

# STATE BOARD OF LAND COMMISSIONERS

August 18, 2026  
Information Agenda

## Subject

Idaho Wildfire Response Framework

## Background

The Idaho Department of Lands (IDL) serves as Idaho's primary wildland fire protection agency for private forest lands and state lands identified under Idaho law. The Department's authority to provide wildfire protection is established through Idaho Code and implemented through a coordinated statewide system of interagency agreements, cooperative response, and locally assigned protection responsibilities.

Idaho Code establishes two primary authorities governing the Department's wildfire suppression responsibilities. First, the Department is responsible for protecting forest lands subject to the Idaho forest fire protection assessment and providing wildfire protection within designated protection areas. Second, Idaho law declares uncontrolled wildfire to be a public nuisance and authorizes Fire Wardens to suppress wildfires that threaten protected lands, life, property, or natural resources regardless of land ownership. Together, these authorities establish the legal foundation for wildfire response throughout Idaho.

While these statutory responsibilities define the Department's authority, wildfire response in Idaho relies upon extensive coordination among federal, state, tribal, local, and rural fire protection agencies. Cooperative agreements establish how agencies share protection responsibilities, provide assistance to one another, and allocate suppression costs while maintaining rapid response regardless of jurisdiction.

Because multiple agencies often respond to the same incident, several operational terms—including jurisdiction, protection responsibility, mutual aid, offset protection, reimbursable response, and cost share—are frequently misunderstood. This briefing provides an overview of Idaho's wildfire response framework and explains how these concepts work together to ensure efficient, coordinated wildfire suppression across the state.

## Discussion

### ***Idaho Wildfire Response Framework***

Wildfire response in Idaho is built upon several foundational principles that guide operational decision making before, during, and after every wildfire.

The first principle is that jurisdiction and protection responsibility are not necessarily the same. The agency that owns or manages the land does not always provide wildfire protection for that land. Through cooperative agreements, protection responsibility may be assigned to another agency that is better positioned to provide a timely response.

The second principle is that the closest appropriate resources respond regardless of jurisdiction whenever practical. Modern wildfire response emphasizes rapid initial attack to reduce fire growth, improve firefighter and public safety, and minimize suppression costs. Cooperative agreements allow agencies to respond quickly while maintaining clearly defined operational and financial responsibilities.

The third principle is that financial responsibility is separate from operational response. Agencies may provide resources under offset protection, mutual aid, reimbursable response, or incident-specific cost-share agreements depending on the circumstances of the incident. These mechanisms allow agencies to coordinate suppression activities while ensuring suppression costs are ultimately assigned appropriately.

### ***Wildfire Response Definitions***

#### **Jurisdiction**

Jurisdiction refers to the agency or landowner with legal ownership or land management responsibility for a parcel of land. Jurisdiction does not change simply because another agency responds to or manages a wildfire.

#### **Protection Responsibility**

Protection responsibility is the assignment of wildfire suppression responsibility within a defined protection area. The protecting agency is responsible for wildfire response, incident management, and implementation of suppression policy regardless of land ownership.

#### **Cooperating Agency**

A cooperating agency provides personnel, equipment, aircraft, or other suppression resources in support of the protecting agency. Providing assistance does not transfer jurisdiction or protection responsibility.

#### **Offset Protection**

Offset protection is an exchange of wildfire protection responsibility between agencies. Under an offset agreement, jurisdiction remains with the land management agency, while protection responsibility is assigned to another agency that can provide more efficient wildfire response. The protecting agency assumes operational responsibility for suppression within the offset area and generally bears suppression costs associated with those lands.

## **Reimbursable Response**

Reimbursable response occurs when one agency provides suppression resources in support of another agency that retains protection responsibility. The assisting agency is reimbursed for allowable suppression costs, while the protecting agency remains responsible for incident management and suppression strategy.

## **Mutual Aid**

Mutual aid provides for the closest appropriate suppression resources to respond regardless of jurisdiction or protection responsibility. Mutual aid is intended to improve initial attack effectiveness and reduce response times. Protection responsibility does not change under mutual aid, and reimbursement occurs only when established thresholds within cooperative agreements are exceeded.

## **Cost Share**

Cost share is an incident-specific agreement among agencies that allocates wildfire suppression costs based upon jurisdiction, protection responsibility, values at risk, operational actions, and overall incident benefit. Cost-share agreements recognize that large incidents often involve multiple jurisdictions and agencies.

## **Closest Forces Concept**

The closest forces concept emphasizes dispatching the nearest available and appropriate suppression resources regardless of agency affiliation. This approach supports rapid initial attack while maintaining established protection responsibilities and financial accountability.

## **"No Man's Land"**

"No Man's Land" is an informal term used to describe privately owned lands that are outside established wildfire protection districts or other recognized protection arrangements. Although these lands have an owner, no agency has been assigned ongoing wildfire protection responsibility. Agencies may respond when fires threaten protected lands, life, property, or other values at risk; however, responding to these incidents does not establish permanent protection responsibility for those lands.

## **Summary**

Idaho's wildfire response framework has evolved to emphasize rapid initial attack, efficient use of suppression resources, and coordinated interagency operations while preserving clear statutory responsibilities. Cooperative agreements do not change land ownership or jurisdiction; rather, they establish operational and financial mechanisms that allow agencies to respond effectively regardless of ownership boundaries.

Understanding the distinction between jurisdiction, protection responsibility, and financial responsibility is essential as wildfire incidents continue to increase in complexity across Idaho. These principles provide the foundation for statewide wildfire response and support the Department's mission to protect life, private property, Idaho's forest resources, endowment lands, communities, and natural resources through coordinated interagency suppression efforts.