



MONTANA LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

Legislative Fiscal Division

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Legislative Fiscal Analyst
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DATE: November 16, 2009

TO: Members of the Legislative Finance Committee

FROM: Barbara Smith, Fiscal Analyst II

RE: 2009 Fire Season

Montana typically experiences wildland fire in all months of the year, the major season of July to September has come to a close. As of October 30, 2009 DNRC responded to 350 fires, included 343 direct protection fires and 7 county assists, which burned 6,826 acres. The initial attack rate, or the percentage of fires contained at ten acres or less, was 98.5 percent. To achieve this rate, 463.3 hours were flown in DNRC aircraft and 1.24 million gallons of water were delivered with DNRC helicopters. In addition, DNRC provided mutual aid assistance on 79 county managed incidents.

Fire costs are based on estimated fire costs and costs that have already been paid. Fire costs are not settled until all reimbursement has been received and all bills have been paid. As of November 16, 2009 fire costs were estimated as follows:

Department Of Natural Resources and Conservation	
Fire Expenditures - Summary Level	
November 16,2009	
<u>Part 1: Fire Protection Costs:</u>	
Paid YTD	\$3,538,670
Estimated Costs To Pay	<u>2,272,869</u>
Paid and Estimated Obligations	<u>5,811,539</u>
<u>Part 2: Reimbursements:</u>	
Actual Reimbursements	<u>0</u>
Anticipated Reimbursements	<u>849,640</u>
Received and Anticipated Reimbursements	<u>849,640</u>
Estimated State Fire Costs	<u><u>\$4,961,899</u></u>

State fire costs are paid from the fire suppression fund. The impact on the fund is as follows:

Fire Suppression Fund In Millions	
FY 2010 Beginning Balance	\$32.6
FY 2010 Estimated Fire Costs	<u>5</u>
Estimated Funds Remaining	<u><u>\$27.6</u></u>

The estimated balance in the fund is \$27.6 million. As per HB 154, if \$15.0 million remains unspent and unencumbered on May 1, 2010, DNRC may use up to \$2.0 million on fire prevention, fuel mitigation projects, and grants for the purchase of fire suppression equipment for county cooperatives. The DNRC is currently considering options for this funding. A plan for this funding will accompany the March 2010 fire cost report.