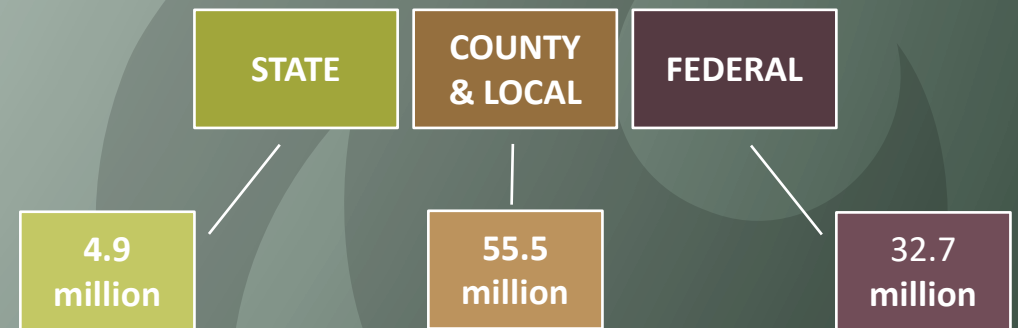


# The State of Montana & Funding Wildfire Suppression

Rob Miller, LFD

## THE CHALLENGE

Protecting 93.1 Million Acres from Wildfires





# The State of Montana & Wildfires

## THE RESOURCES



County Cooperative Fire Protection

400 Fire Departments

Montana DNRC Personnel

US Forest Service, BLM and BIA

Montana Wildfire Suppression Account

# When Montana Became a State In 1889 the Focus Was On Protecting Communities





1885

1889

1945

1987

# Fire Companies Were Authorized

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**7-33-2311. Fire Companies Authorized.**

Fire Companies were first authorized in 1885 to provide fire protection and were the first statutorily recognized and authorized fire agencies.



1885

1889

1945

1987

# Municipal Fire Departments

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AUTHORIZED IN 1889, MANDATORY IN 1937

**7-33-4101. Fire Department Authorized And Required.**

In every city and town of this state there must be a fire department, which must be organized, managed, and controlled by the local municipality.



1885

1889

1945

1987

# Rural Fire Districts

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7-33-2201. Authority Of County Governing Body To  
Protect Range, Farm, And Forest Resources.

For the purpose of protection and conservation of  
range, farm, and forest resources and of the prevention  
of soil erosion, the county governing body **may** perform  
the functions provided in this part.



1885

1889

1945

1987

# Fire Service Areas

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## **7-33-2401. Fire Service Area — Establishment — Alteration — Dissolution.**

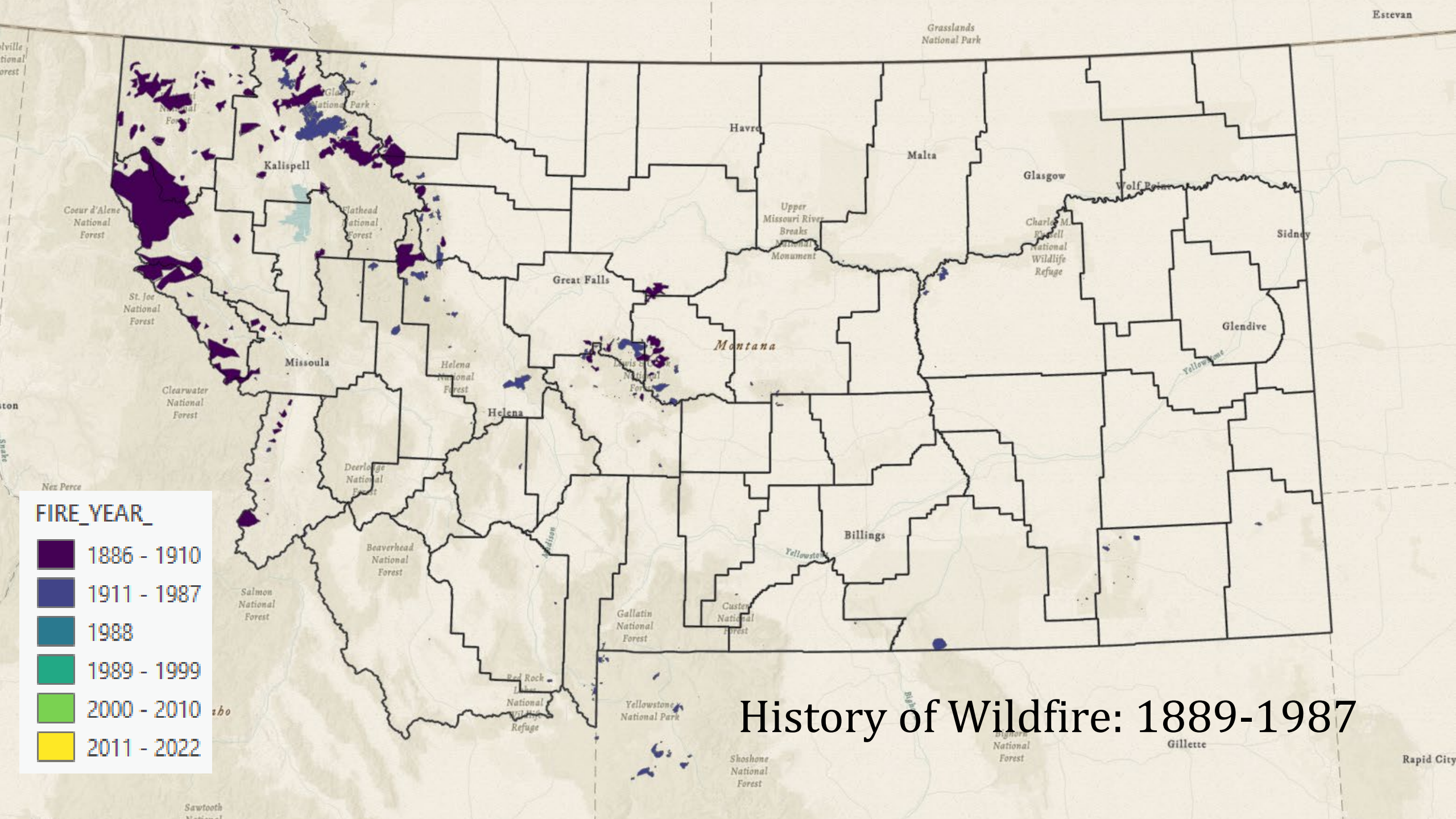
Fire service areas provided a mechanism to assess a fee for fire protection of property outside municipal or rural fire districts.

