

600 FIRE PROTECTION MANUAL

601 WILDLAND FIRE PROTECTION IN MONTANA

A. BACKGROUND

The position the State takes on wildland fire protection in Montana may be summarized as follows:

1. All agencies that are responsible for fire protection on public and private lands should be recognized by the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC). This has been partially attained through the recognition of DNRC, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Flathead Agency (BIA), and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) as Recognized Protection Agencies.
2. Wherever possible, forest fire protection districts or affidavit units should be established, offering the most intensive form of protection to the landowner.
3. In a wildland fire protection district, one and only one Recognized Protection Agency should protect all lands within the established boundaries of the district. There may be more than one jurisdictional agency.
4. Within the affidavit unit, the designated protection agency should protect all lands administered by the agency plus those federal, state, and private lands that have been voluntarily assigned.
5. In other protection types, efforts should be given in the support of the local forces such as the county unit, fire district, fire service area, volunteer fire company.
6. Due to the large acreage of public lands in Montana and the various public agencies involved, it is imperative that these agencies cooperate to the fullest extent in protecting these lands at the least cost to the taxpayer. In addition, the privately-owned lands are intermingled throughout the public ownership, creating some unique protection problems. On federal lands, the governing agency is responsible for fire protection, while all state and private lands are the responsibility of the DNRC Forestry Division, as authorized by state law. To protect all these lands in an efficient manner, cooperative agreements have been signed between recognized federal fire protection agencies and the state. Such agreements give general guidelines for the protection of all lands to the mutual advantage of the protection agencies entering into the agreement. A Master Cooperative

Agreement is in place between the State and the USFS, BLM, BIA, National Park Service (NPS), and the USFWS. A "Recognized Agency" is an agency organized for the purpose of providing forest fire protection and recognized by the DNRC as giving adequate fire protection to forest lands in accordance with rules adopted by the Department.

B. HISTORY OF FOREST FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICTS AND PROGRAMS

One of the first forest fire protection districts was established near Kalispell, Montana in 1911. The Northern Montana Forestry Association (NMFA) was formed to provide protection to this district. The Association was funded by members being assessed an acreage payment for protection of the more than 2½ million acres in Flathead and Sanders counties. Federal funds were made available to each state under the Weeks Law beginning in 1911 for the fire protection program on state and private forested lands. One-half of the money distributed by the states was allotted under the Weeks Law, and the other one-half allocated from state and private funds. The State Forester began assisting the NMFA in 1916. The federal government assisted by employing and supervising 21 patrolmen in 1918. The NMFA provided protection to these lands from 1911 to 1970, when the state assumed the protection duties.

In 1921 another district was formed near Missoula, Montana and the second privately operated forest fire protection association was established. This association was known as the Blackfoot Forest Protective Association (BFPA) and was organized to provide protection on more than 1,200,000 acres of private and state forest lands. The BFPA turned over their protection duties to the state in 1971.

In 1922 the first district directly protected by the state was established near Bigfork, Montana for approximately 50,000 acres of state and private lands.

In 1924, the Clarke-McNary Law was passed, and the federal partnership with the states in fire control on state and private forest lands changed from the Weeks Law program to the Clarke-McNary Section 2 program. Under CM-2, the federal program cost share was made available directly to the State Forester, who was responsible for the direct supervision of the fire program covering state and private lands. The CM-2 partnership has assisted in advancing organized protection to over 8½ million acres of forested lands from 1924 to 1977. In 1977 the CM-2 Act was replaced with the Resources Planning Act (RPA). The partnership continues under this act.

The Montana Legislature established State Forests in 1925, totaling 490,000 acres. The state assumed protection of the Stillwater State Forest District in 1928, the Swan River State Fire Protection District on the Swan River State Forest in 1956, the State Continental Divide District in 1965, the Avon District in 1975,

and the Helena District in 1977.

A third privately-operated forest fire protection association was formed in 1956 to provide protection to 90,000 acres of privately-owned forest and watershed land in the Anaconda area. The Anaconda Forest Protective Association (AFPA) functioned from 1956 until 1966 when the state assumed the protection duties.

State statutes were changed in 1963 to require an affirmative vote of 75% of the landowners representing 51% of the forest land within an area to create a new forest fire protection district. In 1967, this statute was changed to reduce the affirmative vote to 51% of the owners representing 51% of the forest land. Percentages are being realigned/standardized continually by the legislature.

