



## STATE FIRE ASSISTANCE

# Building the National Response to Wildfire

Fork Fire, SD

**THE USDA FOREST SERVICE (FOREST SERVICE) STATE FIRE ASSISTANCE (SFA) PROGRAM IS A FUNDAMENTAL BUILDING BLOCK FOR STATE FORESTRY AGENCIES NATIONWIDE,** and their ability to address wildland firefighting needs. SFA serves to help states and local communities with wildland firefighting response, capacity building, fire prevention education, and wildland fire mitigation. In the western United States, SFA dollars remain critically important to address challenges such as 60–80 day longer fire seasons, expansion of residences in the Wildland–Urban Interface (WUI), warmer temperatures, dense and unhealthy forest stands, and more. The Council of Western State Foresters supports the continuation of a robust SFA Program to prevent, protect and enhance our capacity to respond to and minimize the effects of catastrophic wildfire.



Established in 1967, the Council of Western State Foresters (CWSF) is a nonpartisan organization of state, territorial, and commonwealth foresters of the Western United States and Pacific Islands. State Forestry Agencies provide forest management assistance to landowners, manage state trust lands, and ensure public safety through wildfire and forest health protection services. Please contact us at [westernstateforesters.org](http://westernstateforesters.org).

# WHAT IS STATE FIRE ASSISTANCE?

Established in the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act of 1978, the SFA Program is the primary federal mechanism that provides states and communities financial and technical assistance for wildland fire management. Until recently SFA was budgeted, and the program's funds were distributed, under two major program areas of the Forest Service budget: State & Private Forestry (S&PF) Department and the Forest Service Wildland Fire Management Program. This is indicated in Table 1 on the next page. In the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2014 the SFA budget line items (BLI) were consolidated into one single BLI under the Wildland Fire Management Program.

The SFA Program supports a multitude of activities under an overall program goal focused on mitigating the risk of wildland fire and maximizing the benefits achievable to local communities. The Forest Service provides that, "State, local and private landowner efforts are key to reducing these [wildfire] risks."<sup>1</sup> While providing wildfire suppression mitigation assistance, SFA dollars are also invested in:

1. Hazardous fuels treatments; in fiscal year (FY) 2013 the SFA Program directly funded hazardous fuel treatments on nearly 130,000 non-federal acres in and around at-risk communities, and another 119,127 acres were treated with leveraged funding.
2. Training of local firefighters; most often these local firefighters are the first responders to wildfires in their communities. In FY 2013 alone the program funded the training of 35,815 firefighters.
3. Creating fire-adapted communities as described in the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy, and assisting these communities in wildfire preparedness and mitigation efforts through completion of Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs). Of the 72,681 communities across the country currently at risk of wildfire, only 12,434 (17.5%) are considered appropriately prepared.<sup>2</sup>
4. Funding two competitive processes (nation-wide) to address high priority projects and landscapes as indicated in State Forest Action Plans (FAPs).
5. The purchase, maintenance, and rehabilitation of firefighting equipment for state forestry agencies.

Table 1 displays the net SFA Program funds allocated to western Forest Service Regions (1-6, and 10) for FY 2010 – FY 2014.<sup>3</sup> Though not illustrated in the table, all SFA Program funds received by each individual state are leveraged at least dollar-for-dollar from non-federal sources. A regionally calculated portion of program funds are allotted each year for competitive projects as part of the WUI Competitive Process. Prior to FY 2014 a small portion of SFA funds (15 percent) also contributed to a separate national competitive process known as S&PF Competitive Redesign. In FY 2014 Congress enacted the Landscape Scale Restoration program that institutionalized the redesign competitive process and established its own budget line item.

<sup>1</sup> USDA Forest Service. Fiscal Year 2015 Budget Justification. March 2014

<sup>2</sup> National Association of State Foresters. Communities at Risk Report FY 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Table 1 includes the net allocations to each western Forest Service Region; this does not include cost pools, Congressional earmarks or national priority projects.

