



CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FORESTRY AND FIRE PROTECTION

PRESCRIBED FIRE LIABILITY CLAIMS FUND

PILOT PROJECT



PROGRAM GUIDELINES **JUNE 2026 UPDATE**



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For assistance, please contact the program administrator at liabilityclaimsfund@fire.ca.gov.

Background

Beneficial fire practices—which include prescribed, cultural burning and managed fire—are essential to reduce the risk of large-scale catastrophic fire in California.

California’s Strategic Plan for Expanding the Use of Beneficial Fire sets a target of deploying beneficial fire on 400,000 acres annually. Beneficial fire is used by practitioners to restore habitats, maintain cultural practices, and reduce the risk of catastrophic fire. One of the primary obstacles to increasing two of these essential types (prescribed and cultural) fire use in California, however, is the difficulty for practitioners to obtain adequate liability coverage. While the rates of escape and loss are very low, there is always some residual risk when working with fire.

The U.S. Forest Service reported in 2022 that 99 .84% of prescribed fires go according to plan. Liability coverage, when available, protects practitioners, property owners, and the



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public from the associated financial risk. Increasingly, practitioners on private or tribal land are unable to obtain affordable private insurance for their beneficial fire operations. As a result, in September 2022 Governor Newsom signed into law SB 926 (Dodd 2022), which established a pilot Prescribed Fire Claims Fund. This legislation authorizes claims covering certain losses arising from prescribed fires and cultural burning until January 1, 2028.

This Claims Fund is intended to both encourage greater beneficial fire use and demonstrate that prescribed and cultural burning are low risk, which may entice private insurers back into the market.

About

Public Resource Code (PRC) sections 4500 and 4503 establish the Prescribed Fire Liability Pilot Program (Fund). The Fund is administered by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) with the purpose of increasing the pace and scale of and reducing the barriers to prescribed fire and cultural burning.

CAL FIRE has contracted with the California Insurance Guarantee Association (CIGA) to serve as the third-party administrator to adjust any claims arising out of the Fund. A working group of other state agencies, prescribed fire practitioners, burn bosses, and cultural fire practitioners collaborated with CAL FIRE to develop these Guidelines. A list of these collaborators can be found at the end of these Guidelines.

Enrollment

Enrollment in the Fund is done by completing the California Prescribed Fire Claims Fund [Online Application](#). **To be eligible to enroll in the Fund, there are two primary requirements:**

- 1. CAL FIRE must review and approve the Plan prior to ignition.**
- 2. The prescribed fire must be conducted or supervised by a Burn Boss or a Cultural Burn must be conducted or supervised by a Cultural Fire Practitioner (defined below), for a nonpublic entity, a resource conservation district, or a volunteer fire department or district.**

Burn Boss:



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- a. A person certified pursuant to Section 4477 to conduct prescribed burning operations and to enter into contracts related to prescribed burning operations; or
- b. A person qualified for the National Wildfire Coordinating Group position title of “Prescribed Fire Burn Boss Type 1” or “Prescribed Fire Burn Boss Type 2.”

Cultural Burn means the intentional application of fire to land by a California Native American tribe, a tribal organization, or a cultural fire practitioner to achieve cultural goals or objectives, including for sustenance, ceremonial activities, biodiversity, or other benefits.

Cultural Fire Practitioner means a person recognized by a California Native American tribe or tribal organization with substantial experience in burning to meet cultural goals or objectives, including for sustenance, ceremonial activities, biodiversity, or other benefits. (The definitions for Cultural Burning are pursuant to Public Resource Code 4002.4)

If these definitions are satisfied, a project is potentially eligible for coverage of up to \$2,000,000 for a prescribed fire or Cultural Burn. If a project enrolled in the Fund needs to file a claim for coverage, they must submit an email to liabilityclaimsfund@fire.ca.gov with the name of the burn boss, the project name, a brief description and an estimated claim total. A claim cannot be paid by the Fund unless the following conditions are met:

CAL FIRE reviewed and approved a burn plan prior to the prescribed burn or Cultural Burn taking place. Templates for burn plans may be found at the [NWCG](#) or [CAL PBA](#) website.