The 2007 Legislature changed “Forest Fire District” to “Wildland Fire Protection District” and generally changed “forest” to “wildland” in the title 76 and title 7 codes.

1. **Federal Involvement**

Up until 1965, the U.S. Forest Service had been providing fire protection to state and private lands within 5 districts in Western Montana and to some 1½ million acres of state and private forest lands that were outside the National Forest and district boundaries in Eastern and Central Montana. The state reimbursed the Forest Service for protection of the lands within the districts, while individual contracts at approximately .02¢ per acre were negotiated by the Forest Service with landowners outside the boundaries in Eastern Montana. In 1965, the USFS revised its National Forest protection boundaries to generally coincide with National Forest administrative boundaries and filed these new boundary maps with the state. This withdrawal was made for several reasons, among which were: (1) the Forest Service was charged with redeeming its basic charter of protecting and managing National Forest lands; (2) the Forest Service wished to reduce the Tort Claim liability of protecting large acreage of non-Federal lands outside its boundaries; and (3) the President had decreed that all Federal agencies decrease work done for others. Coupled with these 3 reasons, was the fact that the .02¢ per acre income under the individual contracts did not cover the Forest Service expenses for suppression or administration.

Following the Forest Service withdrawal in 1965, the state continued efforts to provide adequate levels of protection to the state and private forest lands outside of existing fire districts. This was carried forward through the formation of new districts, the formation of affidavit units, and the creation of the state-county cooperative fire program.

2. **State/County Co-op Fire Program**

In 1967, the first State/County Cooperative Fire Protection Agreement was entered into by the state with Meagher County. This enabled the state to provide organizational and planning assistance, equipment, and training to the county. The county in turn protected all the state and private forest lands within the county that were not under the protection of a recognized fire protection agency. All fifty-six counties now participate in this program. Five new wildland fire protection districts have been established by the vote of landowners, and eight new affidavit units are operating at the present time. DNRC Forestry Division's protection responsibilities have expanded from 50,000 acres at Bigfork in 1922 to 5 million acres of direct protection and over 45 million acres of cooperative support today.

3. **Rural Community Fire Protection Program (RCFP)**

In 1972, Title IV of the Rural Development Act authorized and directed the Secretary of Agriculture to provide financial, technical, and other assistance to State Foresters or other appropriate officials to organize, train, and equip fire departments in rural areas and communities under 10,000 population to prevent and suppress fires. This Act, commonly known as the Rural Community Fire Protection Program (RCFP), broadened out the partnership of the federal government with the state into protection of non-forest resources as well as forest resources.

4. **Forest Assessment Program**

House Bill No. 68, Chapter 397, Montana Session Laws of 1977, enacted by the Forty-fifth Legislature of the State of Montana, approved by the Governor of Montana, became effective on July 1, 1977. This act brought about some major changes in the Laws of Montana relating to forestry. The forest fire assessment system was simplified by combining all Class I and Class II forest lands into one class, and establishing a minimum fee of \$6 per owner per year in each protection district. This program provides for the protection of rangelands and other resources by the state through a contract with the landowner. The responsibility and authority of the counties was expanded as well to provide protection for forest and farm resources. A county that has not entered into a cooperative or other written agreement with the state for fire protection, however, must reimburse the Forestry Division for state fire suppression costs resulting from a fire emergency in that county. The assessment rates are subject to review every legislative year. The Forestry Division must set rates at a level that raises no more than one-third of its budget from assessments; the other two-thirds is to come from the State General Fund and federal funds. As the per acre cost comes mainly from the large landowners such as the large forest products companies, and the

minimum is raised mainly from the small landowner with less than 20 acres, these funds are collected at approximately 40%/60% from each group, with the 60% reflecting the belief that it costs more to suppress and protect wildland interface areas than large tracts of forest.

5. **Summary**

Over 50.3 million acres of forest and non-forest state and private lands are protected by the state through a series of protection systems that include wildland fire protection districts, affidavit units and cooperative fire control counties. Actual protection is afforded by the state, either through its own organization, or in support of county forces, or through contracts with the U. S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and the Flathead Indian Agency.

