

# FIRE SUPPRESSION | 2015

## WILDFIRE SUPPRESSION FUNDING

In Montana, wildfires are expected. What we can't predict is the location, severity, and ultimate cost to the state.

Some fire seasons are much more severe, such as 2013 which left the state with a \$57.0 million liability. Milder fire seasons like that in 2011 help ease this burden. In 2011 the state only accrued a \$2.5 million liability.

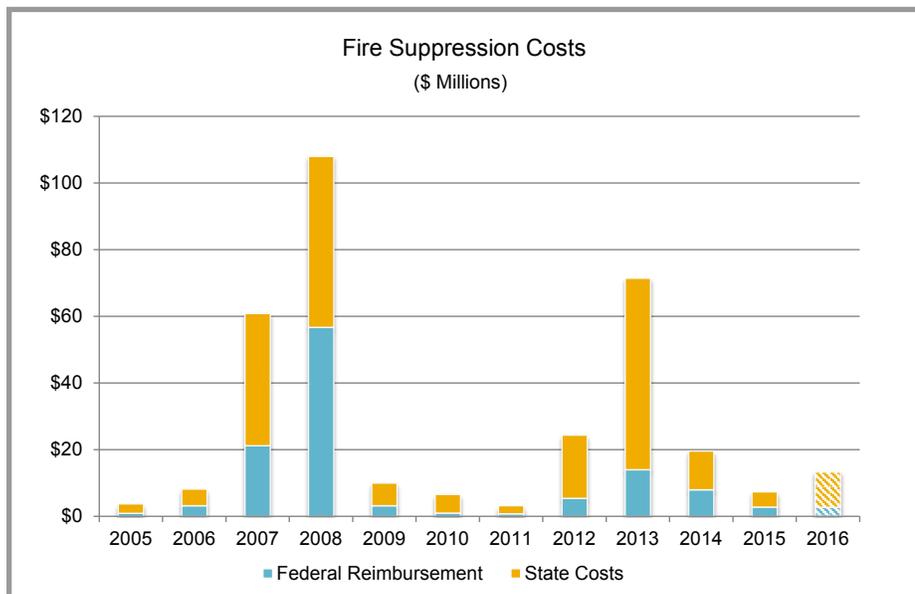
In 2007, the legislative special session created a fire suppression account to specifically address potential fire season costs. This provides for the costs associated with both wildfire protection and wildfire mitigation.

The fund receives ongoing revenues from two sources:

- 1) Up to 0.5% of unused general fund appropriations at the end of each fiscal year
- 2) The unused portion of the Governor's \$16 million emergency appropriation at the end of each biennium

In addition, the 2013 legislature allocated a portion of excess corporation tax collections to the suppression fund for a short period (FY 2014-FY 2015), which resulted in \$5.2 million.

As of September 2015, the fund had \$86.5 million.



The above chart details the amount spent to suppress fires in MT by fiscal year since 2005. Blue represents federal reimbursements, and yellow shows the cost to the state. Each line represents the combined total. FY 2016 is in progress.

## DNRC

The Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) provides direct protection to 5.2 million acres through its direct protection program,

and an additional 45 million acres through the state/federal/county cooperative fire program.

DNRC is also responsible for forest health on the majority of state owned lands. Forest management activities include timber harvesting from trust lands, fuel reduction projects, homeowner assistance and public education.

DNRC PROVIDES DIRECT PROTECTION FOR 5.2 MILLION ACRES

# LANDOWNER FIRE PROTECTION FEE



Landowners within a direct protection zone provide funding for fire readiness by paying a fire protection fee. This fee is set in statute with an upper limit of \$45.00 per parcel per fire district and a \$.25 per acre fee for parcels over 20 acres. Landowners with less than 20 acres pay approximately 60% of the total fee. In FY 2015 this fee raised \$3.5 million.

The state also has

signed an inter-agency agreement for cooperative wildfire management with federal fire agencies that also have fire protection responsibilities in Montana. Considerable investment has been made in the management of wildland fire for infrastructure, training and initial attack suppression activities with the philosophy that in reducing or limiting fire costs, the best defense is to extinguish the fire quickly.

IN FY 2015  
THIS FEE  
RAISED \$3.5  
MILLION

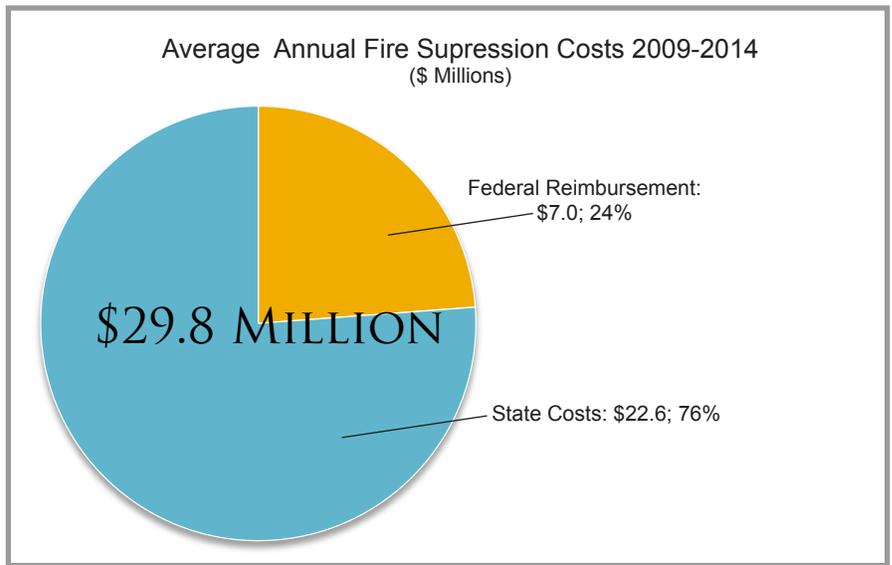
## FEDERAL ASSISTANCE

Federal assistance for fire suppression is made available to the state when fire conditions meet federal thresholds. FEMA (The Federal Emergency Management Agency) determines whether the threat posed by a fire or fire complex would constitute a major disaster. FEMA utilizes the following specific criteria:

- 1) Threat to lives and improved property, including threats to critical facilities and/or infrastructure, and critical watershed areas (otherwise referred to as the 100 structure threshold)
- 2) Availability of state and local firefighting resources
- 3) High fire danger conditions, as indicated by nationally accepted indicators; and
- 4) Potential major economic impact.

If FEMA determines that the state meets the evaluation criteria, a fire cost threshold is applied to determine the amount of funding to be provided.

Montana has a threshold of \$100,000 per fire and a cumulative threshold of \$500,000. When the thresholds are met, and the governor has declared a disaster, FEMA provides 75 percent of the eligible costs. The actual amount is calculated after the fire has been extinguished.



The above chart shows the **five year averages** of fire suppression costs in Montana, from 2009-2014. FY 2015-2016 have not yet been calculated. This information was found using the State Accounting, Budgeting, and Human Resources System (SABHRS).