1. The applicant is required to ensure that the burn plan is reviewed and approved by the CAL FIRE Unit staff prior to ignitions to meet the requirements of the claims fund.
2. If a Cultural Burn is conducted pursuant to an agreement between a Federally recognized Tribe and the California Natural Resource Agency under [Senate Bill 310](#), the agreement may provide that no burn plan is required on a case by case basis. The applicant should mention that they have an agreement with CNRA and a burn plan is not required when they apply to the Claims Liability Fund.
3. All permits required for the prescribed burn or Cultural Burn, including a burn permit if required, were obtained; and



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4. CAL FIRE determines that the prescribed burn or Cultural Burn complied with, as applicable, the terms and conditions of all burn plans, burn permits, any applicable agreements between a Federally Recognized Tribe and CNRA, and any other required permits. Once CAL FIRE finds the conditions were met for enrollment and payment from the Fund for a prescribed burn or Cultural Burn that submitted a claim to the Fund, CAL FIRE will request CIGA to adjust the claim. CIGA will adjust the claim and make a recommendation to CAL FIRE on the amount to be paid. CAL FIRE will then work with the project covered by the Fund on the amount and process for payment.

FAQs

Obtaining enrollment into the Prescribed Fire Claims Fund (Fund) has four distinct steps:

1. **Submitting an application for Fund coverage (required):** First, an eligible Burn Boss or Cultural Fire Practitioner, or their representative, must reserve a spot in the Fund by applying for coverage.
2. **Receiving CAL FIRE approval of project reservation in the Fund (required):** Second, CAL FIRE must approve those reservations that complete the minimum conditions necessary for coverage. Approval will be received via email.
3. **Submission of eligible claims (if applicable):** Any party damaged by a project that is enrolled in the Fund may then submit a claim up to certain amounts as further described.
4. **Submit a completion report (optional):** Once the project is complete, submit a completion report using the provided CAL FIRE Assigned Project Tracking Number. By completing the report, you assist the Funding team in assessing improvements and successes of the pilot program.



Step 1- Submitting an application and reserving coverage in the Fund

1a. How does a Cultural Fire Practitioner or Burn Boss apply for Fund coverage?

A Burn Boss and Cultural Fire Practitioner, or their representative, should reserve coverage for their burn projects as soon as possible by submitting an application to enroll into the Fund. Since funding for this program is limited to 20 million dollars, reservations into the Fund are required. At this time, the Fund will accept up to 200 reservations on a first come first serve basis.

Those eligible to reserve a position in the Fund will be prompted to demonstrate their eligibility and to identify a specific burn project and enroll that burn project in the Fund. Please note that a representative of a Burn Boss or Cultural Fire Practitioner (such as a landowner or project proponent) can fill out an application so long as a Burn Boss and/or Cultural Fire Practitioner has been identified.

To enroll in the Fund, a Cultural Fire Practitioner and/or Burn Boss should:

- Fill out the CA Prescribed Fire Claims Fund [Online Registration Application](#).
- The reservation system will have two parts: *Submitted application* and *approved reservation*. Applications must be submitted at least 7 calendar days in advance of the project to approve the reservation and be enrolled in the Fund.
 - a) *Submitted application* means that the applicant has completed the application.
 - b) *Approved reservation* means that the project has been enrolled. The application has been reviewed to ensure that it was filled out correctly and on-time and that the project qualifies for the Fund. Please allow at least 7 calendar days for approval. You will receive a notice when the reservation has been approved or denied.
 - i. All enrollees who apply will receive a notice letting them know their proposed burn project has been *submitted* for coverage from the Fund and reminding them that coverage will not be *approved* until all minimum conditions are met.



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1b. Does a project have to have an approved burn plan or the required permits to have a reservation?

No. Eligible parties are encouraged to enroll while they finalize receiving their required permits, plans, and other agreements. The required permits and burn plan must be completed prior to the ignition of the burn unit to be eligible for coverage from the Fund.

1c. Should more than one applicant register the same burn project?

No. Only one application per burn project should be submitted. Applicants are encouraged to consider developing larger burn projects that cover multiple separate burn units to expedite enrollment. Up to three burn bosses or cultural fire practitioners are allowed to be identified for the project. The \$2 million limit is per project and not per burn unit.

1d. When should I apply?

Applications should be submitted as soon as the project has identified a responsible Burn Boss or Cultural Fire Practitioner with defined boundaries, objectives, and an expected time of ignition for the project.

