STATE OF CALIFORNIA
Budget Change Proposal - Cover Sheet
DF-46 (REV 03/25)

Fiscal Year	Business Unit Number	Department
2026-2027	3355	Office of Energy Infrastructure Safety

Hyperion Budget Request Name	Relevant Program or Subprogram
3355-021-BCP-2026-MR	2370 – Regulation of Energy Infrastructure Safety

Budget Request Title
Vegetation Management Inspections

Budget Request Summary
The Office of Energy Infrastructure Safety (Energy Safety) requests 4.0 positions funded from existing-related contracting funding in fiscal year 2026-27 and ongoing, to increase the department's utility vegetation management inspection rate of wildfire mitigation plans completed by the investor-owned utilities (IOU).

Requires Legislation (submit required legislation with the BCP)	Code Section(s) to be Added/Amended/Repealed
☐ Trailer Bill Language ☐ Budget Bill Language ☒ N/A	

Does this BCP contain information technology (IT) components? ☐ Yes ☒ No *If yes, departmental Chief Information Officer must sign.*	Department CIO	Date

For IT requests, specify the project number, the most recent project approval document (FSR, SPR, S1BA, S2AA, S3SD, S4PRA), the approval date, and the total project cost.

Project No. **Approval Date:**

Project Approval Document: **Total Project Cost:**

If proposal affects another department, does other department concur with proposal? ☐ Yes ☐ No
Attach comments of affected department, signed and dated by the department director or designee.

Prepared By	Date	Reviewed By	Date
Pukar Deoja	5/14/2026	Ken DaRosa	5/14/2026
Department Director	**Date**	**Agency Secretary**	**Date**
Tony Marino (Acting Director)	5/14/2026	Bryan Cash	5/14/2026

Department of Finance Use Only

Additional Review: ☐ Capital Outlay ☐ ITCU ☐ FSCU ☐ OSAE ☐ Dept. of Technology

Principal Program Budget Analyst	Date submitted to the Legislature
Erin Carson	5/14/2026

A. Problem Statement

Energy Safety requests 4.0 new full-time permanent positions to be funded from existing contract funding to allow the department to conduct more targeted inspections and enhance the department's ability to identify more vegetation field deficiencies, issue more corrective action notices to utilities, and further reduce vegetation ignition risks throughout the State's high fire threat districts. This request will transition $711,000 of existing contracting funding to personnel services funding for the requested 4.0 permanent positions.

At current resource levels, Energy Safety staff currently inspect approximately 5 to 10 percent of the vegetation management commitments completed by the IOUs and reported in their wildfire mitigation plans, subject to the department's oversight (see Appendix A). The 6 utility service territories cover 140,000+ square miles of California, thousands of circuit miles of distribution and transmission lines within high-fire threat districts and 10+ million trees that, if not properly maintained and inspected, can result in potential ignitions and wildfires through vegetation contact. Vegetation contact is a top 5 cause of powerline ignitions, and from 2014 to 2024 the three largest utilities had 1,496 vegetation-related ignitions.

In prior years, the department has augmented its internal vegetation management inspection workload using contracted vegetation management resources. However, due to (1) the limited number of qualified contractors available to perform this highly specialized work, and (2) multiple contractor financial conflicts of interest with the utilities the department regulates, the department has not been able to retain highly specialized and qualified vegetation management contractors over the past four years. This proposal will allow the department to transition its existing vegetation management contract funding to personnel services funding to secure its own internal vegetation management experts to conduct this specialized work and avoid the ongoing contractor conflict of interest issues.

Resource History

(Dollars in thousands)

Program Budget	PY – 2 (2022-23)	PY-1 (2023-24)	PY (2024-25)	CY (2025-26)
Authorized Expenditures**	$37,402	$42,479	$41,151	$40,193
Actual Expenditures**	$22,120	$27,388	$34,472	N/A
Authorized Positions***	N/A	15	16	16
Filled Positions***	N/A	13 (87%)	13 (81%)	16 (100%)*
Vacancies***	N/A	2 (13%)	3 (19%)	0 (0%)*

**Data as of December 31,2025*

***Data reflects Fund 0462*

****Data reflects the Environmental Science Division. Division did not exist prior to FY 2023/24.*

BCP Positions Breakdown

(Dollars in thousands)

# of PYs	Classification	PS	OE	Total
1.0	Senior Environmental Scientist (Supervisory)	$0	$0	$0
3.0	Environmental Scientist	$0	$0	$0
4.0		**$0**	**$0**	**$0**

