

UPDATE



February 2025

LOS ANGELES FIRES RECOVERY California Continues Quick and Effective Action to Assist Recovery: Governor Newsom has launched historic recovery and rebuilding efforts to accelerate recovery and signed legislation providing over \$2.5 billion to support ongoing response and jumpstart recovery efforts for Los Angeles. The Governor has signed 15 executive orders that together are:

- <u>streamlining rebuilding</u> of homes and businesses;
- <u>cutting red tape and suspending permitting</u> requirements under the California Coastal Act;
- <u>removing bureaucratic barriers</u> to provide critical regulatory relief to help fire survivors rebuild, and access essential services;
- providing tax and <u>mortgage</u> relief to impacted <u>communities</u> and <u>businesses</u>, as well as <u>extending tax deadlines</u>;
- fast-tracking temporary housing and protecting tenants; and
- mobilizing debris removal and cleanup and protecting communities from flooding and landslides.

Additionally, State and federal resources have come together to accelerate a safe recovery for Los Angeles:

- The California Conservation Corps (CCC) <u>responded quickly</u> in recovery efforts by installing silt socks and straw wattles around storm drains in the burn zones to keep contaminants found in the ash from washing into the Los Angeles watershed. This was the largest deployment of Corpsmembers in CCC history targeting erosion and contaminant control.
- The California Department of Water Resources deployed over 30 watershed experts and engineers to Los Angeles to support fire mitigation work in burn scar areas and protect downstream communities by keeping toxic runoff out of local watersheds.
- The California Department of Conservation deployed its <u>Watershed</u> <u>Emergency Response Teams</u> to the front lines to quickly assess post fire hazards such as debris flows, flash floods, and falling rocks.
- The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) is supporting intake of burned and impacted wildlife to rehabilitation centers, as well as relocating wildlife to help expedite recovery for both people and animals. CDFW also mobilized staff and volunteers to rescue a population of endangered Steelhead trout in Topanga Creek.
- California State Parks is working with US EPA, Cal OES, and CalEPA to help the recovery effort <u>by hosting two temporary sites to safely process</u> <u>hazardous household materials</u> removed from properties destroyed by the Palisades Fire.
- The U.S. Forest Service continues ongoing assessment of damage from the <u>Eaton</u> and <u>Hughes</u> fires through the deployment of <u>Burned Area</u> <u>Emergency Response (BAER) Teams</u>. These teams include scientists, historians and other subject matter experts that identify potential emergency threats on federal lands, such as human life and safety, national forest property, critical natural resources, and critical pre-



historic and historic properties, and more. In addition, BAER Teams coordinate with other agencies, who assist businesses, homes and landowners preparing for rain events and potential flooding and debris flow in fire affected areas.

 The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is currently engaging in <u>emergency stabilization and rehabilitation (ESR)</u> planning following the Border 2 Fire to mitigate the potential impacts of the burned area, such as mud and debris flows, erosion, and other damages. Additionally, BLM assessed impacts of the Hughes Fire and no emergency stabilization or rehabilitation needs were identified.

TASK FORCE
HIGHLIGHTSTask Force Webpage Shows Top 5 Things to Know About California's Progress
on Wildfire Resilience: A new webpage showcases key progress made by
California to protect the state's diverse natural landscapes and communities

on Wildfire Resilience: A <u>new webpage</u> showcases key progress made by California to protect the state's diverse natural landscapes and communities from wildfire. This includes how historic investments have made real-world impacts, on-the-ground progress in California's wildlands, new tools that increase transparency and show progress, actions to enhance community protection, and new technology and expanded capacity to tackle wildfire. The webpage also includes a <u>more comprehensive list of State</u> <u>accomplishments</u>.

Registration is Open for Task Force Spring Regional Meeting: Hosted by the Marin Wildfire Prevention Authority and FireSafe Marin, the Task Force's next <u>Regional Meeting</u> will be held in San Rafael, CA on March 27. The evening of March 26 will feature a special speaker event sponsored by Climate and Wildfire Institute and Marin Water. Site tours will be offered on March 28.