**Table 1: USDA Forest Service Regions (1-6, and 10) SFA Funding FY 2010 – FY 2014**

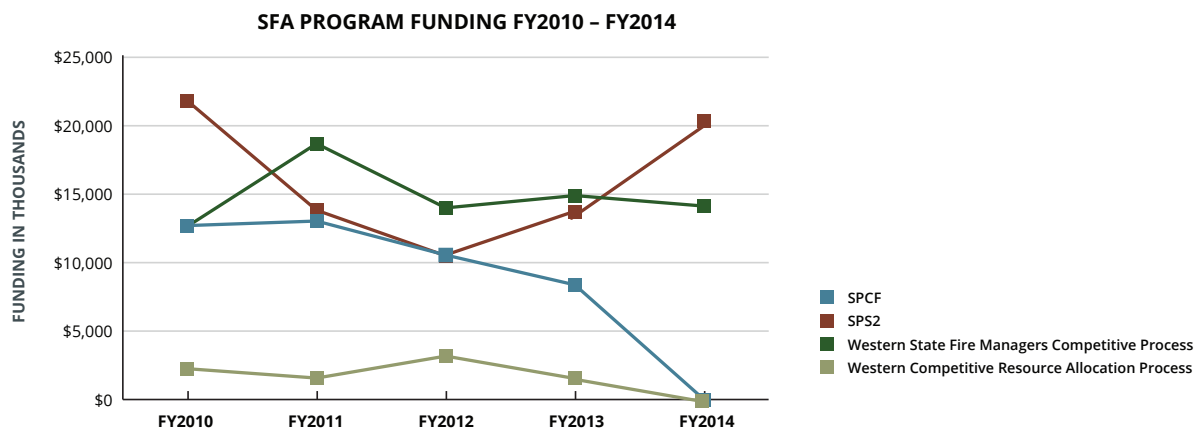
In \$ Thousands

|   | FY 2010         | FY 2011         | FY 2012         | FY 2013         | FY 2014         |
|---|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| SPCF: State Fire Assistance – S&PF      | \$12,707        | \$13,038        | \$10,554        | \$8,376         | \$0*            |
| SPS2: State Fire Assistance – WFM       | \$21,818        | \$13,829        | \$10,500        | \$13,768        | \$20,343        |
| SFA Funds: WUI Competitive Process      | \$12,652        | \$18,694        | \$13,999        | \$14,900        | \$14,131        |
| SFA Funds: Competitive Redesign Process | \$2,251         | \$1,567         | \$3,173         | \$1,536         | \$0**           |
| <b>Totals</b>                           | <b>\$49,428</b> | <b>\$47,128</b> | <b>\$38,226</b> | <b>\$38,580</b> | <b>\$34,474</b> |

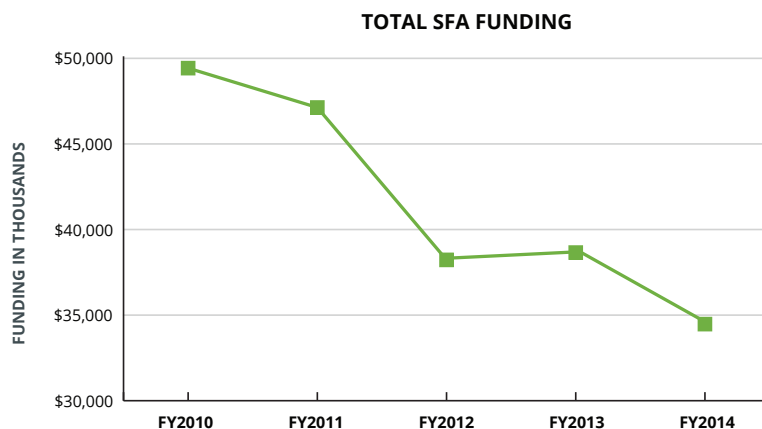
\* SPCF was merged with SPS2 in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2014.

\*\*In FY 2014 the Competitive Redesign Process was formalized through the enactment of the Landscape Scale Restoration program and funded through its own budget line item.

**Graph 1: USDA Forest Service Regions (1-6, and 10) SFA Funding FY 2010 – FY 2014**



**Graph 2: Total USDA Forest Service Regions (1-6, and 10) SFA Program Funding**





## SUCCESS STORIES FROM AROUND THE WEST

Whether it's equipment, fuel breaks, communications, training or community planning, SFA funds are being leveraged with local funds and community commitment. SFA is critical in supporting local firefighting, fire mitigation, and helping to build our nation's response to wildfire. It is an investment we cannot afford to lose. The following stories are only a small sample of how programmatic SFA non-competitive funds are helping communities and restoring lands across the west.



## Working Across Agencies | WYOMING

Wyofire 2014

State Fire Assistance funds help to support wildland firefighting exercises conducted prior to the start of wildfire season in order to train and qualify wildland firefighters and to provide the opportunity for firefighters to familiarize themselves with the processes of reporting to incidents, actions while at incidents, and how to properly leave incidents. WYOFIRE 2014 was hosted by the Wyoming State Forestry Division (WSFD) at Camp Guernsey with approximately 150 people from Wyoming, Colorado, Montana, South Dakota, Nebraska, and Kansas.

Training and qualifying during the event covered a wide range of learning experiences that included resource record/time keeping and management, structure protection, public information, initial attack incident commander, planning, air to ground coordination, communications, medical incident response within an incident, water handling/pumping operations, firing operations, and logistics. The training event was conducted to ensure that the National Wildfire Coordinating Group standards for wildland fire positions are met and positions are filled with qualified and competent firefighting personnel.

WYOFIRE is conducted through mutual cooperation and coordination by the Wyoming State Forestry Division with the United States Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, Wyoming Army National Guard, Camp Guernsey Regional Training Center, Wyoming Office of Homeland Security, National Weather Service, the communities of Guernsey and Hartville and volunteer firefighters.

In addition, last winter the WSFD, with assistance from the Fremont County Fire Protection District and the Colorado Division of Fire Prevention and Control conducted a wildland firefighting equipment maintenance workshop in Cheyenne. Registered participants came from across Wyoming and neighboring states of Nebraska, South Dakota and Colorado.