Upon receipt of a petition signed by at least 30 owners of real property in the proposed service area, or by a majority of the owners of real property if there are no more than 30 owners of real property in the proposed service area, the board of county commissioners may establish a fire service area within an unincorporated area not part of a rural fire district in the county to provide the services and equipment.





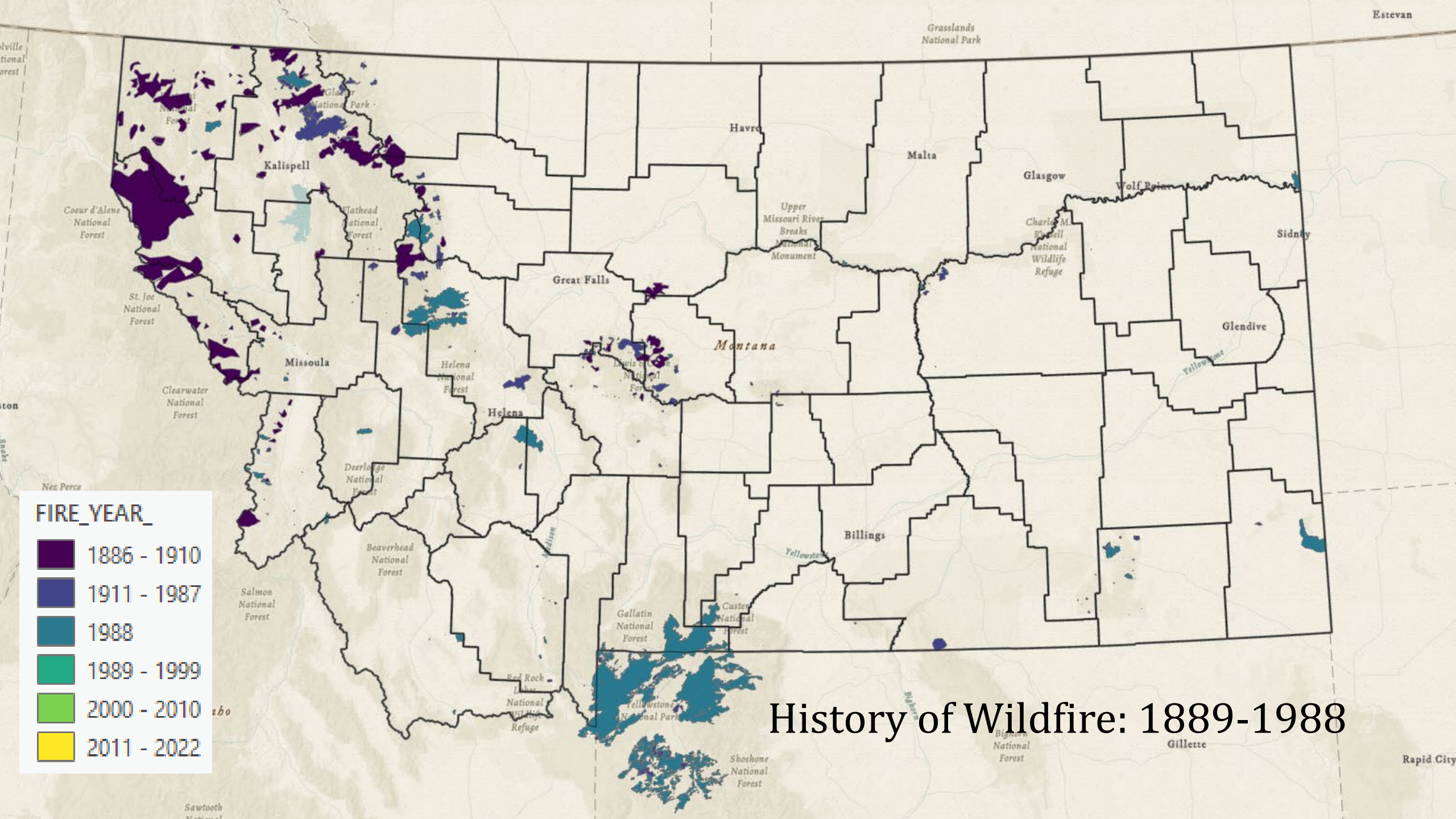