Task Force Highlights from 2024: The Task Force released a summary of the 2024 Year in Review. Highlights include:

- Updated Interagency Treatment Dashboard: The <u>updated Dashboard</u> shows significant progress on resilience treatments across California with three years of data and treatments on 700,000 acres in 2023 and prescribed fire acres more than doubling between 2021 and 2023.
- CAL FIRE Fuels Treatment Effectiveness Dashboard: CAL FIRE's <u>dashboard</u> shows how on-the-ground projects are protecting communities and landscapes when wildfire strikes through Fuels Treatment Effectiveness Reports.
- New Monitoring, Reporting, & Assessment Webpage: This <u>centralized</u> online resource provides detailed information on California's various monitoring and assessment programs to understand the complementary relationship between these efforts.
- California Passes Proposition 4: The <u>approval of Prop 4</u> provides \$1.5 billion for wildfire resilience and is a major advancement for California to reach goals set in the Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan.
 Task Force Science Synthesis: On December 13, the Task Force hosted a <u>meeting</u> in Sacramento that <u>highlighted recent research</u> that is being used to guide California's efforts to respond to increasing wildfire risks in a changing climate.

STATE HIGHLIGHTS Governor Newsom Signs Executive Order to Further Improve Community Hardening and Wildfire Mitigation: On February 6, Governor Newsom signed an <u>executive order</u> to launch key initiatives to continue adapting to future catastrophic wildfires and strengthen community resilience to urban conflagration (large, destructive fires that spread beyond natural or artificial

barriers wherein structures themselves become the fuel that spreads fire). The executive order:
Directs the State Board of Forestry to accelerate its work to adopt regulations known as "Zone 0," which will require an ember-resistant

- regulations known as "Zone 0," which will require an ember-resistant zone within 5 feet of structures located in the highest fire severity zones in the state.
- Tasks the Office of the State Fire Marshal with releasing updated Fire Hazard Severity Zone maps for areas under local government responsibility, adding 1.4 million new acres of land into the two higher tiers of fire severity, which will update building and local planning requirements for these communities statewide.
- Requires CAL FIRE and Cal OES to work with local, federal and tribal partners on improvements to the Federal resource ordering system for wildfire response.

In Response to Executive Order, CAL FIRE Begins Releasing Updated Fire Hazard Severity Zone Maps: Reflecting intensifying wildfires and updated science, <u>new</u> <u>state maps</u> designate more than 2.3 million acres of local land in California as facing "high" or "very high" danger of wildfires. <u>Maps released on February</u> <u>10</u> apply only to inland Northern California — Butte, Colusa, El Dorado, Glenn, Lake, Lassen, Modoc, Nevada, Placer, Plumas, Shasta, Sierra, Siskiyou, Sutter, Tehama and Yuba counties. The other maps will be released over the next six weeks. Once an updated map is released, local officials have four months to incorporate the recommendations for the new hazard rating.

LAO Publishes Report on the Proposition 4 Spending Plan: The California Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) on February 12 <u>published its report on the</u> <u>Proposition 4 Spending Plan</u> as outlined in the 2025-2026 budget. The report provides an overview of the Governor's proposed multiyear spending plan, an overarching assessment of the proposal, and several recommendations for how the Legislature could refine the proposal to reflect its priorities and increase transparency.

CAL FIRE Receives Federal Investment for Resilience Treatments on Nonindustrial Private Forest Lands: On January 6, <u>CAL FIRE announced</u> that they had received \$5 million in <u>USDA Inflation Reduction Act funding</u> to support the <u>California Forest Improvement Program</u> (CFIP). CFIP will deliver technical assistance and direct cost share payments to support the implementation of forest resilience and climate mitigation practices across 2,458 acres of private non-industrial forest lands.

SNC-funded fuel treatments protected Butte County communities from Park Fire. The 2024 Park Fire burned over 450,000 acres and destroyed more than 700 structures. The Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) <u>supported a network of</u> <u>fuel breaks</u> constructed around Butte County communities that helped to prevent even more tragic results.

FEDERAL
HIGHLIGHTSSenator Padilla Introduced Bipartisan Bills to Improve Fire Mitigation and
Resiliency Efforts: On February 3, U.S. Senator Alex Padilla (D-Calif.) introduced
a package of three bipartisan bills to bolster fire resilience and proactive
mitigation efforts. The package includes:

