

AB 350 (Wieckowski and Bigelow)

Forest Fire Prevention Act

EXISTING LAW

In response to the devastating wildfires that swept across Southern California in 2003, the legislature created the Forest Fire Prevention Exemption (FFPE) to the Timber Harvest Plan (THP) in order to incentivize landowners to engage in forest thinning projects intended to reduce the threat of wildfire and to lessen the intensity of wildfires.

Specifically, current law allows for trees less than 18 inches in stump diameter to be cleared and in special circumstances trees less than 24 inches in stump diameter to be cleared, without forcing the landowner to spend upwards of \$40,000 to file a THP. The pilot exemption was renewed twice by the legislature and made permanent last year without any concern expressed by the public and not a single “no” vote.

PROBLEM

Unfortunately over the last 10 years the program has not realized the legislative intent of achieving adequate fire thinning in the state. Since the law’s passage thinning on private forest lands has dropped from 25,000 acres to less than 5,000 acres in 2008 and an average of only 800 acres have been thinned annually.

According to the U.S. Forest Service, 550,000 acres of private timberland is over-stocked and in need of thinning. Given the reality that 1/3 of the state is forestland; California cannot ignore this threat for economic and environmental reasons. From 2005-2011, 832,080 acres of California forestland were burned in wildfires, costing the state over \$1.2 billion in fire suppression costs. The total greenhouse gas emissions (CO2 equivalent) from all forest fires from 2001-2008 is 142 million; the same emissions as 30 million cars driving for 1 year. In addition to the increasing burden on California taxpayers and the massive climate change impacts, inadequate forest thinning and the resulting forest fires destroy wildlife habitat, wildlife, pollute our air, and water.

SOLUTION

The reason that the FFPE has been underutilized over the past 10 years is that the 18 and 24-inch stump diameter limits in existing law do not enable a private landowner to engage in fire thinning projects that are economically feasible. AB 350 would raise the diameter of a tree that qualifies under the FFPE to 28 inches in most instances, and 34 inches where it is necessary to achieve the State’s fuel reduction goals.

STATUS

- Introduced February 13th, 2013

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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