

# Idaho Department of Lands **Strategic Plan for Managing Wildland Fire**



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## **Executive Summary**

Wildfire is a persistent and escalating threat to Idaho's communities, landscapes, and economy. The Idaho Department of Lands (IDL) plays a critical role in protecting the state's forest and range lands, and this Strategic Plan for Managing Wildland Fire outlines a comprehensive approach to strengthening IDL's fire program to meet current and future challenges.

This forward-looking plan is built around five strategic themes that help guide our mission for the next 10 years:

1. Strengthen organizational capacity for evolving wildland fire challenges.
2. Enhance fire prevention and mitigation efforts.
3. Build adaptive infrastructure to address increasing fire occurrence and severity.
4. Foster interagency collaboration and resilience.
5. Expand existing funding streams.

As wildfire seasons grow longer and more intense—driven by population growth, increasing wildland-urban interface, and increasing fire protection responsibilities—IDL is being called upon to do more. This plan addresses this reality with strategies to modernize fire operations, improve workforce recruitment and retention, invest in early detection and response technologies, expand prevention efforts, and ensure sustainable funding mechanisms.

The plan is designed to be a flexible, working document—able to evolve with emerging issues, policy changes, and resource demands. With a continued focus on protecting property and natural resources, and a commitment to responsible stewardship of taxpayer dollars, this strategy positions IDL to lead the state in effective, accountable, and resilient wildfire management. It's the Idaho way.

## **Idaho Department of Lands Statutory Responsibility**

Statutory responsibility for the Idaho Department of Lands (IDL) fire program is described in Idaho Code Title 38, Chapters 1 and 4, also known as the Idaho Forestry Act and Fire Hazard Reduction Law.

Under current Idaho law: "Every owner of forest lands in the state shall furnish or provide therefor, throughout the closed season, protection against the starting, existence or spread of fires thereon..." (Idaho Code 38-111). Under Idaho Code 38-111, each forest landowner has the option to provide adequate fire protection individually or join other landowners to provide protection as a member of a Timber Protective Association (TPA). For landowners that choose neither option, state law directs IDL to provide fire protection and assess the landowner for the service. State law also requires the Director of IDL to: "...divide the state into districts to be known and designated as forest protective districts, having due regard in establishing the boundaries thereof, to the adequate, effective and economical protection of forest and range lands therein." (Idaho Code 38-110). These statutes form the basis of the current IDL Forest Fire Protection Districts and the two TPAs: Clearwater-Potlatch TPA (C-PTPA) and Southern Idaho TPA (SITPA). In recent history no forest landowners, other than the federal government, have met the legal requirements for providing their own fire protection other than by joining a TPA.

For state lands, the law states: "The provisions of this chapter shall be applicable to the forest and range lands belonging to the state with the same force and effect as they apply to privately owned forest and range lands within the state; except that for the protection of state-owned range lands, the state board of land commissioners may enter into agreements or otherwise provide for a reasonable arrangement assuring the timely suppression of fires on or threatening state-owned range lands whether or not said lands are adjacent to or intermingled with forest lands." (Idaho Code 38-105). Funding for the suppression of fires on state range lands is provided for in law: "The state board of land commissioners may authorize the issuance of deficiency warrants for the purpose of paying the costs of fire suppression on state-owned range lands whether or not said lands are adjacent to or intermingled with forest lands. When so authorized, the state controller shall draw deficiency warrants against the general fund." (Idaho Code 38-131A). IDL has protection responsibility on all state-owned land and all private forest lands that are not part of a TPA. IDL also has protection responsibility for some federal land through the Master Cooperative Wildland Fire Management and Stafford Act Response Agreement (Master Agreement).

## **Introduction**

Wildfire remains the primary recurring threat and hazard to Idaho communities and landscapes.

The dynamics of the wildland fire and wildfire environments continue to evolve and grow. In response, IDL is implementing new approaches to address these challenges and bridge existing gaps in the wildland fire program, ensuring continued success in protecting property and natural resources by containing fires to 10 acres or less.

As Idaho has seen an increase in population, wildland-urban interface, and human-caused fires, there has been a decrease in the overall number of federal personnel available to

support wildland fire throughout the country. IDL staff expect further decreases in federal personnel availability in Idaho. It is critical that IDL has the appropriate level of staffing in the right locations to be as effective as possible in minimizing the impact of fire on property and lives.

Within IDL protection, wildfire season has increased 32.4 days over the past 15 years, based on average days between first and last fires from 2010-2014 (210.6 days) and 2020-2024 (243 days). Nationally, that trend is similar. The Master Agreement with the federal cooperators expires in 2027, and IDL is expecting further change in our statewide fire responsibility as a result.

This plan will provide a forward-looking analysis that evaluates the future organizational changes required to successfully address population growth and the growing challenge of wildland-urban interface fires.

The plan addresses the following problem statement:

**Problem Statement:** The Department's fire program is operating on the edge of its capabilities during periods with multiple ignitions, extended attack and long duration fire seasons. Fire seasons are increasingly severe and prolonged, there is uncertainty around the future capacity of federal fire programs, federal agencies are transferring more responsibility for wildfire suppression to state agencies, and the amount of coordination needed to acquire resources during a busy season has dramatically increased. Additionally, the fire environment is growing more complex and is further impacted by rapid population growth, highlighting the need for an effective and modernized fire management program.

The Department believes that this vision statement describes the desired future state of the fire program:

**Vision Statement:** Meeting future wildland fire challenges through effective initial attack, robust incident management capabilities, strong partnerships, and enhanced prevention and mitigation efforts.