- <u>Wildfire Emergency Act</u> Would reduce the threat of destructive wildfires through forest restoration, firefighter training, energy resilience retrofits, and wildfire-hardening home modifications in low-income communities. Specifically, the legislation would:
 - provide the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) with a pilot authority to leverage private financing to increase the pace and scale of forest restoration projects;
 - authorize funding for programs to expand the forest conservation and wildland firefighting workforce;
 - establish an energy resilience program at the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) to ensure that critical facilities remain active during wildfire disruptions, authorizing up to \$100 million for necessary retrofits;
 - expand an existing DOE weatherization grant program to provide up to \$13,000 to low-income households to make wildfirehardening retrofits;
 - expedite the placement of wildfire detection equipment on the ground, such as sensors or cameras, as well as the use of spacebased observation;
 - establish a prescribed fire-training center in the West and authorize grants to support training the next generation of foresters and firefighters; and
 - authorize up to \$50 million to support community grants of up to \$50,000 for locally focused land stewardship and conservation.
- <u>Fire-Safe Electrical Corridors Act</u> Would allow the USFS to approve the removal of hazardous trees near power lines on federal lands without requiring a timber sale, thereby easing the removal of hazardous trees, and reducing the risk of catastrophic wildfire. This would allow the USFS to provide standing permission for electrical utilities to cut and remove hazardous trees near power lines within existing rights-of-way without requiring a timber sale. Utilities would be required to return any proceeds to the USFS.
- <u>Disaster Mitigation and Tax Parity Act</u> Would further incentivize homeowners to proactively protect their homes from disasters by providing a tax exemption on payments from state-based programs. Specifically, the bill excludes qualified catastrophe mitigation payments made under a state-based catastrophe loss mitigation program from gross income calculations.

USFS Treatments Protected Mt. Wilson and Mitigated Impacts of the Los Angeles Fires: In the hours before the Eaton Fire approached Mt. Wilson, USFS and an array of State and county resources worked quickly to build on previously completed fuels projects and remove vegetation to create a buffer around Mt. Wilson. The combination of years of strategically placed fuels treatments and quick action ahead of the fire helped protect the communications tower on Mt. Wilson which played a critical role in coordination and emergency response. In another race against the fast-moving Eaton Fire, USFS Crew 41 worked through the night on January 7, ripping out brush behind homes and grabbing garden hoses to knock down spot fires. These efforts helped protect homes that otherwise may have been lost to the Eaton Fire.

Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Fuels Treatments Reduce Impacts of Southern California Fires: A previously built fire control line, maintained by BLM and Angeles National Forest, was effectively utilized to help suppress the Hughes Fire in Los Angeles County which ignited on January 22. Additionally, BLM rapidly implemented fuels treatments in the Otay Mountain area ahead of the Border 2 Fire, safeguarding sites such as the Customs and Border Protection communications facilities, the <u>Otay Mountain camera</u> part of the <u>ALERT</u> <u>California system</u>, and other public safety and commercial sites situated atop Otay Mountain. The camera played a crucial role in locating the origin of the fire.

New USDA California Climate Hub Website Provides Forestry Resource Repository for Land Managers: The USDA California Climate Hub released a <u>new webpage</u> that compiles datasets and decision-support tools to help land managers and natural resource professionals with assessing the conditions of a landscape for project planning. The list is not exhaustive of all resources but focuses on data and tools available to the public, with an emphasis on resources available within the state of California. The repository also contains a series of factsheets, produced by the USDA California Climate Hub, that offer a succinct overview of the California Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task Force's <u>Regional Resource Kits</u> and its constituent products.

Defense Department Partners with Other Federal Partners to Help Communities Recover from Wildfires: The U.S. Defense Department joined the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Energy, Interior and Homeland Security and the Environmental Protection Agency in <u>announcing a memorandum of</u> <u>agreement</u> on January 6, 2025 that will foster interagency coordination in helping communities recover after a wildfire. The memorandum, developed by the White House Wildfire Resilience Interagency Working Group, follows recommendations by the <u>Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management</u> <u>Commission</u>, which was created in 2021 to form federal policy recommendations related to wildfire prevention, suppression and recovery.

U.S. Forest Service Wraps Up Public Meetings on the Northwest Forest Plan and Amendment: The USDA Forest Service is concluding a <u>series of public meetings</u> across northern California, Oregon and Washington to discuss the proposed amendments to the <u>Northwest Forest Plan</u> (NWFP). These meetings will allow the public to learn about and comment on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) released in November 2024. The NWFP provides landscape scale direction for over 24 million acres, across 17 national forests and other federal land in western Washington and Oregon, and northwestern California.

