

DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE BILL ANALYSIS

AMENDMENT DATE: July 13, 2009
POSITION: Oppose

BILL NUMBER: SB 505
AUTHOR: C. Kehoe

BILL SUMMARY: Local Planning: Fire Hazard Impacts

Existing law requires local governments to include a safety element in their general plans. The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requires a project proponent to mitigate to the extent feasible the environmental impacts of a proposed project. This bill would require the Office of Planning and Research (OPR) to update its 'Fire Hazard Planning' document to be considered by local governments in State Responsibility Areas (SRA) and other designated fire hazard zones in adopting the safety element of their general plans. The Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) would be required to review updates to the safety element of general plans. The bill would also amend CEQA to include fire hazard impact questions in the initial study checklist for projects in SRA or other designated fire hazard zones.

FISCAL SUMMARY

The OPR reports it would require a quarter of a senior planner position at a cost of \$26,000 General Fund to update its 'Fire Hazard Planning' document and prepare amendments to CEQA to include fire hazard impact questions in the initial study checklist for projects in SRA or other designated fire hazard severity zones. CAL FIRE reports a need of \$153,000 and 1.5 positions to work with the OPR and meet additional workload reviewing the safety element of general plans. Although not mandatory to implement the bill, CAL FIRE also reports a need of \$1.1 million and 2.0 positions to develop vegetation data and a geographic information system to maintain SRA and fire hazard severity zone maps. Those maps are currently updated every five years, but it is unclear whether that would be sufficient to meet local planning needs. We note that to the extent the bill results in improved local planning as it relates to fire hazards, it could result in the avoidance of significant fire suppression costs. However, the bill would not change existing development in the Wildland-Urban Interface.

SUMMARY OF CHANGES

Amendments to this bill since our analysis of the April 21, 2009 version include eliminating the requirement that CAL FIRE review and comment on every project in SRA and designated fire hazard severity zones.

COMMENTS

Finance opposes this bill because it would result in General Fund costs not reflected in the 2009 Budget Act, as well as significant cost pressures to maintain SRA and fire hazard severity zone maps. Although the bill would not affect existing development in SRA, we note that improved local planning as it relates to fire hazards could provide fire prevention benefits.

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Analyst/Principal (0634) M. Almy	Date	Program Budget Manager Karen Finn	Date
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Department Deputy Director	Date
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Governor's Office:	By:	Date:	Position Approved _____
			Position Disapproved _____

BILL ANALYSIS Form DF-43 (Rev 03/95 Buff)

BILL ANALYSIS/ENROLLED BILL REPORT--(CONTINUED)

AUTHOR

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SB 505

Code/Department Agency or Revenue Type	SO	(Fiscal Impact by Fiscal Year)							
	LA	(Dollars in Thousands)							
	CO RV	PROP 98	FC	2009-2010 FC	2010-2011 FC	2011-2012	Fund Code		
3540/Forest&Fire	SO	No	C	\$77	C	\$153	C	\$153	0001
0650/OPR	SO	No	C	\$13	C	\$26	C	\$26	0001