## Strategic Plan

The plan to strengthen IDL's fire program to meet current and future challenges is built around five organizational themes:

1. Strengthen organizational capacity for evolving wildland fire challenges.
2. Enhance fire prevention and mitigation efforts.
3. Build adaptive infrastructure to address increasing fire occurrence and severity.
4. Foster interagency collaboration and resilience.
5. Expand existing funding streams.

Under each theme's section, this plan describes why each theme is important, the key strategies to make the theme a success, and a description of actions already taken. The Appendix includes tables that describe the tasks that will be necessary to implement the key strategies.

## **Theme 1. Strengthen organizational capacity for evolving wildland fire challenges**

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There is less alignment between what IDL expects/needs and what the workforce requires in order to pursue the career field. This includes tools to address the physical and mental stresses of the work, work-life balance, and scope of work/responsibilities. Hurdles related to workforce readiness include approval for additional full-time equivalent positions (FTEs); funding personnel at a competitive pay rate; and recruiting, training, and retaining personnel with the ability to learn and use desired skill sets.

Beyond the firefighter workforce, Fire Bureau employees have historically been tasked with supporting multiple programs, such as one person overseeing aviation and fire investigation. As each program has become more complex, expansion of critical program management is necessary for success and staff retention.

Under Idaho Code 38-107, Fire Wardens are to abate the nuisance of fire. With significant population growth throughout the state and consequently an increase in unwanted human-caused fire ignitions, IDL has experienced an increase in nuisance fire responses. IDL policy and procedures require the investigation of all abated fires. This added workload has resulted in more investigations than the program can handle.

Aviation support personnel are not provided by IDL and are solely funded and provided by our federal counterparts at federally operated air centers across Idaho. These support personnel are required under the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) and the industry standards for the safe oversight and management of aviation operations.

The fire business program is responsible for auditing and authorizing wildfire billings from vendors and cooperators. The program supports incident business training, tracks wildfire billings (including negligent wildfire cases), oversees wildfire audits, coordinates federal grant applications, and provides oversight for wildfire-related financial and operational processes to ensure accuracy and compliance.

In the 2024 season alone, the program processed 1,110 vendor payment packages totaling \$33,364,114.89, which is a sharp increase compared to 687 packages and \$12,161,350.27 in 2023. The financial scale of these operations is also evident in the five-year average for suppression spending, which stands at \$48,370,800.

The fire logistics program is integral to firefighting and assists with wildland fire suppression nationwide. The demand for cache resources and support has grown considerably, yet infrastructure and staffing have not kept pace. The Coeur d'Alene National Fire Cache provides annual support to 300 wildfires at the national, state, and local levels, warehouses \$15 million of supplies, provides critical repair and refurbishment services of vehicles and equipment, and manages and maintains IDL's response and distribution fleet. Additionally, it provides support for local fire departments through the Firefighter Property and Federal Excess Property Program to supply them with surplus military equipment that is converted for use by the departments.

### **Key Strategy – Increase workforce capacity, readiness, and compensation**

- Provide competitive pay on par with Western states through an increase of entry-level engine captain rate that is in alignment with state policies, while addressing pay compression and equity between job classifications.

- Improve recruitment and retention strategies focused on entry-level and seasonal personnel through targeted mentorship programs.
- Focus on filling already approved positions that provide operational leadership and enhanced suppression capability.
- Establish appropriate staffing of initial attack, aviation, engine modules, and crew resources.
- Establish additional dedicated fire suppression modules.
- Conduct job classification analysis and review to determine if primary and support fire job classifications align with IDL policy and industry standards.
- Continue to recruit and promote collateral duty firefighting and support duties across IDL non-primary fire positions.
- Develop IDL Differential Pay Policy to incentivize collateral duty firefighters and firefighter support roles. Implement differential pay for fire suppression personnel time.
- Analyze and adjust the IDL Hazard Pay Policy to align with industry standards (federal and other states).
- Develop a self-reliant training program that supplements, instead of being dependent upon, federal training offerings.
- Assess need for IDL specific NWCG training compatible courses across the Department.
- Develop fire qualification training curriculum and 5-year schedule for recurring required courses (e.g., guard school, engine academy, basic faller).
- Further develop employees' support services by developing a cadre of trained peer supporters, hospital/family liaisons, and access to mental health services.

#### **Key Strategy – Expand Fire Bureau leadership and program management**

- Enhance aviation program expertise and capacity to continue to support fire aviation resource needs and to navigate state/regional/national aviation strategies and complexities across the industry including development of Idaho aviation operating plans, policies, procedures, and guidance with consideration to NWCG standards.
- Evaluate and ensure competitive pay structures and classifications for aviation-specific positions.
- Conduct a comprehensive review of aviation contracting support to understand the distinctions between state procurement and fire procurement processes, along with a statutory and policy analysis to optimize operational efficiency and effectiveness.
- Gap/needs analysis for IDL programs that are currently reliant on federal resources, specifically prevention, fire business, and incident support (fire cache and logistics).

- Support, evaluate, and implement early detection technologies such as satellite detection, lightning detection, and fire detection cameras. Seek funding for implementation.
- Coordinate with partner agencies and other interested parties to ensure maximum effectiveness and efficiency with detection capability and interoperability.
- Keep pace with the rapid evolution of radio technology.
- Analyze IDL’s organizational structure, with efficiency and effectiveness of the wildland fire program in mind.
- Improve interoperability with the TPAs by reviewing and identifying needed changes to agreements.

### **Key Strategy – Expand program delivery**

- Strengthen aviation program air support operations to ensure continued management of contracted aviation assets. Develop a transition plan to develop an aviation program that is capable of independently managing and supporting IDL aviation assets, consistent with the Governor’s 2024 Wildfire Report Recommendation #10.
- Develop dedicated program capacity for grant, agreement, and procurement management and oversight.
- Increase investigation program capacity. Add dedicated qualified investigators across the state for rapid response.
- Continue to implement automated financial systems, standardize billing procedures, and invest in workforce expansion and training.
- Increase cache logistics staff support.

