

STATE BOARD OF LAND COMMISSIONERS

February 18, 2025
Information Agenda

Subject

Modernizing Wildland Fire Operations Facilities

Background

Over the past decade, the scope and scale of the Idaho Department of Lands' (Department) wildland fire programs have expanded significantly due to the increasing number of wildfire incidents, the need for advanced fire prevention strategies, and the integration of modern technology and equipment. The State Board of Land Commissioners (Land Board) has supported substantial investments in personnel and equipment in recent years to support the wildland fire program. This investment has proven significant as the Department works towards its goal of suppressing at least 95% of fires at 10 acres or less.

Despite these advancements, the Department's fire operations buildings have not kept pace with the growth of personnel and equipment, leading to increased maintenance costs, operational inefficiencies, safety concerns, and a potential reduction in the effectiveness of the Department's fire response capabilities.

Discussion

The current facilities supporting the Department's fire program (originally constructed in the mid-1960s through the 1980s) have become increasingly inadequate to meet the growing demands of fire management, emergency response, and public safety. As part of the Department's Strategic Fire Planning effort, staff have defined clear goals that align with the organization's mission and vision. One of these goals is to build adaptive infrastructure to address increasing fire intensity. A primary action for this goal is to develop a comprehensive fire operations facilities plan.

The Department proposes constructing Fire Operations Centers utilizing a slab-on-grade pre-engineered metal building that is scalable to meet the individual needs of each Forest Protective District. This design provides the greatest return on investment due to decreased cost associated with the building's footprint, increased life expectancy, and reduced long-term maintenance costs when compared to standard wood frame construction. The use of a standard design will also save money over the life of the project by reducing architectural and engineering costs.

The Department's facilities need is statewide across all districts. The Department is currently finalizing an assessment which will be included in the Department's comprehensive fire operations facilities plan. The Timber Protective Associations' facilities will also be evaluated as part of this effort.

The Department has investigated three alternatives for securing funding for this project: Idaho Permanent Building Funds capital improvement project, line-item enhancement budget appropriation, and the Idaho State Building Authority (ISBA).

The ISBA was established in 1974 pursuant to Idaho Code § 67-6403. The authority was created to provide for "predevelopment costs, temporary financing, land development expenses, construction and operation of governmental facilities for rental to State government." Idaho Code § 67-6410 requires a concurrent resolution by the legislature allowing the State Agency to enter into agreements with the ISBA to finance the construction of the facilities.

The Department proposes investigating the feasibility of partnering with the ISBA to modernize fire operation facilities. This will require due diligence (including legal analysis) by the Department. The Department will report back to the Land Board with the results of all due diligence.

Investing in modern fire operations facilities is essential to ensuring the safety, efficiency, and effectiveness of Idaho's wildland fire management program. Through improved infrastructure, the agency will reduce maintenance costs, enhance firefighter safety, increase operational readiness, and provide a robust platform for future growth.