C. METHODS OF WILDLAND FIRE PROTECTION

A large part of the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation's mission has been the protection of the natural resources of the State from wildfire. DNRC's primary firefighting mission is protection of those state and private classified forest lands lying within our protection boundaries. Large tracts of federal lands within protection boundaries are also being protected through contract or offset. Although "forest fire protection" has been the term used to describe this responsibility for several years, it has now been redefined to a broader one of "wildland fire protection." Wildland fire protection is a more inclusive term for both forest and range lands and better defines DNRC's role as a natural resource fire protection agency. Our current program direction is to take suppression actions that are both offensive and defensive on farm, range, forest, watershed, or other uncultivated lands in private and public ownership. DNRC accomplishes the mission of protecting these private and public lands through a combination of three primary methods: Direct, Contract, and State/County Cooperative fire protection.

1. **Direct Protection**

This term is used to describe areas where fire protection is handled directly by DNRC. Prevention, pre-suppression and suppression work is all considered part of DNRC's direct fire protection responsibility. DNRC hires personnel and purchases equipment necessary to fulfill wildland fire protection responsibilities for assigned lands (those within established wildland fire protection districts or units).

2. **Contract Protection**

Contract protection is that provided to State- and privately-owned lands by

a federal agency which has been recognized by the Department (DNRC), with the Department as final board of appeals. Recognized federal fire protection agencies are required to provide protection at the same or higher level as they do on their own lands. Contracting is accomplished either by the offset method, where the State provides fire protection on an approximately equal area of federal land, or by direct payment to the federal agency for their services.

3. **State-County Cooperative Protection**

The State/County Cooperative Fire Protection program is a lower intensity fire protection than that of direct or contract protection, but it fully meets the legal requirements for protecting natural resources. The county provides the basic level of fire protection through a system of volunteers, county personnel, rural fire districts, etc. The county may be supported by the State in matters of organization, planning, prevention, equipment, training, and fire suppression.

Two primary wildland fire protection systems are utilized to provide for the protection of state and private lands whether these lands are protected by the state or a contracted agency. These two systems are known as Wildland Fire Protection Districts and Affidavit Protection Units.

4. **Wildland Fire Protection Districts**

A Wildland Fire Protection District is an area authorized and established (according to 76-13-204, Montana Code Annotated, or MCA) by the Montana DNRC for the protection of classified forest land from fire. Protection within a district is the most intensive form of forest fire protection provided within the state. District boundaries are established through a vote of the landowners. The protection for the state and private lands within the district is assigned to a recognized protection agency by the DNRC. All classified forest lands (state, private, or federal) within the district boundaries are normally under the protection of one recognized agency. Payment for protection is made by the private landowners through annual assessments, which are charged up to the maximum as provided by law based upon actual costs of protection. Payment for protection of another agency's lands within a district is handled on a direct billing basis. Fire prevention, detection, and suppression services are provided through the state in all districts. Most of the National Forests or certain portions have been formed into protection districts. All of the lands lying within the boundaries of the following National Forests are in a district: Bitterroot, Flathead, Kootenai, and Lolo. Portions of the following forests contain districts: Deer Lodge, Gallatin, and the Helena. The only other federal agency protecting lands within a district is the BIA on the Flathead reservation. The remainder of the districts within the state

are protected by the Forestry Division. Currently, Montana has 32 districts.

5. **Affidavit Protection Units**

An Affidavit Unit is an area of forest land receiving fire protection from the DNRC as authorized under 76-13-201(2), MCA. An affidavit is a sworn, notarized statement of the landowner's inability to protect his own land from wildland fire and his willingness to pay for protection. No private lands in these units are protected without a signed affidavit. The state provides protection to those private lands within an affidavit unit under these signed forest fire protection affidavits. The protection of affidavit ownerships within the affidavit unit is assigned by the state to a recognized fire protection agency. Federal and state forest lands within the unit are protected by cooperative agreement between the state and agency involved. Protection costs for private lands are collected by the state through an annual assessment, charging up to the maximum as provided by law, based upon actual costs of protection. Forest landowners with signed affidavits receive the same degree of protection as those landowners receive within a wildland fire protection district. The main disadvantage is that when fires occur in an affidavit unit, the protection agency must determine whether the fire is on protected or unprotected land. If the land is unprotected, a determination must then be made as to whether the fire is or will threaten protected lands before the protection agency can take action. Actions taken on fires that are not a direct threat lessen the motivation for landowners to sign an affidavit or create a district.

