

Written Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 1404
To the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Water
By Angelina Ma, Student State Policy Analyst from Saving the Sea
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To whom it may concern,

My name is Angelina Ma, and I am a state policy analyst with Saving the Sea, a student-run group of policy analysts based out of California dedicated to protecting our environment. I am writing to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 1404, also known as the Wildfire Prevention Fee.

SB 1404 aligns with existing law that authorizes the State Board of Forestry and Fire Prevention to establish a fire prevention fee that will “benefit the owners of habitable structures in state responsibility areas who are required to pay the fee”. This bill would extend the operation of these funding provisions indefinitely, ensuring sustained support towards critical wildfire prevention efforts, such as fire hazard severity mapping and comprehensive emergency evacuation plans. Reinstating the fees is particularly important for rural and less developed areas, where residents tend to have less access to resilient infrastructure and wildfire education, despite a greater risk of fire.

The Wildfire Prevention Fee has already demonstrated highly effective outcomes, directly refuting critics' concerns about low returns. In its first year of operation in 2017, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) recorded positive outcomes in 61 of the 81 areas it assessed after fuel treatment. CAL FIRE has also used the revenue to revolutionize the federal Fuel Treatment Effectiveness Monitoring (FTEM) system, accelerating post-fire reporting and proactive impact assessment. A new study from UC Davis shows that every dollar spent on fuel treatment can save about \$3.75 in wildfire damages, which includes property loss, carbon emissions, and exposure to fine particulate matter. Thus, the reinstatement of the Wildfire Prevention Fee ensures sustained funding for initiatives like these, which proactively address land resilience and human health and safety in a cost-effective manner.

On a residential scale, homeowners in high-risk communities receive direct protection, with up to \$40,000 for retrofitting to wildfire safety standards. As of January 2026, CAL FIRE has retrofitted homes in six pilot counties, and the technologies and toolkits they use for these services are designed to be transferable. Revenue from fee collections would also be appropriated to maintain education programs and fire-related law enforcement activities, which enhance access to wildfire awareness and prevention resources for residents in rural and less-developed areas, who may otherwise lack access.

On behalf of Saving the Sea, thank you for considering my testimony in support of Senate Bill 1404. We believe the reinstatement of this existing legislation aligns with the increased need for wildfire preparedness measures given the rising frequency and severity of climate conditions, and provides particularly necessary support for low-density, high-risk homeowners.

Sincerely,
Angelina Ma, State Policy Analyst