

2017 WILDFIRE SEASON



Fire Season Statistics

	Fires	Acres
Direct Protection	290	5,144
County Assist	47	551,776
Mutual Aid	176	n/a
Co. & Local Gov.	810	186,393
Total	1,323	743,313

53% of the fires were human caused, 46% were lighting caused, and 1% were of unknown cause.

The five year average is 330 fires and 133,061 acres burned. This year there were 337 fires and 556,919 acres burned.

Our first fire was March 17; last fire was December 11.

54 of Montana's 56 Counties implemented fire restrictions.

97% of the fires were 10 acres or less.



Mission

To protect lives, property and natural resources on state and private lands by providing resources, leadership and coordination to ensure safe and aggressive fire suppression.

Overview

This wildfire season brought unique challenges for Montana, not only was the season exceptionally hot and dry over a long period of time, the fires occurred across the whole state the entire season. Typically fire season begins in eastern Montana and moves west by August, with the eastern portion decreasing in activity, this was not the case this year. The Department of Natural Resources and Conservation was not the only agency affected by Montana's uncharacteristically severe wildfire conditions, our federal, state, county and local partners also felt the heat.

What was originally predicted to be a "below average fire season" for Montana turned into a challenging fire season due to a phenomenon some meteorologists are calling "flash droughts" which affected not only one but two areas in the state.

As early as June, drought conditions arrived in eastern Montana. Governor Bullock issued an executive order

declaring a drought emergency for 18 counties and two Indian Reservations. This was followed by a drought disaster declaration less than a month later for 28 of the 56 counties and five of the seven Indian Reservations across Montana. Five days after the drought disaster declaration was issued, Governor Bullock declared a fire emergency for the state of Montana.

In July, the Lodgepole Complex in Garfield County, the second largest fire in Montana history, burning 270,743 acres, caused huge devastation to local landowners. The end of August also brought two large fires in southeast Montana; the Sartin Draw Fire, 93,344 acres and the Battle Complex 90,957 acres.

Fire suppression efforts in Montana continue to demonstrate the value of partnerships between our cooperators. This continued coordination with cooperators is what it takes to work through a wildfire season such as this one.

- Mike DeGrosky, Chief,
Fire & Aviation Management Bureau

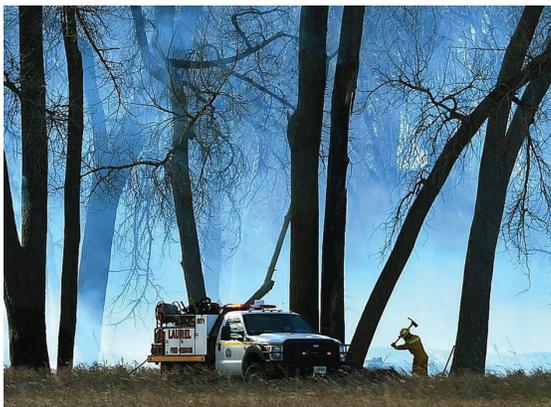
Cost The estimated State fire cost for the 2017 season are \$74.4M. This includes an estimated FEMA reimbursement of \$11.4M. The total cost does not include costs for the Montana Air National Guard, which is approximately \$6.3M. The total cost does include estimated costs of \$5.2M for Canadian air resources used through the Northwest Compact.

The DNRC was involved in 28 Cost Shares with federal partners this season and eight Fire Management Assistance Grants (FMAG's) declared on the following incidents.



FMAG's Administered by DNRC		
Incident	Counties Affected	Estimated FEMA Reimb.
Lodgepole Complex	Garfield, Petroleum	\$2,937,244
Alice Creek	Lewis & Clark	\$3,122,519
Lolo Peak	Missoula, Ravalli	\$975,000
Highway 200 Complex	Sanders	\$306,959
Moose Peak	Lincoln, Sanders	\$4,100,850

FMAG's Administered by DES		
Incident	Counties Affected	Estimated FEMA Reimb.
Rice Ridge	Missoula, Powell	75% of eligible county costs will be reimbursed to the county affected.
West Fork	Lincoln	
Strawberry	Teton, Pondera	



Equipment Development and Communications Center

20 engines, two water tenders and two fuel trucks were built in 2017. 17 of these engines were delivered to fire departments in Mineral, Beaverhead, Powell, Missoula, Treasure, Yellowstone, Musselshell, Beaverhead, Madison, Cascade, Phillips, Fergus, Sheridan, Carter, Garfield and Custer Counties as part of the County Cooperative Fire Program. 197 items of federal excess property, at an acquisition value of \$10.5M were acquired this year through the Firefighter Program (FFP).

County Assist Team "CAT"

The CAT was dispatched this year on Aug. 23rd. During their fourteen day roll they worked five fires, totaling 103,800 acres, across three Land Offices. This DNRC sponsored All-Hazard IMT was formed in 1990 to help rural and volunteer fire departments with wildfires when local resources become stretched beyond their capacity.

