INSIDE Forests

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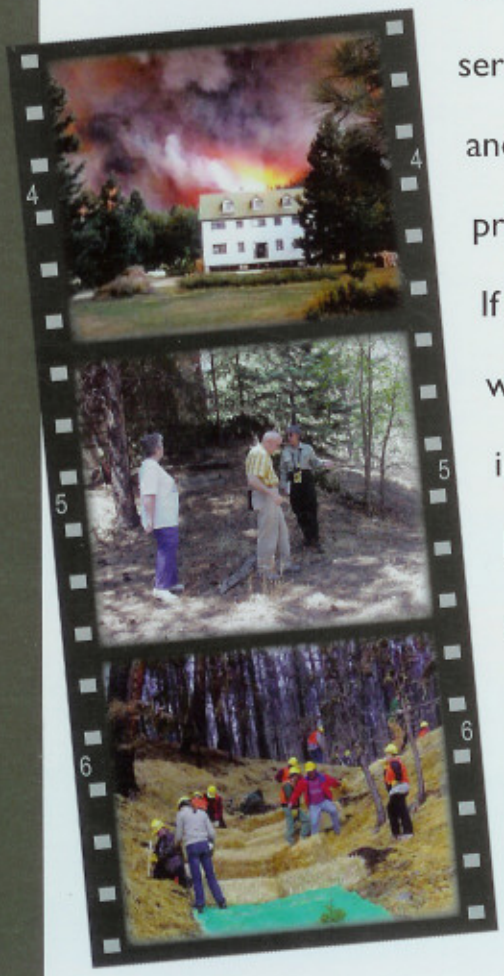
AFTER THE FIRE:

A Landowner's Guide to Programs and Services for Assistance in Montana



This guide describes the programs and services provided by the major agencies and organizations that offer assistance to private landowners after wildfire strikes. If you live in an area that is susceptible to wildfire, being familiar with the information in this guide before wildfire strikes can help you better prepare to begin the process of recovery after a wildfire. Each of the agencies and organizations described in this guide can provide you with additional information about their programs and services.

DURING THE FIRE

Where to Get Information

If your property is threatened by or has been burned by a wildfire large enough that a fire camp has been established, you can obtain information and updates on firefighting efforts from the Information Officer at the fire camp. Incident Management Teams may host public meetings to help keep affected residents informed, and law enforcement personnel may also designate a point of contact for information and updates. Information about the majority of wildfires burning at any time in the United States, including the one nearest you, may be obtained at the national incident information website, **www.inciweb.org**.

AFTER THE FIRE

What to Expect

What happens after a fire depends on factors including the size and severity of the fire, and whether the burned area includes federally-managed lands. If federally-managed lands were burned and the fire was large enough (generally over 200 acres) or if significant threats exist as a result of a smaller fire, the federal government normally mobilizes a Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) Team to assess post-fire threats, values at risk, and needs for emergency stabilization treatments on federally-managed lands.

If significant threats to private lands exist, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) carries out a similar assessment on private lands, with a focus on potential threats to life and property. Both the BAER and NRCS assessments are large-scale assessments, designed to quickly evaluate conditions and identify significant risks. Immediate post-fire hazards include large areas of bare soil which are susceptible to erosion, particularly on steep slopes, and standing snags. Eroded material can fill streams and culverts, and debris flows can damage property and structures. If the NRCS determines through its assessment that individual private properties are at risk, agency staff will contact the landowners and provide information about the risks and suggestions for methods to mitigate risks.

Where to Get Help

The rest of this guide describes the programs and services provided by the major agencies and organizations that offer assistance to help private landowners recover from damage caused by a wildfire. Several agencies and organizations, including the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation Forestry Division, Conservation Districts, and Resource Conservation and Development Areas can help direct landowners to sources of assistance.

In the case of large wildfires that affect many landowners, there may be public meetings where agency personnel provide information on services and programs available. Please be aware that programs and funding levels can change from year to year, and that assistance may not always be available. While this guide can serve as a starting point, you should contact the agencies directly to determine if assistance is available and whether you meet eligibility requirements. Some forms of assistance are available only to residents of a Presidentially-declared disaster area. The availability of assistance also depends on factors such as the size of a wildfire and the nature of the damage to your property.