1e. If a Burn Boss or Cultural Fire Practitioner already has prescribed fire liability coverage, should they still apply for coverage from the Fund?

Yes. Payment from the Fund may augment or be primary to liability coverage. In addition, enrollment will allow the State to gather information about the needs of beneficial fire practitioners, the rates of escape, loss and damage, and the benefit of the Fund to the State.

1f. How long will it take me to apply?

If the applicant has completed a description of the project and has all the required information about the project, submitting the application for the Fund should take about 10 minutes.

1g. How much does it cost to apply?

There is no cost to apply for and enroll in the Fund.

1h. Do you need permits and review / approval of your burn plan to enroll a project?

No. All permits and approval of the burn plan must be in place prior to **ignition**. We recommend you ensure all permits can be realistically secured prior to enrollment.



Applicable permits may include CAL FIRE, Air Quality, and others depending on land jurisdiction.

Step 2- Review and approval of Fund coverage by CAL FIRE

2a. How does a Burn Boss or Cultural Fire Practitioner know if their burn project application has been approved?

Sacramento CAL FIRE staff will review and approve reservations for eligibility of Fund coverage that have met the minimum qualifications required by the Fund. All applicants will receive a notice that their burn project has been approved for coverage and enrolled in the Fund once all applicable conditions are met. Applicants who have not received an approved enrollment notice should assume that their burn project is NOT covered by the Fund. A denial email will be sent to the applicant if they do not qualify for enrollment into the Fund. CAL FIRE reserves the right to exclude anyone who is ineligible or anyone with a burn project that has not undergone appropriate planning and permitting from participating in the Fund.

2b. How long will approval take?

The submitted application must be approved prior to any ignitions in the burn project to be eligible for coverage from the Fund. Please allow 7 calendar days for approval/denial after the application is submitted.

2c. What are the minimum requirements for an approved reservation to have a claim paid by the Fund if damages occur from the project?

To have a reservation approved for payment from the Fund, the following minimum requirements must be met:

- The applicant must have received the approved reservation in the Fund.
- CAL FIRE must have reviewed and approved the burn plan* as required in [Public Resource Code 4500](#).
- A burn permit, if required, and all other permits required to conduct the prescribed fire or Cultural Burn must have been obtained.

*Please note that a Cultural Fire Practitioner operating under an agreement between a federally recognized Tribe and CNRA may access the Fund without a burn plan or burn permit.



2d. How long is my approved reservation good for?

- All approved reservations will be enrolled in the Fund from July 1st of each year to June 30th of the following year (for example, July 1, 2026 – June 30, 2027).
- All approved reservations after July 1st shall have a start date of the date of reservation approval and may exist until June 30th of the following year (for example, October 15, 2026 – June 30, 2027).
- The approved reservation may be renewed upon request if the specified burn project is not completed. For projects occurring in July, CAL FIRE recommends requesting a renewal in advance of the June 30th date.

2e. Where can I find a template of a burn plan?

Templates for burn plans may be found at the [NWCG](#) or [CAL PBA](#) websites for a Burn Boss.

2f. Where do I submit my burn plan and/or burn permit approval?

When CAL FIRE burn permits are required, a burn permit can be applied for on the Office of State Fire Marshal [Burn Permit Website](#). PRC 4500 requires a burn plan to be reviewed and approved by CAL FIRE. The local CAL FIRE Unit will review and may approve the burn plan. When permits are not required, a burn plan may be submitted to your local CAL FIRE Unit for approval. Contact the local Unit staff for the person that will be responsible for approving burn plans. Here is the Unit “Contact Us” website. ([CAL FIRE Contacts | CAL FIRE](#))

2g. Do I need to complete a burn plan for a Cultural Burn conducted by a Cultural Fire Practitioner?

In most circumstances, yes. The burn practitioner must have the burn plan reviewed and approved by the local CAL FIRE Unit. The supplemental burn description in the Fund application is no longer available.

- The Cultural Fire Practitioner has the option to provide a burn plan from the template suggestions (ex. NWCG or CAL PBA).
- If a Cultural Burn is conducted pursuant to an agreement between a federally recognized Tribe and the California Natural Resource Agency under [Senate Bill 310](#), the agreement may provide that no burn plan approval is required. Otherwise, a Cultural Fire Practitioner is required to have confirmation of an approved burn plan



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from CAL FIRE prior to ignition of the burn to be eligible for a claim to be paid by the Fund.