# History of Wildfire: 1889-1910



**FIRE\_YEAR\_**

- 1886 - 1910
- 1911 - 1987
- 1988
- 1989 - 1999
- 2000 - 2010
- 2011 - 2022

# History of Wildfire: 1889-1987



Estevan

Grasslands National Park

Havre

Malta

Kalispell

Glasgow

Wolf Point

Coeur d'Alene National Forest

Flathead National Forest

Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument

Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge

Sidney

St. Joe National Forest

Great Falls

Glendive

Missoula

Helena National Forest

Lewis and Clark National Forest

Montana

Yellowstone

Clearwater National Forest

Helena

Deer Lodge National Forest

Nez Perce

Billings

Beaverhead National Forest

Yellowstone

Salmon National Forest

Gallatin National Forest

Custer National Forest

Red Rock

National Wildlife Refuge

Yellowstone National Park

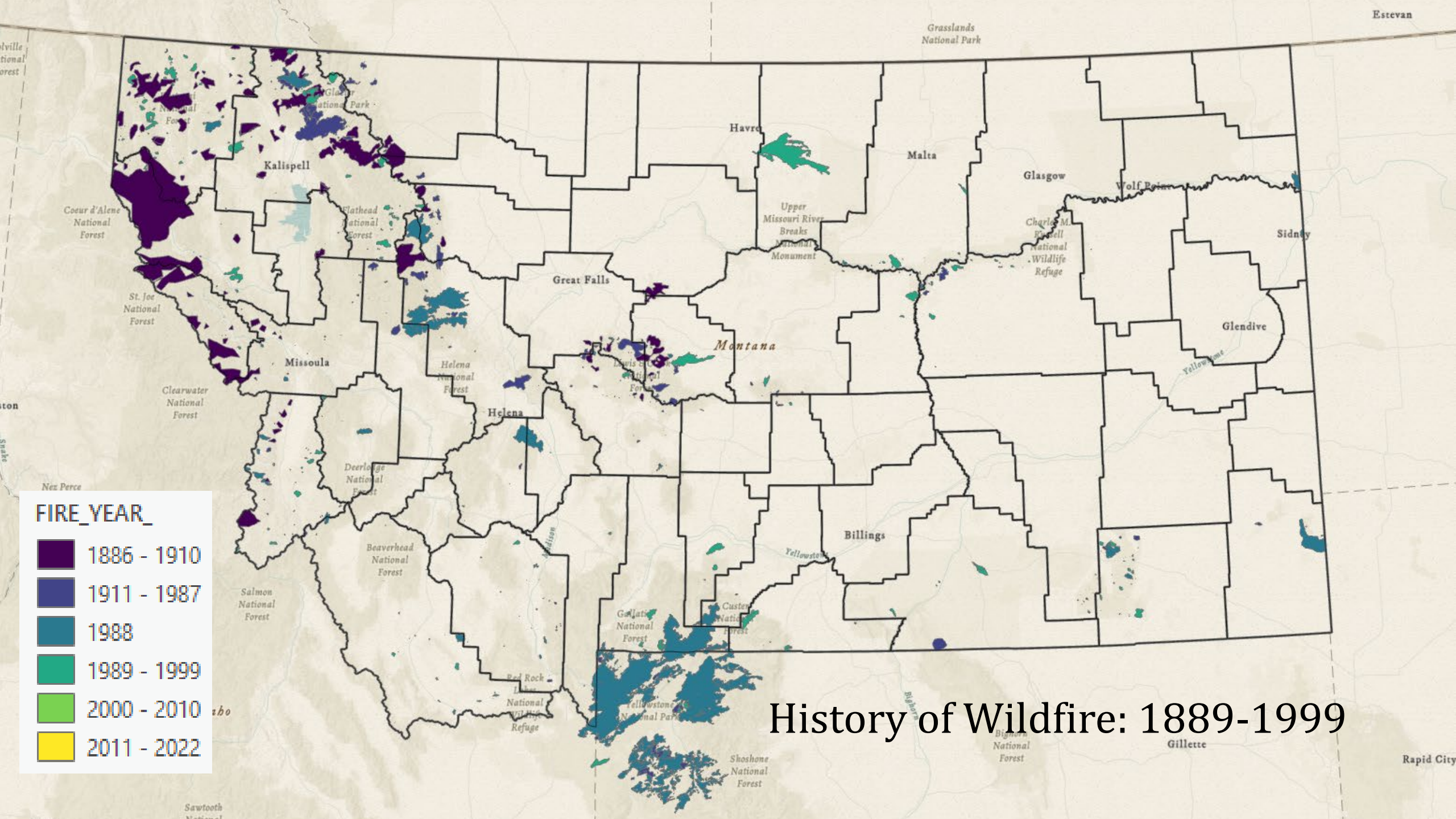