- Maurer Mtn. Fire: 3,000 acres, human-caused, Dillon
- Holmes Gulch Fire: 110 acres, human-caused, Helena
- Mendenhall Fire: 1,275 ac., human-caused, Big Timber
- Sartin Draw: 91,142 acres, natural cause, Ashland
- Snider Fire: 8,273 acres, natural cause, Ashland



The Rice Ridge Fire visible from Placid Lake southwest of Seeley Lake.



Training

Fire season is the time when individuals who have taken training get a chance to put the knowledge and skills they learned in class to use on actual incidents. Task proficiency is documented in a position task book (PTB), over 50 PTBs were completed this year.

DNRC conducted 216 training sessions attended by over 3,600 participants in 2017.

- 2,155 Local Gov. trainees
- 1,075 DNRC trainees
- 199 Federal trainees
- 264 Other trainees

Safety

The safety of firefighters and the public is always the top priority. 75 injuries were reported. There was no lost time by DNRC employees from these reported injuries. We learn from the injuries reported and take measures to prevent these injuries from occurring in the future.

Causes of injuries include: walking on uneven ground (25); exertion on fireline (15); exercise (13); sting/bite (5); vehicle accident (3); exposure to illness (3); asthma (2); working with knives/axes/chainsaw (3); debris in eye/ear (2); burn (1); struck by equipment (1); lighting exposure (1); and snake bite (1).

Incident Management Teams and Northern Rockies Multi-Agency Coordination Group

The commitment and sacrifice made by incident management teams (IMT) this fire season was astonishing! The Northern Rockies region hosted 20 Type 1 and Type 2 IMT, who worked 44 fire assignments, totaling 733 days. 60 days on assignment per team was the average with some team members enduring 75 days out this season.

Area Command was established in southwest Montana on August 16th to assist in coordinating the numerous active incidents in the area. SW Montana Area Command was in place until September 21st. The last time Montana had an Area Command team in place was 2007.

Prioritization of resources and incident issues were worked through and resolved by the Northern Rockies Multi-Agency Coordination Group (MAC) in conjunction with the Northern Rockies Coordination Center (NRCC).

Department of Corrections

For the second fire season, inmates from the Women's Prison in Billings contributed to the wildfire effort, assisting on six fire assignments for a total of 32 days. Inmates from the Men's Prison in Deer Lodge also contributed to this year's tough season. The Type 2 Hand Crew was out for 49 days on a mix of large, initial attack and extended attack fires. The DNRC and Corrections partnership is very beneficial in filling needs when resources are limited. This partnership has a long history of cooperation for fire duty, dating back to 1969.



The Lolo Peak Fire visible from the Missoula Helibase

Fire Adapted Communities & Prevention

Public outreach and education is the driving force behind DNRC's fire adapted communities and prevention programs. The goal is to assist communities and landowners to take risk reduction actions that will better protect themselves, firefighters and their property from wildfires. Great work is being done across the state that incorporates reducing the homes chances of ignition, hazardous fuels reduction, discussing the fire environment we live in and assessing individual and communities wildfire risk.

Reducing human-caused wildfires is also a priority. Keep Montana Green (KMG) and One Less Spark, One Less Wildfire are two programs that reduce property and natural resource loss, increase safety and overall lower fire suppression costs. 2017 marks KMG's 56th art contest, in which 3,000 students and 133 teachers from 100 schools participated. Through hard work and working together we can create a Fire Adapted Montana.

Northwest Compact

The Northwest Compact is utilized by the DNRC when additional help is needed. Through agreements with neighboring states and Canada, this compact serves as the instrument to make resources available.

In 2017, Alberta provided one Type I rappel helicopter with a seven person crew, three four person helitack crews and two dispatchers. Saskatchewan provided two CL215T's (super scoopers) with bird dogs (lead airplanes) and Alaska provide three engine bosses, two task force leaders and six helicopter crew members.



National Guard

The Montana National Guard was activated on August 6th and worked through September. More than 850 Montana National Guard service members worked in various capacities on wildfires this season. 92 service members did multiple rotations and were stationed at incidents across the entire state including the Meyers Fire, Lolo Peak Fire, West Fork Fire, Sapphire Complex, Highway 200 Complex, Rice Ridge Fire, and Caribou Fire. They also provided general support in the cities of Helena, Missoula and Kalispell. In addition to forming firefighting hand crews, guard members also served on engines and water tenders, at security checkpoints, and supported radio communications.

National Guard aviation resources including three Blackhawk helicopters and two Chinook helicopters, worked 16 wildfires totaling 491 flight hours.

Aviation

1,349 Flight Hours

2.1 Million Gallons of Water Dropped

1,371 Firefighters Transported

38,495 Pounds Cargo Hauled

