

CONCURRENCE IN SENATE AMENDMENTS

AB 697 (Chau)

As Amended August 26, 2021

Majority vote

SUMMARY

Requires the Natural Resources Agency (NRA) to establish a Good Neighbor Authority Program (program) for the purposes of conducting ecological restoration and fire resiliency projects on national forest lands.

Senate Amendments

Requires projects that part of the program to be designed, to the extent feasible, to do the following:

- 1) Prevent type conversion and the spread of invasive plants and grasses.
- 2) Based upon the best available science, provide for ecological restoration and fire resiliency projects appropriate to the landscape and vegetation being treated.
- 3) Provide ecologically appropriate treatment for native shrublands, such as chaparral and coastal sage scrub, including the removal of flammable nonnative invasive species and the restoration of native species, where appropriate.

COMMENTS

Good Neighbor Authority (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.

Since GNA was first authorized, the number of projects and participating states has grown. 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 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 it provides clean air, clean water, carbon storage, and recreational opportunities. High-intensity wildfires threaten all of these values. At least four western states, including Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington, have established formal programs where the state either contributes to or is primarily responsible for planning, managing, and implementing forest restoration projects on Forest Service lands.

California recently entered into a Memorandum of Understanding 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. In addition, CAL FIRE has funded work through its Healthy Forest grant program on federal land using GNA.

AB 92 (Budget Committee), Chapter 18, Statutes of 2020, among other things, enacted Public Resources Code Section 4810 that establishes the Fund in the State Treasury to facilitate the implementation of forest management projects on federal lands. AB 697 would take the next step by formalizing a GNA program in California.

According to the Author

The federal government owns and manages 57% of California's 33 million acres of forestland, while the state and local governments own and manage only 3% of the forestlands. Wildfires are a continuing and growing problem in California. The frequency, size, and intensity of wildfires is increasing every year, causing severe damage to infrastructure, life, our forest ecosystem, and property. In fact, the top seven largest wildfires all occurred since 2017, and were amongst the deadliest. Five of the top six occurred in 2020 alone, which resulted in more than 4.1 million acres burned. Many major wildfires start on federal forestlands then spread to and damage communities throughout our state. Recognizing the importance of working together to address forest health and wildfire risk, Congress expanded the GNA nationwide in 2014 to authorize the states and federal government to share funds, staff and other resources, across jurisdictional boundaries, through signed agreements. AB 697 would create a program for the State to plan, manage and implement forest restoration projects on [United States (U.S.)] Forest Service lands through an expanded and formalized GNA that would accelerate the pace and scale of ecologically based forest management.

Arguments in Support

The Nature Conservancy, in support of this bill, writes this bill would create a program to allow the state to help plan, manage, and implement forest restoration projects on Forest Service lands through an expanded and formalized GNA. The bill would help to accelerate the pace and scale of ecologically based forest management on national forest lands by implementing the Shared Stewardship Agreement between the State and the U.S. Forest Service.

Arguments in Opposition

None received

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee:

- 1) Unknown but potentially significant cost pressure (General Fund or special fund) to fund projects under the Good Neighbor Authority Program, which this bill would establish.
- 2) To the extent the bill encourages forest treatment activities that reduce the occurrence of catastrophic wildfires from what otherwise would have occurred, this bill would result in potentially significant savings due to avoided fire suppression and other costs (General Fund).

VOTES:**ASM NATURAL RESOURCES: 8-2-1****YES:** Luz Rivas, Chau, Friedman, Cristina Garcia, McCarty, Seyarto, Stone, Wood**NO:** Flora, Mathis**ABS, ABST OR NV:** Muratsuchi**ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 13-1-2****YES:** Lorena Gonzalez, Calderon, Carrillo, Chau, Davies, Gabriel, Eduardo Garcia, Levine, Quirk, Robert Rivas, Akilah Weber, Friedman, Stone**NO:** Bigelow**ABS, ABST OR NV:** Megan Dahle, Fong**ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 66-0-13****YES:** Aguiar-Curry, Arambula, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Bloom, Boerner Horvath, Bryan, Burke, Calderon, Carrillo, Cervantes, Chau, Chiu, Cooley, Cooper, Cunningham, Daly, Davies, Frazier, Friedman, Gabriel, Gallagher, Cristina Garcia, Eduardo Garcia, Gipson, Lorena Gonzalez, Gray, Grayson, Holden, Irwin, Jones-Sawyer, Kalra, Kiley, Lackey, Lee, Levine, Low, Maienschein, Mayes, McCarty, Medina, Mullin, Muratsuchi, Nazarian, O'Donnell, Petrie-Norris, Quirk, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Reyes, Luz Rivas, Robert Rivas, Rodriguez, Blanca Rubio, Salas, Santiago, Stone, Ting, Villapudua, Waldron, Ward, Akilah Weber, Wicks, Wood, Rendon**ABS, ABST OR NV:** Bigelow, Chen, Choi, Megan Dahle, Flora, Fong, Mathis, Nguyen, Patterson, Seyarto, Smith, Valladares, Voepel**SENATE FLOOR: 37-1-2****YES:** Allen, Archuleta, Atkins, Bates, Becker, Borgeas, Bradford, Caballero, Cortese, Dahle, Dodd, Durazo, Eggman, Glazer, Gonzalez, Grove, Hertzberg, Hueso, Hurtado, Jones, Kamlager, Laird, Leyva, Limón, McGuire, Min, Newman, Ochoa Bogh, Pan, Portantino, Roth, Rubio, Skinner, Umberg, Wieckowski, Wiener, Wilk**NO:** Nielsen**ABS, ABST OR NV:** Melendez, Stern**UPDATED**

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