

Date of Hearing: June 25, 2019

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Jose Medina, Chair

SB 462 (Stern) – As Amended June 13, 2019

[Note: This bill is doubled referred to the Assembly Committee on Natural Resources and will be heard by that Committee as it relates to issues under its jurisdiction.]

SENATE VOTE: 38-0

SUBJECT: Community colleges: Urban and Rural Forest and Woodlands Restoration and Fire Resiliency Workforce Program

SUMMARY: Requires the Chancellor's Office of the California Community Colleges (CCC), working in collaboration with the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges (ASCCC), to develop a forest and woodlands restoration workforce model curriculum and vocational programs to be offered by community college districts commencing on or before July 31, 2021. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires the CCC Chancellor's Office (CCCCO), working in collaboration with the ASCCC, to develop a forest and woodlands restoration workforce model curriculum and related vocational programs to be offered by community college districts commencing on or before July 31, 2021.
- 2) Requires the model curriculum to reflect regional needs, and to be developed in consultation with experts from the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, University of California Extension, and nonprofit organizations with a demonstrated expertise in forest and woodland restoration and fire management.
- 3) Requires the CCCCCO to allocate funds appropriated as specified, in the Budget Act or another statute to community college districts that offer coursework in accordance with the model curriculum developed pursuant to this bill. The funds allocated to these community college districts will be used for costs of implementing this article, including, but not necessarily limited to, costs of participation in vocational programs related to coursework offered in accordance with the model curriculum.
- 4) Requires the final contents of the model curriculum be determined solely by the ASCCC, which may rely upon its internal course identification and numbering system. To the extent practicable and feasible, the model curriculum and the related vocational programs shall accomplish all of the following:
 - a) Provide professional training in implementing prescribed fire projects, including the knowledge and skills necessary to plan and implement broad-scale surface and ladder fuel treatments within the wildland urban interface, wildlands, and urbanized areas, where appropriate;
 - b) Include, but not necessarily be limited to, a focus on the ecological concerns, economics, and practices necessary to improve community safety and forest resilience;

- c) Train students in the retrofitting of houses, including the use of fire-resistant materials and the maintenance of defensible space measures required by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection or local fire agencies;
 - d) Train students in urban forestry consistent with the California Urban Forestry Act of 1978 (Chapter 2 (commencing with Section 4799.06) of Part 2.5 of Division 4 of the Public Resources Code); and,
 - e) Train students in policies or guidance related to the management of vegetation near utility infrastructure and relevant portions of electric utility wildfire mitigation plans.
- 5) States the intent of the Legislature that certified graduates from the curriculum developed pursuant to this article shall be able to matriculate into the prescribed fire teams of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection or into work with other compatible state and federal forest restoration efforts and other private professional restoration businesses and related apprenticeship programs.
- 6) Allows the California Fire Science Consortium, a part of the Joint Fire Science Program, to authorize its representatives from the University of California and the California State University (CSU) to provide fire advisors, who may participate in community workshops on fire and forest ecology, ecosystem function, live prescribed fire trainings, tools and equipment operations and maintenance, burn planning, smoke management permitting, worker safety, grant writing support, and natural resource restoration business practices.
- 7) Allows the fire advisors from the California Fire Science Consortium to provide information on defensible space, the retrofitting of homes, the promotion of resilience in ecosystems, and the public safety components of making communities more resistant to wildfires. The fire advisors may also provide information to public agencies, and provide input into the appropriate land and resource management plans of those agencies.
- 8) Requires the CCCCCO, working in collaboration with the California Fire Science Consortium, to provide community college districts interested in offering the forest and woodland restoration workforce course with information about fire advisors from the consortium who are qualified, willing, and available to be course instructors or to consult with those instructors.
- 9) Makes the following definitions:
- a) “Chancellor’s office” refers to the Chancellor’s Office of the California Community Colleges;
 - b) “Resilience” refers to the quality of an ecosystem or landscape to maintain its key features after a disturbance event, specifically homes, communities, or ecosystems and that can accept ecosystem-appropriate fire and its beneficial effects without significant change in the nature or component part of the system and retain the vegetation structure, biodiversity, composition, spatial arrangement, and natural processes; and,
 - c) “Restoration” refers to activities at homes, at communities, and across landscapes that establish conditions for improved resilience against wildfires.

