

State of Alaska FY2009 Governor's Operating Budget

Department of Natural Resources Statewide Fire Suppression Program Results Delivery Unit Budget Summary

Statewide Fire Suppression Program Results Delivery Unit

Contribution to Department's Mission

Forestry's contribution to the department mission is to manage wildland fires in the most efficient and cost-effective manner possible, meeting statutory requirements to provide wildland fire protection to all state, municipal, and private lands. This contribution is delivered through the Fire Suppression Preparedness, Fire Suppression Activity, and Non-Emergency Hazard Mitigation Projects components.

Core Services

The Division provides fire management to meet its statutory responsibilities under AS 41.15.010 for managing wildland fires on all state, municipal and private lands in Alaska. The core service provided is rapid and aggressive initial attack on wildland fires consistent with the Alaska Interagency Fire Management Plan. This is accomplished directly through fire suppression preparedness and fire suppression activity by the Division as well as negotiating cooperative agreements with federal agencies and local government fire cooperators for assistance.

The RDU funds wildland fire suppression operations and fixed preparedness operating costs to provide for critical supplies, services, equipment, and personnel. Helicopters, air tankers and light fixed-wing aircraft will be contracted and leased from private vendors to provide detection, aerial supervision, transportation of initial attack firefighters and application of fire retardant to suppress wildland fires. Village emergency firefighting crews, incidental emergency firefighters, local government and federal cooperator personnel will be hired in emergency situations to supplement the division's seasonal firefighters.

FY2009 Resources Allocated to Achieve Results

FY2009 Results Delivery Unit Budget: \$29,656,000	Personnel:	
	Full time	32
	Part time	180
	Total	212

Key RDU Challenges

The wildland fire season is occurring earlier and lasting longer in response to changes in climate, with wildland fires occurring as early as January and commonly in March. The initial attack workforce has historically been funded for 3-5 months for an anticipated fire season from April through August. The extended fire season is creating significant problems in accomplishing required training as well as initial attack with too few staff-months.

Recruitment for firefighting positions is a major problem and openings continue to be recruited within Alaska and nationally with very poor results. Critical shortages in dispatch, logistics, and experienced professional level fire managers have necessitated national recruitment. Competition for personnel from both municipal and federal positions offering significantly higher wages is no longer offset by the state's benefits since the advent of Tier III and Tier IV.

Salaries and benefits are not competitive. With expected loss due to retirement of two-thirds of our fire managers, supervisors, and fire personnel in the lead technician class within the next five years, we must be competitive.

Use of the Division of Forestry's highly trained and qualified ICS firefighters for all-risk incident response is becoming increasingly common both in Alaska and nationally. While this provides benefits to the state, when combined with the limited staff-months funded, it has an increasing impact on the availability of personnel for the basic wildland fire mission.

Costs of the fire program vary not only directly with the intensity and length of the fire season, but with unavoidable increases in service contract costs. Suppression cost trends are based on the average fire costs over a ten year period, eliminating the high and low years. No increase to fund the suppression costs have been requested since FY04, although the two largest Alaska fire seasons ever have occurred since that period. The 2004 fire season established a new high year which increased the expenditure trend even more above the budgeted funding level. Above what is budgeted. The state is observing earlier and longer fire seasons and has found that the baseline of historic expenditures is no longer indicative of the normal fire season with the observed climate changes.

Cost increases due to market pressures on vendors, particularly those supplying contracts fire fighting aircraft, are being manifested through much higher than anticipated bids on all aviation contracts. Forestry requested an increment increase in FY09 to fund this shortfall.

Legislation passed in 2006 mandated a change in the designated fire season, moving the start date from May 1st to April 1st and the end date from Sept 30th to August 31st. This change will require the Division of Forestry to be ready to respond to wildland fires a month earlier than they historically have, but it does not address the increased length of fire season needs. While increased fire season length is creating a critical need for longer staffing each season, an additional need is recognized for increased capacity such as helicopters and equipment to respond to high risk areas. The FY09 budget request reflects funding needs for continued deliverables and management of the fire program.

The Bureau of Land Management, Alaska Fire Service has experienced a significant reduction in their operational capability due to federal budget reductions. While the Division of Forestry has relied on federal cooperators for support in the past, there is now reduced ability to use federal resources to augment state resources on wildland fires.

Fires in remote locations help meet land manager resource objectives through hazardous fuel reduction and habitat improvement. Policy regarding remote private property protection on the "cabin Policy" is being reviewed. According to current statute, DNR is directed to provide wildland fire protection commensurate with values of natural resources at risk. The Department is proposing statutory language change that would expand wildland fire protection decision-making to include all values, both natural and cultural. With the results of numerous public meetings in Interior Alaska in mind, the Division of Forestry is exploring methodologies to incorporate individual land owner, as well as land manager, input into the annual review process of the Alaska Interagency Fire Management Plan. This interagency federal/state plan pre-identifies the suppression action that will occur on lands in Alaska. Legislative understanding of the natural role of fire in the environment and confidence in good fire management resulted in good support.

Significant Changes in Results to be Delivered in FY2009

Proposed requests will meet the increased financial obligations to respond to the fire season and to pay for increased aviation contract costs. Requests will support the mission and measures established for continued deliverables and management of the fire program. No other significant changes in results to be delivered are anticipated.

Major RDU Accomplishments in 2007

See specific detail at component level for Fire Suppression Activity and Fire Suppression Preparedness.

Contact Information

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**Statewide Fire Suppression Program
RDU Financial Summary by Component**

All dollars shown in thousands

	FY2007 Actuals				FY2008 Management Plan				FY2009 Governor			
	General Funds	Federal Funds	Other Funds	Total Funds	General Funds	Federal Funds	Other Funds	Total Funds	General Funds	Federal Funds	Other Funds	Total Funds
<u>Formula Expenditures</u>	None.											
<u>Non-Formula Expenditures</u>												
Fire Suppression Preparedness	12,793.6	214.6	1,218.3	14,226.5	13,363.4	833.5	605.1	14,802.0	14,487.6	861.8	633.7	15,983.1
Fire Suppression Activity	13,626.5	12,236.8	632.3	26,495.6	6,712.5	5,460.4	1,500.0	13,672.9	6,712.5	5,460.4	1,500.0	13,672.9
Totals	26,420.1	12,451.4	1,850.6	40,722.1	20,075.9	6,293.9	2,105.1	28,474.9	21,200.1	6,322.2	2,133.7	29,656.0

**Statewide Fire Suppression Program
Summary of RDU Budget Changes by Component
From FY2008 Management Plan to FY2009 Governor**

All dollars shown in thousands

	<u>General Funds</u>	<u>Federal Funds</u>	<u>Other Funds</u>	<u>Total Funds</u>
FY2008 Management Plan	20,075.9	6,293.9	2,105.1	28,474.9
Adjustments which will continue current level of service:				
-Fire Suppression Preparedness	267.3	28.3	28.6	324.2
Proposed budget increases:				
-Fire Suppression Preparedness	856.9	0.0	0.0	856.9
FY2009 Governor	21,200.1	6,322.2	2,133.7	29,656.0