Shoshone National Forest

Big Horn National Forest

Gillette

Sawtooth National Forest

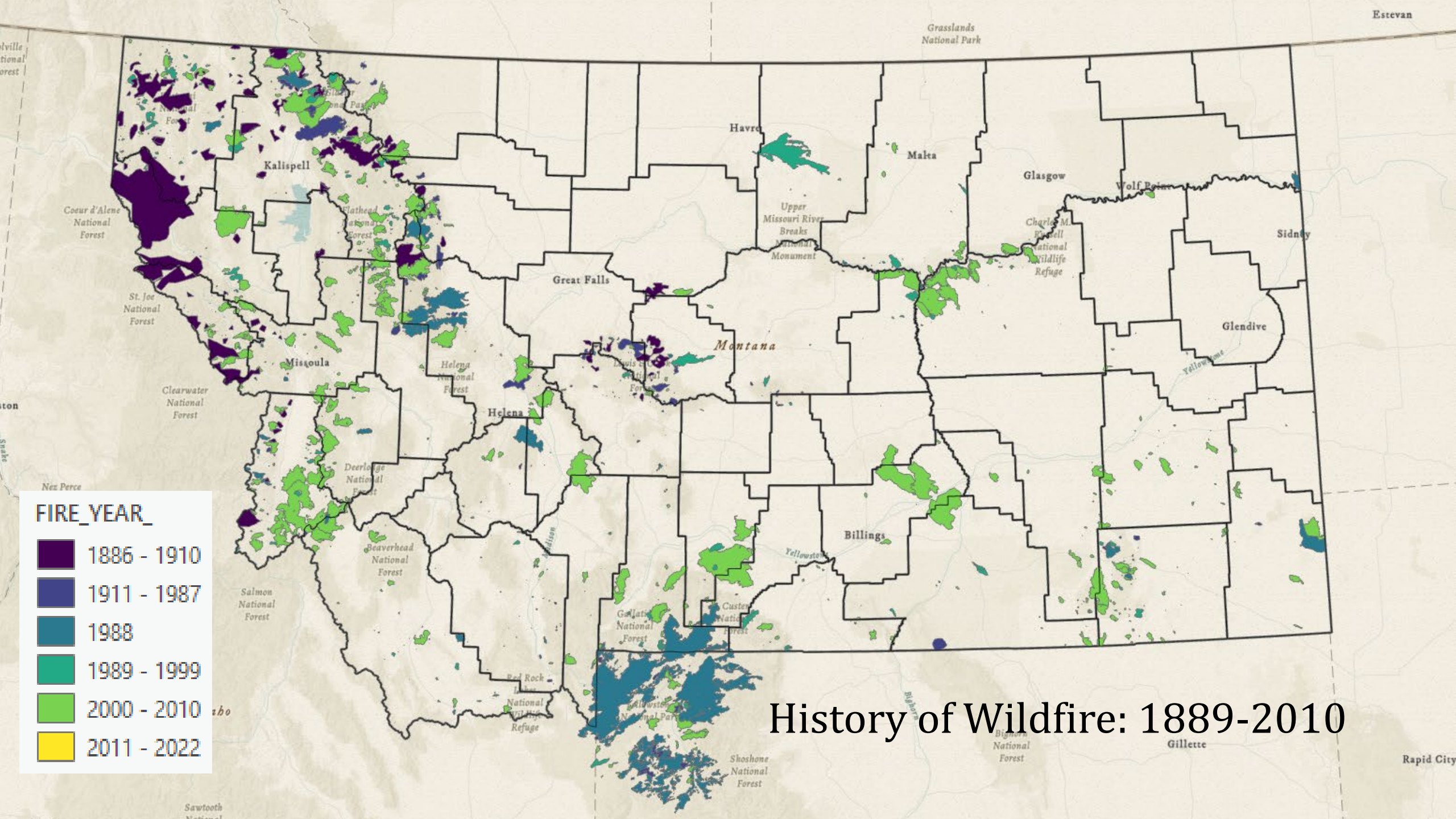
Rapid City



**FIRE\_YEAR\_**

- 1886 - 1910
- 1911 - 1987
- 1988
- 1889 - 1999
- 2000 - 2010
- 2011 - 2022

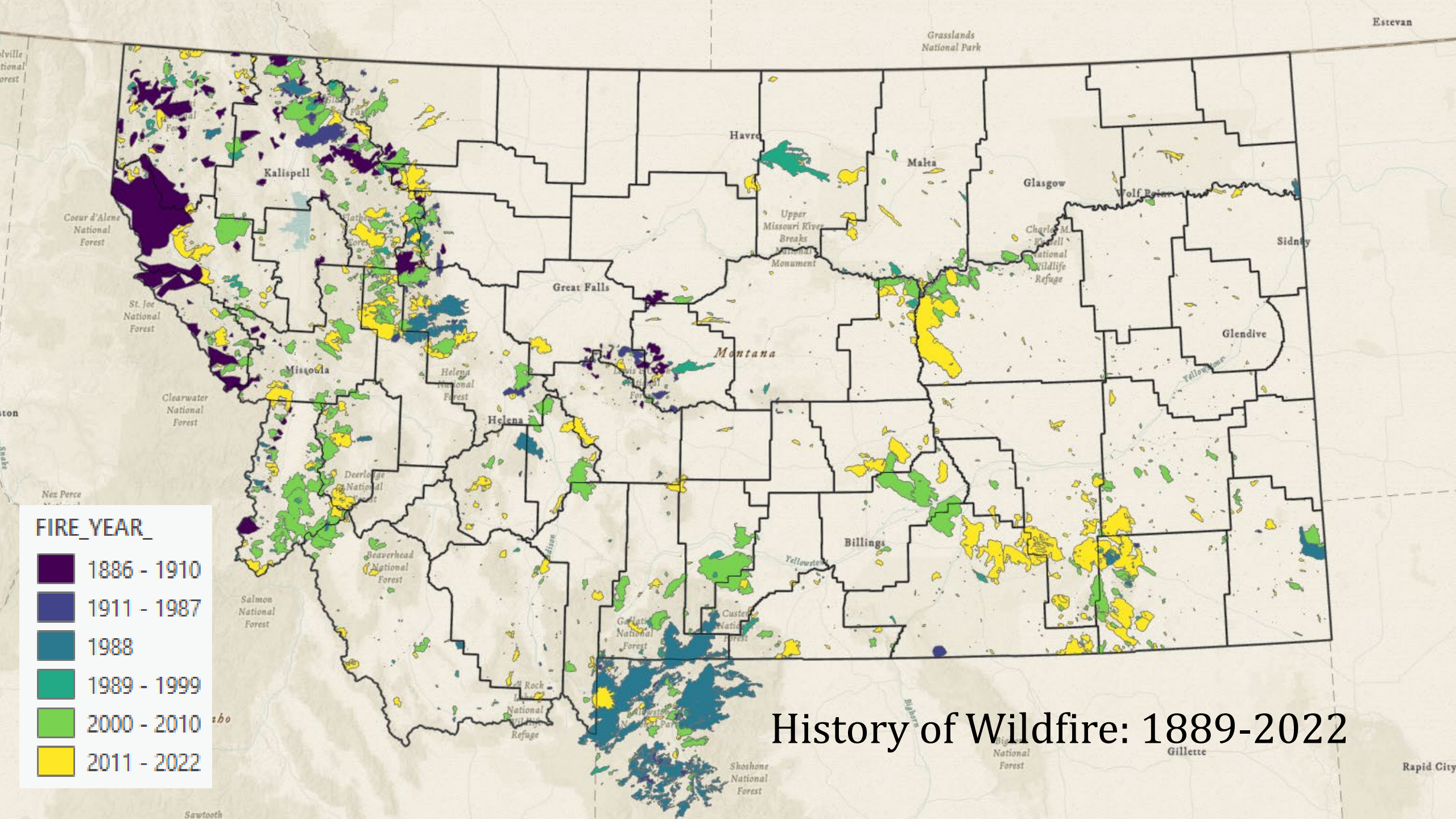
# History of Wildfire: 1889-1999



**FIRE\_YEAR\_**

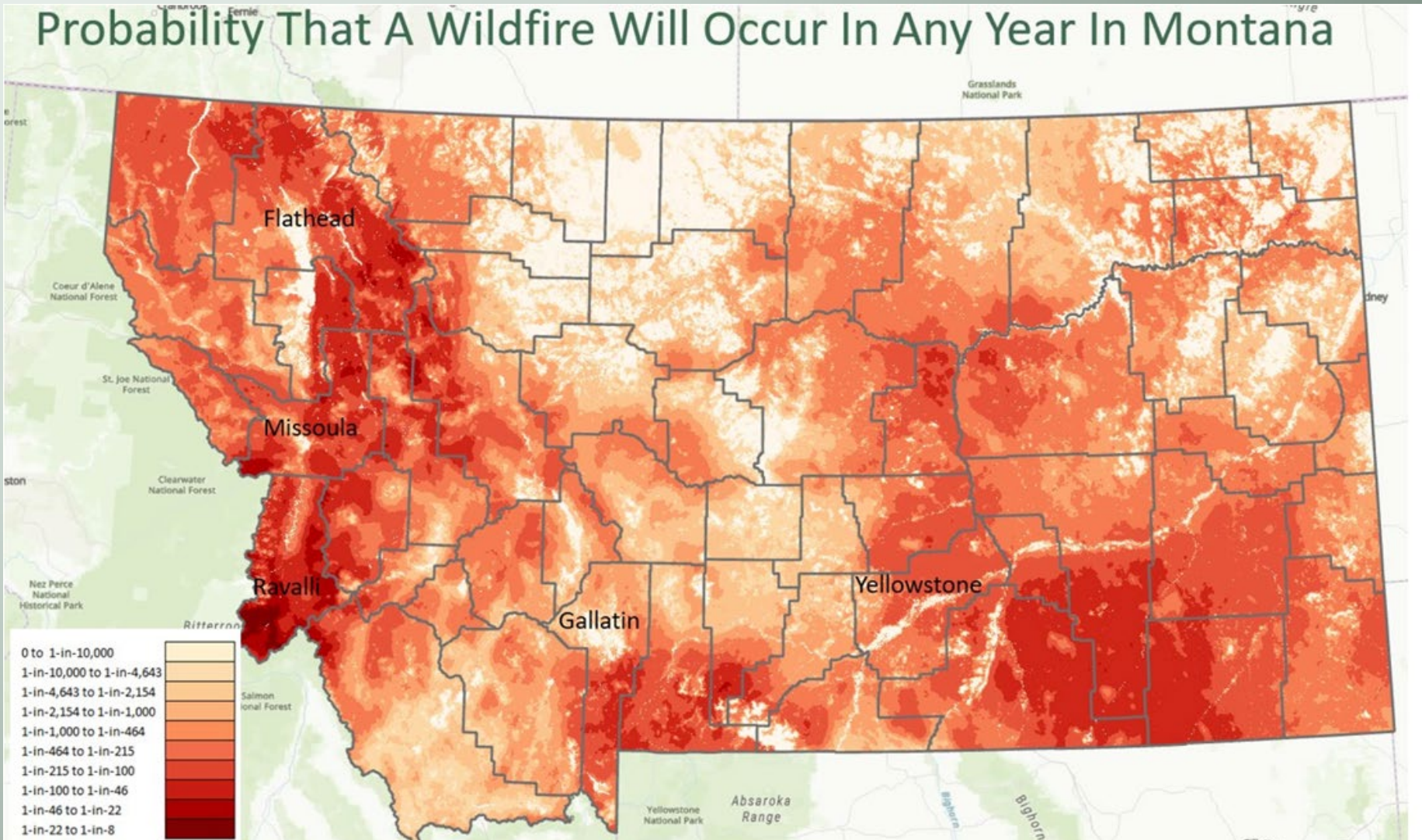
- 1886 - 1910
- 1911 - 1987
- 1988
- 1989 - 1999
- 2000 - 2010
- 2011 - 2022