The National Forests, or portions thereof, that have not been assigned as districts have been designated affidavit units. National Forests included Beaverhead, Custer, Deer Lodge, Gallatin, Helena, and Lewis & Clark. The Bureau of Land Management has designated one area of the state as being an affidavit unit. This unit is located in the central part of the state north of the Missouri river and is called the C.M. Russell North Unit. The Department of Natural Resources and Conservation also has a number of units throughout the state. All state-owned lands within these units are protected by a cooperative agreement between the U.S. Forest Service or Bureau of Land Management and the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation. The total number of affidavit units in the state is eleven. Total protection for state and private lands within all affidavit units is 764,142 acres.

Both the "Wildland Fire Protection District" and the "Affidavit Protection Unit" protect forest lands. Intermingled with the forest lands within established districts and affidavit units are non-forested lands. These lands, formally considered unprotected except for those public lands under

the responsibility of a recognized protection agency, now receive the minimum protection under the State/County Coop Fire program.

However, should a landowner desire a higher level of fire protection, there is an agreement available to these non-forest landowners for protection of their lands. An agreement must be signed by the individual landowners, similar to the affidavit for forest lands. A signed agreement is required before protection is provided to lands which lie within a wildland fire protection district or affidavit unit. The option to sign up non-forest lands belongs to the landowner. The payment rate for protection of these lands is negotiated between the protection agency and the landowner, but usually equals the rate for protection of forest lands within the same affidavit unit or protection district.

6. **Bureau of Indian Affairs**

The Bureau of Indian Affairs provides protection to those lands under their jurisdiction which lie within established Indian reservation boundaries. As previously mentioned, the Flathead Reservation has been formed into a district and is recognized by the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation to provide fire protection to all state and private forest lands within the reservation. State and private lands in all other reservations receive fire protection from the individual owner, the county through the State/County Coop Fire program, or from rural fire districts formed by the county. The state is not aware of any contracts between private landowners and the BIA for protection.

7. **Bureau of Land Management**

The Bureau of Land Management administers large acreages of public lands scattered throughout the state and provides fire protection to these lands. The major portion of this land is in the eastern part of the state, with the exception of two large blocks of ownership located in the west/central and southwest sections of the state. Certain areas of BLM ownership are designated Grazing Districts, but only one area in the state is designated a fire affidavit unit. This unit is known as the C.M. Russell North and is in central Montana. Private lands may be protected by the BLM through the affidavit program in this area. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is “recognized” as the protection agency in a portion of this area as well.

8. **Self-Protection by Landowners**

Self-protection is authorized under Section 76-13-201, MCA. As stated by law, this protection shall be in conformity with reasonable rules and standards for adequate fire protection adopted by the DNRC. This means that the landowner is required to furnish proof of adequate protection to

the Department. This type of protection is rarely adequate except in isolated cases. Costs for assistance by the state during a fire emergency in a county without a cooperative agreement must be reimbursed to the state as directed by law. Some private lands may receive protection through rural fire districts, although these districts are formed mainly to provide structural fire protection. Most protection provided by the individual landowner is minimal in many cases. Non-forested state-owned lands in unprotected areas are provided with some form of fire protection by the lessee or the local jurisdiction.

The distinction between natural areas and structural developments has been well defined in the past. However, these differences have become more vague with the encroachment of structural developments into what was exclusively forest or wildland areas. This mixture of wildlands and developments has become quite extensive throughout the State and has been labeled the "Wildland/Urban Interface (WUI)". This rapidly expanding area has created significant fire management problems for all agencies with natural resource fire protection responsibilities.

D. STRUCTURAL/IMPROVEMENTS FIRE SUPPRESSION

Montana law also states that DNRC **may** protect non-forest lands and **improvements**¹ when requested by the landowner. DNRC has elected to provide protection to non-forest lands at landowner request through the use of non-forest agreements. However, DNRC has not elected to provide the same level of protection to improvements. DNRC Fire Management interprets improvements to include structures and related high value items as defined within NFPA 1500-10².

¹ **MCA 76-13-105. Protection of nonforest lands and improvements.** Non-forest lands and improvements may be protected by the department when requested by the landowner at rates determined by the department.

² **NFPA 1500-10 (1-5) Definitions. Structural Fire Fighting.** The activities of rescue, fire suppression, and property conservation involving buildings, enclosed structures, vehicles, vessels, aircraft, or like properties that are involved in a fire or emergency situation.