PROGRESS THROUGH COLLABORATION

Healthy Eldorado Landscape Partnership Getting to Work with \$10 Million in Crystal Basin. Work is beginning on a portfolio of fuels reduction and recreation infrastructure improvements in the Crystal Basin area of the Eldorado National Forest. Back in 2023, CAL FIRE-Forest Health, SNC, and the USFS committed \$10 million to an inaugural pilot landscape grant to <u>Healthy Eldorado Landscape</u> <u>Partnership's (HELP) Crystal Basin Project</u>. The pilot grant seeks to align state and federal funding sources into one, larger grant and create efficiencies for funders and grantees alike. The story behind this unique collaboration is being told in <u>a video</u> produced by California State University, Sacramento also funded by CAL FIRE Forest Health through a grant to U.S. Forest Service's Shared Stewardship Program.

Survey Open for Landowners to Provide Input on Prescribed Burning: In

collaboration with the University of California Cooperative Extension, Pennsylvania State University is conducting a <u>survey</u> to better understand private landowner perspectives and potential intentions to use planned burning in California. The objectives of this project are to:

- evaluate private forest landowners' attitudes towards prescribed fire in California;
- identify barriers and opportunities for prescribed fire adoption in the state;
- develop tailored support strategies for California landowners;
- and assess the influence of policy and environmental factors on prescribed fire use in California.

Partnerships Lead to Long-Term Protection of the Lost Coast Redwoods: The Bureau of Land Management has acquired the Lost Coast Redwoods property

from Save the Redwoods League ensuring lasting protections of approximately 4,500 acres along eight miles of California coastline. Funded by the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund, Save the Redwoods League, and California's Wildlife Conservation Board and Coastal Conservancy, the acquisition includes a diverse ecosystem of old- and second-growth redwoods in northern Mendocino County and builds on decades of work that has now protected over 53 miles of the coastline.

LEGISLATION WATCH **AB 1 (Connolly) Residential property insurance: wildfire risk.** This bill would require the department, on or before January 1, 2030, and every 5 years thereafter, to consider whether or not to update its regulations to include additional building hardening measures for property-level mitigation efforts and communitywide wildfire mitigation programs. As part of this consideration, the bill would require the department to consult with specified agencies to identify additional building hardening measures to consider, as well as to develop and implement a public participation process during the evaluation.

ABX1 6 (Patterson) Forestry: timber operations: maintenance of timberlands for fuels reduction. Would authorize projects exclusively for noncommercial wildfire fuels reduction in timberland, paid for in part or in whole with public funds, to prepare a timber harvesting plan as an alternative to complying with CEQA, and would require these projects to be regulated as timber operations, as provided. This bill is similar to AB 2639 (Patterson, 2024).



AB 252 (Bains) Wildfire protection: Department of Forestry and Fire Protection: staffing. Existing law establishes the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, and requires the department to be responsible for, among other things, fire protection and prevention. This bill would provide that it is the intent of the Legislature to enact subsequent legislation relating to increasing year-round staffing levels at the department.

AB 261 (Quirk-Silva) Fire safety: fire hazard severity zones: State Fire Marshal.

This bill would, as applied to both state responsibility areas and lands that are not state responsibility areas, authorize the State Fire Marshal, in periods between the State Fire Marshal's review of areas of the state for recommendations regarding an area's fire hazard severity zone, to confer with entities, including, but not limited to, public agencies, tribes, nonprofit organizations, project applicants, and members of the public, on actions that may impact the degree of fire hazard in an area or the area's recommended fire hazard severity zone designation. The bill would authorize the State Fire Marshal to provide a written response to an entity on actions that may impact the degree of fire hazard and would require this written response to be posted on the State Fire Marshal's internet website.

AB 307 (Petrie-Norris) Bond Act of 2024: Department of Forestry and Fire Protection: fire camera mapping system. This bill would require, of the \$25,000,000 made available to CAL FIRE from the Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness, and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024, \$10,000,000 be allocated for purposes of the ALERTCalifornia fire camera mapping system.

AB 404 (Sanchez) California Environmental Quality Act: exemption: prescribed fire, reforestation, habitat restoration, thinning, or fuel reduction projects. Existing law, until January 1, 2028, except for the issuance of a permit or other permit approval, exempts from the requirements of CEQA prescribed fire, reforestation, habitat restoration, thinning, or fuel reduction projects, or related activities, undertaken, in whole or in part, on federal lands to reduce the risk of high-severity wildfire that have been reviewed under the federal National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 meeting certain requirements. Existing law requires a lead agency, if it determines that a project qualifies for the above exemption, to file a notice of exemption with the Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation and with the county clerk in the county in which the project will be located. This bill would extend the above exemption and requirements on the lead agency indefinitely. By extending the requirements on the lead agency, this bill would impose a state-mandated local program. This bill contains other related provisions and other existing laws.