Workload History

Workload Measure	PY - 4	PY - 3	PY - 2	PY-1	PY	CY*
Environmental Field Inspection Activities Completed (i.e., trees inspected)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	32,980	18,269
Locations Inspected	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	4711	2,965
Vegetation-Related Wildfire Safety Concerns and Notices of Violation Issued	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	258	120

**Data as of December 31, 2025*

B. Justification

Environmental Science Division

The Environmental Science Division requests 1.0 Senior Environmental Scientists (Supervisory) and 3.0 Environmental Scientist positions. Energy Safety currently has 6.0 permanent full-time vegetation management inspector field positions to verify the reported vegetation management wildfire mitigation plan initiative work within the utility high fire threat district responsibility areas throughout California. The utilities report quarterly to the department hundreds of circuit miles of inspections and resulting vegetation management mitigation work including, but not limited to, hazard tree removal and trimming trees to adhere to required clearance distances from energized equipment.

The department can only inspect and immediately issue field deficiencies for a fraction of this quarterly reported wildfire mitigation plan work due to limited resources available to cover the thousands of circuit miles and millions of trees within the utilities' expansive areas of responsibility across California. The department has had minimal success hiring and retaining contracted vegetation management inspectors due to, in part, financial conflict of interest with the utilities. The department conducts desktop audits of the utility reported wildfire mitigation plan work. Under existing law, these audits are conducted a year or more after the utilities' field work was completed such that deficiencies are provided to the utilities upon completion of the audit. In contrast, field inspections provide immediate results to the utilities that allow the utilities to more timely correct deficiencies found in the field reducing ignition risk.

The vegetation management field inspection process is conducted by highly trained, specialized environmental specialist staff that review and validate the wildfire mitigation work reported to the department by the utilities. Examples of this work include reviewing procedures and verifying wood debris removal, tree trimming, and pruning to verify that tree limbs are the regulatory required distance away from energized infrastructure. This process provides real time data to the department that is conveyed to the utilities, along with prescribed mitigation timeframes depending on the severity of the potential ignition risk and informs whether the utility is implementing its wildfire mitigation plan and therefore eligible for a safety certification (Public Utilities Code Section 8389 (e)(7)). Safety certifications are important as they encourage electrical utilities to invest in safety and make changes to limit wildfire risks and reduce costs for when a utility has a safety certification, it affects the amount, if any, that the utility must repay the California Wildfire Fund for costs and expenses associated with a covered wildfire.

Additional inspectors will allow Energy Safety to both inspect more of each of the high-fire-threat districts territories (See Appendix A) and support more annual vegetation management audits by

field verifying the targets and accomplishments claimed in utility-supplied documentation. Utilities also use wildfire mitigation plans to demonstrate additional wildfire mitigation and asset protection work above regulatory compliance they need to perform to address wildfire risk. These wildfire mitigation plans are used in California Public Utilities Commission rate proceedings to justify ratepayer funds to cover the cost of those additional mitigations. Additional inspectors will allow Energy Safety to verify and audit whether those mitigations are performed in the highest consequence locations and focus on maximizing vegetation risk reduction.

Energy Safety inspectors have resourcefully identified utilities performing vegetation clearing around poles without electrical equipment and hazard tree and slash management debris removals inaccurately reported, but current staffing is insufficient to conduct structured, targeted field audits. As utilities often conduct vegetation management activities in only a portion of their territories, Energy Safety must assess whether the work is being done in the highest priority/highest risk areas. Additionally, as utilities are beginning to replace in-person inspections with fixed-wing aircraft and helicopter LiDAR and satellite imagery, Energy Safety will need to field-verify that the right inspection type is being used to ensure the same outcomes. For instance, LiDAR can't identify hazard trees and satellite imagery requires clear line of sight and is less reliable in densely forested areas.

To meet these ongoing needs, the Environmental Science Division requests the following positions whose roles and responsibilities are described below:

- 1.0 Senior Environmental Scientist (Supervisory): The 1.0 Senior Environmental Scientist (Supervisory) will serve in a supervisory and lead role planning inspection work, supervising the employees, and ensuring team safety and assisting environmental scientists with technical field support while travelling and driving throughout the state. They serve as the primary subject matter expert on all facets of utility vegetation management programs and protocols, provide expert testimony as required, lead the development of inspection plans, prepare job safety briefings, verify wildfire mitigation plan compliance via vegetation inspections, prepare and review inspection reports and associated notices of violations and wildfire safety concerns, respond to and investigate concerns from the public, and lead special projects and assessments, and communicate immediate safety risks to the utilities.