10) States the following intent of the Legislature:

- a) That certified graduates from the curriculum developed pursuant to this article shall be able to matriculate into the prescribed fire teams of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection or into work with other compatible state and federal forest restoration efforts and other private professional restoration businesses and related apprenticeship programs;
- b) That more communities in California shall become resilient communities so that they can withstand a fire event without loss of life or property; and,
- c) That homes should be retrofitted to reduce the risk of fire and should have regular defensible space inspections. Communities and forest and woodlands landscapes should have ongoing efforts to manage the vegetation that can create high severity wildfires while remaining able to accept low intensity fires designed to restore historic ecosystem function.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Establishes the CCCs, a postsecondary education system consisting of community college districts and the Board of Governors of the CCCs. (Education Code (EDC) Section 70900)
- 2) Charges the Board of Governors with providing leadership and direction to community college districts and performing various functions, including ensuring the right of Academic Senates to assume primary responsibility for making recommendations in the areas of curriculum and academic standards and approving all educational programs offered by community college districts. (EDC Section 70901)
- 3) Requires the governing board of a community college district, prior to establishing a new vocational or occupational training program, to conduct a job market study of the labor market area, and determine whether or not the results justify the proposed vocational education program. (EDC Section 78015)
- 4) Requires the governing board of a community college district to review its vocational or occupational training programs every two years to ensure they meet labor market demands. (EDC Section 78016)
- 5) Establishes the Strong Workforce Program as a K-14 state education, economic, and workforce development initiative for the purpose of expanding the availability of high-quality, industry-valued career technical education and workforce development courses, programs, pathways, credentials, certificates, and degrees. (EDC Section 88820, et seq.)

FISCAL EFFECT: According to the Senate Appropriations Committee, this bill will result in unknown but potentially significant cost pressure for community colleges to implement the model curriculum and offer new courses and programs that integrate the curriculum. Based on the cost of similar programs funded in recent years, start-up funding for the program could be \$10 million. The CCCCO indicates that any costs it would incur to support faculty through the existing curriculum development process would be minor and absorbable within existing resources.

COMMENTS: *Need for the bill.* According to the author, the need for an expanded, skilled forestland restoration workforce is increasing in California. A skilled and broadly-trained workforce is critical to undertake the tremendous amount of work that is necessary to remove dangerous fuel levels (predominantly smaller trees and shrubs, and ground fuels) and to use prescribed fire to restore resilient landscapes in these fire-associated ecosystems. This skilled workforce is also needed to enhance fire prevention as a way of life for homeowners and in communities at risk for catastrophic wildfire, and to undertake the home retrofitting and defensible space implementation that is necessary to reduce the risks from wildfires.

The author contends that this bill would help create a workforce necessary to undertake the scale of landscape work that California faces, and would directly engage county and city governments, land planners, environmental groups, non-profit organizations, foresters, Fire Safe Councils, and the public statewide, to reduce vulnerability to fire among human communities and ecosystems through cooperative work with Cal Fire, Resource Conservation Districts, and the CA Conservation Corps.

Forest Restoration and the California Fire Science Consortium. The California Natural Resources Agency shares with the California Environmental Protection Agency the responsibility for implementing the Timber Regulation and Forest Restoration Program. The program is directed to work across all forestry related agencies to seek transparency and efficiency improvements to the State's timber harvest regulation programs, provide for the development of ecological performance measures, establish a forest restoration grant program, and require program reporting to the Legislature.

The California Fire Science Consortium (as part of the Joint Fire Science Program's Fire Science Exchange network) is a network of scientists and managers that strive to accelerate the awareness, understanding, and adoption of wildland fire science information by federal, tribal, state, local, and private stakeholders within ecologically similar regions.

How are community college courses typically created? Generally, community college districts, in partnership with their local Academic Senates, create their own academic courses locally, with the Chancellor's Office required to review and approve all courses for degree completion purposes. The California Community College Curriculum Committee makes recommendations and provides guidance to the Chancellor's Office on local and regional implementation of curriculum policy and regulations, including general education and workforce development. When establishing new career technical education (CTE) or workforce programs, community college district governing boards are required to conduct a job market study of the labor market area, and determine whether or not the results justify the proposed program. Further, community college district governing boards must review their existing workforce programs every two years to ensure they meet labor market demands. Further, as a condition of receiving funding under the Strong Workforce Program, community college districts must collaborate regionally to plan how they will meet their workforce training needs.