### **Theme 1 Actions Already Taken**

- FY26 Budget Enhancements: Fire Aviation Section Manager, firefighter bonuses.

### **Theme 2. Enhance fire prevention and mitigation efforts**

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Fire prevention and mitigation are critical aspects of reducing starts, or if ignition occurs, keeping fires small and therefore reducing the impact of incidents while increasing responder safety.

Fire suppression costs are generally calculated on damages to private properties, loss of timber resources and infrastructure, and aid for evacuations—but these financial costs are just a fraction of the total costs of wildfires. *True* total costs include reduced business revenue, lost tax revenue, and overall decline in property values as well as human suffering and loss of life.

A 2022 report from the Western Fire Chiefs Association cited that, according to the Congressional Budget Office, federal fire suppression spending on federal lands *alone* averaged \$2.5 billion between 2016 and 2020. In 2017 alone, wildfires caused \$24 billion worth of damages—and in 2018, \$22 billion. A 2022 report by the Western Forestry



Leadership Coalition stated that over 10 million acres were burned annually three times from 2015 to 2021—and with the corresponding rapid growth of the wildland-urban interface, there were more than 97,196 structures destroyed by wildfires across the country between 2005 and 2022.

Looking at the outputs from Verisk’s FireLine assessment, while California and Texas have the highest number of properties at risk from wildfire, Montana and *Idaho* have the highest percentage of properties at risk, with 29% and 26% respectively. According to a 2017 University of Idaho Policy Analysis Group Report, Idaho had 10,868 acres of forestland under state protection burn in 2005 with a total suppression cost of \$13,877,000—and in 2015, a more severe fire season, those numbers rose to 78,571 acres under state protection burned for a total suppression cost of \$78,113,000.

Fire prevention is a crucial component of hazard mitigation by recognizing the risk of wildfire and then communicating that risk to the public. By raising awareness, promoting safe behaviors, and providing clear guidance on reducing ignition sources, prevention efforts address the hazard at its source—ultimately decreasing the likelihood of wildfire starts and improving overall mitigation outcomes.

Through outreach, education, and public engagement, fire prevention protects Idaho’s landscapes, communities, and resources while reducing wildfire costs. ***Research from the USDA Forest Service shows that every \$1 invested in prevention can save up to \$35 in suppression and post-fire rehabilitation expenses, underscoring the value of proactive efforts.***

The fire mitigation program provides pass-through awards to cooperators throughout Idaho to reduce the threat and impact of wildfire on communities and landscapes. ***In Idaho, for every \$1 spent on mitigation, between \$15 and \$32 dollars is saved in suppression expenses*** (*Estimating Suppression Productivity of Reducing Wildfire*; T. Holfeltz, 2004). Wildfire mitigation investments, strategically placed, can reduce the severity of and damage from future catastrophic wildfire. Investing in proactive fire mitigation strategies is a cost-effective and life-saving approach. Activities such as prescribed burns, forest thinning, mastication, and community education initiatives have been proven to reduce the intensity and spread of wildfires. By prioritizing projects that support these mitigation activities, IDL can work with federal and local partners to reduce the risks and costs associated with catastrophic fires—especially the growing number of life-threatening conflagrations. Every dollar spent on wildfire mitigation saves multiple dollars in fire suppression and disaster response and recovery. In addition, wildfire mitigation activities create jobs in forestry, conservation, and emergency management, providing economic opportunities for local communities.

Idaho was the first state in the nation to execute a Shared Stewardship Agreement with the USDA and Forest Service—and has, in close cooperation with three National Forests and IDL’s GNA foresters, expanded cross-boundary fuel-reduction treatments to thousands of acres of high-risk private forestlands across seven counties. This cross-boundary work, focused on expanding county wildfire mitigation programs, is in direct alignment with President Trump’s 2025 Executive Order to immediately expand timber production on federal forestlands, the USDA Secretary’s corresponding Memo, and Governor Little’s subsequent Executive Order, *Make Forests Healthy Again Act*. These kinds of interagency-led, cross-boundary projects reinforce these mandated increases in harvesting, active

management, and fuel-reduction treatments on federal forests and on surrounding state and private lands.

IDL has long managed administrative code related to forest practices to include slash management as an enforcement obligation. Many of these codes have not changed in decades and have not been updated to address changes in fire occurrence or advancements in scientific understanding.

### **Key Strategy – Strengthen prevention programs**

- Implement systemic statewide scale-up of state and federal funded prevention efforts by reclassifying current staff to a full-time program manager and adding regional prevention support staff.
- Expand advertising/messaging, reader boards, billboards, and gas station television (GSTV); modernize the Idaho Burn Permit system; and migrate funding streams from federal funds to state funds.

### **Key Strategy – Strengthen mitigation programs**

- Assess the optimal organizational structure and location of the fire mitigation program, expand cooperative program delivery through contracting and shared positions, enhance area and district implementation with education and private land projects, increase the use of prescribed fire, and transition funding sources from federal to state funds.
- Review administrative codes and policies to identify areas for updates or new additions to ensure wildfire reduction efforts can be expanded across all lands, not just state lands.
- Educate and inform Idaho’s legislators and Congressional delegates of the value of wildfire mitigation investments so they can champion policy legislation and funding initiatives that strengthen and build wildland fire mitigation operations in Idaho.
- Educate and inform Idaho’s public, focusing on the overall importance of wildfire mitigation projects in reducing the risk of damage to their lives and properties.

