

Assembly Bill 2114

California Pocket Forest Initiative

Assembly Member Ash Kalra

SUMMARY

AB 2114 would offer communities access to healthy, self-sustaining natural green areas by forming the California Pocket Forest Initiative, a program that would authorize CAL FIRE to provide 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 Therefore, it is crucial for California to begin addressing the scarcity of urban green spaces.

Pocket forests are an efficient and effective solution to this problem. 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 2114 would establish the California Pocket Forest Initiative as a part of the California Urban Forestry Act of 1978. The Initiative would allow CAL FIRE to award cities, counties, districts, non-profits, and public schools with 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.

CAL FIRE would also provide guidance to program staff on the proper application of the Miyawaki Method. This would include instruction on the selection of plant species for approved pocket forest projects. Although not all plant species would need to be drought-resistant, the selection of drought-resistant native species would be encouraged.

CONTACT

Marissa Plante, Legislative Assistant
Marissa.Plante@asm.ca.gov
(916) 319-2027

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

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