- 3.0 Environmental Scientists: The 3.0 Environmental Scientists will review utility vegetation management programs and protocols, support the development of inspection plans, verify Wildfire Mitigation Plan(WMP) compliance via travelling and driving to vegetation field inspections throughout the state, prepare job safety briefings, prepare inspection reports and associated notices of violations and wildfire safety concerns, respond to concerns from the public, support the development and updating of inspection job aids and inspection guides relevant to vegetation inspections, and communicate immediate safety risks to the utilities.

C. Departmentwide and Statewide Considerations

This request builds on the successful framework of utility wildfire mitigation and safe excavation efforts approved by the Legislature and the Governor, including the Governor's June 21, 2019 Catastrophic Wildfires, Climate Change and Our Energy Future Strike Force Progress Report; Chapter 626, Statutes of 2018 (SB 901); Chapter 79, Statues of 2019 (AB 1054); Chapter 81, Statutes of 2019 (AB 111); Chapter 405, Statutes of 2019 (SB 209); Chapter 115, Statues of 2021 (AB 148); Chapter 809, Statutes of 2016 (SB 661); Chapter 307, Statutes of 2020 (SB 865); and a number of additional laws directed at reducing the likelihood and impact of utility-related wildfires and improving excavation safety around buried infrastructure.

Residents of California will benefit from this budget proposal as it will enable Energy Safety to further drive a reduction in utility-related catastrophic wildfires risk, which has a disproportionate impact on vulnerable communities, including socio-economically disadvantaged communities, people with access and functional needs, and other socially vulnerable populations.

D. Outcomes and Accountability

- Increase the department's inspection volume by 65 to 75 percent as measured by an increase in geographic territory covered within utilities' high fire threat districts (see Projected Outcomes Table and Appendix A).
- Increase the immediate field identification of vegetation contact ignition risk to utility Infrastructure and issue more notices of non-performance and wildfire safety concerns with risk driven mitigation timeframes to reduce wildfire risk throughout California.
- Reduce state-paid travel time for its inspection employees and increase the amount of field inspection time by geographically deploying resources resulting in increased efficiency and field productivity.
- Complete structured field audits beyond the minimum utility-reported wildfire mitigation plan initiative inspections to independently verify that the utilities are completing the wildfire mitigation work in compliance with regulatory standards on the riskiest circuits and high-fire threat districts throughout their systems.

Projected Outcomes

WORKLOAD MEASURE	CY 2025-26	BY 2026-27	BY+1 2027-28	BY+2 2028-29	BY+3 2029-30	BY+4 2030-31
Environmental Field Inspection Activities Completed (i.e., trees inspected)	36,000	60,000	60,000	60,000	60,000	60,000
Locations Inspected	6,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000
Vegetation-Related Wildfire Safety Concerns and Notices of Violation Issues	240	450	450	450	450	450

E. Implementation Plan

Upon approval of this request, hiring will commence immediately and continue throughout 2026-27. The hiring process will require coordination with current management to develop duty statements, justification of positions, advertising, recruitment in a competitive employee market, and hiring and onboarding.

F. Supplemental Information (If Applicable)

The current and proposed percentage of vegetation management inspections map is available upon request. Current and proposed organization charts are also available upon request.

BCP Fiscal Detail Sheet

(Dollars in Thousands)

BCP Title: Vegetation Management Inspections

BR Name: 3355-021-BCP-2026-MR

Budget Request Summary

Personal Services

Personal Services	FY26 Current Year	FY26 Budget Year	FY26 BY+1	FY26 BY+2	FY26 BY+3	FY26 BY+4
Positions - Permanent	0.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0
Total Positions	**0.0**	**4.0**	**4.0**	**4.0**	**4.0**	**4.0**

Fund Summary

Fund Source

Fund Source	FY26 Current Year	FY26 Budget Year	FY26 BY+1	FY26 BY+2	FY26 BY+3	FY26 BY+4
Total State Operations Expenditures	**$0**	**$0**	**$0**	**$0**	**$0**	**$0**

Program Summary

Program Funding

Program Funding	FY26 Current Year	FY26 Budget Year	FY26 BY+1	FY26 BY+2	FY26 BY+3	FY26 BY+4
Total All Programs	**$0**	**$0**	**$0**	**$0**	**$0**	**$0**

Personal Services Details

Positions

Positions	FY26 Current Year	FY26 Budget Year	FY26 BY+1	FY26 BY+2	FY26 BY+3	FY26 BY+4
0762 - Environmental Scientist (Eff. 07-01-2026)	0.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0
0764 - Sr Envirnal Scientist (Supvry) (Eff. 07-01-2026)	0.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Total Positions	**0.0**	**4.0**	**4.0**	**4.0**	**4.0**	**4.0**