You may also find that assistance is provided by community volunteers and local organizations. Local volunteers and organizations can often mobilize quickly to provide services such as moving and temporarily sheltering livestock and other animals, providing household supplies to fire victims, and meeting other needs not met by the major agencies and organizations.

FOR EMERGENCY SHELTER, FOOD, AND OTHER NECESSITIES:

American Red Cross

The American Red Cross provides disaster relief focused on meeting the emergency needs of individuals and families. The Red Cross opens shelters for those displaced by a disaster, provides meals and snacks to families and to emergency workers in affected areas, and sets ups registration and information sites. After a disaster, trained Red Cross interviewers meet with families to determine their needs. Assistance may include providing the means to help pay for groceries, new clothes, rent, emergency home repairs, transportation, medicines, medical supplies, and emergency medical treatment. Red Cross nurses deliver first aid and attend to other health-related matters.

Family members from outside the disaster area can call their local Red Cross chapter and request assistance in determining the well-being of family members in the disaster area. The Red Cross can also help link disaster victims to other sources of assistance. Red Cross assistance is given free of charge. Individuals and families in need of assistance should contact their local Red Cross office or call the Montana Chapter at **(406) 727-2212** or **(800) ARC-MONT**.

Local Community Organizations and Volunteer Groups

Local community organizations and volunteer groups may also offer disaster relief services, typically seeking to meet needs not covered by other agencies and organizations. Because each community and disaster is different, it is difficult to say in advance just what role local groups will play. Services provided by local groups and organizations are often coordinated through County Disaster or Emergency Services Offices.

FOR FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FOR LOSS OR DAMAGE TO A PRIMARY RESIDENCE AND LOSS OF OTHER PERSONAL PROPERTY:

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

FEMA's assistance programs are available only to residents of a Presidentially-declared disaster area. FEMA's ***Assistance for Individuals and Households*** may include cash grants of up to $26,200 for temporary housing, home repair or replacement, and other disaster-related needs. When you apply for assistance, an inspector will call to schedule an appointment to inspect your property within a few days. If assistance is approved, you will receive a housing assistance check within 7 to 10 days of the inspector's visit. In the case of large wildfires that affect many private property owners, FEMA may establish a Disaster Recovery Center where more information about assistance programs can be obtained. To apply for assistance, call FEMA at **(800) 621-3362**. Information about FEMA may also be found at the agency's website, **www.fema.gov**.

Small Business Administration (SBA)

The SBA offers assistance not only to small businesses, but to any eligible home owner, property owner, or renter in a declared disaster area. The disaster declaration may be either Presidential or a SBA administrative declaration. Descriptions of the two types of declarations may be found at the SBA's website.

The SBA offers ***Home and Personal Property Disaster Loans***. Personal property loans for replacement of clothing, furniture, automobiles, etc., destroyed or damaged during a disaster are available up to $40,000. Loans of up to $200,000 are available to return a primary residence to its pre-disaster condition. SBA loans are not intended for immediate emergency relief, but rather to help in long-term rebuilding and repair. Processing of a SBA loan application can take up to several weeks. More information about SBA loans may be found at the SBA's website, **www.sba.gov**, or obtained from the Montana District Office of the SBA in Helena at **(406) 441-1081**.

FOR FINANCIAL AND/OR TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE IN ASSESSING POST-FIRE CONDITIONS, PLANNING FOR RECOVERY, AND RESTORING AND REHABILITATING LANDS DAMAGED BY WILDFIRE:

Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) Forestry Division

Service Foresters from the Montana DNRC's Forestry Division provide technical assistance to private landowners upon request. Service Foresters can conduct post-fire assessments for individual landowners and help them develop plans to mitigate impacts from a wildfire and to promote rehabilitation and recovery of their forests. Depending on the availability of funding, DNRC Forestry may also be able to offer some financial assistance through cost-share programs. Service Foresters also try to assist landowners in identifying sources of technical and financial assistance available from other agencies and organizations, and provide referrals to private forestry consultants who can help carry out the work. DNRC Forestry also operates the Montana Conservation Seedling Nursery, where landowners can purchase tree seedlings for post-fire rehabilitation and other conservation purposes. A listing of DNRC Forestry Assistance information, field offices, Nursery contacts, and a personnel directory is available on DNRC Forestry's website, **www.dnrc.mt.gov/forestry** or by calling **(406) 542-4300**.

