

<https://www.kqed.org/science/1972138/heres-how-newsoms-proposing-to-spend-4-1-billion-on-the-climate-and-environment>

Here's How Newsom's Proposing to Spend \$4.1 Billion on the Climate and Environment

Kevin StarkDanielle Venton

Jan 8

The \$227 billion budget proposed on Friday by Gov. Gavin Newsom includes \$4.1 billion in spending on a suite of environmental initiatives meant to fight climate change, gird California against devastating wildfires, reduce smog, and bolster the adoption of clean vehicles on the state's roads.

Given the pandemic-induced recession, the fact that California has so much to spend on the environment is remarkable, but the state is looking at a \$15 billion surplus thanks to a progressive tax structure that helped capture huge capital gains generated by a soaring stock market.

Only eight months ago, in May, Newsom was forced to at least temporarily abandon his biggest climate priorities in order help fill a \$54.3 billion deficit.

But now the coffers are full enough for the governor to propose his biggest-ticket environmental expenditure, nearly \$1.5 billion for the construction of charging stations and electric vehicle incentives in anticipation of a massive amount of new electric cars, trucks and other vehicles roaming state roads.

Newsom said he thinks the money could ensure California's dominance as an EV marketplace. The proposed funding comes after his executive order last year to end the sale of new gasoline-powered cars in the state by the year 2035, a move Newsom says will slash planet-warming emissions by 35%.

“We want to accelerate our efforts on alternative fuel vehicles,” Newsom said Friday. “Remember, this is a climate move, not just an economic move, because at the end of the day, it's about health. It's about asthma. It's about dirty air.”

The administration says the new spending will create jobs and reduce smog in heavily impacted areas of the state. Newsom wants to leverage private-sector investment to boost these efforts.

“This is where the world is going,” he said. “You want to be big. You've got to be big in big things. Nothing bigger than low-carbon, green growth; nothing more impactful.”

Brian Nowicki, California climate policy director at the Center for Biological Diversity, applauded the investment in emissions-free vehicles, but he said the state “needs to make sure those investments are optimally applied to boost both economic and environmental equality in California’s most polluted and underserved communities.”

Newsom is also proposing \$384 million to support agricultural programs that sequester carbon and fight climate change, and he wants to spend \$300 million from the state’s general fund to pay for toxic waste cleanup in areas facing high public health risks.

Kate Gordon, Newsom’s senior climate policy advisor, said during a press call that the budget “highlights our commitment for a carbon neutral, climate resilient and equitable future.”

Addressing Wildfires

After a devastating wildfire year in which more than 9,000 blazes consumed more than 5 million acres of the state, the governor proposed a billion dollars in new spending on wildfire prevention.

On the press call, Wade Crowfoot, California's natural resources secretary, says the state is focusing resources on fostering ecological resilience to big fires, by reintroducing managed burns and thinning out forests.

“We see the growth of our catastrophic wildfires and climate change and realize that we cannot respond our way out of this crisis,” he said. “We have to do a lot more upfront to build our resilience ... and find a way to use ecological fire on the land, and take a lot of actions to protect both our communities and our natural places.”

As part of that plan, Newsom wants to spend \$512 million on forest management, which would pay for prescribed fire, fire breaks, home hardening and direct investment in tribes to sustainably manage their land. Fuel breaks, strips of land that are altered as a preventative measure to help slow the spread of a fire, were credited with saving lives and homes during this past wildfire season.

The governor also wants to hire at least 30 more fire crews, with 15 members per crew, and purchase new air tankers, helicopters and equipment.

State Sen. Bill Dodd, who represents several fire-prone counties including Sonoma and Napa, said the new budget reflects the importance of investing in prevention.

“The reality is we’re not able to fight these climate-driven fires anywhere near what our expectations were,” he said. “Our experience shows us that we have to do more on prevention. And I believe that this budget does that.”

Environmental groups such as the Save the Redwoods League applauded the proposed focus on prevention and proactive forest management, saying California’s coastal redwood and giant sequoia forests would benefit.