



Fire Suppression Interim Committee

60th Montana Legislature

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DAWN FIELD, Secretary
BARBARA SMITH, Fiscal Analyst

TO: David Ewer, Director
Office of Budget and Program Planning

FROM: Senator John Cobb, Chair

RE: FY 2009 Fire Season Recommendations

DATE: February 29, 2008

The Fire Suppression Interim Committee (FSIC) recognizes that the decisions regarding the implementation of resources for the upcoming fire season are that of the administration. The FSIC would like to offer to the administration options to increase resources for the upcoming fire season. This letter details those recommendations and the potential cost savings.

The Fire Suppression Interim Committee (FSIC) met via conference call on Friday, February 22 to discuss the availability of funding sources to increase the seasonal workforce within the Forestry Division of the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC). By a unanimous vote, the committee agreed to recommend to the administration specific initiatives for the FY 2009 fire season to be funded with the fire suppression fund, which includes \$40 million available for fire suppression costs after July 1, 2008. Discussions with legal staff led to the conclusion that this fund could be utilized to provide additional resources for the FY 2009 fire season, if those resources would have been part of the normal suppression bill. The cost of adding emergency fire personnel has historically been a part of the fire suppression bill.

DNRC provided the FSIC with a prioritized list of potential resource needs for the upcoming 2011 biennium. After close review of the list, the committee selected specific items designed to provide additional seasonal resources to DNRC to increase efficiency in initial and extended attack as well as increased fiscal oversight. The initiatives could also provide an opportunity to determine their effectiveness prior to adding such resources to DNRC's base budget.

The items endorsed are as follows:

Extend Engine Crews to 7 days/wk

Increase seasonal positions on DNRC engines to provide 7 days/wk coverage. This initiative would require approximately 7.0 seasonal FTE and \$260,000. These resources could potentially prevent two 1000+ acre wildfires for an annual savings of \$3.0 million.

Extend Aviation Coverage to 7 days/wk

Increase seasonal positions in the Aviation Program to provide 7 days/wk coverage. This increase would staff each helicopter with a manager, crew, and fuel truck driver. This initiative would require approximately 6.79 seasonal FTE and \$469,846. These resources could potentially prevent two 1000+ acre wildfires for an annual savings of \$3.0 million.

Fire Business Specialists

Increase the presence of fire business specialists in the field offices and within the Central Services Division. These individuals would also serve as incident business advisors on DNRC managed fires. This initiative would increase the fiscal oversight during and after fire season for a potential costs savings of approximately \$750,000 per year. This initiative would require approximately 4.0 seasonal FTE and \$300,000.

Dispatch Center Staff

Augment existing and add additional dispatch positions at all land offices for increased representation in interagency dispatch centers, yielding better distribution of firefighting resources on state and local government fires. This initiative would require approximately 4.25 seasonal FTE and \$95,000.

Operations Section Supervisor

Increase the efficiency in fire management fire operations across the state and consistently represent DNRC within the Northern Rockies Coordinating Group by adding 1.0 modified FTE as a section supervisor within the Fire and Aviation Management Bureau. This addition would require approximately \$95,000.

The committee would appreciate a response from the administration regarding the implementation of the above mentioned initiatives prior to the next scheduled meeting on March 27, 2008. This information can be provided to our staff, Barb Smith of the Legislative Fiscal Division. If you require additional information I can be reached at 562-3670 or you can reach Barb at 444-5347.

- C Members of the Fire Suppression Interim Committee
 - Taryn Purdy, LFD
 - Barbara Smith, LFD
 - Leanne Heisel, LSD
 - Todd Everts, LEPO
 - Hal Harper, Governor's Office
 - Mary Sexton, Director, DNRC
 - Bob Harrington, Administrator, Forestry Division, DNRC
 - Amy Sassano, OBPP
 - Christine Hultin-Brus, OBPP