SB 88 (Caballero) Air resources: carbon emissions: biomass. Would require CARB, on or before January 1, 2027, to finalize the standardized system and historic baseline of GHG emissions from California's natural fire regime reflecting conditions before modern fire suppression. The bill would require CARB, on or before January 1, 2028, to adopt a method of quantification or a lifecycle model for avoided carbon emissions from wildfire from the application



of prescribed fire to forest biomass resources and agricultural biomass resources, and to develop a carbon credit or offset protocol for biochar and other beneficial carbon-removal products that result from the avoidance of megafires and prescribed fire using existing methodologies.

SB 223 (Alvarado-Gil) The Wildfire Smoke and Health Outcomes Data Act.

Would require CA Dept. of Public Health (CDPH) in consultation with CAL FIRE and the Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task Force, to create, operate, and maintain a statewide integrated wildfire smoke and health data platform on or before July 1, 2028, that, among other things, would integrate wildfire smoke and health data from multiple databases. The purpose for the data platform would include providing adequate information to understand the negative health impacts on California's population caused by wildfire smoke and evaluating the effectiveness of investments in forest health and wildfire mitigation on health outcomes in California. This bill is a reprint of SB 945 (Alvarado-Gil, 2024).

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Gavin Newsom changes California fire laws after meeting Trump. Newsweek, February 7, 2025.

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> Being there: effectiveness of a 360-degree virtual tour for increasing understanding of forest treatments for fire hazard reduction in California, USA. Taylor, Alan H., et al. Fire Ecology 21.1 (2025): 2.

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FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES USFS Community Wildfire Defense Grants: <u>This program</u> assists at-risk communities and tribes with planning for and mitigating wildfire risks. Out of the up to \$200 million available, individual grants of up to \$250,000 can be used to develop and update community wildfire protection plans. Individual grants of up to \$10 million can be used for wildfire resilience projects that implement community wildfire protection plans. <u>Deadline is February 28, 2025</u>.

> **CAL FIRE Tribal Wildfire Resilience Grants:** Up to \$5 million are available for <u>Tribal</u> <u>Wildfire Resilience grants</u> to support California Native American tribes in managing ancestral lands, implementing and promoting Traditional Environmental Knowledges in wildfire resilience, and establishing wildfire safety for tribal communities. <u>Deadline is March 28, 2025.</u>

WCB Climate Adaptation and Resilience Program: <u>This program</u> funds projects that provide climate adaptation and resilience on California's natural and working lands. <u>Rolling application</u>.

The Headwaters Economics Community Planning Assistance for Wildfire: This <u>technical assistance program</u> provides support for communities to reduce wildfire risks through improved land-use planning, compelling communication, and applied research. <u>Rolling application.</u>



Wetlands and Mountain Meadows Restoration: <u>This program</u> provides funding for projects that restore or enhance wetlands and watershed ecosystems and provide co-benefits, consistent with the Natural and Working Lands Climate Smart Strategy and Pathways to 30x30. <u>Rolling Application.</u>

LOOKING AHEAD Task Force 2025 Meeting Dates: The Task Force has released its 2025 meeting dates.

- March 27-28: Regional Meeting Marin County
- June 6: Sacramento, 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.
- September 4-5: Regional Meeting TBD
- December 12: Sacramento, 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

February 18: CAL FIRE Webinar on New Toolkit for Wildfire Planning Guidance: CAL FIRE, in collaboration with the Community Wildfire Planning Center, Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network, and California Fire Safe Council, will host an introductory <u>webinar</u> from 3-5 p.m. that will focus on the brand new <u>California Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPP Toolkit</u>). The webinar will cover CWPP Toolkit contents, California requirements for future CWPPs, and the submittal process for CWPPs.

April 1-May 27: UCANR Forest Stewardship Workshop Series: This <u>workshop series</u> will help landowners develop plans to improve and protect their forestlands in an ecologically and economically sustainable manner. The workshops will address management objectives and planning, forest restoration, fuels reduction, project development, permitting, and cost-share opportunities. Participants will connect with other landowners and learn how to collect information to develop their own management plans.