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# SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES AND WATER

Senator Henry Stern, Chair  
2021 - 2022 Regular

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<b>Bill No:</b>	SB 804	<b>Hearing Date:</b>	April 13, 2021
<b>Author:</b>	Glazer		
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<b>Urgency:</b>	No	<b>Fiscal:</b>	Yes
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**Subject:** California Conservation Corps: forestry training center

## BACKGROUND AND EXISTING LAW

*CalFire.* Existing law establishes the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CalFire) in the California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA) to oversee and administer programs related to forest health and fire prevention and response.

*Conservation Camp Program.* Existing law establishes the California Conservation Camp Program to provide for training and use of wards and inmates assigned to conservation camps to perform public conservation projects including forest fire prevention and control, forest and watershed management, recreation, fish and game management, soil conservation, and forest and watershed revegetation. The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR), in cooperation with CalFire, operates 35 conservation camps in 25 counties. All camps are minimum-security facilities and all are staffed with correctional staff.

Prior to 2021, there were 43 conservation camps. In October 2020, CalFire and CDCR announced the depopulation of eight conservation camps – four in the north and four in the south – that had been operating at “well below capacity for some time.” The consolidation was part of Governor Newsom’s 2020-21 state budget, which called for the camps to be consolidated by the end of December 2020.

*California Conservation Corps.* Existing law establishes the California Conservation Corps (CCC) in CNRA to administer the state’s conservation corps program. Corps members are 18-25 years old, enroll one year of service, which can be extended, and receive a stipend. Corps members implement projects to preserve, maintain, and enhance environmentally important lands and water; accomplish public works projects; assist emergency operations, fire prevention, and suppression; and contribute to energy conservation, among others. The CCC had an average of 1,867 corps members enrolled during the last three fiscal years.

Existing law identifies fire prevention, fire suppression, and disaster relief as a major emphasis of the CCC. The CalFire director is responsible for the training, supervision, and direction of corps members engaged in fire prevention, fire suppression, and other emergency activities.

Existing law requires the CCC director to establish a Forestry Corps Program to (1) develop and implement forest health projects, (2) establish forestry corps crews, (3) help corps members obtain forestry and forest technician degrees and certificates, (4)

train corps members to operate forestry equipment; and (5) create pathways from the corps to degree programs and jobs. Forest health projects include fuels reduction and hazardous fuels removal, tree planting, tree mortality and tree felling, forestry and conservation awareness and outreach, and wildlands forest firefighting training, among others. There are three forestry corps crews, one each in the Inland Empire, Solano County, and Tahoe. Each crew has an average of 11-12 corps members but is funded for 15 corps members.

Existing law authorizes the CCC director, in recruiting and enrolling corps members and special corps members, to select applicants who are on probation, parole, post release community supervision, or mandatory supervision. There were one to three formerly incarcerated individuals enrolled as corps members in the last three fiscal years.

Existing law authorizes the CCC director to establish the Education and Employment Reentry Program to enroll formerly incarcerated individuals who successfully served on a Conservation Camp program crew, among other requirements, as program participants. The program's objectives include:

- Developing, partnering with, and creating opportunities for the forestry corps program objectives.
- Collaborating with the Employment development Department to provide access to workforce services.
- Collaborating with nongovernmental organizations dedicated to providing access to counseling, mentorship, supportive housing, health care, and educational opportunities.
- Employing collaborations and partnerships available to the CCC.

Program participants would implement natural resource management projects, including fuels reduction and vegetation management; forest health restoration; assisting in fire prevention and disaster operations; and conserving, maintaining, improving, and developing natural resources, as specified, among others. Implementation of the program is contingent upon an appropriation. The CCC has not received funding for this program, yet.

Existing law requires the CCC to submit an annual report to the Legislature on specified education and employment outcomes of corps members following their participation in the CCC. The first report was due December 31, 2020; it has not yet been submitted to the Legislature.

*Ventura Training Center.* CalFire, CCC, and CDCR created a firefighter training and certification program at the Ventura Training Center (VTC) in Camarillo. Trainees are people on parole who participated in the Conservation Camp Program. VTC provides firefighter training, certifications and job readiness support to create a pathway for formerly incarcerated individuals to compete for entry-level firefighting jobs with state, federal and local agencies. VTC participants are trained and available to assist in fire suppression, emergency incident response and to perform fire prevention and resource management work. Onsite counselors help participants to develop skills to successfully reintegrate into the community. Services include employment skill assessments, money

management, technology training, tutoring, career planning, and searching and applying for jobs.

A maximum of 80 cadets are housed at VTC at any one time. The program enrolled 21 cadets in the first year and 45 in the second year. The average age was 32-34. The CCC and its VTC partners have not released outcomes data, yet, for this program.