The class offered participants a comprehensive understanding of maintaining a 2-1/2 and 5 ton 6x6 military trucks. Participants spent three days of rigorous training that included lectures and hands-on demonstrations.



Firefighters learn the basic understanding of maintaining their 2-1/2 and 5 ton 6x6 military trucks.



Torch Out, Wyofire 2014



## MONTANA | Addressing High Priority Needs

Mann Gulch Training



New Technology Radio System

The Montana DNRC Fire & Aviation Management program has been able to use funding provided through the State Fire Assistance (SFA) program to address some high priority needs. Firefighter and public safety is the highest priority of the program and these federal funds have been used to increase safety in several areas.

SFA funds helped to develop and implement a chainsaw use training course. The course is given annually and provides a practical field day of saw use under close professional guidance for all trainees. Additionally the funds helped support a DNRC chainsaw qualification system which requires training and certification on a periodic basis for all DNRC sawyers.

SFA funding has been used to provide a ‘staff ride’ type training session to DNRC firefighters at the site of the historic 1949 Mann Gulch fire tragedy. Each year 30-60 firefighters are transported to Mann Gulch and given a facilitated tour which focuses on the lessons learned from that fire. Included are discussions in fire protocol, fire tactics, and crew communication and cohesion.

As DNRC transitioned the state radio system to narrowband, SFA funding was important to support the purchase of newer technology equipment. Narrowband radios allowed DNRC to meet the FCC mandate as well as continue to communicate with the many interagency (county, RFD, federal) partners in fire suppression in Montana.

Expansion of the DNRC radio system, particularly mountain top repeaters, has been supported with SFA funds. This expansion was necessary to provide adequate communication to firefighters in the field and provide for their safety when deployed on an incident.



## Investment Reaps Huge Dividends | COLORADO

Fuel Break between Boundaries

State Fire Assistance funds have been used to help implement fuels reduction projects at Santa Fe Trail Ranch, a 17,000-acre subdivision with 454 35-acre lots near Trinidad, CO. Not long after receiving the first SFA grant, the ranch developed a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). With additional funding from SFA and state grants over the last 8 years, the ranch has been able to complete a significant amount of the fuels reduction work identified in their CWPP.

One of those priority projects was development of a shaded fuelbreak on the boundary between Santa Fe Trail Ranch and Vermejo Park Ranch. The fuelbreak provides firefighters improved access for fire suppression efforts, and improved egress for residents of both communities. The 2011 Track Fire demonstrated the need for fuelbreaks. The 27,000-acre fire started in New Mexico and burned its way into Colorado. It was headed straight for Santa Fe Trail Ranch when the wind shifted, diverting it away from the community and across I-25.

In addition to completion of more than 1,760 acres of fuelbreaks since 2006, approximately 1,700 additional acres of fuels treatment has occurred around homes and other structures on the ranch. Understanding the importance of investing in fuels mitigation and forest restoration, the community has far exceeded the match requirements for every grant they have received. For example, the ranch provided \$171,772 of cash and in-kind match for the \$68,682 SFA grant they received in 2006. They received another \$84,000 in SFA funds in 2007, which they matched with a \$125,000 grant from the state, and cash and in-kind support from landowners.

“The first SFA grant we received was monumental in terms of implementing the initial fuels reduction projects, and it demonstrated to the community the benefits that are derived from creating openings in the forest canopy and expanding access for emergency responders and residents,” said Dave Skogberg, who received the first grant in 2005. He emphasizes his belief in the projects, “We are confident that the fuels mitigation projects we have been able to accomplish as a result of SFA funding will someday help to save our community, important infrastructure — and possibly human lives. It’s an investment that reaps huge dividends, and we are very fortunate to be a recipient of these funds.”



Waldo Canyon Fire, 2012



Aspen tree with burnt trunk



# SOUTH DAKOTA | Working Across Lands in the Great Plains

South Fork Prescribed Fire, SD



SD Secretary of Agriculture, Lucas Lentsch, tours Great Plains Dispatch.

State Fire Assistance funding is utilized to support the Great Plains Interagency Dispatch Center (GPC) in Rapid City, SD. GPC provides vital support to the local, state, and federal wildland fire suppression agencies for incidents involving private, state, and federal lands in South Dakota as well mobilizing resources for incidents within the region and national incidents. Work is accomplished in an interagency environment providing vital dispatch support to keep firefighters safe on incidents.

State Fire Assistance grants supported 105 Training Classes with 1,464 firefighters attending wildland training classes. This allowed opportunities for 100 level through 400 level courses to be provided, accommodating more firefighters and more efficient use of time and funds.

State Fire Assistance funding is also utilized to support a new prescribed fire program. The agency was able to treat more acres and conduct trainings and certifications. This will grow the prescribed fire program exponentially. Prescribed fire is a cost effective way for habitat to be expanded, which is a high priority within the state, especially for pheasant habitat as well as other wildlife.



**The Council of Western State Foresters**

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