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State of Montana

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Governor



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Governor Bullock Announces Fire Fund Doubled, Sufficient Budget Reserves to Manage Pandemic

Bullock's strong fiscal management leads to fire fund reaching statutory max for first time in history and reserves of over \$600 million

MONTANA - Governor Steve Bullock today announced that the fire fund has doubled to its statutory maximum and that the state of Montana is well equipped to manage the uncertainty ahead created by the pandemic due to sufficient budget reserves of over \$600 million.

"Because we headed into this pandemic in an historically strong position and because we were careful stewards of taxpayer dollars, Montana is in an enviable financial position as other states weather budget challenges," said Governor Bullock. "Montanans can rest assured that we are well equipped to handle less concurrent challenges with a fire fund that can cover nearly five average wildfire seasons and the reserves to sustain critical services and manage through the pandemic."

On August 13, \$46.7 million was transferred from the general fund to the fire suppression fund, putting the fire fund at its statutory maximum of \$441.5 million, or 4% of fiscal year 2021 appropriations, for the first time in history. With prudent fiscal management, responsible stewardship of taxpayer dollars, and lower than expected Medicaid costs, state agencies under Governor Bullock finished the fiscal year under budget, allowing for the transfer to the fire fund.

The fire fund now contains enough money to cover nearly five average years of state fire suppression costs. The ten-year average fire suppression cost is \$21.1 million. In 2013, Governor Bullock proposed and passed House Bill 154 to change the way wildfires are paid for by the state, which seeks to dedicate dollars to the fire suppression fund in advance of wildfire season. This legislation included that revenues by state agencies in excess of 9.0% of total general fund be transferred to the fire fund.