### **PROPOSED LAW**

This bill would, upon an appropriation, direct the CCC director, no later than December 31, 2023, and in partnership with CalFire and CDCR, to establish a forestry training center in northern California to provide enhanced training, education, work experience, and job readiness for entry-level forestry jobs. Specifically, the bill would:

- 1) Model the training center after VTC, but with a forestry focus.
- 2) Authorize the program to incorporate fire prevention, fire suppression, emergency incident response, and resource management training modules.
- 3) Require the director to prioritize enrollment for formerly incarcerated individuals who have successfully served on a Conservation Camp program crew and were recommended for participation by the CalFire Director and the CDCR Secretary.
- 4) Authorize the director to enroll corps members and local community conservation corps members at the training center, if funding and resources allow.
- 5) Provide that successful completion of a training program at the training center constitutes qualifying experience for an entry-level forestry position at CalFire.
- 6) Make findings related to the need for a special statute for northern California.

### **ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT**

According to the author, "This legislation would create a center to train formerly incarcerated people in forestry management, thereby reducing the risk of deadly wildfires, while offering these qualified individuals a pathway to gainful employment. One way to reduce the devastation of wildfires is to proactively engage in forestry and vegetation management, including brush clearing. One of the greatest obstacles to this practice, however, is a lack of a trained workforce. This bill seeks to fill that void by establishing a program where graduates would be eligible for an entry-level forestry positions throughout the state."

According to the American Forests Foundation, "California's forests are reaching a breaking point. Just last year, California witnessed the largest wildfire ever recorded with the August Complex. There is a pressing need for increased forest health activities and professional foresters, yet several reports have found that California lacks the professional forestry workforce to attend to this need. The state [needs] bold, creative policy solutions to reach its goals to reduce wildfires, address forest health, and decrease recidivism."

To address forest health, the state must invest in human capital and expand opportunities in forestry. The state already allows incarcerated individuals to work on firefighting crews. Creating a forestry training program for formerly incarcerated individuals will decrease recidivism rates by creating a path to gainful employment while increasing the number of forestry professionals in the state."

**ARGUMENTS IN OPPOSITION**

None received.

**COMMENTS**

***This bill is double-referred to the Senate Public Safety Committee.*** Elements of the bill under that Committee's jurisdiction will be discussed there, and are included here for context and completeness only.

***Is this bill necessary?*** The CCC has broad authority to enroll formerly incarcerated people as regular corps members or as program participants under the Education and Employment Reentry Program. The latter program includes a forestry focus, among others, and has not yet been funded. The CCC uses its broad authority to provide workforce development and education services to formerly incarcerated individuals at the VTC and is exploring other opportunities to create training centers for this population in other areas of the state. This bill would provide specific legislative direction to establish a center for forestry pathways by a specified deadline, assuming it is funded, in northern California. If passed, it would indicate the Legislature's priorities for where to establish new training centers and for which fields.

The Committee may wish to consider whether to (1) support the creation of a new center with a forestry focus (as envisioned by this bill), (2) consider the creation of multiple centers for formerly incarcerated individuals with a range of foci, (3) support efforts to fund the Education and Employment Reentry Program, or (4) a combination of all three. There is certainly a great need to develop the workforce necessary to address California's forest and watershed health, catastrophic wildfire, biodiversity, climate change, and emergency response challenges. It is also necessary to do so in a way that (1) supports high roads job opportunities, and (2) increases equity by providing pathways and opportunities for marginalized populations, like formerly incarcerated individuals. Depending on the Committee's preference, the Committee may wish to consider directing Committee staff to continue working with the author to explore the options listed above.

***This bill is consistent with the Senate's Blueprint for a Fire Safe California.*** That document describes the Senate's 2021 priorities for addressing issues related to wildfire and includes an overarching priority to train and deploy a fire resiliency workforce. It provides specific direction to permanently expand the mission of the CCC to grow the pipeline to family sustaining careers in the fire service and related employment sectors. Focus areas include backfilling inmate fire crews and assisting with firefighting, post-fire ecological and watershed restoration, enhanced vegetation management, wildfire hazard mitigation, and defensible space and home hardening.

***Technical amendments.*** The Committee may wish to consider the following technical amendments:

***Enrollment.*** The bill prioritizes enrollment for formerly incarcerated individuals who have served on a California Conservation Camp program crew and were recommended by CalFire and CDCR. Some counties, like Los Angeles County, also utilize the services of formerly incarcerated individuals to fight fires, but, as written, those individuals would have lower priority for enrollment. The Committee may wish to consider amending the

bill to prioritize formerly incarcerated individuals who have served on a fire camp at the state or county level (*see Amendment 1*).

*Reporting.* Existing law requires the CCC to submit an annual report to the Legislature on specified education and employment outcomes of corps members following their participation in the CCC. The first report was due December 31, 2020; it has not yet been submitted to the Legislature. The requirements for that report do not include tracking and reporting outcomes for formerly incarcerated individuals enrolled in VTC or similar programs. The Committee may wish to consider amending the bill to require the CCC to track and report education and employment outcomes for VTC, the forestry training center proposed by the bill, the Education and Employment Reentry Program, and any other CCC programs that serve formerly incarcerated individuals (*see Amendment 2*).