Community Colleges Strong Workforce Program. As mentioned above, existing law establishes the Strong Workforce Program to improve the availability and quality of CTE leading to certificates, degrees, and credentials. The program has two components—\$248 million for community colleges and \$164 million for K-12 local educational agencies (LEAs)—and focuses on data-driven outcomes rather than activities, along with an emphasis on innovation and risk-taking.

For community colleges, the program requires neighboring community colleges to form eight regional consortia, with the purpose of coordinating CTE activities among colleges in the region. Each consortium must collaborate with various regional stakeholders, including local workforce development boards, industry leaders, and LEAs, to develop a four-year plan for how they will address regional workforce needs. Consortia use labor market data to direct Strong Workforce funds toward one or more of ten priority industry sectors. Funding is allocated based on the number of unemployed adults, projected job openings, and performance meeting regional workforce needs.

Once a consortium's funding amount is determined, the funds are divided with community college districts receiving about 60 percent of program funds directly and the consortium receiving the other 40 percent. Both pots are for supporting regionally prioritized initiatives aligned with Strong Workforce plans.

Existing fire science degree programs. Given California's size, population, and geography, the state has a need for a robust and diverse network of firefighters, fire investigators, fire inspectors, and first responders. The vast majority of fire science education is taken at the undergraduate level through community colleges. Outside of colleges, the state also provides its own programs and training facilities.

Most undergraduate degrees are a two-year associate or certificate programs exploring the nature of fire, fire chemistry, and flammable materials as well as covering fire department administration, fire management, and legal issues surrounding the profession. Four-year degrees are typically aimed at current fire professionals seeking career advancement such as fire science training, command and control, or fire and emergency services management. There are dozens of colleges in California that offer degrees related to fire science and emergency response with nearly 3,000 students graduating with degrees and certificates annually.

According to the author, the model curricula that would be created by this bill differs from existing fire science degree programs in several ways. While restoration workforce is, in part, a refinement of existing portions of curriculum found in several (eight, with more pending) campuses in California, there is no complete, explicit restoration workforce training opportunity in existence in California today, in terms of science-based restoration need. Having a workforce with the skills identified in this bill will significantly expand work focused on the problem of California fires being driven largely by surface and ladder fuels.

Arguments in support. The California Forest Watershed Alliance (CAFWA) wrote in support of SB 462, noting that, "As California moves forward with various programs and projects targeted at increasing the state's resilience and resistance to catastrophic wildfire, it has become increasingly evident that we do not have an adequate workforce to implement the work necessary to achieve our forest and watershed restoration and vegetation management goals. There is an urgent need for the development of a forest and woodlands restoration workforce to perform vital fuels treatment and forest and woodlands management work to prevent future wildfires, and we believe that the California Community College system, with its strong presence in the wildland urban interface and rural communities, is a prime candidate for the establishment of such a curriculum."

"SB 462 has the potential to provide the exact workforce so desperately needed to not only perform controlled burns and fuels thinning to reduce wildfire and improve forest, woodlands

and watershed health, but to also increase job opportunities and bring economic benefits to California's rural, socioeconomically disadvantaged communities.”

The ASCCC also wrote to the committee in order to formally remove their opposition to SB 462, noting that, “...the ASCCC recognizes that many of our communities have suffered devastating losses due to the wildfires that have plagued our state over the last several years, and we express sincere empathy for the victims and our admiration to Senator Stern for his efforts to identify an amelioration plan for California. We also appreciate that SB 462 recognizes the role of the Academic Senate in the development of model curriculum. Due to the author's willingness to amend SB 462 (Stern, as of 12 June 2019) the ASCCC removes its opposition to the bill and thanks the author and his staff for their work on this bill.”

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**Support**

California Native Plant Society
Northern California Power Agency
Sierra Business Council
The Fire Restoration Group

Opposition

None on File.

Analysis Prepared by: Kevin J. Powers / HIGHER ED. / (916) 319-3960