History of Wildfire: 1889-2010



# Where Do Wildfires Occur In Montana?

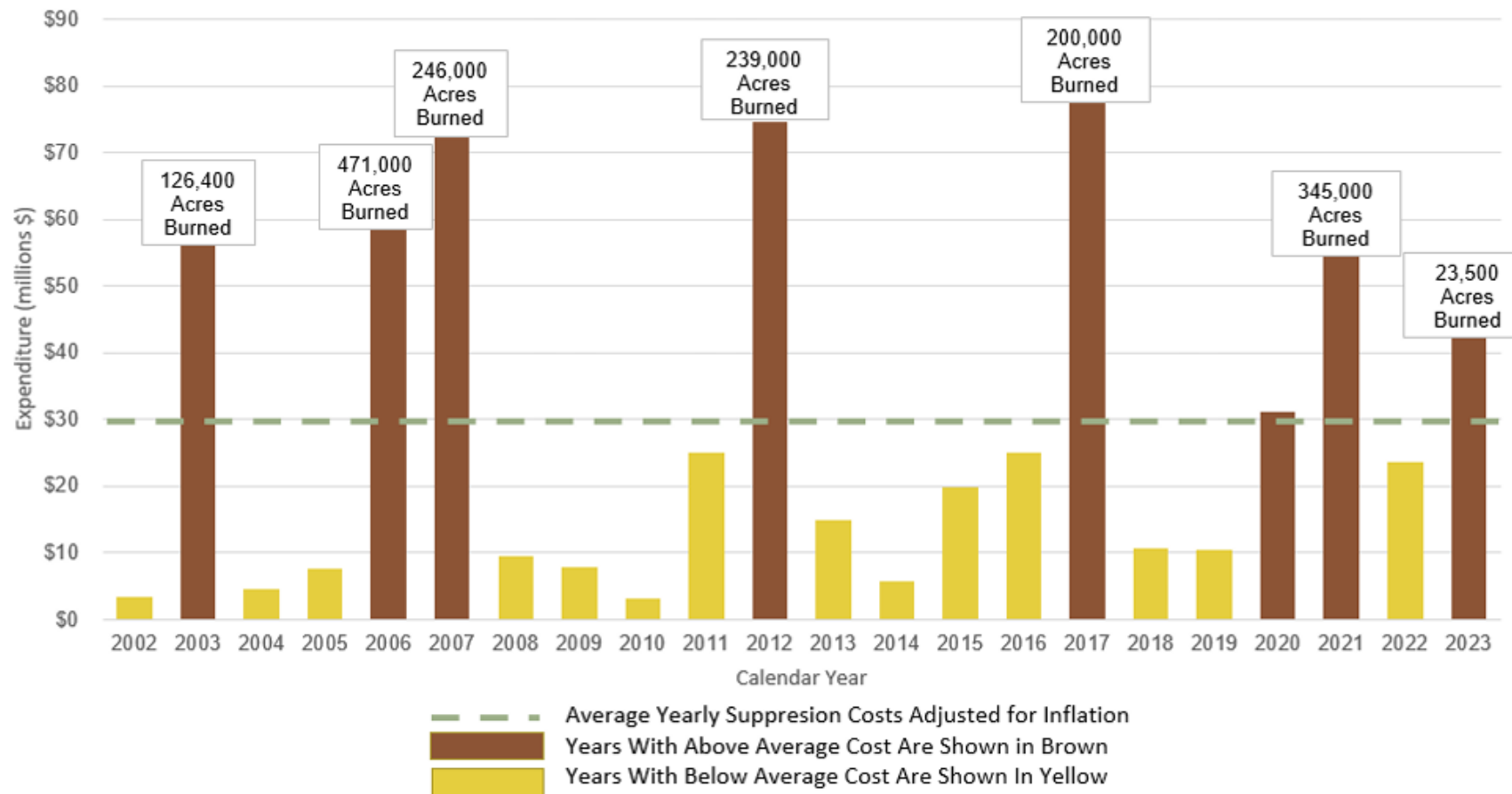
Wildfire risks are highest in areas with high fuel loads, such as the dense forests of western Montana and the regions bordering Yellowstone National Park. The shrublands and grasslands of eastern Montana also face a high risk.



In recent years, new residential and commercial development in the wildland-urban interface of Flathead, Missoula, Ravalli, Yellowstone, and Gallatin counties has complicated wildfire suppression efforts and increased associated costs.

# Wildfire Suppression Funding

Montana Fire Suppression Costs & Acres Burned on State, County, and Private Lands  
(\$ millions adjusted for inflation)



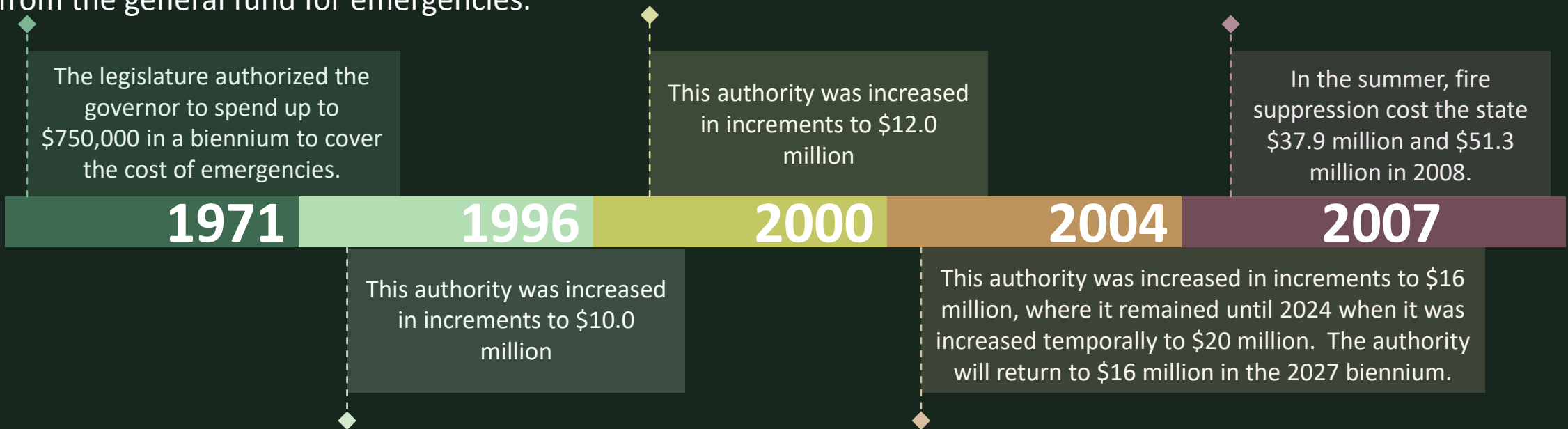
Over the past two decades, Montana has faced substantial financial burdens due to wildfire suppression:

