



Jackson Soil & Water Conservation District
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March 30, 2025

To: Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildfire

From: Jackson Soil and Water Conservation District (JSWCD)

Re: **Support SB 85 and Suggested Improvements, Neighborhood Protection Cooperative Grant Program**

Chair Golden and Committee Members,

JSWCD is a public agency with an elected Board of Directors that serves Jackson County by protecting natural resources through education and technical assistance to implement voluntary conservation in partnership with private landowners and federal, state, and nonprofit partners.

We support SB 85 and particularly the portion of the bill that establishes the Neighborhood Protection Cooperative Grant Program. Promoting wildfire resilience in communities is very important and will take a combination of local and state resources to make a difference. In the aftermath of fires in Jackson County several years ago, JSWCD has been working with landowners in rural communities to help increase wildlife resilience and at the same time improve the habitat in land surrounding homesites. We would welcome the opportunity to use this grant program to further our work.

We have the following recommendations to improve the bill:

- It is unclear what type of work is envisioned to be done under this program. We encourage clarifying language that points to management practices in the lands surrounding homesites and other infrastructure. Examples include forest thinning to promote wildfire resilience, and removal of fire prone invasive species such as blackberries. We do not think that the bill is intended to fund home hardening actions such as fire-resistant building materials, but clarity on this matter is important.
- It is unclear what is meant by "communities" or "neighborhoods" under the bill. The bill allows the State Fire Marshall to define neighborhoods, but we encourage clarifying language to specify whether the bill is intended to focus on urban, rural, wildland urban interface, or any or all these areas.

- Many times, projects to promote wildfire resilience can have very important co-benefits. For example, removing invasive blackberries improves wildfire resilience and allows establishment of desirable native vegetation which provides numerous ecosystem services, including improving water quality, filtering nutrients, providing habitat for wildlife and contributing pollinator sources. We suggest adding “co-benefits” to the list of criteria for awarding the grants.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our input.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Stan Dean".

Stan Dean, Chair of the Board
Jackson Soil & Water Conservation District
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