### **Key Strategy – Analyze and update IDL’s fire hazard management program**

- Review and identify alternatives for enhancing IDL’s fire hazard program implementation guidance.

## **Theme 3. Develop adaptive infrastructure to address increasing fire occurrence and severity**

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Adaptive infrastructure, designed with the flexibility to adjust and evolve in response to shifting demands, such as response-ready facilities, seasonal employee housing, robust communication systems, and advanced firefighting technology, can help IDL respond more efficiently to changing fire dynamics, protect communities, and safeguard vital resources.

A substantial gap exists between current resources and the necessary facilities, modern technology, and equipment required for optimal operations. Fire operations facilities are inadequate in square footage and function (e.g., fire cache was built in 1974), while

detection infrastructure has not kept pace with increased wildfire occurrence. In both cases, this has led to increased maintenance costs, operational inefficiencies, safety concerns, and a reduction in the effectiveness of our fire response capabilities.

Historically, IDL based contracted aviation assets at federally controlled interagency fire aviation facilities and did not contribute appropriately with funding or personnel to the facility operations. Coupled with unequal contribution, federal agencies have less flexibility with purchasing and leasing facilities, and changes are on the immediate horizon for federal aviation facilities across the state. More responsibility must be taken for the facilities supporting IDL's fire aviation program.

IDL needs modern tools and systems to keep pace with the evolving nature of wildfires and improve the efficiency of response efforts. Outdated equipment and manual processes hinder the Department's ability to respond quickly and effectively. By integrating advanced technologies such as real-time data analytics, satellite imaging, and automated firefighting systems, the agency can enhance situational awareness, improve decision making, and streamline operations.

Modernized tools also facilitate better coordination among agencies, quicker resource allocation, and faster communication, ultimately minimizing damage and saving lives.

Without addressing infrastructure needs, other tasks and their associated resources will be difficult to implement as the Department simply runs out of space to do the work.

### **Key Strategy – Develop and implement a comprehensive fire facilities plan**

- Develop fire facilities, including employee housing where needed, across forest protective districts, aviation sites, and for the Fire Bureau to accommodate current and future program expansion, thus improving readiness.
- Analyze response times associated with area of responsibility and identify total need across all state forest protective districts and TPA districts, Coeur d'Alene Interagency Fire Cache, aviation, and regional dispatch centers.
- Upon completion of analysis, consider leveraging interagency relationships, co-location possibilities, and establishing satellite remote guard stations to improve response times where appropriate (e.g., Avery).
- Evaluate if the one centralized fire cache still makes sense or if a more distributed regional model or a combination would add value.

### **Key Strategy – Modernize tools, equipment, and systems**

- Increase early fire detection capabilities. Early wildfire detection aids in quick response and rapid wildfire suppression, minimizing suppression cost and damages. There are numerous technologies today that require coordinated deployment and use. These technologies include AI-enabled wildfire detection cameras, advanced lightning detection, and satellite detection. IDL will need funding for hardware, software, maintenance, and other programmatic costs such as training. This buildout will be a multi-year approach, increasing capabilities after discussion with utility companies, federal fire agencies, local entities, and other state agencies.

- Consistent with the Governor’s 2024 Wildfire Report Recommendation #4, create an Interoperability Committee with the intention of coordinating wildland fire detection cameras.
- Acquire an advanced integrated, centralized software platform to enable the aggregation of geographic, environmental, and predictive wildfire data to aid in decision making, resource allocation, and firefighting strategies. A single source of information is critical to real-time decision making and shared situational awareness. Technology is more refined and is a needed tool for wildfire suppression and planning in an increasingly complex environment. These software solutions allow for inclusion of resource tracking, detection data, active wildfire mapping, wildfire modeling, etc.
- Additional strategies include modernizing our radio communications infrastructure to include interoperability with all fire departments in the state and being prepared for advancement in technology. This will include increasing our radio coverage to accommodate new protection areas, decrease system redundancy, and work with consolidated dispatch centers. Periodic gap analysis will be needed to determine the best value solutions due to rapidly evolving technology.
- Complete the implementation of the electronic Fire Business System by developing integration with statewide Luma system.

### **Theme 3 Actions Already Taken**

- FY26 Budget Enhancements: Fire detection cameras, satellite fire detection and mapping.

### **Theme 4. Foster interagency collaboration and resilience**

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Interagency collaboration is essential for successful wildfire suppression operations. No single agency has all the required resources and capabilities to deal with large-scale wildfires or multiple ignition days and must rely on collaboration from other agencies to address these challenges.

Wildfires frequently span large and complex areas that require a coordinated effort from multiple organizations to effectively manage. Different agencies bring unique expertise, resources, and capabilities to the table, such as local resources, state resources, federal resources, and emergency management organizations.

By working together, these agencies can share critical information, pool resources, and align strategies, ensuring a more efficient and unified response. Effective collaboration also ensures quicker mobilization of resources, better communication during the incident, and the ability to address both immediate firefighting needs and long-term recovery efforts.

Local Fire Service Organizations (FSOs) represent a significant resource in Idaho’s wildland fire response. The Idaho Office of Emergency Management (IOEM) also plays a critical role in emergency response of all types within the state of Idaho. Leveraging IOEM and FSOs’ resources for wildfire suppression in return for supporting emergency response embodies the Idaho way.

The impacts of wildfires on Idahoans are particularly felt through smoke. Every citizen has been exposed to unhealthy particulate levels associated with smoke, both from out-of-state

sources and incidents in Idaho. Additionally, as the use of prescribed fire continues to grow, the impacts of these planned, short duration events still have significant localized impacts to communities.

