



Legislative Fiscal Bureau

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May 29, 2001

Joint Committee on Finance

Paper #663

Forest Fire Suppression Grants (DNR -- Forestry and Parks)

[LFB 2001-03 Budget Summary: Page 480, #7]

CURRENT LAW

The forest fire suppression grant program was created under 1997 Act 27, and provides a total of \$525,000 annually (\$198,000 forestry SEG and \$327,000 FED) to cities, villages, towns, counties, and fire suppression organizations that enter into written agreements to assist DNR in the suppression of forest fires when requested. "Forest fires" are uncontrolled, wild or running fires occurring on forest, marsh, field or cutover lands and the farms and improvements incidental to the wild fires. Grants may be awarded for up to 50% of the cost of purchasing fire resistant clothing and fire suppression supplies, equipment, and vehicles.

GOVERNOR

Provide \$250,000 annually from the forestry account to provide a 48% increase in available cost-share grants to local fire departments. A total of \$775,000 (\$448,000 in forestry SEG and \$327,000 FED) would be available for grants. Also, expand the allowable uses of these grants from fire suppression clothing, supplies, equipment, and vehicles to also include fire prevention materials and fire suppression training.

DISCUSSION POINTS

1. The Department indicates that, since its creation, applications for grants under the program have exceeded demand. In 2000-01, 213 grant applications were received, requesting a total of \$824,700 in grant funds. DNR awarded 195 grants with the \$525,000 in available funding. The following tables detail grants awarded by purpose and region for fiscal years 1997-98 through 1999-00.

TABLE 1**Fire Department Equipment Grants by Region**

<u>Region</u>	<u>1997-98</u>		<u>1998-99</u>		<u>1999-00</u>	
	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Northern	\$240,300	45%	\$217,800	41%	\$204,600	39%
West Central	147,700	28	144,100	27	191,700	36
Northeast	80,600	15	78,000	15	64,300	12
South Central	62,500	12	89,400	17	67,900	13
Southeast	<u>1,300</u>	<u>---</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>
Total	\$532,400	100%	\$529,300	100%	\$528,500	100%

TABLE 2**Fire Department Equipment Grants by Purpose**

<u>Region</u>	<u>1997-98</u>		<u>1998-99</u>		<u>1999-00</u>	
	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Fire suppression equipment	\$202,300	38%	\$178,500	34%	\$149,600	28%
Communications equipment	149,100	28	149,200	28	227,200	43
Off-road vehicles	117,100	22	135,300	26	91,600	17
Protective clothing	63,900	12	64,900	12	56,700	11
Mapping	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>1,400</u>	<u>---</u>	<u>3,400</u>	<u>1</u>
Total	\$532,400	100%	\$529,300	100%	\$528,500	100%

2. The primary recipients of these grants tend to be rural and voluntary fire departments. Local fire departments are generally able to respond to fire emergencies faster than the DNR suppression unit. Short response times allow units to fight fires while still small, potentially resulting in the loss of fewer acres of forest land and residential properties. The Department argues that the effectiveness of most local fire departments in fighting forest fires can be improved by providing better coordination, training, and equipment. Further, it is argued that due to financial concerns, most volunteer fire departments allocate resources for equipment associated with residential fires rather than wild fires. Expanding the allowable uses of these grants to also include fire prevention materials and fire suppression training would benefit the Department and forest owners by ensuring that the local units (which would most likely be the first fire fighting teams to reach the scene of the forest fire) would be properly prepared to manage the situation until DNR suppression units arrived, and would increase the effectiveness of local departments as partners in

forest and wild fire suppression efforts.

3. However, it may be argued that local communities receive the most benefit from better training and equipment for their fire departments. Additionally, these communities would bear the greatest cost for damages associated with forest fires in their areas. From this perspective, it may be reasonable to encourage local funding of these initiatives. Finally, expanding the purposes for which grants may be made would increase demand for limited state funds.

ALTERNATIVES TO BASE

A. Funding

1. Approve the Governor's recommendation to provide \$250,000 annually from the forestry account to increase available cost-share grants to local fire departments by 48% to \$775,000 (\$448,000 in forestry SEG and \$327,000 FED).

<u>Alternative A1</u>	<u>SEG</u>
2001-03 FUNDING (Change to Base) <i>[Change to Bill]</i>	\$500,000 \$0]

2. Provide \$125,000 annually from the forestry account to increase available cost-share grants to local fire departments by 24% to \$650,000 (\$323,000 in forestry SEG and \$327,000 FED).

<u>Alternative A2</u>	<u>SEG</u>
2001-03 FUNDING (Change to Base) <i>[Change to Bill]</i>	\$250,000 - \$250,000]

3. Maintain current law.

<u>Alternative A3</u>	<u>SEG</u>
2001-03 FUNDING (Change to Base) <i>[Change to Bill]</i>	\$0 - \$500,000]

B. Allowable Uses of Grants

1. Approve the Governor's recommendation to expand the allowable uses of these grants from fire suppression clothing, supplies, equipment, and vehicles to also include fire prevention materials and fire suppression training.

2. Maintain current law.

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