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“Legislative budget proviso restricting the allocation of administrative costs to fire suppression results in a larger share of costs to the remaining programs, including the state trust lands.”

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2022 DNR Legislative Priorities: Administrative Support for Firefighters

Wildland fire suppression costs are increasing

The State of Washington has experienced an exponential growth of wildfires, both in terms of severity and duration. Fire seasons are routinely lasting from April through October, requiring an average of 700 firefighters each year. These employees require as much or more administrative support as our regular employees, since a new cadre of these non-permanent employees are recruited, hired, on-boarded, equipped, paid, housed, trained, transported and off-boarded each year. They require special equipment, training, housing and transportation that our agency and regional administration staff must support.

Agency trust and dedicated funds bear a disproportionate share of agency administrative costs

None of the agency's administrative or indirect activities to support emergency fire suppression staff may be charged to the emergency fire suppression appropriation because of two sentences in the 2021-23 Operating Budget, Section 310(8): *“The appropriations provided in this subsection may not be used to fund the department's indirect and administrative expenses. The department's indirect and administrative expenses shall be allocated among its remaining accounts and appropriations.”*

This means that the department's other agency trust and dedicated accounts have had to make up the difference. Programs such as State Uplands and Aquatics pay the price for this proviso language, **reducing revenues to trust beneficiaries, salmon recovery funding, and forest health treatments.**

Our staff and seasonal firefighters lack needed administrative support

As the number of seasonal firefighters increases along with the more severe and frequent wildfires, so too does the workload of central agency and regional administrative staff. These employees work longer hours and postpone their other work until after fire season ends. As a result, staff must deal with normal work in the offseason, which has been getting shorter every year.

The solution

DNR asks that these two sentences be removed from Section 310(8) for future operating budgets, and that a new investment is made to fund the department's administrative needs. [This change is supported by an independent review funded by the Legislature](#), conducted by Stellar LLC.

Allowing the emergency fire suppression funds appropriation to fund agency administrative and indirect activities will shift **17.182 million dollars** for Fiscal Years 2022 and 2023 from agency fiduciary trust and dedicated funds to the State General Fund and the Disaster Recovery Account. **This will allow agency fiduciary trust and dedicated funds to have the required balance to restore and protect state lands and waters.**