While IDL has staff members across the state who unofficially track the smoke during the wildfire season, there is no smoke management program at IDL to monitor and manage the effects of smoke or to interface with other supporting regulating agencies such as Idaho Department of Environmental Quality.

**Key Strategy – Expand coordination with Fire Service Organizations, the Idaho Fire Chiefs Association, and the Idaho Office of Emergency Management**

- Cultivate, enhance, and maintain interagency relationships. Leverage these relationships as a force multiplier for IDL’s suppression mission by assisting partners in executing their respective missions.
- Increase programmatic capacity and leadership to support Emergency Support Function #4 (ESF#4) responsibilities and coordination with IOEM and the Idaho Fire Chiefs Association for the strategic movement of fire resources to increase response and support capacity statewide.
- Consistent with the Governor’s 2024 Wildfire Report Recommendation #8, develop a statewide memorandum of understanding between firefighting entities at the local, state, and federal level to ensure capacity, coordination, and mutual aid response during wildfire events.

**Key Strategy – Expand coordination with regulatory agencies for smoke management**

- The establishment of a smoke management program supported by a full-time program manager will ensure the efficient coordination of this increasingly impactful effect of wildfires for Idahoans. This position could be shared between Idaho Department of Environmental Quality and IDL to further increase the regulatory coordination associated with smoke management in Idaho.

**Key Strategy – Increase ability to exchange resources with other states**

- Current federal law does not allow for reciprocal billing between the eight existing regional forest fire compacts. IDL must execute multiple compact agreements and enter into state-to-state agreements with numerous other states. Support and promote the National Association of State Foresters Wildland Fire Committee efforts towards allowing reciprocal billing between forest fire compacts to streamline IDL’s ability to leverage resources from all 50 states.
- Join the Great Plains Interstate Fire Compact (GPIFC). In the absence of reciprocal billing between compacts, joining the GPIFC would allow IDL access to wildland fire resources from neighboring states directly to the south and east as well as from North Dakota to Texas.
- Secure state-to-state agreements to augment fire suppression resources and to clarify billing procedures with other states to increase the overall resiliency of the fire program.

## **Theme 4 Actions Already Taken**

- FY26 Budget Enhancement: Fire Emergency Support Program Manager.

## **Theme 5. Expand existing funding streams**

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Funding for IDL's wildland fire preparedness or pre-suppression is used for training and equipping firefighters. This includes everything from engine oil changes to utility bills to personnel time in classroom training. This budget also supports prevention at the forest protective districts as well.

Funding for preparedness currently comes from three sources: dedicated funding from assessments (44%), general fund (43%), and federal grants (13%). The funding from assessments has generally remained the same throughout the years due to the assessment rate being unchanged since 2009. While the general fund portion has increased over the past four years, federal funds have steadily decreased due to national program cuts and changes in allocation methodologies.

Funding from assessments is intended for supporting pre-suppression and preparedness functions. Idaho Code specifies that forest landowners will pay up to \$0.65 per acre of forestland and up to \$40 per improved parcel. These assessments are managed by the Fire Wardens and audited routinely.

The software system, Private Fire, is antiquated and using older technology that has not kept up with the scope and scale of today's landscape. Private Fire is unable to be updated and could have security concerns. The software is at the end of its life and work arounds are required for continued operation.

Due to changes in protection responsibility in the 2023 Master Agreement, IDL has experienced an increase in rangeland fire protection. This ground is not assessed under Idaho statute, but it contributes to significant resource consumption for pre-suppression, suppression, and resource consumption.

There are several challenges to funding Idaho fire preparedness. One of these items is uncertainty and availability of federal grant funds. Recent changes have indicated there may be significant shortfalls in federal grant funding in years to come.

IDL has increased protection responsibility by approximately 3 million acres over the past 3 years, including adding the East Idaho Forest Protective District in Idaho Falls. This has strained IDL resources. IDL still has approximately 350,000 acres in offset protection. These acres could go back to state protection under a future Master Agreement, and IDL must be ready to take on the additional workload.

The assessments are currently insufficient for rapid program growth. IDL needs to develop a forest assessment program that will better address these resource shortages and increased resource commitments, in addition to exploring other options for expanding preparedness funding streams. This will require stakeholder engagement and change to Idaho Code.

### **Key Strategy – Assessments audit and modernization: Modernize software, conduct a financial and forest assessment audit, and reform assessment rate**

- Hire a program manager to oversee and serve as a subject matter expert for assessments.

- Conduct a systematic statewide review of all assessed parcels, beyond the annual audits conducted by the forest protective districts. Use audit results to drive statewide consistency calibration and identify necessary process/procedure changes.
- Deploy a spatially enabled centralized software system for analyzing and capturing data related to assessed parcels capable of interfacing with county tax roll records. Evaluate ability to record payments received by parcel. Using the new Fire Assessment Management System, evaluate assessed fees vs. suppression expenses vs. fire starts in the wildland-urban interface.
- Conduct assessments rate audit to ensure that the rate is appropriate for today's wildland fire challenges and expectations. Evaluate if the correct acres and fuel types are being assessed and if a single rate for all acres makes sense.

## **Key Strategy – Explore other options for expanding preparedness funding streams**

### **Theme 5 Actions Already Taken**

- FY26 Budget Enhancement: Statewide Forest Assessment Program Manager.

## **Conclusion**

Given the trends of increasing acres burned and rising costs for fire suppression, IDL needs to make changes in the fire program to meet current and future challenges and provide the fire program Idahoans expect.

By implementing this strategic plan, IDL will build a more resilient, self-sufficient wildland fire suppression program capable of addressing the evolving challenges posed by climate change and increased wildfire activity. Through investments in personnel, infrastructure, technology, and collaboration, IDL will protect Idaho's communities, landscapes, and natural resources from the growing threat of wildfires.

