

Assembly Bill 57

California Pocket Forest Initiative

Assembly Member Ash Kalra

SUMMARY

AB 57 would offer communities access to healthy, self-sustaining natural green areas by forming the California Pocket Forest Initiative, a pilot program that would authorize CAL FIRE to provide demonstration grants for pocket forests to public and nonprofit entities.

BACKGROUND

Urban areas are often bereft of easily accessible green spaces, leaving plants, animals, and human residents without places to thrive. While plants and animals lack the space that they need to live and grow, humans are deprived of the many health benefits that come from having access to nature. For example, a 2019 study found that people who spent at least two hours a week in nature were much more likely to report good health and psychological wellbeing.ⁱ

Pocket forests are an efficient and effective way to address the scarcity of urban green spaces. A pocket forest is a small plot of urban land that has been densely planted with native plant species. Over the course of two to three years, the plot will grow into a self-sustaining miniature forest.

Pocket forests are rooted in the Miyawaki Method, a style of tree planting that directs growers to study and emulate an area's native ecosystem. Specifically, it instructs growers to analyze and improve a plot's soil conditions, then densely plant the plot with native main tree species, sub-species, shrubs, and ground-covering herbs. Because of growers' intentionality, pocket forests have been successfully grown in such varied places as Brazil, India, and the United Kingdom.

Once mature, a pocket forest can provide a crucial habitat for important native animal species and an accessible green space for urban residents. Their impact would be especially felt in California, as the state hosts hundreds of threatened and endangered plant and animal species and supports a 95% urban human population.ⁱⁱ Furthermore, pocket forests can serve as pit stops for vital pollinators, making them an asset in the fight to protect fragile bee populations. In tandem with other environmental efforts, they can

reshape the urban landscape into something more beneficial and equitable for all.

The existing California Urban Forestry Act of 1978 allows CAL FIRE to establish and run an urban forestry program that will encourage more effective tree planting and management in urban areas. However, the Act does not currently include any specific pocket forest programs or initiatives.

SOLUTION

AB 57 would establish the California Pocket Forest Initiative as a part of the California Urban Forestry Act of 1978. The Initiative would be a pilot program that would investigate the applicability and effectiveness of the Miyawaki Method in California. The program would award cities, counties, districts, non-profits, and public schools with demonstration grants to plant pocket forests on public land. CAL FIRE would prioritize grant applications from disadvantaged communities and communities that lack easily accessible green spaces.

By January 1, 2030, CAL FIRE would submit a report to the Legislature that evaluates the Miyawaki Method in California and recommends modifications to make it a better fit for the state. The Initiative would be sunset on January 1, 2031.

SPONSORS

California Institute for Biodiversity
California ReLeaf

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ⁱ <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-019-44097-3>

ⁱⁱ https://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/2010_census/cb12-50.html