

Senate Joint Resolution 21: By Sen Facey & Sen. Hansen
“...Requesting an interim study of local fire protection...”

Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation:

- State wildland fire protection agency for state & private lands. (76-13-104)
- Significant and long standing relationship with all 56 counties and all career, combination, and volunteer fire departments. (Est. 400 total)
- Formal County Cooperative Agreement with each county: details responsibilities for state and county regarding wildland fire training, equipment, and suppression.
 - DNRC has ~ 320 vehicles in the county coop fleet across the state. (Mostly state owned trucks loaned to the counties.)
 - These agreements are between the Board of County Commissioners and the DNRC. *They do require worker's compensation coverage for all operators of state fire equipment. We have worked hard with numerous counties to assure coverage, but we also know that most operators of the equipment are members of small fire departments or companies with no direct connection to the county.*
- **Montana DNRC recognizes the need to assure workers compensation coverage for all volunteer firefighters as an important goal of this interim committee.**
- **Montanans have greatly contributed to and benefited from the nearly 50 year old “County Cooperative Fire Protection” program. Our program has been effective and cost efficient, however we are seeing some important signs of ‘stresses in the model. This stress includes:**
 - The general aging and decreasing numbers of volunteers in the fire service.
 - Decreasing ability from the counties to provide effective initial attack, or monitor fires after active suppression to prevent a rekindle fire.
 - Other emergency response (EMS, all hazard incidents, etc.) demands year round can result in volunteer fire fighter burn out and decreased participation.
 - The lack of clarity regarding the responsibilities for fire management between the County government and RFDs creates confusion.
 - The current fiscal arrangement of the state paying for most suppression costs divorces county government from the financial responsibility for the increased fire suppression response and costs of rural subdivision development.
 - Increasing costs to the state: \$42,788,967 spent on county assists the last five fire seasons.
- **Fire program funding:** The Montana DNRC fire program is funded several ways; using federal, state general fund and state special revenue sources (see chart.) This funding split is designated in Montana code (MCA 76-13-201 to 213.) In addition, all fire suppression costs are now funded by the legislatively established (MCA 76-13-150) fire suppression account. During recent discussions in the 2015 Legislature regarding program funding, questions arose regarding whether the current process was fair and appropriate.

Montana DNRC Fire Program Funding:				
Fiscal Year	General Fund	Fire Assessment	Federal	Total:
2012	\$ 6.3 MM	\$ 3.4 MM	\$.6 MM	\$ 10.3 MM
2013	\$ 6.3 MM	\$ 3.4 MM	\$.6 MM	\$ 10.3 MM
2014	\$ 6.8 MM	\$ 3.4 MM	\$.5 MM	\$ 10.7 MM
2015	\$ 7.0 MM	\$ 3.5 MM	\$.5 MM	\$ 11.0 MM

Fire suppression costs now average ~\$20.1 MM annually. These costs are funded by the fire suppression account.

Average Fire Cost Summary 2006 - 2015			
Fiscal Year	Total Cost	Reimbursements	Net Cost
2006	\$8,302,312	(\$3,240,042)	\$5,062,270
2007	\$61,000,318	(\$21,290,928)	\$39,709,390
2008	\$108,152,537	(\$56,757,219)	\$51,395,318
2009	\$10,082,885	(\$3,211,351)	\$6,871,534
2010	\$6,695,714	(\$1,047,748)	\$5,647,966
2011	\$3,293,346	(\$807,571)	\$2,485,775
2012	\$20,357,103	(\$3,596,721)	\$16,760,382
2013	\$71,224,976	(\$14,000,275)	\$57,224,701
2014	\$19,658,832	(\$8,038,987)	\$11,619,844
2015	\$6,650,715	(\$2,631,560)	\$4,019,155
Total 2006-2015			\$200,796,335
10-Year Average Cost			\$ 20,079,634
Total 2006-2015 (excluding high and low years)			\$141,085,859
8-Year Average Cost			\$ 17,635,732

Questions?