## **Measures of Success**

Success for IDL's wildland fire program means a resilient and responsive organization capable of meeting the state's evolving fire challenges with efficiency, agility, and foresight.

It will be reflected in reduced fire size and severity through timely and effective initial attack, improved firefighter safety, and robust interagency coordination.

Investments in prevention, mitigation, infrastructure, and workforce development will lead to more fires being kept under 10 acres, lower suppression costs, and fewer impacts to communities and natural resources.

A modernized assessment and funding system will ensure financial sustainability and readiness.

Ultimately, success means Idahoans are safer, landscapes are healthier, and the Department continues to be a national leader in state-led wildfire response. To that end, we will measure success by:

- A continued measure of initial attack success. Keep 95% of fires at or below 10 acres.
- The ability to manage multiple ignitions on one or more forest protective districts during a lightning event without exceeding IDL's fireline leadership capability.
- The Department and its cooperators are able to manage multiple type 3 incidents simultaneously without drawing on the national coordination system for Incident Management Teams.
- The Department's engines are fully staffed with qualified engine bosses and firefighters.
- Trained temporary fire staff are likely to return to IDL for multiple seasons.
- Facilities provide adequate and efficient space for personnel and equipment and improved response time.
- Increased retention and recruitment of skilled firefighters.
- Enhanced ability to sustain operations without federal dependency.
- Reduced human-caused fire ignitions through targeted prevention efforts.
- Improved community resilience against wildfire threats.
- More effective mitigation efforts through stable funding streams.
- Improved safety, efficiency, and effectiveness of fire suppression resources.
- Improved regulatory coordination for smoke management.
- Increased access to funding and firefighting personnel.
- More predictable and sustainable fire suppression funding.
- Greater financial independence for Idaho's wildland fire program.
- Enhanced capacity for long-term wildfire risk reduction initiatives.



Idaho Department of Lands  
Strategic Plan for Managing Wildland Fire

## Appendix

### Current and FY26 Planned Actions

Key Strategy	Tasks	Resources Needed	Implementation FY(s)	Enhancement Request; OT or OG
1.2 – Expand Fire Bureau leadership and program management	Reclassify Cache Program Manager and Business Program Manager to Section Managers	FM Bureau and HR	FY26	
4.1 – Expand coordination with Fire Service Organizations, the Idaho Fire Chiefs Association, and the Idaho Office of Emergency Management	Complete all tasks assigned by the Governor’s Roundtable Recommendations	Staff	Ongoing	N/A
4.1 – Expand coordination with Fire Service Organizations, the Idaho Fire Chiefs Association, and the Idaho Office of Emergency Management	Fire Emergency Support Program Manager		FY26	OG
4.1 – Expand coordination with Fire Service Organizations, the Idaho Fire Chiefs Association, and the Idaho Office of Emergency Management	Idaho Code Title 38 legislation change to include all hazard response, reimbursable fuels reduction project work, and post-fire recovery work; and deficiency warrant authority		FY26	

**FY27 and FY28 Priorities**

<b>Key Strategy</b>	<b>Tasks</b>	<b>Resources Needed</b>	<b>Implementation FY(s)</b>	<b>Enhancement Request; OT or OG</b>	<b>FY27</b>	<b>FY28</b>
1.1 – Increase workforce capacity, readiness, and compensation	Current wildfire suppression resource needs (9 Assistant Wardens, 20 Resource Foremen - Results in (3) 0.83 Res Foreman and 2 full-time Assistant Wardens at each district, and additional staff for helitack)	29 FTP, PC/OE	FY27 thru FY29+	OT & OG	1 Lands Resource Specialist (PDS), 1 Lands Resource Specialist Helitack (CMS), 1 Lands Resource Foreman Helitack (CMS)	1 Lands Resource Specialist (POS), 1 Lands Resource Foreman (POS)
1.1 – Increase workforce capacity, readiness, and compensation	Standardized dedicated fire suppression modules with foreman per zone (south zone is without)	1 FTP, PC/OE/CO	FY28	OT & OG		1 Resource Foreman
1.2 – Expand Fire Bureau leadership and program management	Aviation program staffing (Aviation Section Manager, Rotor Wing Program Manager, Aviation Safety Program Manager, Aerial Supervision, Air Intelligence Lead UAS)	5 FTP, PC/OE/CO, Contract(s) for multi-mission aircraft	Section Manager FY26, Rotor wing PM in FY28	OT & OG		Rotor Wing PM
1.3 – Expand program delivery	Investigation Program Specialist	1 FTP, PC/OE/CO	FY27	OT & OG	1 Program Specialist	

<b>Key Strategy</b>	<b>Tasks</b>	<b>Resources Needed</b>	<b>Implementation FY(s)</b>	<b>Enhancement Request; OT or OG</b>	<b>FY27</b>	<b>FY28</b>
1.3 – Expand program delivery	Statewide fire business support	2 FTP, PC/OE (1 program manager, 1 program specialist)	FY 27 & FY28	OT & OG	Business Program Manager	
1.3 – Expand program delivery	Statewide fire logistics support	1 FTP, PC/OE (1 program manager)	FY27	OG	Logistics Program Manager	
1.3 – Expand program delivery	Increase (1) shop staff from 0.67 to 1.0; (1) prevention specialist from 0.83 to 1.0; (1) Management Asst from 0.83 to 1.0	0.67 FTP, PC/OE	FY27	OG	(3) partial FTPs to 1.0: 0.67 FTP total	
1.3 – Expand program delivery	Increase current (2) 0.67 CDC/GVC Dispatch Coordinators to 1.0 FTPs to align with N. ID Consolidated Dispatch org chart	0.67 FTP, PC/OE	FY27	OT & OG	(2) 0.67 dispatcher conversions to 1.0: 0.66 FTP total	
1.3 – Expand program delivery	Create 2 (0.83) dispatch positions (specify positions) to finalize the interagency org chart within N. ID zone dispatch center	1.67 FTP, PC/OE	FY28	OT & OG		(2) 0.83 dispatchers
2.2 – Strengthen mitigation programs	Shift Mitigation Program Manager to state funds for stabilization of program	PC	FY27	OG	1 Program Manager (funding, not FTP)	

