United States Forest Service, known as the Shared Stewardship Agreement, to reduce wildfire

risks on federal, state and private lands by sustainably treating one million acres of forest lands annually by 2025.

AB 92 (Committee on Budget, Chapter 18, Statutes of 2020) among other things, established the GNA to facilitate the implementation of forest management projects on federal lands. Revenues for the account will be generated from federal timber sales, which have not yet occurred. The state may also place money into the fund.

The purpose of AB 697 is to revise and codify the GNA program in California.

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