DNRC's suppression actions on structures will be defensive in nature³, and thus be confined to the exterior of structures.

Local fire service agencies have the basic responsibility of both offensive and defensive structural firefighting. Not all structures located within the state are covered by a local fire service. Many wildland areas within the Department's direct protection responsibility contain structures that are not covered by a structural fire service. DNRC may hire qualified structural firefighting services to provide protection for the duration of the wildfire threat.

1. **Standards and Guidelines**

The following standards and guidelines are designed to clarify and explain the role of the DNRC fire management program in the Wildland/Urban Interface area as well as in other areas where structures may be involved.

The definitions of standard and guideline from Chapter 1 of the "Forest Management Standards and Guidelines" are as follows:

- ***Performance Standard*** - A specific level of performance required to satisfy policy. That level of performance may be either a desired product or simply a procedure. Neither the Unit nor the Area have the authority to choose to violate a performance standard. Only the State Forester or his designated representative can make that choice. Instances may arise where there are apparent conflicts between performance standards. Once again, those conflicts will be resolved by the State Forester or his designated representative.
- ***Guideline*** - The recommended activities that should lead to the satisfaction of performance standards. There is discretion at the Unit or Area level in applying guidelines. A Unit or Area may choose to conduct activities that conflict with the guidelines provided here, but the activities must produce a result that meets performance standards. The Unit or Area must also document a justification for substantially deviating from recommended guidelines.

³ **NEPA 1500-13 (1-5) Definitions.** Offensive Operations: Actions that involve a direct attack on a fire, to directly control and extinguish the fire, often performed in the **interior** of involved structures. Defensive Operations: Actions that are intended to control a fire by limiting its spread to a defined area, avoiding the commitment of personnel and equipment to dangerous areas. Defensive operations are generally performed from the exterior of structures and are based on a determination that the risk to personnel exceeds the potential benefits of offensive actions.

DNRC limits actions on structural fires to:

- Protecting or saving of **human life**. DNRC only attempts the protection of human life when such suppression activities will not jeopardize the lives of firefighters. DNRC firefighters will **not** enter the interior of any burning structure and may only conduct defensive structural suppression actions.
- Containing the fire to the structure involved. DNRC's actions are confined to the **exterior** of the structure only. DNRC will **NOT** undertake offensive interior suppression actions; our firefighters' primary focus will be to prevent the fire from spreading to nearby wildlands.

GUIDELINE - Restrict or confine the fire to the structure by spraying the exterior with water or foam.

- DNRC will maintain an awareness of the unseen highly hazardous materials contained within structures that may explode violently or produce toxic fumes and/or smoke that may cause serious injury.
- DNRC will conduct defensive suppression actions involving structures only to the extent they can be performed safely.
- Defending a structure from an approaching wildfire prior to its ignition. We will ensure lives are not placed in danger in defense of a structure.

GUIDELINE - Defend a structure from destruction, from the outside (exterior), utilizing various tactics. Tactics may include spraying water or foam on the structure, burning out from existing or established control lines, and clearing fuels/materials from around the structure to make a "defensible space."

- Use tactics within the capabilities of DNRC's wildland firefighting personnel and equipment. DNRC will put safety of its personnel as its priority while defending a structure.

The Incident Commander may make the decision to sacrifice wildland acres in the defense of improvements and has the latitude to sacrifice both wildland and improvements to ensure safety to personnel and the public from excessive risk.

GUIDELINE - Base decision on value comparison of wildland and improvements, the safety of firefighters and equipment and the impact actions will have on overall wildland suppression strategy.