2h. What are the reporting requirements and is all information public information?

- Administrators will request information about whether the burn occurred, as well as burn size, location, property owner, jurisdictional area, CAL FIRE Unit, contact information, fuel type, permits obtained for each approved reservation, and any escape, loss, or damage (whether or not a claim was filed). This information will help evaluate the success of this pilot program.
- Approved Applicants should report any changes to or completion of projects annually by June 30th following the approved reservation. This voluntary information will help evaluate the success of this pilot program.
- Applicants should report whether burns were completed.
- Applicants should report any unanticipated events.

Collected information will be compiled and shared publicly on a regular basis. All information submitted to CAL FIRE will be treated in accordance with the requirements of the California Public Records Act, and may be subject to disclosure upon request.

2i. How do I protect confidential cultural information submitted to CAL FIRE?

For a Cultural Burn, a Cultural Fire Practitioner has the option to provide this information at their discretion. CAL FIRE asks that any “confidential” information or data provided by the Cultural Fire Practitioner in the Claims Fund application is clearly marked as “confidential”. Information provided in the claims fund is not confidential unless this request is made. Some information may be displayed about the project in a vague or incomplete way to maintain confidential information.

2j. Who can enroll a burn project for coverage by the Fund?

- A Cultural Fire Practitioner as defined above; or
- A Burn Boss as defined above.
- Burn Bosses or Cultural Fire Practitioners affiliated with Resource Conservation Districts or Volunteer Fire Departments or Districts.

Please note that a representative of either a Cultural Fire Practitioner or Burn Boss (such as a landowner or project proponent) can fill out the application on their behalf.

**2k. Who is NOT eligible to enroll a burn project under the Fund's coverage?**

- Private landowners that have not yet identified a Burn Boss or Cultural Fire Practitioner to conduct or supervise the burn.
- Federal or State Burn Bosses or Cultural Fire Practitioners employed and associated with the burn project for the federal government, state government, or other similar public entities.
- As an example: A Forest Service employee that is the burn boss for a federal burn project cannot enroll it into the claims fund. A CAL FIRE employee cannot enroll a CAL FIRE project into the Claims fund.

2l. Can I transfer an approved reservation?

Approved reservations may, with CAL FIRE approval, be transferred from one Burn Boss or Cultural Fire Practitioner to another with an update to the reservation. You can have three Burn Bosses or Cultural Fire Practitioners identified in the claims fund. Please contact the program administrator at liabilityclaimsfund@fire.ca.gov for any transfer requests. Please allow 7 days for approval of any changes.

2m. What is the notification obligation for adjacent landowners if the project caused damages?

The Burn Boss or Cultural Fire Practitioner shall notify the adjacent landowners in writing of the availability of the Fund and the claims process within 10 days from the completion of each burn unit. Failure to properly notify adjacent landowners may impact the ability of the Fund to pay for claims.

2n. What is the obligation of the Burn Boss or Cultural Fire Practitioner if damages occur from the project?

The Burn Boss or Cultural Fire Practitioner shall notify the adjacent landowners in writing of the availability of the Fund and the claims process within 10 days from the completion of each burn unit. Failure to properly notify adjacent landowners may impact the ability of the Fund to pay for claims.

2o. How does CAL FIRE review and approve a burn plan?

Burn Plan review and approval is the primary responsibility of the CAL FIRE Unit. Obtaining a burn permit with the burn plan attached satisfies this requirement. The burn plan's core



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details are typically incorporated into the burn permit and constitute approval of the burn plan.

In multiple Units, there are times of the year where burn permits are not required. The burn practitioner must communicate with their local unit to ensure their plan has been reviewed and approved. An email or other written acknowledgement should be kept as confirmation in the event a claim is filed.

Step 3 – Claims Submission

3a. What can I do as a landowner if I believe damages occurred from a burn project enrolled in the Fund?

A landowner can review the [online dashboard](#) for the project information and contact liabilityclaimsfund@fire.ca.gov for further assistance.

3b. Who can submit a claim to the Fund?

