

WSAB Consultation to Energy Safety on Fiscal Year 2027-2028 Budget

Staff Draft

March 4, 2026

Introduction

Public Utilities Code 326.1(e) requires the Office of Energy Infrastructure Safety (Energy Safety) to consult with the Wildfire Safety Advisory Board (WSAB or the Board) in the preparation of its budget. In the standard state government budget process, departments begin development of budget change proposals (BCPs) more than a year before the beginning of the fiscal year in which the BCP would take effect. Therefore, to provide timely consultation to Energy Safety, WSAB is providing input to the preparation of the budget for fiscal year (FY) 2027-2028, which begins July 1, 2027.

Senate Bill (SB) 254 (Becker, Ch. 119, Stat. of 2025), among other things, amended Public Utilities Code (PUC) sections 326.2 and 8389, describing some of WSAB's duties. It also changed PUC section 8387, requiring publicly owned utilities (POUs) and electrical cooperatives (co-ops) to submit wildfire mitigation plans (WMPs) on a schedule determined by WSAB. At its December 3, 2025, meeting, WSAB adopted a schedule that designed for more collaboration with POUs and co-ops and more substantive review of their WMPs than was previously possible.

The current staffing for WSAB support is one supervisor, two senior policy advisors, and one analyst in the WSAB Branch of Energy Safety. We acknowledge the challenging budget situation for state government in FY2026–2027. While there are many uncertainties about the budget for the subsequent fiscal year, commencing more than a year from now, it is important for us to provide our observations and input to Energy Safety.

WSAB Budget Priorities

Staffing

WSAB's strategic plan recognizes the importance of staff support for a board of dedicated members who are largely uncompensated for their time. To achieve its goals, WSAB has prioritized staff retention and development. It is of the highest importance to WSAB that the resources at Energy Safety to support the work of WSAB at least maintain staffing levels and include adequate funding and staff time for training and professional development.

Even with four full-time staff, WSAB is highly constrained in meeting its statutory obligations to provide advice to Energy Safety and advisory opinions to 51 publicly owned utilities and rural electrical cooperatives. This is especially true after the changes made by SB 254. WSAB requests additional staff resources to allow staff to support the WSAB members' priorities and meet these obligations. Specifically, WSAB requests that staff resources expand to include senior staff with utilities engineering expertise, and environmental science and utility vegetation management expertise. This will support WSAB priorities and recommendations on grid hardening and utility vegetation management and allow for more in-depth review of those sections of WMPs, including identifying emerging good practices among utilities. WSAB also requests additional utilities analyst resources to do more comprehensive reviews and research, and spend additional time in collaboration with utilities, Energy Safety staff, and external experts.

Travel to Meetings and Site Visits

The Board has prioritized site visits and staff conference attendance in its strategic plan, for their value in educating Board members and staff and building external relationships. For these reasons, it is imperative that WSAB have the resources necessary to make these possible, including travel reimbursements for Board members and staff, room or equipment rental as needed, etc.