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## SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Senator Connie Leyva, Chair

2019 - 2020 Regular

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**Bill No:** SB 462 **Hearing Date:** April 10, 2019  
**Author:** Stern  
**Version:** February 21, 2019  
**Urgency:** No **Fiscal:** Yes  
**Consultant:** Ian Johnson

**Subject:** Community colleges: Forestland Restoration Workforce Program.

**NOTE:** This bill has been referred to the Committees on Education and Natural Resources and Water. A "do pass" motion should include referral to the Committee on Natural Resources and Water.

### SUMMARY

This bill requires the Chancellor's Office of the California Community Colleges (CCCs), in collaboration with the Academic Senate for the CCCs, to establish a model curriculum for a forestland restoration workforce program that could be offered at the community colleges.

### BACKGROUND

Existing law:

- 1) Establishes the CCCs, a postsecondary education system consisting of community college districts and the Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

**ANALYSIS**

This bill:

- 1) Requires the chancellor's office, working in collaboration with the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges (CCC), to establish a model curriculum for a forestland restoration workforce program that could be offered at campuses of the CCCs.
- 2) Specifies that the program shall provide professional training in implementing prescribed fire projects, including using the tools and operating the equipment necessary for broad scale surface and ladder fuel treatments within the wildland-urban interface and wildlands where appropriate.
- 3) Specifies that as part of the program students shall learn to operate forest landscape restoration machinery, to work with tools such as chainsaws, pole saws, chippers, smaller biomass masticators, and small wood processors, and shall learn relevant forestland practices with a particular focus on the economics and operations of small-medium scale restoration businesses in California.
- 4) Specifies that the program shall train students in the retrofitting of houses with materials approved by the California State Fire Marshal, and with implementation of community defense techniques approved by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.
- 5) Requires the model curriculum to include guidelines for the presentation of a forestland restoration workforce course at community college campuses that opt to offer this course. These guidelines shall include, but not be limited to, recommendations for appropriate instructional materials and supplies and the qualifications to be required of course instructors.
- 6) Requires the chancellor's office to distribute the model curriculum to community college districts no later than January 1, 2021, with the goal of enabling interested community college districts to offer the course to students beginning with the 2021–22 academic year.
- 7) Specifies that certified graduates of the forestland restoration workforce course shall be eligible 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 related apprenticeship programs.
- 8) 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 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.

- 9) 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.
- 10) Requires the chancellor's office, working in collaboration with the California Fire Science Consortium, to provide community college districts interested in offering the forestland 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.

### STAFF COMMENTS

- 1) ***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."

"While some community colleges have forestry classes, there is not a model curriculum for a forestland restoration program that provides professional training in implementing prescribed fire projects, including the use of tools and equipment necessary for broad-scale surface and ladder fuel treatments within the wildland-urban interface and other forestlands where appropriate. Additionally, students should be trained in how to operate a business that focuses on these restoration activities, including worker safety, environmental compliance, and public engagement as well as training for public service in a local or state fire agency."

- 2) ***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.

- 3) ***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.

- 4) ***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.

- 5) ***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 program 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.

- 6) ***Have community colleges ever created model curriculum for courses?***  
While model curricula for specific types of courses are not typically developed at the state level for community college courses, a related effort has been undertaken previously as part of the system's effort to improve the transfer process. Specifically, the California Community Colleges (CCC) and the California State University (CSU) jointly developed 33 "transfer model curricula." Each of these curricula identifies pre-major community college courses that prepare students for upper-division CSU coursework in that major. Statute required, by fall 2015, each community college offer an associate degree for transfer in each of the majors corresponding to the first 25 transfer model curricula developed.
- 7) ***Is there a fire restoration and fire resistance strategy workforce shortage?***  
According to the author, every turn in conversations within the Forest Management Task Force, Resource Conservation Districts, discussions with Federal land managers, Fire Safe Councils, CAL FIRE and others, comes down to the need for seriously expanded pace and scale of restoration treatments and the permeant, long-term maintenance of these restored landscapes.

## **SUPPORT**

Calforests  
California Association of Resource Conservation Districts  
California Farm Bureau Federation  
California Native Plant Society  
Rural County Representatives of California  
Sierra Business Council

## **OPPOSITION**

None received

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