- Individuals with qualified damages;
- Insurance companies who have received claims of damage by insured parties or their beneficiaries (insurers shall be asked to demonstrate such coverage obligation);
- Trustees, corporations, or other entities who hold title to property damaged by a burn project enrolled in the Fund;
- The representative, estate, or guardian(s) of persons with damages from a burn project enrolled in the Fund;
- Any subrogate of a claim.

3c. How do I submit a claim?

Please email the program administrator at liabilityclaimsfund@fire.ca.gov to file a claim.

3d. How long do I have to submit a claim?

Any claim must be submitted within 60 days from the date of the injury or the claims period from the Fund will be closed.

3e. What is the Coverage Limit?

All burn projects enrolled in the Fund are eligible for coverage of *up to* \$2 million per project, if available. Depending on whether any prior claims have been drawn from the



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Fund, and the amount of such claims, less than \$2 million may be available for any project. A project is defined as “all activities conducted pursuant to any one burn plan.”

- If losses from a project do not exceed \$2 million, and full coverage is available, claimants will be required to waive all potential claims against burn project participants upon accepting payment from the Fund.
- If losses from a project exceed \$2 million or the amount available from the Fund, losses will be paid on a proportional basis, with total payment not to exceed \$2 million or the amount available. Claimants will be required to waive claims against burn project participants for the amount paid from the Fund, upon accepting payment from the Fund. However, claimants may still seek compensation for the unpaid portion of loss or damage from burn project participants.
- Note, all payment is subject to and contingent upon appropriation of funding to CAL FIRE.

3f. What injuries does the Fund cover?

- The Fund will only cover damages that occur outside of a planned burn unit. No claims are eligible within the planned boundary for trees, carbon stocks or other assets that are within the burn unit boundary.
- The Fund is intended to cover property (real and personal) damage, personal injury and death, and some forms of smoke damages.
- Smoke damage to real property, other than to agricultural or natural resources, are eligible for coverage, as are damages, losses, physical injury or death resulting from vehicle accidents solely caused by smoke.

3g. What damages are not covered by the fund?

Except in the limited circumstances described above, smoke damages (including, but not limited to, smoke-related and fire-related health claims, such as asthma or exposure to toxic fumes) are not eligible for coverage by the Fund.

3h. How will claim viability be determined?

With landowner permission, CAL FIRE will determine whether the claimed damage or loss was caused by the burn project. Claims are subject to California Insurance Code Section 530, which defines proximate versus remote causes.



3i. How will damaged claim value be determined and adjusted?

The California Insurance Guarantee Association (CIGA) is a third-party administrator that CAL FIRE contracted with to determine the value of the damaged or lost real property. CIGA will consult with CAL FIRE to determine if the claim is valid. Damages will not be paid for claims less than \$5,000. For claims greater than \$5,000, the claim will be paid from \$1.00. A claim being paid from \$1.00 means there is no deductible for the Fund to pay a claim.

Miscellaneous

1. What does it mean that the Fund is a “pilot project”?

The pilot project is meant to remove one of the primary obstacles to using beneficial fire by providing liability coverage in the event of loss or damage occurring from a prescribed fire or cultural burn. This pilot project is also intended to bring private insurers back into the beneficial fire insurance market by providing additional data about the risk of loss or damage from prescribed fire and cultural burns. This pilot project expires January 1, 2028, and may change over time to better accommodate the needs of beneficial fire practitioners. Please check back frequently as the rules may change over time. We encourage beneficial fire practitioners to use the fund and report back on their achievements to provide accurate data for the State.

2. What types of burns are expected to utilize the Fund?

Broadcast burning is expected to be the main type of burn project covered by the Fund. Pile burn projects that are for direct public benefit may also apply but the total number of these projects may be capped pending availability of reservations. For example, a pile burn project identified in a Community Wildfire Protection Plan might qualify.

3. Does anything in this program alter the standards created by SB 332?

No, liability for suppression costs that result from a prescribed fire or cultural burn are not eligible for compensation from this Fund. However, nothing in this program is intended to supplant or alter those requirements and protections found in [SB 332](#).

If you need assistance applying to enroll in the Fund, please go to the [online application website](#) or contact the program administrator at liabilityclaimsfund@fire.ca.gov.



Acknowledgements

List of Collaborators

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