
**SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY, UTILITIES AND
COMMUNICATIONS**
Senator Ben Hueso, Chair
2021 - 2022 Regular

Bill No: SB 694 **Hearing Date:** 4/19/2021
Author: Bradford
Version: 2/19/2021 Introduced
Urgency: No **Fiscal:** Yes
Consultant: Nidia Bautista

SUBJECT: Fire prevention: electrical corporations: wildfire mitigation plans: workforce diversity

DIGEST: This bill requires an electrical corporation's wildfire mitigation plan to include a description of how the electrical corporation will develop sufficient numbers of experienced personnel necessary to complete the work described in the plan, as provided.

ANALYSIS:

Existing law:

- 1) Establishes the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC), which has regulatory authority over public utilities, including electrical corporations. (California Constitution Article XII, §§3 and 4)
- 2) Requires each electrical corporation to annually prepare and submit a wildfire mitigation plan to the CPUC for review and approval, as specified. Requires an electrical corporation's wildfire mitigation plan to include specified components. (Public Utilities Code §8386)
- 3) Establishes the California Conservation Corps (CCC) to train young men and women to engage in projects that include, but are not limited to, preserving, maintaining, and enhancing environmentally important lands and waters, accomplish useful and needed public works projects in both urban and rural areas, and assist in fire prevention and suppression. (Public Resources Code §14000 et seq.)
- 4) Establishes the Community Conservation Corps, commonly known as the local conservation corps, to mean nonprofit public benefit corporation or an agency operated by a city, county, or city and county, and is certified by the CCC as meeting specified criteria. (Public Resources Code §14507.5)

This bill requires an electrical corporation's wildfire mitigation plan to include a description of how the electrical corporation will develop sufficient numbers of experienced personnel necessary to complete the work described in the plan, including:

- 1) The extent to which the electrical corporation is seeking to develop as part of its workforce current and former members of CCC crews;
- 2) Current and former crew members of community conservation corps, as defined in Public Resources Code §14507.5; and
- 3) Formerly incarcerated conservation crew members.

Background

Wildfire Mitigation Plan (WMP). As a result of SB 1028 (Hill, Chapter 598, Statutes of 2016), and further expanded by SB 901 (Dodd, Chapter 626, Statutes of 2018) and AB 1054 (Holden, Chapter 79, Statutes of 2019), electric investor-owned utilities (IOUs) are required to file a WMP with guidance by the CPUC, specifically the Wildfire Safety Division (WSD). The CPUC also reviews and determines whether to approve these plans and ensures compliance with guidance and statute. The electric IOUs' WMPs detail, describe and summarize electric IOU responsibilities, actions, and resources to mitigate wildfires. These actions include plans to harden their system to prevent wildfire ignitions caused by utility infrastructure, such as widespread electric line replacement with covered conductors designed to lower wildfire ignition, pole replacement, and other measures and actions. The plans also include information regarding the electric IOUs' efforts to conduct extensive vegetation management to reduce the risk of tree branches, grasses, and other vegetation from coming into contact with utility infrastructure. Electric utility employees conduct some of the wildfire mitigation work. However, electric utilities also contract with third parties for much of the work. In response to recent catastrophic and deadly fires caused by utility infrastructure, the state has imposed additional requirements on electric utilities to reduce their wildfire risks. The aggressive efforts to mitigate more of their infrastructure has at times also challenged the existing available workforce supply to conduct these activities.

CCC, local conservation corps. The CCC was established in 1976 by then-Governor Jerry Brown who modeled the CCC after the original Civilian Conservation Corps of the 1930s established by then-President of the United States Franklin Roosevelt which helped put mostly men to work during the Great Depression. The CCC is a department within the California Natural Resources Agency and is the oldest conservation corps in the nation. The program provides

young men and women, ages 18-25 years old, a year of paid service to the State of California. CCC members come from across the state, work on environmental projects, and respond to natural and manmade disasters. The CCC enrolls, roughly, 3,000 members each year, gaining skills and experience with the intent of leading to meaningful careers. The CCC also annually certifies local conservation corps, pursuant to Public Resources Code §14507.5, by ensuring the local conservation corps meets statutory criteria defining a community conservation corps and, when applicable, specified grant funding criteria. The local conservation corps can be nonprofit public benefit corporations or an agency operated by a city, county, or city and county. There are 14 local conservation corps currently certified by the CCC working in regions across the state, including throughout Southern California, the Bay Area, and many areas of the Central Valley.

Comments

This bill notes the intent of the Legislature to expand opportunities for meaningful employment in electrical grid modernization, vegetation management, and wildland firefighting. This bill requires electric IOUs to include additional information in their wildfire mitigation plans about how the utility and its contractors are developing sufficient workforce for the wildfire mitigation work. This bill specifically requires information regarding the efforts to develop as part of the workforce current and former members of the CCC and local conservation corps, including formerly incarcerated members. The author expresses his desire to address the shortages in existing electric utility wildfire mitigation workforce by providing opportunities for current and former members of the CCC and local conservation corps who have developed skills that can help fill the needs of the electric utilities. Some of the state's largest electric utilities have noted that labor shortages for wildfire mitigation work have been a challenge, including Pacific Gas & Electric testifying at a hearing of the Senate Energy, Utilities, and Communications Committee. Both the CCC and the local conservation corps acquire skills that could provide a potential pool of candidates to help utilities address wildfire risks, including wildland fire suppression and vegetation management, among others.

Related/Prior Legislation

SB 1448 (Bradford, 2020) would have required an electrical corporation's wildfire mitigation plan to include a description of how the electrical corporation will develop sufficient numbers of experienced personnel necessary to complete the work described in the plan, as provided. The bill was held in the Assembly Committee on Utilities and Energy.

SB 247 (Dodd, Chapter 406, Statutes of 2019) made several changes related to the vegetation management requirements of electrical corporations, including: specifying qualifications and prevailing wages for line clearance tree trimmers, and other requirements.

AB 1054 (Holden, Chapter 79, Statutes of 2019) shifted the responsibility for review of wildfire mitigation plans from the CPUC to the WSD of the CPUC (temporarily located there) and made modifications to the review process, among other provisions.

AB 111 (Committee on Budget, Chapter 81, Statutes of 2019) required, by January 1, 2020, the CPUC to establish the WSD within the CPUC and requires all functions of the WSD to be transferred to Office of Energy Infrastructure Safety, effective July 1, 2021.

SB 901 (Dodd, Chapter 626, Statutes of 2018) established the requirement that the wildfire mitigation plans of each electrical corporation meet a number of specified requirements, among other provisions.

SB 1028 (Hill, Chapter 598, Statutes of 2016) required electric IOUs to file annual wildfire mitigation plans and requires the CPUC to review and comment on those plans. The bill also required POU and electrical cooperatives to determine their risk of catastrophic wildfire that can be caused by their electric lines and equipment and, if a risk exists, submit wildfire mitigation plans to their governing board for its approval.

FISCAL EFFECT: Appropriation: No Fiscal Com.: Yes Local: Yes

SUPPORT:

None received

OPPOSITION:

None received

ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT: According to the author:

California's electric utilities are investing substantially in wildfire mitigation. The hardworking individuals doing this work are making the State safer, but the Wildfire Safety Division and the Wildfire Safety Advisory Board have found we just do not have enough of them. SB 694

helps to equitably resolve that workforce shortfall by requiring utilities to actually plan for workforce development in this area. This includes considering as a potential part of that workforce both state and local conservation camp crew members, as well as formerly incarcerated conservation crew members, given the directly-relevant experience of each group to wildfire mitigation.

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