<b>Key Strategy</b>	<b>Tasks</b>	<b>Resources Needed</b>	<b>Implementation FY(s)</b>	<b>Enhancement Request; OT or OG</b>	<b>FY27</b>	<b>FY28</b>
2.3 – Analyze and update IDL’s fire hazard management program	Review and identify alternatives for enhancing IDL’s fire hazard program implementation guidance	Fire Bureau, Ops, Wardens, potential code change/ requirements	FY27			
3.1 – Develop and implement a comprehensive fire facilities plan	Phase 1 Fire Facilities Implementation	\$45,000,000	FY2024-FY2031	OT	Pursue Permanent Building Funds capital project to acquire Grangeville building (\$8M - \$12M)	
3.2– Modernize tools, equipment, and systems	Conduct cost analysis of IDL “share” within ID dispatch centers and GACCs	Staff	FY27			
3.2 – Modernize tools, equipment, and systems	Deploy 15 fire cameras each, FY27 & FY28	\$300,000 CO \$180k OE (OG)	FY27 thru FY28	OT & OG	\$480k	\$480k
3.2 – Modernize tools, equipment, and systems	Improve radio comms infrastructure	\$1.25 million	FY27	OT	\$1.25 million	

## Future Actions

### Theme 1. Strengthen organizational capacity for evolving wildland fire challenges

#### Key Strategy 1.1 – Increase workforce capacity, readiness, and compensation

<i>Strategy 1.1 Tasks</i>	<i>Resources Needed</i>	<i>Priority: High, Med, Low</i>	<i>Enhancement Request; OT or OG</i>
Continue to maintain entry level % of policy benchmarks identified in FY25 starting pay rates in future FYs as DHR adjusts pay structures	PC	High	OG
Eliminate LRS underfill job classification and recruit exclusively for LRSS	Hiring practice changes, PC	Low	
Public Safety Pay Series inclusion for IDL staff included in PERSI Rule of 80	DHR market analysis	High	
Ongoing needs analysis of Idaho's suppression obligation, abilities, and needs	Analysis	High	
Differential pay for personnel conducting fire suppression	IDL Differential Pay Policy, New Luma time code	High	
Analyze Wildland Firefighter Differential Pay policy and propose changes for process/procedure efficiency	Possible statute change	Medium	
Continue to promote collateral duty firefighting/support roles for non-primary fire staff	Ensure all new hires have fire qualification expectations included in development plans	High	
Develop IDL led fire qualification training curriculum (including engine academy) and 5-year recurring course schedule. Include crosswalk for IOEM/IFCA participation in IDL IMT3 and for IDL participation in All-Hazard.	Staff		

### Key Strategy 1.2 – Expand Fire Bureau leadership and program management

<i>Strategy 1.2 Tasks</i>	<i>Resources Needed</i>	<i>Priority: High, Med, Low</i>	<i>Enhancement Request; OT or OG</i>
Update IDL aviation FMH/Policies and Addendum to NWCG, analyzing alignment, necessary deviations, and FAA regulation & guidance	Analysis, policy & guidance updates	High	
Evaluate need to move/develop UAS policy for entire Department given use of UAS by fire, tech services, endowments, and GNA	Analysis, policy & guidance update		
Evaluate aviation contracting complexities, SME roles, and procurement responsibilities. Identify gaps/needs.	Analysis & recommendations	High	
Radio/Detection Program Manager	1 FTP, PC/OE	Medium	OT & OG

### Key Strategy 1.3 – Expand program delivery

<i>Strategy 1.3 Tasks</i>	<i>Resources Needed</i>	<i>Priority: High, Med, Low</i>	<i>Enhancement Request; OT or OG</i>
8 Aircraft Managers (AWSM and SEAT)	Needs analysis	Medium	
Analyze SME needs and responsibilities for fire grants, procurement, and authorities per statute and IDL policies	Analysis	Medium	
Dedicated qualified fire investigators	6 FTP, PC/OE	Medium	OT & OG
Program Specialist-dedicated legal admin support for fire investigations	Needs analysis	High	
Assess opportunities and cost/benefit of contracting engine builds vs. adding Shop Foreman & 4 mechanics (3 shop & 1 SEM Grade K and Grade H)	Needs analysis of IDL engine build program vs. vendor engines builds	High	

Evaluate the current job positions, classifications, and span of control for Cache to determine if appropriate. Identify gaps/needs in organizational structure by FTP and job class.	Analysis	Medium	
Radio Network Operations Manager (Grade J)	1 FTP, PC/OE	Medium	OT & OG
Increase emergency purchasing authority to 2 million at point of sale	Policy changes from State Treasury	High	

## Theme 2. Enhance fire prevention and mitigation efforts

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### Key Strategy 2.1 – Strengthen prevention programs

<i>Strategy 2.1 Tasks</i>	<i>Resources Needed</i>	<i>Priority: High, Med, Low</i>	<i>Enhancement Request; OT or OG</i>
Convert Prevention Program Specialist to Program Manager	PC	Medium	OG
Messaging/advertising reader boards, billboards, and GSTV	\$320,000 OE	Medium	OG
Replace State Burn Permit system	\$120,000 OE	Medium	OT
2 regional (N/S) Prevention Program Specialists	2 FTP, PC/OE/CO	Medium	OT & OG