- The average annual cost, adjusted for inflation, has been \$30 million over the last 22 years.
- In the past five years, this average has slightly increased to \$32.3 million.
- In the last two decades seven years were above average with four of those years double the average expense.
- About 29% of the lands in the state are federal, not included on the chart



# Fire Suppression Funding Prior to 2008

Originally the legislature did not appropriate authority specifically for fire suppression costs. The Department of Natural Resources used general fund authority appropriated for other non fire related activities. When the legislature next convened the department would request a supplemental appropriation to cover the cost of fires. The Governor was also given authority to spend from the general fund for emergencies.

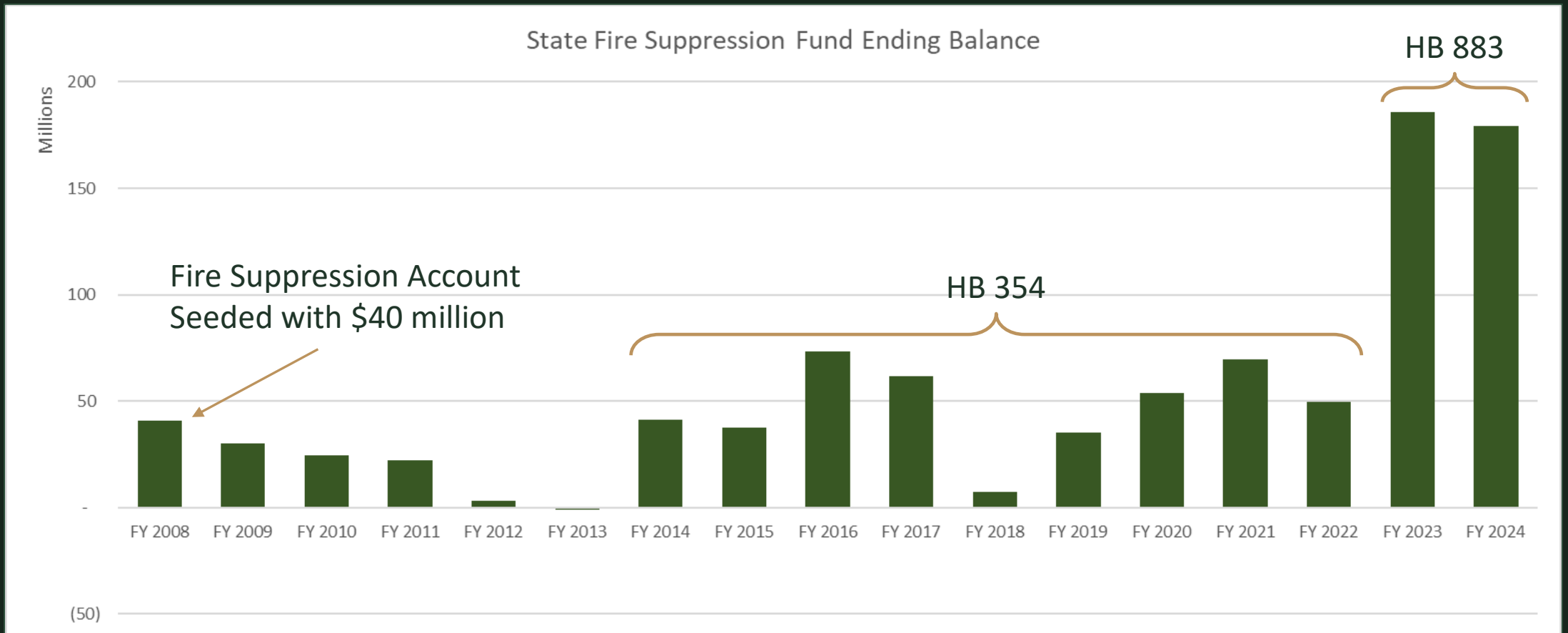


In response the legislature created the Wildfire Suppression State Special Revenue account and seeded it with \$40 million. The new account was statutorily appropriated for wildfire suppression.

# The Montana Wildfire Suppression Account

- The wildfire suppression account was established by the legislature in 2008.
- Statutorily appropriated to the Department of Natural Resources for wildfire suppression, mitigation, preparedness, and equipment purchases.
- The legislature seeded the account with \$40.0 million from the general fund but provided no other reliable revenue.

# Montana Wildfire State Special Revenue Fire Suppression Account



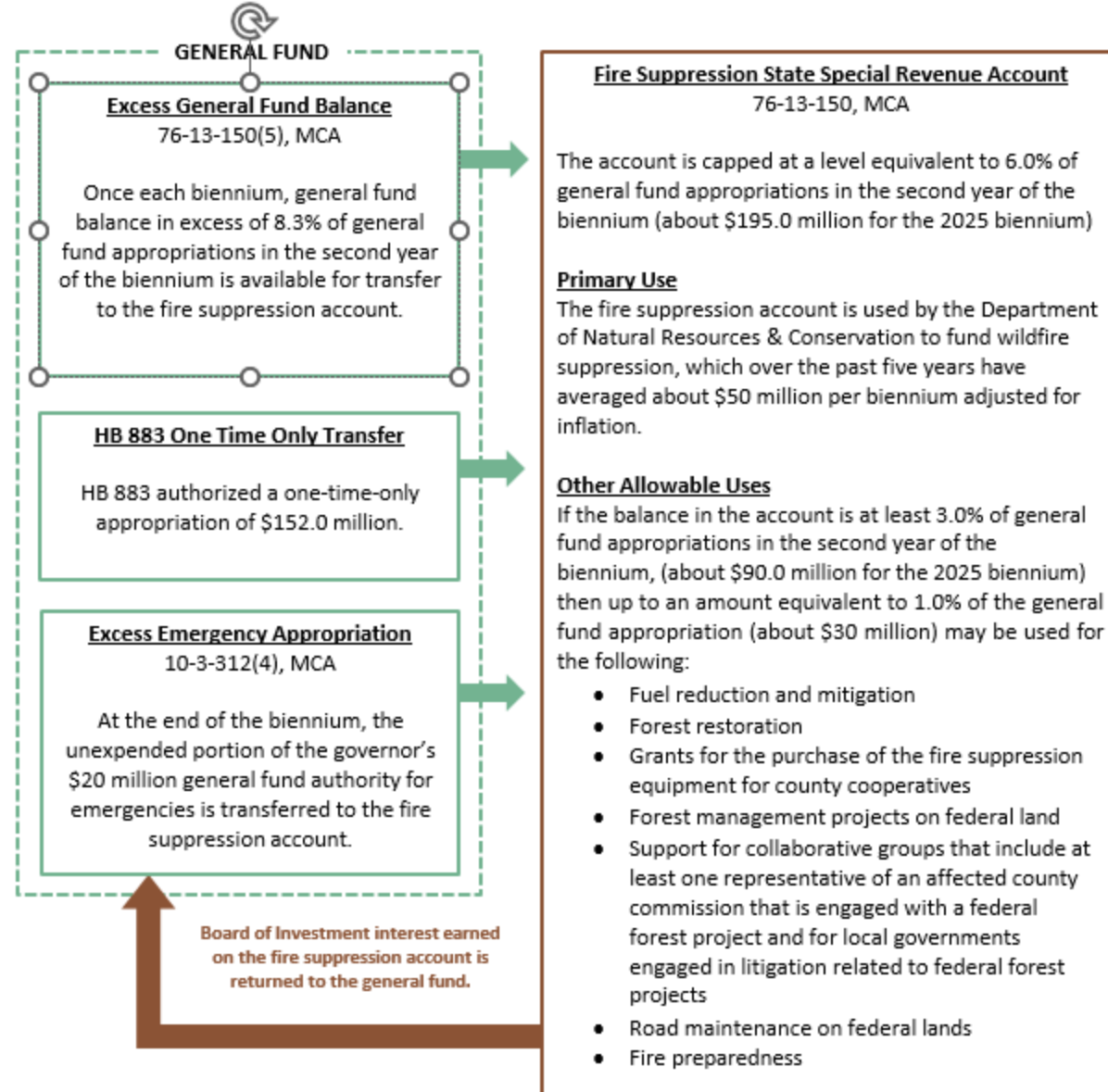
# How Does Montana Currently Fund Wildfire Suppression?

In short, Montana funds fire suppression with general fund that is deposited in the wildfire suppression state special revenue account.

To provide a more reliable revenue source and increase the available balance in the fire suppression account the 2023 legislature passed HB 883 which did three things.

1. HB 883 seeded the fire suppression fund with \$152 million.
2. HB 883 provided a mechanism in statute to transfer sufficient general fund to the fire suppression account each biennium sufficient to bring the balance to an equivalent of 6.0% of the general fund revenues in the second year of the biennium, about \$200.0 million in the 2025 biennium.
3. HB 883 increased the amount that DNRC could use for fire mitigation, equipment, and preparedness from \$5.0 million per biennium to \$30.0 million per biennium.

## Montana Wildlife Suppression State Special Revenue Account General Fund Transfers (HB 883)



# State Partners in Wildfire Suppression.

## County Co-Op Fire Protection Arrangement

All wildfires start out small and if fire suppression is early and effective, the likelihood that fire will grow into a major incident is reduced. Over the past 10 years, 96% of wildfires in Montana have been controlled before they reach 10 acres. Through the County Co-op Fire Protection Arrangement, local fire departments provide the initial attack on fires and extended attack in most cases. When a wildland fire exceeds the capacity of the county, DNRC will intervene to assist. The agency brings state and federal resources at no cost to the county providing organizational and technical assistance, equipment, training, and direct fire control assistance when needed. The additional authority provided in HB 883, as described above, will enable the state to expand this assistance.

Statistics include:

- County firefighters provide initial attack on over 2,000 wildland fires each year.
- Over the years, DNRC has provided 360 fire engines and water tenders to local fire departments,
- DNRC trains more than 3,000 local government firefighters each year

## 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 \$50 per parcel per fire district and a \$0.30 per acre fee for parcels over 20 acres. Landowners with less than 20 acres pay approximately 60% of the total fee. In FY 2018 this fee raised \$3.8 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.

## Federal Assistance

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) determines whether the threat posed by a fire or fire complex would constitute a major disaster. FEMA utilizes the following specific criteria:

- 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)
- Availability of state and local firefighting resources
- High fire danger conditions, as indicated by nationally accepted indicators
- Potential major economic impact

# Modernization & Risk Analysis (MARA)

On October 10th, starting at 8:30, the MARA committee (as well as the chairs and vice chairs of all interim committees, who will be invited to attend) will host a conversation on;

## Wildfires: Practices, Finances, and the Future.

This agenda item will be just over 3 hours and include participation from the

- Montana DNRC
- Montana DEQ
- US Forest Service
- Headwaters Economics
- Energy companies, Insurance companies, and the
- State Auditor/Insurance Commissioner's office.

The goal of this conversation is to establish solid legislative understanding of wildfires in the state, both present and future, and generate ideas for future legislative action in this policy area.