



San Mateo County Bill Analysis Form

Date Submitted: March 25, 2025
Submitted Department: County Executive's Office
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Reviewed and Approved by County Attorney
☒ Yes ☐ No

Reviewed and Approved by County Executive
☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A

Senate Bill 326 Senator Becker, District 13 The California Wildfire Mitigation Strategic Planning Act

Version Date: February 11, 2025
☒ New bill ☐ Amended Bill ☐ Gut & Amend

Recommended Position

☐ Sponsor ☐ Support
☐ Support, if Amended ☐ Oppose
☒ Other - Supervisors Canepa and Mueller requested the Board support this measure.

Summary

Senate Bill (SB) 326 (Becker) would create a framework for evaluating wildfire mitigation actions and investments by state, federal, and private actors. The bill would also improve utility and non-utility wildfire mitigation coordination efforts across California, with the goal of reducing wildfire risk and increasing the overall cost-effectiveness of wildfire-related spending.

Background/Analysis

Recent catastrophic wildfires in California have underscored the importance of improved local preparedness and emergency response. Various communities across the state, such as unincorporated communities in San Mateo County, face higher fire damage risks and need reinforced measures to protect residents' safety.

This past February, the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CalFIRE) released its updated fire hazard severity zone maps. Six jurisdictions in San Mateo County, including Half Moon Bay and Pacifica, saw an increase in the number of zones deemed as "very high," thus pushing local entities to consider pursuing more rigorous regulations and standards. Although California has made progress in this area in recent years, the Legislature continues to assess more comprehensive actions to complement previous efforts.

In the aftermath of the 2018 Camp Fire in Northern California, AB 1054 (Chapter 79, Statutes of 2019) created a framework in which electric utilities evaluate their wildfire risk and plan for their wildfire mitigation investments and activities. Utilities are required to submit for review and

approval, as a part of the annual Safety Certificate process, which is overseen by the Office of Electric Infrastructure Safety (OEIS) within the California Natural Resources Agency, a Wildfire Mitigation Plan comprehensively detailing the activities and investments the utility will take to reduce the risk of wildfire, quantifying the contribution of these investments to risk reduction, and estimating the cost-effectiveness of these efforts.

In addition, in 2021, Governor Newsom created a multi-agency effort—the California Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task Force—to identify needs, develop strategies, and produce plans to accelerate and improve wildfire management and resilience. That same year, CalFIRE established the new Community Wildfire Preparedness and Mitigation Division, making the division's deputy director responsible for the department's fire preparedness and mitigation missions.

Nonetheless, according to Senator Becker's office, no framework currently exists that effectively evaluates how these multiple wildfire prevention programs interact or how they can be better coordinated to maximize success.

SB 326 (Becker) is a reintroduction of last year's SB 1014 (Dodd), which was held on suspense in the Assembly Appropriations Committee. SB 326 (Becker) is also one of 13 bills included in the State Senate's major wildfire bill package this session.

The Bill and its Challenges

SB 326 (Becker), specifically, does the following:

- (1) Requires the deputy director, on or before January 1, 2027, and every 3 years thereafter, to

prepare a Wildfire Risk Mitigation Planning Framework sufficient to quantitatively evaluate wildfire risk mitigation actions taken by multiple actors. The framework will detail:

- Responsible entities, cost estimates, risk reduction efficiencies, methodologies, personnel requirements, and other factors determined to be appropriate.
- (2) Requires the deputy director, on or before April 1, 2027, and every 3 years thereafter, to prepare a Wildfire Risk Baseline and Forecast for the state delineated on a statewide level and by county. This will include:
 - Estimates of current ignition risks and evaluations of potential consequences to life, property, and ecosystems.
- (3) Requires the deputy director, on or before August 1, 2027, to prepare a Wildfire Mitigation Scenarios Report, to be updated annually which would contain specified information, including identification of a reasonable range of possible scenarios for overall wildfire risk mitigation spending.
- (4) Requires the deputy director to, each year the framework is completed, submit a copy of the framework and forecast to the Legislature, the OEIS, and the Public Utilities Commission for review and consideration.
- (5) Authorizes the deputy director to contract with a private consultant or a public university with special expertise in quantitative assessment of wildfire risk and risk mitigation to conduct quantitative assessment of wildfire and community risk modeling and for preparation of these reports.

The Senate Governmental Organization Committee suggests that the author consider expanding the bill to include private universities as potential contractors.

Recommended Solution

Adopting a resolution to support SB 326 would align with the County's 2024 Legislative Platform and previous County advocacy supporting climate resiliency and wildfire risk mitigation efforts.

Departments Impacted

Department of Emergency Management

- If implemented, the impacts on the County's emergency management operations would require additional funding for significant staffing increases to support the following: (1) increased coordination of mitigation efforts across the full cycle of emergency management without authority, as the department currently does not have the authority to compel local

stakeholders, such as the fire safe councils, to provide the needed information, (2) curation, analysis, and distillation of relevant data, and (3) holistic risk and hazard analysis for contributions to the Wildfire Risk Baseline and Forecast.

Sustainability Department

- No impacts identified; the department defers to the Department of Emergency Management for input.

Parks Department

- The County already works and collaborates with other regional fire preparedness groups, such as the Santa Cruz Mountain Stewardship Network, to coordinate mitigation efforts. Although this bill may not bring newly added benefits to the County itself, neighboring counties that could benefit from increased regional coordination can help San Mateo County become more fire resilient.

Department of Planning and Building

- The current version of the bill does not mention what, if any, environmental review will be conducted in conjunction with planning and mitigation efforts and whether they are immune from local permit requirements. Although this does not necessarily pose an issue, the need for coastal development permits and associated environmental review in coastal zones may warrant further consideration and discussion.

San Mateo County Fire Department

- Impacts are unknown. CalFIRE is currently reviewing the bill and considering its impacts on the department. The department's bill analysis process is confidential, and as such, cannot weigh in until the Administration approves their analysis. More information on potential impacts and/or benefits to the County may be provided soon.

Fiscal Impact

SB 326 would have unknown fiscal impacts on the County of San Mateo. The Department of Emergency Management will require additional staffing to comply with the requirements of this bill.

Support

Pacific Forest Trust.

Opposition

None Registered on File.

Status

3/25/25—Heard in the Senate Governmental Organization Committee (Ayes 13. Noes 0) and Re-referred to the Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee.