



Permanent Staffing for Enhanced Defensible Space Inspections

Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE)

Proposal

The Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) requests **transitioning temporary roles to permanent staffing to ensure California can meet its long-term wildfire mitigation and defensible space compliance obligations.**

Challenge

California continues to face historically destructive fires, with 15 of the 20 most destructive fires occurring in the past decade. Data from CAL FIRE's Damage Inspection (DINS) program shows that **structures lacking compliant defensible space are six times more likely to be destroyed during wildfire events.** Yet, despite the state's goal to inspect approximately 250,000 homes annually, CAL FIRE will only be able to complete 129,206 inspections annually once one-time Wildfire & Forest Resilience (WFR) funding expires in 2026-27.

Personnel

\$6.1 million General Fund and 31.0 positions in 2026-27, with \$5.6 million ongoing, to stabilize and right-size the state's Defensible Space Inspection (DSI) Program and support the ongoing workload created by Chapter 391, Statutes of 2019 (AB 38).

- 17.0 Permanent Forestry Technician positions
- 3.0 Forestry Technician (limited-term WFR to perm funding)
- 9.0 Forestry Technician positions (supported through internal fund shifts)
- 2.0 support positions
- Total: 31.0 positions (29 Forestry Technicians + 2 support)



Solution

CAL FIRE requests staffing and funds to support production of approximately 53,248 annual inspections, offsetting the loss of 28 temporary WFR-funded inspectors and preserving CAL FIRE's ability to meet our annual goal of 250,000+ inspections. Vehicles and associated equipment are included to enable statewide fieldwork.

Benefits

- Based on recent disaster backfill data, **defensible space compliance could avoid costs exceeding \$9.1 million annually**, not including impacts from the Eaton and Palisades fires.
- **Insurance stability:** Improved defensible space and structure hardening support homeowner eligibility for insurance under California Department of Insurance's "Safer from Wildfire" standards.
- **Statewide resilience:** Permanent staffing ensures continuity of inspections, public education, and enforcement under PRC §4291, and supports anticipated future workload under the Governor's Executive Order N-18-25 (Zone Zero implementation).
- **Operational stability:** Permanent positions improve retention, institutional knowledge, and inspection data quality—challenges intrinsic to temporary staffing.

Conclusion

This proposal is a vital investment in the state's wildfire preparedness strategy. **A stable defensible space workforce reduces losses, strengthens communities, and meets statutory mandates.**