

## **Testimony to the U.S. House of Representatives**

### **Committee on Resources**

#### **Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health**

#### ***Interagency Cooperation in Wildland Fire Fighting***

Honorable Representative Hayworth, Committee Chairperson, and Committee members:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before your committee.

My testimony will be on how the Arizona State Land Department, Fire Management Division, operates with rural fire departments and federal agencies in the suppression of wildfires in this state.

The Arizona State Land Department, Fire Management Division, provides for the prevention and suppression of wildfires on state and private lands which are located outside incorporated municipalities. It accomplishes this mostly through the use of cooperative agreement with local fire departments, other state agencies, federal agencies, and persons organized to prevent and suppress wildfires. The division also maintains in-house overhead and firefighting capabilities through the qualifications of its own employees. Through this program we protect 22,400,000 acres of state and private land (see exhibit A for more information on the division). The Division has in place four (4) very important cooperative agreements to help facilitate this cooperative effort in fire suppression. These agreements are the Joint Powers Agreement, Cooperative Intergovernmental Agreements with rural fire departments, Cooperative Agreements with volunteer fire departments, and FEMA-State Fire Management Assistance Grant.

The Joint Power Agreement (Exhibit B) is an agreement between the state and federal agencies that allows for mutual wildland fire suppression assistance and cooperation between the state and federal agencies involved in wildland fire suppression. There are three important functions of this agreement. First, the agreement provides for coordinated initial attack of wildfires on each other's jurisdiction. This initial response may or may not be reimbursable. Secondly, it provides for reimbursement of costs when requested to assist cooperating agencies in suppression action. Thirdly, it establishes a method of allocating suppression costs when the fire burns on lands of both parties. There are several other provisions that provide for annual operating plans and mobilization plans.

The next two agreements, the Cooperative Intergovernmental Agreements with rural fire departments and the Cooperative Agreements with volunteer fire departments (Exhibit C & D), deal with the subdivision of state government and volunteer associations. (Rural Fire Districts vs Volunteer Fire Department) There are five important provisions in this agreement that supply important benefits to fire departments. They are training, technical assistance, equipment, reimbursement, and suppression assistance. The training provision provides for the opportunity to receive basic, intermediate, and advanced training in wildland fire suppression. This training will allow them to participate in suppression requests and other advanced fire assignments. The second important provision allows the state to provide technical assistance to the department. For example, the state could provide fuel hazard reduction planning or grant applications for equipment. The third provision provides the department with the opportunity to obtain fire suppression equipment from the Division. The Division has the ability to obtain federal excess property vehicles which

are then reconditioned into fire engines. The Fire Management Division loans these engines to fire departments, along with the ability to purchase suppression tools at reduced cost. The fourth provision allow for the fire departments to be reimbursed for suppression action outside their response area when it is requested by the state. The fifth provision provides for additional suppression resources inside the fire department's response area when requested by the fire department.

Initial and extended suppression action for wildland fires in the State of Arizona are based on these three agreements plus annual operating plans for the four Area Zones in Arizona. In the White Mountain and Northern Arizona Zones, state resources are dispatched by agreement through the Apache-Sitgreaves and Coconino National Forest (Exhibit E & E-1). The other two Zones are dispatched out of the state dispatch center in Phoenix. During severe fire seasons, the Land Department, through the Fire Management Division, provides additional suppression and prevention resources through a special funding process of up to \$1,000,000. The system of agreements and operating plans is used to mobilize approximately 230 rural and city fire departments to assist the State Forester in suppressing wildland fires on 22.4 million acres (Exhibit F). This system also allows the state to assist our federal cooperators with additional suppression resources.

The last agreement is between the State and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), which allows the State to request the financial assistance in hopes of mitigating a disaster. This helps the state mobilize additional suppression and emergency response resources without the fear of being unable to pay for the added expenses (Exhibit G).

Again, I would like to thank the committee for this opportunity.

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