

California's Fire Safe Councils

In Urgent Need of State Funding



Problem:

Western U.S. wildfires have garnered broad public and political attention in recent years due to the severity and expanse of the areas they have consumed, including thousands of homes burned and devastating damage to natural resources. **According to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF), over the past five years, wildfires in California have consumed over three million acres while annual carbon emissions from these fires were roughly equivalent to the emissions of 1.5 million cars each year.** In addition, CDF reports that in 2003 alone, over 6,000 homes and structures were destroyed and 23 fatalities . . . not forgetting the five firefighters who lost their lives last year. This will only increase over the next decade as California's population continues to increase within the wildland urban interface.

In addition, increasing concerns about the impacts of climate change and its effect on water supplies and forest health have led to concerns that wildfires will intensify and last longer throughout the spring and summer months. While wildfire has become a significant threat to California's environmental health, the state has devoted very little to fire prevention programs, instead forced to focus primarily on fire suppression. **It is time for California to create a stable funding source dedicated to proactive fire prevention measures to help supplement existing fire fighting methods and limit carbon emissions.**

Background:

The California Fire Safe Council (Council) and a statewide network of over 150 local fire safe councils (see attached map) are the state's leading community-based resources for wildfire preparedness. The Council, with support at the local level, seeks to reduce the stress on firefighting resources by encouraging neighbors to take responsibility for making communities safer and able to withstand the effects of wildfires.

The Council is funded primarily by federal funds and currently receives no state funding. In fact, 98% percent of the Council's funding comes from a federal grant program associated with the National Fire Plan while its remaining funds come from private grants. The Council has averaged nearly \$9 million per year in funding (see attached chart) to implement a multi-agency grant process where local councils help develop and implement hazard mitigation projects, wildfire safety planning and educational programs. The well-established Fire Safe California Grants Clearinghouse is the main entity for administering competitive grants to local councils with wildfire safety projects.

Unfortunately, federal funds have been woefully inadequate and unstable to meet the state's increasing needs. The current funding is well below the Council's projected need of \$26 million per year for an effective and growing program. Moreover, the Council's efforts to obtain future federal funds will be challenging as others compete for limited federal dollars. This dilemma, coupled with the state's increasing wildfire risk, will create untenable efforts to protect public safety, not to mention the impacts to local fire safe councils and the state's ongoing efforts to address climate change.

Solution:

The state should help supplement federal funding for this important fire prevention program using appropriate oversight criteria. **The proposed budget request would seek an appropriation of nearly \$26 million for fiscal year 2007-08 to be distributed as follows:**

1.	Fire Safe Council Prevention and Fuel Reduction Projects	\$16,000,000
2.	California Fire Safe Council and Clearinghouse	\$2,300,000
3.	Local Fire Safe Council Coordinators and Operating Costs	\$3,600,000
4.	Fire Safe Educational Programs	\$1,000,000
5.	CDF Community Fire Prevention Specialists	<u>\$2,800,000</u>
	Total =	\$25,700,000

**National Fire Plan - Community Assistance Grants
California Fire Safe Council Perspective
Winners and Losers (2001-2006)**

2001	Agency	Grant Program	Requests		Funded		Non-Funded	
			#	\$(mm)	#	\$(mm)	#	\$(mm)
	USFS	Economic Action	96	\$6.0	57	\$2.8	39	\$3.2
		Wildland Urban Interface (CDF)	29	\$1.4	29	\$1.4		
	BLM	Community Assistance	151	\$6.2	101	\$4.1	50	\$2.1
		Community Protection (CDF)	12	\$1.4	9	\$0.4	3	\$1.0
		FY-2001 Totals ----->	288	\$15.0	196	\$8.7	92	\$6.3
					68%	58%	32%	42%

2002	Agency	Grant Program	Requests		Funded		Non-Funded	
			#	\$(mm)	#	\$(mm)	#	\$(mm)
	USFS	Economic Action	78	\$3.4	52	\$1.7	26	\$1.7
		Community Protection	54	\$5.5	20	\$1.7	34	\$3.8
		Wildland Urban Interface (CDF)	16	\$0.9	16	\$0.9		
	BLM	Community Assistance	171	\$8.3	91	\$3.8	80	\$4.5
		Community Protection (CDF)	27	\$1.5	27	\$1.5		
		FY-2002 Totals ----->	346	\$19.6	206	\$9.6	140	\$10.0
					60%	49%	40%	51%

2003	Agency	Grant Program	Requests		Funded		Non-Funded	
			#	\$(mm)	#	\$(mm)	#	\$(mm)
	USFS	Economic Action	57	\$1.7	27	\$1.0	30	\$0.7
		Community Protection	91	\$8.9	28	\$1.7	63	\$7.2
		Wildland Urban Interface (CDF)	14	\$0.7	14	\$0.7		
	BLM	Community Assistance	83	\$4.7	75	\$3.5	8	\$1.2
		Community Protection (CDF)	20	\$1.2	20	\$1.2		
		FY-2003 Totals ----->	265	\$17.2	164	\$8.1	101	\$9.1
					62%	47%	38%	53%

