

[https://www.idahopress.com/news/local/idl-director-agency-will-face-challenges-if-fire-suppression-fund-isnt-restored/article\\_2298874e-e8bd-11ef-8970-f3accbcea816.html](https://www.idahopress.com/news/local/idl-director-agency-will-face-challenges-if-fire-suppression-fund-isnt-restored/article_2298874e-e8bd-11ef-8970-f3accbcea816.html)

## Idaho Press

### **IDL Director: Agency will face challenges if fire suppression fund isn't restored**

- [LAURA GUIDO lguido@idahopress.com](mailto:LAURA GUIDO lguido@idahopress.com)

BOISE — The Idaho Department of Lands director told state budget-writers Tuesday that there would be a significant challenge if the wildfire suppression fund isn't replenished after a very active fire season.

Director Dustin Miller told members of the Joint Finance and Appropriation Committee (JFAC) that the state's Fire Suppression Deficiency Fund, which in 2023 had been raised to total around \$68 million, would dip to around \$13 million in fiscal year 2026 if the governor's budget recommendation of adding a total of \$100 million to the account wasn't taken.

There is about \$35.8 million currently in the account; however, Miller said that it's unclear exactly how much will be left after the state finishes cost-sharing payments and reimbursements with federal partners.

The governor's budget recommendation includes providing a supplemental appropriation for the current fiscal year of \$60 million and another \$40 million for fiscal year 2026.

In October, Miller reported the state at that point had spent more than \$50 million on fire suppression in 2024, [the Idaho Press reported](#).

Miller also faced questions about state management of fires and lands versus federal management. Federal agencies, such as the Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Forest Service, oversee [34.5 million acres of lands in Idaho](#) — nearly two-thirds of the state's total landmass.

The state manages about 2.5 million acres of state endowment land.

A number of committee members questioned why the federal agencies seemed to take longer to contain fires on their lands.

Sen. Cindy Carlson, R-Riggins, asked if Miller thought fires were getting more expensive over time because of how federal lands are managed.

Miller responded that there were a number of reasons fires are getting more expensive to fight.

"We're seeing longer, hotter fire seasons, more extreme fire behavior, more growth in the state, and you are seeing a lot more human-caused fires," Miller said.

He said more people living on the edges of wildland and urban areas are also contributing to higher costs. He noted that federal agencies have a “larger estate to manage” and that both state and federal resources are prioritized toward saving life and property.

JFAC co-Chair Sen. C. Scott Grow, R-Eagle, asked why federal agencies didn’t more quickly jump on the fire when it started burning early near Grandjean over the summer — the Wapiti and Bull Trout fires started in July in National Forest lands.

Miller said that over the summer there were several lightning-related fires started all over the state as well as region at the time.

“We were at extreme fire behavior ... there weren't a lot of resources to send to those fires, so things had to be prioritized,” Miller said.

Senate Minority Leader Melissa Wintrow, D-Boise, asked Miller how much it would cost if the state took control of all federal land.

“That would be a significant fire bill for us to pay,” Miller responded. “I don’t think we could afford to pay that fire bill, especially what we saw this year.”

Gov. Brad Little also included in his proposed budget a recommendation to add three new positions in the department for a fire emergency support program manager, fire aviation section manager and statewide forest assessment manager for a total of \$577,100.

Laura Guido is the Statehouse reporter and covers Idaho politics. You can follow her on Twitter @EyeOnBoiseGuido, email her at [lguido@idahopress.com](mailto:lguido@idahopress.com) and [sign up for the Eye on Boise newsletter](#) online.