Montana Association of Conservation Districts

The Montana Association of Conservation Districts provides sponsorship for technical and financial assistance through cost-share programs from the Montana Department of Natural Resources and the Natural Resources Conservation Service to assist private landowners who have been affected by wildfire. Cost-share programs address soil erosion and watershed concerns. For further information, please contact your local Conservation District or the Montana Association of Conservation Districts at **(406) 443-5711**, or e-mail **mail@macdnet.org.**

County Weed Districts

Areas burned by wildfires can be especially susceptible to invasion of noxious weeds. County Weed District offices can provide technical assistance to help landowners develop revegetation, weed management, and monitoring plans, and in some cases can provide financial assistance to help implement plans. County Weed Districts may also provide assistance in preparing and sponsoring applications to the Montana Noxious Weed Trust Fund Grants Program administered by the Montana Department of Agriculture. For more information or to request assistance, contact your County Weed District or call the Department of Agriculture at **(406) 444-5400**.

USDA Forest Service

If National Forest System lands are impacted by wildfire, the USDA Forest Service will also be involved with post-fire emergency rehabilitation and longer-term recovery work. At a minimum, landowners can work with their neighboring District Rangers to coordinate cross-boundary stabilization and rehabilitation work. Depending on available programs in any given year, the Forest Service may be able to provide technical and/or financial assistance to support private landowners' efforts to treat burned stands of timber, stabilize slopes, and manage longer-term impacts of noxious weeds and post-fire insect and disease infestations. In some cases, these programs are delivered through partnering agencies such as the State Forester or the Montana Department of Agriculture; in other cases, the Forest Service administers the programs directly. For additional information, call **(406) 329-3539** or e-mail **r1_bitterroot_fireplan@fs.fed.us**.

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

The NRCS conducts assessments of post-fire hazards, values at risk, and needs for emergency stabilization treatments on private lands after large wildfires (more than 300 acres) or if significant threats exist as a result of a smaller fire. If post-fire hazards present a risk to private property owners, the NRCS will contact the property owners to provide information about the risks and suggestions for mitigation measures. NRCS may provide financial and technical assistance for emergency measures that relieve imminent hazards to life and property created by a natural disaster through the ***Emergency Watershed Protection*** program. Assistance is provided to help prevent further property damage from flooding, runoff, and erosion. Treatment measures include repairing existing water control structures, removing debris and sediment from channels, establishing vegetative cover (does not include tree planting), controlling erosion and protecting stream banks. The NRCS also offers financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers through the ***Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)***. A special share of EQIP funding in Montana can be awarded to agricultural producers for post-fire restoration, with a focus on addressing immediate hazards. Regular EQIP funding may be available to agricultural producers for longer–term restoration activities such as tree planting. Timelines are dependent upon the availability of funding. For more information about NRCS conservation programs and technical assistance, contact your local USDA Service Center, call **(406) 587-6813** or visit **www.mt.nrcs.usda.gov**.

Montana State University Extension

Montana State University (MSU) Extension offers educational resources and technical assistance via county extension offices and university faculty in areas including range, forestry, horticulture, and financial planning. Forestry faculty are located on the University of Montana campus in Missoula and provide services including workshops and literature on forest planning, pest management, wildfire hazard mitigation, burned area recovery assessment, and land restoration practices. Range faculty are located on the MSU campus in Bozeman and provide services and publications on range restoration, species preferences, and alternative livestock feeds after a wildfire. MSU Extension's website, **http://extn.msu.montana.edu**, includes a publications list as well as a personnel directory for state and county office field staff. For more information, contact your county extension office or call **(406) 994-1752**.