E. MONTANA FIRE PROTECTION HISTORICAL TIMELINE

- 1887** The Codes of the Territory of Montana contained strongly worded laws for the protection of timber from fire.
- 1895** The State Legislature enacted basic fire laws similar to those contained in the Territorial Codes.
- 1901** The Legislature passed the first laws designed to prevent fires spreading from railroad rights-of-way to forest lands. At this time, 65 percent of the forest fires in Montana were being caused by railroad locomotives.
- 1905** The Federal Government became active in the administration of Federal forest reserves in Montana.
- 1907** The Legislature established an Office of State Firewarden.
- 1909** The Office of State Forester was created. The Legislature created a State Forestry Board made up of the Registrar of State Lands, State Forester, and State Land Agent. No appropriations were ever made to enable this Board to carry on its assigned duties, so it failed to function during its 30 years of statutory existence.
- 1910** The Big Blowup of 1910 burned 3 million acres of forest in western Montana and northern Idaho and killed 85 firefighters. This event focused attention on the need for fire protection.
- 1911** Northern Montana Forestry Association was organized and members assessed a voluntary payment for protection of over 2½ million acres in Flathead and Sanders Counties. The passage of the Weeks Law enabled federal participation in fire control on state and private forest lands.
- 1916** State Forester's activities in forest fire control consisted mainly of cooperation with the Northern Montana Forestry Association. Federal money was being made available under the Weeks Law for the fire protection program on state and private forested land, half the money being allotted under the Weeks Law and the other half from state and private funds. The federal government employed and supervised the patrolmen.
- 1918** Cost of fire suppression is prorated on the basis of ownership burned. Under the Weeks Law fire protection program, 21 patrolmen were financed in Western Montana. The State Legislature established the first law setting up a closed burning season and assigned the enforcement responsibility to the State Forester.

- 1920** Burning permits were developed to aid in forest fire prevention.
- 1921** Blackfoot Forest Protective Association was organized to provide protection on more than 1,300,000 acres of privately owned forest lands.
- 1922** Bigfork State Fire Protection Unit was organized to provide protection for approximately 50,000 acres north of Bigfork.
- 1924** The Clarke-McNary Law was passed, and federal participation in fire control on state and private forest lands was transferred from the Weeks Law to the Clarke-McNary Section 2 (CM 2) Program. Under CM-2, the federal program share was made available directly to the State Forester, who then assumed direct supervision of the fire program covering state and private lands.
- 1925** The Montana Legislature established State Forests totaling 490,000 acres.
- 1927** The Fire Season Law was strengthened.
- 1928** The State assumed protection of the Stillwater State Forest.
- 1939** The Montana Legislature repealed the law setting up the Forestry Board in 1909 and created a new State Board of Forestry with expanded membership and responsibilities. Laws were also passed under which commercial forest lands in Montana were classified for fire protection purposes.
- 1945** State authorized the establishment of Rural Fire Protection Districts.
- 1951** State Forester became chairman of the Civil Defense Fire Section.
- 956** The Anaconda Forest Protective Association was organized for the protection of approximately 90,000 acres of privately owned forest and watershed lands. The State Board of Forestry established the Swan River State Fire Protection District.
- 1959** Improved hazard reduction and fire laws were created by the Montana Legislature.
- 1961** Helena Continental Divide District established by Board of Forestry.
- 1963** In order to create a new forest fire protection district, an affirmative vote of 75 percent of the owners representing 51 percent of the acreage within the area is required.

1965 USFS withdrew protection from some 1½ million acres of state and private forest lands outside protection boundaries in eastern Montana.

Fire districts and incorporated municipalities were authorized to enter into mutual aid agreements with public and private agencies.

Direct protection duties begun by the State of Montana for the State Continental Divide District.

1966 The Anaconda Forest Protection Association turned over direct protection to the State of Montana.

1967 A ruling changed the requirements for creating a new wildland fire protection district to require an affirmative vote of 51 percent of the owners representing 51 percent of the acreage within the area.

1967 First State/County Cooperative Fire Protection Unit established for the State with Meagher County.

1969 Three counties are added to the State/County Cooperative protection program - Broadwater, Gallatin, and Wheatland.

1970 The Northern Montana Forestry Association turned over their direct protection duties on some 1½ million acres to the State of Montana.

Added eleven counties to the State/County cooperative fire protection program: Cascade, Chouteau, Glacier, Granite, Hill, Lewis & Clark, Liberty, Park, Pondera, Silver Bow, and Toole.

1971 Blackfoot Forest Protective Association turned over direct protection duties on over 1½ million acres to the State of Montana.

The State Forester's Office became the Forestry Division within the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation through the reorganization of state government.

Gallatin Bridger District was formed by a vote of landowners.

1972 The Rural Community Development Act Title IV was passed, broadening out the participation by the federal government into protection of non-forest resources as well as forest resources.

Added two counties to the State/County cooperative fire protection program: Fallon and Prairie.

