



Support Form for SB 675 (Limón): Prescribed Grazing for Wildfire Resilience

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SB-675 Prescribed grazing: local assistance grant program: Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task Force. (2023-2024)

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AMENDED IN SENATE MAY 18, 2023

AMENDED IN SENATE APRIL 12, 2023

AMENDED IN SENATE MARCH 30, 2023

CALIFORNIA LEGISLATURE— 2023–2024 REGULAR SESSION

SENATE BILL

NO. 675

Introduced by Senator Limón

February 16, 2023

An act to amend Sections 4124 and 4124.5 of, and to add Sections 741.5, 4004.5, 4124.2, and 4771.6 to, the Public Resources Code, relating to fire prevention.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

SB 675, as amended, Limón. Prescribed grazing: local assistance grant program: Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task Force.

Existing law requires the State Board of Forestry and Fire Protection to appoint a Range Management Advisory Committee and to consult with the advisory committee on rangeland resource issues under consideration by the board.

The bill would require, on or before July 1, 2024, the advisory committee, in consultation with specified entities, to develop guidance for local or regional prescribed grazing plans, as provided. The bill would require the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (department) and the Department of Conservation to consider and incorporate, where appropriate, this guidance in specified grant programs, as provided.

Existing law requires the department to establish a local assistance grant program for eligible fire prevention and home hardening education activities in the state, including public education outreach activities, as provided. Existing law, until January 1, 2024, authorizes the Director of Forestry and Fire Protection to authorize advance payments from a local assistance grant award, as provided. Existing law makes funding for this program subject to an appropriation by the Legislature.

This bill would expand the definition of fire prevention activities to include prescribed grazing, defined as the lawful application of grazing by a specific kind of livestock at a determined season, duration, and intensity to accomplish defined vegetation or conservation goals, including reducing the risk of wildfire by reducing fuel loads, controlling undesirable or invasive plants, and promoting biodiversity and habitat for special status species. The bill would expand allowable public education outreach activities to include training on ~~livestock management~~ and community-supported prescribed grazing. The bill would also indefinitely extend the director's authority to issue advanced payments and authorize these payments to cover the cost of supplies or infrastructure, including, but not limited to, fencing and watering improvements for prescribed grazing, as provided. The bill would also require the department, in consultation with the advisory committee, to increase opportunities and outreach for projects on state and private land that include prescribed grazing in the local assistance grant program.

Existing law requires the Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task Force, established by former Governor Edmund G. Brown Jr., to develop a comprehensive implementation strategy to track and ensure the achievement of the goals and key actions identified in the state's "Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan," as provided. Existing law requires, on or before January 1, 2026, and every 5 years thereafter, the task force to update the action plan.

This bill would require the task force, on or before June 30, 2025, in consultation with the advisory committee, to develop a strategic action plan to expand the use of prescribed grazing, as provided. The bill would require the task force to consider incorporating prescribed grazing in the January 1, 2026, update to the "Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan."

Vote: majority Appropriation: no Fiscal Committee: yes Local Program: no

THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA DO ENACT AS FOLLOWS:

SECTION 1. Section 741.5 is added to the Public Resources Code, to read:

741.5. (a) On or before July 1, 2024, the Range Management Advisory Committee, established pursuant to Section 741, in consultation with the Department of Fish and Wildlife and the University of California Cooperative Extension Livestock and Natural Resources Advisors and Specialists, shall develop guidance for local or regional prescribed grazing plans. The guidance shall include all of the following:

- (1) Best practices for identifying and selecting priority areas for prescribed grazing.
- (2) Best practices for developing project plans and metrics for applying, monitoring, and evaluating the effectiveness and impacts of prescribed grazing.
- (3) Best practices for using prescribed grazing to increase the diversity and abundance of native species and decrease the abundance of invasive species, including through adaptive management, exclusion areas, wildlife-friendly fencing, and monitoring.
- (4) Recommendations for securing sufficient land and resources, including forage, needed to pasture livestock when not engaged in a prescribed grazing project.
- (5) Best practices for building community support and engaging with public and private landowners to improve the implementation and outcomes of a prescribed grazing plan.
- (6) Methods to identify opportunities to house and maintain shared grazing infrastructure.
- (7) Best practices to use prescribed grazing to support and enhance prescribed burns and other vegetation management projects.
- (8) Other recommendations to increase the pace and scale of prescribed grazing at the local or regional levels, where appropriate.

(b) The department shall consider and incorporate, where appropriate, the guidance developed pursuant to subdivision (a) in the grant program established pursuant to Section 4124.5.

(c) The Department of Conservation shall consider and incorporate, where appropriate, the guidance developed pursuant to subdivision (a) in the grant program established pursuant to Section 4208.1.

SEC. 2. Section 4004.5 is added to the Public Resources Code, to read:

4004.5. "Prescribed grazing" means the lawful application of grazing by a specific kind of livestock at a determined season, duration, and intensity to accomplish defined vegetation or conservation goals, including reducing the risk of wildfire by reducing fuel loads, controlling undesirable or invasive plants, and promoting biodiversity and habitat for special status species. Prescribed grazing may involve any or multiple kinds of livestock.

