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Idaho, federal wildfire agencies update cooperative agreement

- [By BRAD CARLSON Capital Press](#)
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The Idaho Department of Lands will provide primary wildfire protection on more land under an updated interagency agreement.

Growth in the wildland-urban interface also is addressed in the Idaho Master Cooperative Wildland Fire Management and Stafford Act Agreement, last updated in 2016.

The agreement provides a foundation for how state and federal fire agencies work together and a model for sharing resources, according to a multi-agency news release. It aims to simplify business processes, align core missions and enable agencies to respond across the state while retaining flexibility to adjust to fires and the environment.

Mutual aid, which calls for the closest agency to respond to a fire regardless of land jurisdiction, is more formal in the new agreement, Josh Harvey, Department of Lands fire management chief based in Coeur d'Alene, said in an interview.

Under the new agreement, if the responding agency's costs exceed \$15,000, it will send a bill to the responsible agency. If the responding agency's costs are below the threshold it will cover the bill itself. Aircraft costs are billable separately.

The agreement also covers how agencies share the cost of fighting fires that start in one jurisdiction and cross into another. An agency could be paid based on how much of its own acreage was burned, for example.

“Under the 2016 and previous agreements, we did not do nearly as many cost shares as the new agreement is going to make agencies do,” Harvey said. Idaho's costs likely will increase, but will vary each year with the number of fires and burned acres as well as their locations.

Though the agreement requires the department to protect more land, its stronger mutual aid provisions mean “our ability to respond efficiently should go up,” he said.

IDL focuses on fires near communities and on state endowment timberland. Gov. Brad Little and the legislature in recent years increased funding.

The department is taking primary responsibility along the Salmon River corridor from White Bird south to Riggins, where growth continues in the wildland-urban interface. The Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest had it previously

The forest, which operates Slate Creek Ranger Station in the area, will continue to provide initial attack. “But it does become more incumbent on us to put additional resources in that corridor,” Harvey said.

Urban-interface growth also is reflected in the department's Southwest Forest Protective District picking up primary responsibility for land in the Garden Valley and High Valley areas north of Boise. Previous leadership was a mix of the Forest Service and the department.

The department is establishing the Cottonwood Forest Protective District, with 15 people and four engines in eastern Idaho, with funding from the 2023 legislature. The U.S. Bureau of Land Management had primary protection responsibility previously.

BLM has been "a really good partner and has been supporting us for years" in that area, Harvey said. "We are going to be taking on timbered acres, but it is mutual aid — BLM will be there to support us."

IDL also has close relationships with other states and Canada, he said.

The agreement also involves National Park Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service regions.