### **Prior legislation**

SB 94 (Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review, Ch. 25, Statutes of 2019) directed the Division of Juvenile Justice, until July 1, 2020, in partnership with the CCC and participating certified local conservation corps, to develop and establish a pre-corps transitional training program to approximate the experience of serving in a conservation corps.

AB 278 (McCarty, Ch. 571, Statutes of 2019) authorizes the CCC director to enroll a person on parole in the corps.

AB 1668 (Carrillo, Ch. 587, Statutes of 2019) requires the CCC to establish the Education and Employment Reentry Program (EERP) to employ formerly incarcerated individuals who served on a Conservation Camp program and were recommended for participation by the CalFire director and the CDCR secretary.

AB 2126 (Eggman, Ch. 635, Statutes of 2018) requires the CCC director to establish a Forestry Corps Program by July 1, 2019, as specified.

AB 864 (McCarty, Ch. 659, Statutes of 2017) authorizes the CCC director, in recruiting and enrolling corps members and special corps members, to select applicants who are on probation, post release community supervision, or mandatory supervision.

### **SUGGESTED AMENDMENTS**

#### **Amendment 1**

14415.7. (a) (1) Upon appropriation, on or before December 31, 2023, the director, in partnership with the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection and Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, shall establish a forestry training center in northern California to provide enhanced training, education, work experience, and job readiness for entry-level forestry jobs.

(2) In establishing the training center, the director shall model the training center after the Ventura training center described in Schedule (3) of Item 3540-301-0001 of the Budget Act of 2018 (Chapter 29 of the Statutes of 2018), but the training center shall focus on forestry.

(3) The training center may include fire prevention, fire suppression, emergency incident response, and resource management training modules.

(b) **The director shall enroll at the training center formerly incarcerated individuals and prioritize enrollment for those formerly incarcerated individuals who have done either of the following:**

**(1) The director shall prioritize for enrollment at the training center formerly incarcerated individuals who have** successfully served on a California Conservation Camp program crew and were recommended by the Director of Forestry and Fire Protection and the Secretary of the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.

**(2) Successfully served on a fire fighting crew at the county level and were recommended for participation by county probation and county fire departments.**

(c) The director may enroll corpsmembers and local community conservation corpsmembers at the training center if funding and resources allow.

(d) Successful completion of a training program at the training center shall constitute qualifying experience for an entry-level forestry position at the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

## Amendment 2

Add a new section to the bill to amend section 14424 of the Public Resources Code, as follows:

14424. (a) Commencing January 1, 2020, the corps shall report by December 31 of each year the total number of corpsmembers in the cohort who permanently separated from the corps during the state fiscal year that ended 18 months before the date the report is due.

(b) To the extent feasible, the report shall include the number of corpsmembers in the cohort who did any of the following in the 12-month period following final separation from the corps:

(1) Enrolled in an adult school or other precollegiate-level program.

(2) Enrolled in an apprenticeship or other vocational education program.

(3) Enrolled in postsecondary education.

(4) Were employed during the second and fourth quarters.

(5) Were simultaneously employed and enrolled in a secondary, postsecondary, or apprenticeship or other vocational education program.

(6) Obtained employment in jobs that they received specialized training to perform while they were enrolled in the corps.

(c) To assess longer-term outcomes for corpsmembers, the report shall also include the number of corpsmembers in the cohort who received any of the following either while serving in the corps or in the 12-month period following final separation from the corps:

(1) A high school diploma or its recognized equivalent.

(2) An industry-recognized credential.

(3) An associate or bachelor's degree.

(d) To assess the performance of variations in the delivery of the corps' programs, the corps shall disaggregate the data reported pursuant to this section into the following subgroups of corpsmembers:

(1) Partial-year corpsmembers, who enrolled in the corps for a period of more than 60 days but less than one year.

(2) Full-year corpsmembers, who enrolled in the corps for a period of one year or more.

- (3) Residential center corpsmembers, who resided in a residential center for the majority of the time they were enrolled in the corps.
- (4) Nonresidential center corpsmembers, who reported to a nonresidential center for the majority of the time they were enrolled in the corps.
- (e) The corps shall provide the report to the chairpersons and vice chairpersons of the budget committees in both houses of the Legislature, as well as the relevant budget subcommittees and policy committees in both houses of the Legislature that have subject matter jurisdiction over the corps.

**(f) Commencing December 31, 2023, and every year thereafter, in the report required under this section, the corps shall include a section to report the information required in subdivisions (a) through (e) inclusive, as appropriate, for formerly incarcerated individuals enrolled in corps programs, including, but not limited to, the Education and Employment Reentry Program, the Ventura Training Center, the forestry training center required in Section 14415.7, and any other centers or programs created by the corps.**

#### **SUPPORT**

American Forest Foundation  
Rubicon Programs

#### **OPPOSITION**

None received.

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