Farm Service Agency (FSA)

The FSA offers emergency financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers to help them recover from the effects of natural disasters, including wildfires. Programs include the ***Emergency Conservation Program*** and the ***Emergency Loan Program***. The Emergency Conservation Program provides emergency financial and technical assistance to rehabilitate farmland damaged by natural disasters. The Emergency Loan Program provides emergency loans to help agricultural producers recover from production and physical losses due to natural disasters. More information about these programs can be found at the FSA's website, **www.fsa.usda.gov**. For assistance, contact your local FSA office or call **(406) 587-6872**. FSA offices are located in most counties in Montana in USDA Service Centers.

Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA)

The BIA, through the Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) program, provides planning assistance and funding for emergency stabilization, rehabilitation, and long-term restoration on burned Indian-owned trust lands. Where trust lands adjoin private property or other federally owned property, treatments may be prescribed across boundaries regardless of ownership. The treatments allowed are primarily emergency in nature, and are designed to stabilize the effects of the fire. Most treatments will occur within the first year after the fire. For additional information, call the BIA, Rocky Mountain Region One, at **(406) 247-7949**.

Resource Conservation and Development Areas (RC&Ds)

Eight RC&Ds in Montana offer unique combinations of facilitation and coordination skills and nonprofit assistance that can assist emergency responders during a wildfire and private landowners in fire recovery efforts. RC&Ds can help county officials coordinate evacuations, movement of livestock, public meetings, firewise prevention work, and local volunteers during the wildfire. During recovery efforts, RC&Ds can contact and facilitate discussion among government and private entities and landowners, accept tax deductible donations, and apply for and manage grants that may assist in recovery efforts. Each RC&D is a nonprofit entity that serves three or more counties. To see which RC&D covers your area, refer to the Montana RC&D association website, **www.mrcda.org**.

Bureau of Land Management (BLM)

When BLM lands are impacted by wildfire, the agency's Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) team is available to assist local offices and areas in assessing damage. Resource specialists then develop a cost-effective BAER Plan/Report for each fire that lists impacts and damages to resources, provides project specifications, and requests funding to mitigate damage within the area of approved plans. BLM's ***Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation*** program provides technical and financial support through approved plans. Emergency Stabilization funds are available immediately for projects that mitigate imminent life-threatening hazards. Allowable treatments include soil and slope stabilization, stream channel stabilization, hazard tree removal, and repair or placement of infrastructure such as culverts. Rehabilitation funds for projects such as fence reconstruction and noxious weed control are usually available later. The Department of Interior (DOI) and BLM assist landowners in creating defensible space to reduce the potential impacts of wildfire. BLM and the DOI also assist in funding some Rural Fire District activities and equipment through provisions of the National Fire Plan. For more information or assistance, contact a BLM BAER representative at your local BLM office or call the Montana State Office at **(406) 896-5029**.

FOR SUPPORT IN COPING WITH EMOTIONAL STRESS ASSOCIATED WITH SUFFERING WILDFIRE-RELATED LOSSES:

Federal Emergency Management Agency

Residents of a Presidentially-declared disaster area may contact FEMA for crisis counseling services by calling **(800) 621-3362**.

American Red Cross

Disaster mental health services workers offer information and help educate people about the emotional impacts of disasters and how to cope with them.

County Public Health Nurses

County Public Health Nurses can provide referrals to mental health services.

BEFORE THE FIRE

Work done before wildfire strikes can help landowners create defensible space around structures and help return forests to healthier conditions that are less susceptible to catastrophic wildfire. Many of the agencies and organization that provide financial and technical assistance to private landowners after a wildfire also provide assistance for defensible space work and hazardous fuels treatment. Contact your local DNRC Service Forester, county Conservation District, or RC&D Area for more information, or visit **www.firewise.org**.

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Night fire photo on front cover by Karen Wattenmaker.

Bitter Root RC&D Area, Inc.

NRCS Natural Resources Conservation Service