

Communication from Public

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Council File No: 25-1363

Comments for Public Posting: Southern California Wildfire Response respectfully submits the attached written comments regarding Council File 25-1363 and Los Angeles's Wildland-Urban Interface. SCWR requests an opportunity to meet with the City, LAFD, and appropriate Public Safety leadership to discuss how qualified volunteer wildfire resources may responsibly support wildfire prevention, preparedness, mitigation, and established emergency-response systems. Please see the attached statement for our full comments and recommendations.

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA WILDFIRE RESPONSE

Written Public Comment Regarding Council File 25-1363

2026 Los Angeles Wildland-Urban Interface

Submitted by: Luciano Haber
Southern California Wildfire Response (SCWR)

To the Honorable Members of the Los Angeles City Council and Public Safety Committee:

My name is Luciano Haber, and I submit this comment on behalf of Southern California Wildfire Response, a nonprofit volunteer wildland fire and disaster-response organization serving the Los Angeles region.

Our purpose in submitting this comment is simple:

Southern California Wildfire Response wants to help Los Angeles prepare for the wildfire that has not happened yet.

We are not seeking to replace the Los Angeles Fire Department, duplicate its responsibilities, or circumvent the established incident-command and mutual-aid systems that protect this City. We are asking Los Angeles to examine how trained, organized volunteer wildfire resources such as SCWR can responsibly support those systems.

THE SCALE OF THE CHALLENGE

Los Angeles faces an extraordinary wildfire exposure.

CAL FIRE's 2025 recommended Fire Hazard Severity Zone mapping identified approximately **117,773 acres** within the City of Los Angeles as Moderate, High, or Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones. Approximately **101,592 acres** were classified as Very High Fire Hazard Severity.

At the same time, the City's FY 2026-27 budget assumes approximately **3,400 sworn LAFD firefighters** on payroll.

Even if every sworn LAFD firefighter could theoretically be dedicated exclusively to those approximately 118,000 fire-hazard acres - which they obviously cannot - that represents roughly **35 acres of designated fire-hazard land for every sworn firefighter.**

In reality, LAFD personnel must protect the entire City while simultaneously responding to emergency medical calls, structure fires, traffic collisions, rescues, hazardous-material incidents, wildland fires and countless other emergencies.

This is not an argument that LAFD is failing. **It is an argument that we ask an extraordinary amount of LAFD.**

The physical consequences of that responsibility are also real. Publicly reported incidents over the past several years document numerous LAFD firefighters being injured while protecting this City. During the February 2024 Wilmington compressed-natural-gas vehicle explosion alone, nine LAFD firefighters were injured, including two who were initially listed in critical condition.

Additional qualified capacity should therefore not be viewed as competition with our professional fire service. It should be viewed as an opportunity to support it.

THIS IS A NATIONAL PROBLEM WITH LOCAL CONSEQUENCES

The United States Fire Administration reports that **more than 60,000 American communities** are at risk from wildland-urban interface fires, and the nation's WUI continues to expand by approximately **two million acres each year**.

According to the National Interagency Coordination Center, wildfires destroyed **18,385 structures nationwide in 2025**, including **12,773 residences**. The Southern California Geographic Area alone accounted for **16,324 structures destroyed**.

Los Angeles does not need to imagine the consequences of catastrophic wildfire. **We have experienced them.**

OUR OUTREACH

Over the past several weeks, I have personally traveled throughout the Los Angeles region attempting to introduce SCWR to the people and agencies responsible for protecting our communities.

I have walked into the field offices of elected representatives. I have visited Los Angeles Fire Department stations. I have visited Los Angeles County Fire Department facilities. I have sought conversations with local, county, state and federal fire-service and government leadership.

The purpose of those visits has never been to tell established agencies how to perform their missions. I have carried essentially the same message through every door:

We are here. How can we help?

Those conversations have reinforced our belief that relationships cannot begin during a catastrophe. When smoke is already rising over the mountains, **it is too late to start exchanging business cards.**

Relationships must be established beforehand. Training must happen beforehand. Operational expectations must be understood beforehand. Standards must be established beforehand. And trust must be earned beforehand.

WHAT SCWR CAN CONTRIBUTE

Southern California Wildfire Response is developing volunteer personnel specifically interested in wildfire prevention, preparedness and response.

Depending upon qualification, authorization, incident needs and the direction of the agency having jurisdiction, organizations such as ours can potentially contribute to wildfire-prevention and community-preparedness efforts; patrol and observation during elevated fire danger; early identification and reporting of potential ignitions and hazards; wildland reconnaissance; community education; logistical and communications support; mitigation and fuels-related projects; mop-up and patrol functions when appropriately assigned; support to established fire agencies and incident-management organizations; and development of additional trained community wildfire personnel.

SCWR recognizes that enthusiasm alone does not qualify an organization to participate in emergency operations. Training matters. Qualifications matter. Accountability matters. Communications matter. Incident command matters. Safety matters.

That is precisely why we are asking for engagement rather than simply asking for recognition.

OUR REQUEST TO THE CITY OF LOS ANGELES

As Los Angeles continues developing its approach to the Wildland-Urban Interface, Southern California Wildfire Response respectfully requests that the City, the Public Safety Committee, LAFD and other appropriate City entities **meet with SCWR and evaluate our organization.**

Determine what standards we would need to satisfy to become a useful supplemental resource. Identify appropriate non-emergency roles in wildfire prevention, mitigation, preparedness and community resilience. Explore whether pathways exist for qualified volunteer wildfire organizations to train, coordinate or otherwise support established agencies under clearly defined authority and operational standards. And, where deficiencies exist within our organization, tell us what they are.

Challenge us to meet the standard rather than leaving willing volunteers outside the conversation.

We are not asking the City to lower its standards for us. We are asking the City to tell us what those standards are and give us the opportunity to meet them.

CONCLUSION

The next major wildfire will not wait for Los Angeles to finish building relationships. It will not wait for agreements to be drafted. It will not wait for additional personnel to be recruited. And it will not wait for organizations that could potentially support the response to introduce themselves.

That work must happen now.

There are people in this community willing to train. There are people willing to patrol. There are people willing to spend their time preparing neighborhoods for wildfire. And there are people willing to serve beside the professional firefighters already carrying an enormous responsibility for this City.

Southern California Wildfire Response does not seek to replace those firefighters. **We seek to stand behind them.**

We respectfully ask the City of Los Angeles to give us a seat at the table, evaluate what we can contribute, establish the standards expected of us, and determine whether SCWR can become part of a stronger and more resilient wildfire-preparedness system for Los Angeles.

**We are here.
We are willing to work.
Tell us how we can help.**

Respectfully,

Luciano Haber

Southern California Wildfire Response