1973 Gallatin River District formed by the vote of landowners.

Added two counties to the State/County cooperative fire protection program: Golden Valley and Yellowstone.

1974 Plains Fire Unit established.

Added one county to the State/County cooperative fire protection program: Dawson.

1975 Avon Forest Fire District formed by adding 40,000 acres to the Garrison Attack Station.

1976 Helena Forest Fire District and Yellowstone Forest Fire District formed.

Legislative Council enters into a review of state fire laws.

1977 Class I and II Forest Lands combined into one class. A minimum fee was established. Counties were given more direct authority to provide protection and reimbursement was required for state expenditures if a cooperative agreement is not established.

1977 Added one county to the State/County cooperative fire protection program: Teton

1979 Added six counties to the State/County Cooperative Fire Protection program via new system of County Fire Program entry plans: Daniels, Roosevelt, Custer, Sweetgrass, Big Horn, Jefferson.

1981 Added nine counties to the State/County cooperative fire protection program: Beaverhead, Blaine, Carter, McCone, Powder River, Richland, Sheridan, Stillwater, Wibaux.

The Division of Forestry was transferred from the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation over to the Department of State Lands.

1983 State Land Board recognizes the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) as a wildland fire protection agency for state and private lands in Montana.

Entered into an agreement with USFS Region 1 to transfer two million acres of forest lands from federal protection to state protection over a 10-year period.

1984 State added the Libby Protection Unit by assuming protection from the USFS of Block I, the Libby Protection Unit, containing approximately 355,000 acres in the Fisher River-Wolf Creek drainage.

1985 Added eleven counties to the State/County cooperative fire protection program: Carbon, Fergus, Garfield, Judith Basin, Madison, Mussellshell, Petroleum, Phillips, Rosebud, Treasure, Valley.

1986 State assumed Block II in the Helena and Lincoln areas containing 385,000 acres of additional protection from the USFS, expanding existing protection on the Helena Protection Unit and adding the Lincoln Attack Station to the Clearwater Protection Unit.

1988 State assumed Block III in the Missoula, Seeley Swan, and Whitefish areas containing approximately 414,370 acres of additional protection from the USFS, expanding existing fire protection on the Missoula, Clearwater, Swan, and Kalispell Protection Units.

Began joint fire dispatch operations between the Kootenai National Forest and the Libby Unit.

Began joint fire dispatch operations between the Flathead National Forest, Glacier National Park, Kalispell Unit, Swan Unit, and Stillwater Unit.

Began joint area support center at the Flathead National Forest between Northwestern Land Office, Flathead and Kootenai forests, and Glacier National Park.

Began joint interagency coordination center at Region One, USFS between the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation and USFS.

1989 Added three western counties to the State/County cooperative fire protection program: Deer Lodge, Ravalli and Flathead Counties.

1990 State assumed Block IV in the Dillon and Basin areas containing approximately 637,652 acres of additional protection from the USFS. The Dillon Unit and Lima Initial Attack Stations were established as a result of Block IV.

1991 Added three western counties to the State/County Cooperative Fire Protection program: Lake, Lincoln, and Sanders Counties.

1992 State assumed Block V containing 55,743 acres in the Dillon area and 1,568 acres in the Cottonwood Lakes Road area of the Southwestern Land Office. The total Block V protection taken over by the State was 57,311 acres. **Block V completed the 10-year offset program with the USFS that began in 1984.**

Began fire protection July 1 on the 120,225-acre Philipsburg Forest Fire Protection District.

1993 Began joint area support center at Southwestern Land Office between Lolo Forest and Southwestern Land Office.

Added one (1) western county to the State/County cooperative fire protection program: Powell County

1996 Fire & Aviation Strategic Plan completed.

1997 Added final three western counties to the State/County Cooperative Fire Protection program: Granite, Mineral and Missoula. This now provides wildland fire protection to all state and private lands in Montana.

New Master Fire Cooperative Agreement between Montana DNRC, BLM, NPS, BIA, FWS and USFS was completed in 2005 and is renewed every five years.

2007 SB 145 was passed by the Montana Legislature. The bill added or modified law to:

1. Set State Fire Policy.
2. Changed Firewarden responsibilities.
3. County is no longer required to report forested lands to the Department.
4. Modified open burning, recreational burning, and burn permit requirements.
5. Changed “forest fire” in the codes to “wildland fire.”