2004	Agency	Grant Program	Requests		Funded		Non-Funded	
			#	\$(mm)	#	\$(mm)	#	\$(mm)
	USFS	CFSC Clearinghouse	124	\$6.5	27	\$2.0	97	\$4.5
		Community Protection	73	\$18.0	26	\$2.2	47	\$15.8
		Southern California "Earmark"	23	\$1.3	23	\$1.3		
	BLM	Wildland Urban Interface (CDF)	180	\$3.8	44	\$2.6	136	\$1.2
		Community Assistance	11	\$0.9	11	\$0.9		
		Community Protection (CDF)						
		FY-2004 Totals ----->	411	\$30.5	131	\$9.0	280	\$21.5
					32%	30%	68%	70%

2005	Agency	Grant Program	Requests		Funded		Non-Funded	
			#	\$(mm)	#	\$(mm)	#	\$(mm)
	USFS	CFSC Clearinghouse	153	\$14.3	29	\$2.5	124	\$11.8
		Community Protection	17	\$4.3	17	\$4.3		
		Southern California "Earmark"	21	\$1.1	21	\$1.1		
	BLM	Wildland Urban Interface (CDF)	186	\$13.0	27	\$1.8	159	\$11.2
		Community Assistance	10	\$0.8	8	\$0.4	2	\$0.4
		Community Protection (CDF)						
		FY-2005 Totals ----->	387	\$33.5	102	\$10.1	285	\$22.6
					26%	30%	74%	70%

2006	Agency	Grant Program	Requests		Funded		Non-Funded	
			#	\$(mm)	#	\$(mm)	#	\$(mm)
	USFS	CFSC Clearinghouse	50	\$5.0	10	\$1.2	40	\$3.8
		Community Protection	72	\$9.5	51	\$3.9	21	\$5.6
		State Fire Assist to CFSC's (Sen. Feinstein)	21	\$2.2	6	\$0.3	15	\$1.9
		Southern California "Earmark"						
	BLM	Wildland Urban Interface (CDF)	142	\$16.8	36	\$2.3	106	\$14.5
		Community Assistance						
		Community Protection (CDF)						
		FY-2006 Totals ----->	285	\$33.5	103	\$7.7	182	\$25.8
					36%	23%	64%	77%

6 Year Average	Agency	Grant Program	Requests		Funded		Non-Funded	
			#	\$(mm)	#	\$(mm)	#	\$(mm)
		NFP 2001-2006 6 Year Average ----->	330	\$24.9	150	\$8.9	180	\$16.0
					45%	36%	55%	64%

Proposed Bill Language – California Fire Safe Councils

Public Resources Code

4740. The Legislature hereby finds and declares:

(a) The department has extensive technical expertise in wildland fire prevention and vegetation management on forest, range, and watershed lands. When appropriately applied, this expertise can have significant public resource benefits by decreasing wildland fire hazards, increasing rangeland production, improving watershed yields, and increasing wildlife habitat.

(b) Because of limited fiscal resources, local government needs assistance in preventing future problems resulting from inadequate fire prevention planning and vegetation management.

(c) The state's taxpayers will benefit if existing state expertise is made available to local governments, thereby eliminating the need for duplicating such services at the local level.

4741. In accordance with policies established by the board, the department shall assist local governments in preventing future wildland fire and vegetation management problems by making its wildland fire prevention and vegetation management expertise available to local governments to the extent possible within the department's budgetary limitations. Department recommendations shall be advisory in nature and local governments shall not be required to follow such recommendations.

Nothing in this section shall alter the existing obligations of any local government or affect the existing liability of any local government.

Add Section 4742 and 4743 to the Public Resources Code as follows:

4742. The Legislature hereby finds and declares all of the following:

- a) California wildfires have garnered broad public attention due to the severity and expanse of the areas they have consumed.
- b) The state has a compelling interest in reducing the threats of wildfires, including threats to lives, property and natural resources.
- c) California's increasing population and the threat of catastrophic wildfire will affect vast acreage of natural forestland, wildland urban interface, homes and public safety.
- d) Wildfire threats also present a challenge for addressing climate change reduction efforts as any potential benefit of forests to reduce carbon emissions will be lost as a result of wildfires.
- e) Federal funds have been the primary funding source for funding the California

- Fire Safe Council, one of the state's leading community-based wildfire preparedness efforts.
- f) The California Fire Safe Council includes a statewide network of local fire safe councils who help develop and implement hazard mitigation projects, wildfire safety planning and educational programs.
 - g) Although federal funds have been the sole funding source for the California Fire Safe Council, these funds are woefully inadequate and unstable to meet the state's increasing needs.
 - h) Because wildfire has become a significant threat to California's environmental health and public safety, more efforts are needed at the state and local level to address fire prevention and reduction.

4743. It is the intent of the Legislature to create the establishment of a cost share, community-based wildfire threat reduction and prevention program administered by the California Fire Safe Council, in conjunction with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, to assist in the implementation of the recommended wildfire threat reduction programs as follows:

- a) Fire Safe Council Prevention and Fuel Reduction Projects
- b) California Fire Safe Council and Clearinghouse
- c) Fire Safe Council Coordinators and Operating Costs
- d) Fire Safe Educational Programs
- e) CDF Community Fire Prevention Specialists