### Key Strategy 2.2 – Strengthen mitigation programs

<i>Strategy 2.2 Tasks</i>	<i>Resources Needed</i>	<i>Priority: High, Med, Low</i>	<i>Enhancement Request; OT or OG</i>
Evaluate Division of Forestry and Fire organization structure and mitigation capacity needs	Committee-Executive Leadership, Fire Bureau, Forestry Assistance Bureau, Shared Stewardship, Operations, & Fire Wardens	Medium	

Evaluate Western states' programs for recommendations for program expansion in Idaho	Cooperative committee to independently evaluate Western programs	Medium	
Analysis of area capacity to implement additional program activities (this is tied to the FTE ask, asst wardens, resource foreman)	Staff from Forestry Assistance, Fire Wardens, Operations	Medium	
Develop prescribed fire and mitigation SOPs for all land ownerships to expand wildfire reducing activities across all lands	Staff from Forestry Assistance, Fire Wardens, IDL Legal	High	

### **Key Strategy 2.3 – Analyze and update IDL's fire hazard management program**

<i>Strategy 2.3 Tasks</i>	<i>Resources Needed</i>	<i>Priority: High, Med, Low</i>	<i>Enhancement Request; OT or OG</i>

## **Theme 3. Build adaptive infrastructure to address increasing fire occurrence and severity**

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### **Key Strategy 3.1 – Develop and implement a comprehensive fire facilities plan**

<i>Strategy 3.1 Tasks</i>	<i>Resources Needed</i>	<i>Priority: High, Med, Low</i>	<i>Enhancement Request; OT or OG</i>
Phase 1 Facilities Situation Analysis			
Phase 1 Facilities Plan			
Phase 2 Response Time & Situation Analysis			
Phase 2 Facilities Plan			
Phase 2 Facilities Implementation	TBD	Medium	OT
Fire aviation facilities needs analysis and aircraft location/response time evaluation	Staff	High	



### Key Strategy 3.2 – Modernize tools, equipment, and systems

<i>Strategy 3.2 Tasks</i>	<i>Resources Needed</i>	<i>Priority: High, Med, Low</i>	<i>Enhancement Request; OT or OG</i>
Procure Wildfire Management Information System	OE	Medium	OT
Deploy 50 advanced early lightning detection sensors	\$1,000,000	Medium	OT
Satellite fire detection	\$500,000	Medium	OG
Increase command vehicle fleet (includes investigation vehicles)	\$380,000	Medium	OT
Explore contracting IDL exclusive use Multi-Mission Platform. Potential to use as IDL detection / air attack platform if done correctly.	TBD, multiple examples within states nearby to look to	Medium	
Analyze current and forecast need for additional aviation assets throughout state responsibility areas.	Analysis	High	
Evaluate standard engine platform for IDL districts for 2030+ to determine if type 5 still makes sense	Analysis		

## Theme 4. Foster interagency collaboration and resilience

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### Key Strategy 4.1 – Expand coordination with Fire Service Organizations, the Idaho Fire Chiefs Association, and the Idaho Office of Emergency Management

<i>Strategy 4.1 Tasks</i>	<i>Resources Needed</i>	<i>Priority: High, Med, Low</i>	<i>Enhancement Request; OT or OG</i>
Identify additional needs regarding capacity and process delineation, to include but not limited to, administration, coordination, and mobilization (following Title 38 legislative change, FSO participation increase, and type 3 IMT creation)	Needs analysis	High	
Finalize IDL/ICMA/IOEM MOU addressing resource sharing, cooperative training and creation of all-hazard type 3 teams. (Reference Roundtable Report)	Staff	High	

### Key Strategy 4.2 – Expand coordination with regulatory agencies for smoke management

<i>Strategy 4.2 Tasks</i>	<i>Resources Needed</i>	<i>Priority: High, Med, Low</i>	<i>Enhancement Request; OT or OG</i>
Smoke Management Program Manager	1 FTP, PC/OE/CO	Low	OT & OG

### Key Strategy 4.3 – Increase ability to exchange resources with other states

<i>Strategy 4.3 Tasks</i>	<i>Resources Needed</i>	<i>Priority: High, Med, Low</i>	<i>Enhancement Request; OT or OG</i>
Federal legislation change for Forest Fire Compact reciprocal billing	Proposed legislative verbiage change. Support NASF. Consider ID delegation sponsorship.		
Join GPIFC	Staff & analysis	High	

Secure state-state agreements with MN and TX		High	
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## Theme 5. Expand existing funding streams

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### Key Strategy 5.1 – Assessments audit and modernization: Modernize software, conduct a financial and forest assessment audit, and reform assessment rate

<i>Strategy 5.1 Tasks</i>	<i>Resources Needed</i>	<i>Priority: High, Med, Low</i>	<i>Enhancement Request; OT or OG</i>
Statewide assessed parcel audit and review	Assessment Program Manager, GIS staff	High	
Implement process improvements based on assessment audit results	Assessment Program Manager	High	
Conduct WUI assessment audit of revenues & expenses. Use outcomes for WUI rate validation.	Assessment Program Manager, GIS staff	Medium	
Forest protection rate assessment audit	Staff	Medium	
Implement forest protection rate assessment changes based on audit findings	Legislative update	Medium	
Explore options and discuss options for “statewide” assessment	Staff	Medium	
Private Fire Assessment Management System	Assessment Program Manager, Contracted IT Development	Medium	OG