

STATE BOARD OF LAND COMMISSIONERS

May 20, 2025

Department Report

Pre-Season Fire Brief: May-August 2025

The current Significant Wildland Fire Potential Outlook for Idaho is "Normal" throughout Idaho for May with increasing amounts of "Above Normal" areas across the state. The "Above Normal" areas begin in northern Idaho in June and work south until nearly all areas of the state are "Above Normal" by August. The far eastern edge of the state is forecasted to remain normal through August. Long range forecasts indicate above average temperatures and below average precipitation through September. Moderate drought and abnormally dry conditions exist for portions of northern Idaho and along the Idaho-Montana border. If these conditions persist, an earlier fire season at all elevations is possible. Snowpack in nearly all areas of the state is above 75% of normal, however, rapid snow loss at mid and lower elevations could negate the effect of higher elevation snowpack. This information relies on several variables and will become more accurate over the next several months.

As of May 13, Idaho Department of Lands (IDL) has had 43 fires for 40.7 acres, mostly due to debris and grass burning. IDL has sent resources to 8 states already this season.

IDL Resources

IDL is concluding the solicitation of an exclusive use contract for a Type 1 helicopter for the upcoming fire season. Once awarded, the contract will ensure the state retains the same helicopter capacity as it had during the last fire season. The response from contractors interested in working with IDL has been positive thus far. A final update, including the contract awarded and details, will be given in June. IDL will maintain the same aerial assets as last season, including four (4) Single Engine Water Scoopers (SEWS) based in Coeur d'Alene. Additionally, four (4) Single Engine Air Tankers (SEATs) will be stationed within the state—two (2) in McCall and two (2) in Grangeville.

In terms of ground resources, IDL will have the following personnel and equipment:

- A 20-person Type 2-IA hand crew based in Deary (Teakean Crew).
- A 6-person Northern Idaho Suppression Module based in Sandpoint.
- A fleet of 50 engines distributed throughout the district and timber protective association (TPA) offices. This includes five (5) newly approved Strategic Engines. By the start of the fire season, 26 engines will be fully staffed, with qualified Engine Bosses. With the expected fire season conditions and staffing, the potential for contracting additional engines to meet operational needs is under evaluation.

The East Idaho FPD has made significant progress, with a Fire Warden and Assistant Fire Warden already hired. The district is currently recruiting staff to fill three vacant positions:

- One (1) Assistant Fire Warden
- Two (2) Resource Foreman-Engine Captain positions

The district's boundary has been defined and approved, and IDL is actively finalizing local agreements and operating plans with federal partners and Fire Service Organizations (FSOs) within the district. As part of its preparations for the fire season, the district is planning to hire a seasonal crew of 8 to 10 individuals.

IDL continues to recruit for the upcoming fire season. Currently, 20 out of 29 permanent Resource Foreman positions are filled. Between the TPAs and IDL, 15 of 19 Assistant Fire Warden positions are staffed, as well as all 13 Fire Warden roles.

The District Readiness Reviews are scheduled to begin this month and will be completed by the end of June. Despite these staffing efforts, there remain gaps in key positions, including Engine Boss and Incident Commander Type 4 roles. With only 40 to 60% of engines being fully staffed with seasonals and Resource Foremen, there is a need for additional fire management support for 7-day coverage. Non-fire IDL staff will need to assist in backfilling engine staffing while maintaining their regular responsibilities.