SEC. 3. Section 4124 of the Public Resources Code is amended to read:

4124. For the purposes of this article, "fire prevention activities" means those lawful activities that reduce the risk of wildfire in California, including, but not limited to, mechanical vegetation management, prescribed grazing, prescribed burns, creation of defensible space, and retrofitting of structures to increase fire resistance.

SEC. 4. Section 4124.2 is added to the Public Resources Code, to read:

4124.2. The department, in consultation with the board's Range Management Advisory Committee, established pursuant to Section 741, shall increase opportunities and outreach for projects on state and private land that include prescribed grazing in the local assistance grant program.

SEC. 5. Section 4124.5 of the Public Resources Code is amended to read:

4124.5. (a) The department shall establish a local assistance grant program for fire prevention and home hardening education activities in California. Groups eligible for grants shall include, but are not limited to, local agencies, resource conservation districts, fire safe councils, the California Conservation Corps, certified community conservation corps as defined in Section 14507.5, University of California Cooperative Extension, the Board of Commissioners under California Volunteers described in Section 8411 of the Government Code, Native American tribes, and qualified nonprofit organizations. The department may establish a cost-share requirement for one or more categories of projects.

(b) (1) The local assistance grant program shall establish a robust year-round fire prevention effort in and near fire threatened communities that focuses on increasing the protection of people, structures, and communities. To the maximum extent practicable, the grants shall be designed to be durable and adaptively managed so that while improving resiliency to wildfire, the projects, when on forest land, retain a mixture of species and sizes of trees to protect habitat values. The department shall prioritize, to the extent feasible, projects that are multiyear efforts.

(2) For purposes of this subdivision, "fire threatened communities" means those communities in high and very high fire hazard severity zones, identified by the director pursuant to Section 51178 of the Government Code, or Article 9 (commencing with Section 4201) of this code, or on the "Fire Risk Reduction Community" list maintained by the board pursuant to Section 4290.1.

(c) Eligible activities shall include, but not be limited to, all of the following:

- (1) Development and implementation of public education and outreach programs. Programs may include technical assistance, workforce recruitment and training, and equipment purchases.
- (2) Fire prevention activities as defined in Section 4124.
- (3) Projects to improve compliance with defensible space requirements as required by Section 4291 through increased inspections, assessments, and assistance for low-income residents.
- (4) Technical assistance to local agencies to improve fire prevention and reduce fire hazards.
- (5) Creation of additional "Firewise USA" communities in the state or other community planning or certification programs deemed as appropriate by the department.
- (6) Projects to improve public safety, including, but not limited to, access to emergency equipment and improvements to public evacuation routes.
- (7) Vegetation management along roadways and driveways to reduce fire risk. Where appropriate, the Department of Transportation shall be consulted if state infrastructure will be affected. Those projects shall remain consistent with paragraph (1) of subdivision (b).
- (8) Public education outreach regarding making homes and communities more wildfire resilient, including training on ~~defensible space~~, ~~livestock management~~, ~~space~~ and community-supported prescribed grazing.
- (9) Projects to reduce the flammability of structures and communities to prevent their ignition from wind-driven embers.
- (10) Development of a risk reduction checklist for communities that includes defensible space criteria, structural vulnerability potential, and personal evacuation plans.

(d) The department may consider the fire risk of an area, the geographic balance of projects, and whether the project is complementary to other fire prevention or forest health activities when awarding local assistance grants.

(e) (1) The director may authorize advance payments from a grant awarded pursuant to this section. The advance payment shall not exceed 25 percent of the total grant award. The director may authorize a greater amount, not to exceed 50 percent of either the total grant award or the cost of equipment, supplies, or infrastructure, including, but not limited to, fencing and watering improvements for prescribed grazing, whichever amount is less, for the purpose of purchasing necessary equipment, supplies, or infrastructure.

(2) The grantee shall expend the funds from the advance payment within 6 months of receipt, unless the department waives this requirement.

(3) The grantee shall file an accountability report with the department four months from the date of receiving the funds and every four months thereafter.

(f) Until July 1, 2025, the department may authorize advance payments on a grant awarded under this section in accordance with subdivision (d) of Section 11019.1 of the Government Code.

(g) The department may expand or amend an existing grant program to meet the requirements of this section.

(h) Funding for the local assistance grant program created pursuant to this section shall be made upon appropriation by the Legislature.

SEC. 6. Section 4771.6 is added to the Public Resources Code, to read:

4771.6. (a) On or before June 30, 2025, the task force, in consultation with the Range Management Advisory Committee of the State Board of Forestry and Fire Protection, established pursuant to Section 741, shall develop a strategic action plan to expand the use of prescribed grazing to support the state's efforts to increase the pace and scale of wildfire and forest resilience activities and strengthen the protection of communities and reduce their fire risk.

(b) The plan shall include a focus on reducing wildfire risk in and near "fire threatened communities," as that term is defined in paragraph (2) of subdivision (b) of Section 4124.5.

(c) The strategic action plan shall include a component on monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of prescribed grazing on reducing wildfire risk, including near communities, and the impacts of prescribed grazing on forest and wildland health, promoting the diversity and abundance of native species, and decreasing the abundance of invasive species.

(d) The task force shall consider incorporating prescribed grazing in the January 1, 2026, update to the state's "Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan."