

Wildfire Suppression Funding and Costs

Why this study: The 2016 Legislature directed JLARC to review how DNR and the State Fire Marshal share costs and secure reimbursement for wildfire suppression.

Department of Natural Resources (DNR)

Suppresses fires on forest lands	
11,000 responses (FY 2010-16)	\$369 million spent (FY 2010-16)

State Fire Marshal

Mobilizes and pays for fire districts and contractors to help local fire districts	
93 mobilizations (FY 2010-16)	\$65 million spent (FY 2010-16)

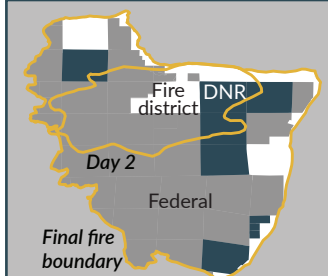
Wildfire suppression costs are shared across state, federal, and local agencies, consistent with formal agreements

Initial Response



Under mutual aid agreements, agencies help one another at no cost during the initial response (about one work shift).

Extended Response



- Fire spreads
- Multiple agencies may respond
- Mobilization may be authorized
- Costs are shared per agreements

\$72 million recouped

DNR and the Emergency Management Division (EMD) report that the state has recouped \$72 million (FY2010-16) through cost-share reimbursement, recovery from negligent private parties, and federal grants.

Here's how cost sharing worked for **extended response** on one fire:

	DNR	Federal	Fire Marshal
Amount paid (Payments to staff or contractors)	\$3.0M	\$4.5M	\$0.7M
Benefit received (Resources used on agency-protected land)	\$1.7M	\$5.6M	\$0.9M
<i>If an agency's total benefit received is more than its amount paid, it reimburses the other agency.</i>			
Reimbursement	\$1.3M	\$1.1M	\$0.2M

Accurate and refined data collection is needed to improve DNR's information about costs and characteristics

Fire characteristic data (e.g. acres burned) is unreliable or unused. Procedures for data entry and validation are inconsistent.

No efficient way to identify the cost of an individual fire. Fires can have multiple cost codes that are maintained in multiple locations.

Legislature asked about specific factors affecting suppression costs

National research cited development and housing density among factors that influence cost. Insurance and land ownership were not cited. Statewide data on these factors is unavailable. Acreage is considered a poor indicator of fire costs.

Source: JLARC staff literature review

Legislative Auditor recommends:

1. DNR should refine its data collection of key data elements and seek input from the appropriate Legislative committees.
2. DNR should improve the accuracy and reliability of the key data elements it collects.
3. DNR should develop a systematic and verifiable way to identify the costs of individual fires.

The complete report is on the JLARC web site.

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