



Wildland Fire Management

Volunteer Fire Assistance Grants Help Rural Communities

Volunteer Fire Assistance Grant Program

The Volunteer Fire Assistance Grant Program helps rural communities with populations of 10,000 or fewer, which includes nearly 90 percent of the Nation's cities and towns. Firefighters, almost all of whom are volunteers, are in critical need of training and equipment. Assistance is provided to:

- Establish new fire departments
- Upgrade fire suppression capabilities
- Train firefighters for wildland fire suppression

Volunteer Fire Assistance funding is awarded almost entirely to volunteer fire departments in rural areas. It is estimated that the cost of converting the Nation's volunteer firefighters to paid firefighters would total \$37.8 billion annually. There are approximately 555,650 volunteers in 13,246 volunteer fire departments (VFDs) in the region served by Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry (NA S&PF). It only makes sense to prepare VFDs for protecting State, private, and Federal lands, especially communities at risk.

Federal Excess Personal Property (FEPP) and Department of Defense Firefighting Property (FFP) Programs

The FEPP and FFP programs are the "lifeblood" of the States and rural fire departments that depend on them to adequately equip themselves for fighting fires. Over more than 50 years, FEPP has saved the taxpayers in NA S&PF more than \$450 million. Benefits are realized each year as firefighting equipment is loaned or has its title passed to State forestry agencies and partners, including rural fire departments. These programs also meet the Federal interest in protecting State and private lands from wildland fires. Positioning equipment that can suppress fires under the "closest forces" often provides the first and only fire protection to many communities, especially in areas of high risk. It also gives State Foresters an opportunity to organize, train, and equip rural communities.

Key Issues:

- VFDs are the primary responders to wildland fires on private lands; they also help suppress fires on Federal lands within the States served by Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry.
- Firefighter safety is a core value of NA S&PF. During recent property reviews, approximately 45–50 percent of VFD personnel lack proper wildland fire training and personal protective equipment.
- FEPP is a foundation program for providing equipment to volunteer fire departments.
- In the NA S&PF Strategic Plan for 2013–2018, Conserve and Manage Working Forest Landscapes for Multiple Values and Uses, Objective E states, "Support efforts to reduce wildfire threats to people, communities, and natural resources."

Accomplishments:

Volunteer Fire Assistance Program FY2014

- Awarded grants totaling \$3.6 million to 1,795 departments
- Provided assistance to a total of 3,472 fire departments
- Helped form three new fire departments
- Trained 7,045 volunteers in Incident Management and wildland fire suppression

Federal Excess Personal Property and Department of Defense Firefighting Property Programs

- The 5-year average for NA S&PF acquisitions is \$9.6 million and \$203.3 million for FEPP and FFP, respectively.
- In 2014, more than \$3.9 million in firefighting equipment was acquired through FEPP and loaned to State forestry fire protection agencies and local fire departments. All 20 States served by NA S&PF participate in this program; inventoried equipment primarily includes vehicles, heavy machinery, and some aircraft parts.



- In 2014, more than \$10.9 million in firefighting and emergency services equipment was acquired through FFP; NA S&PF transferred ownership of equipment in 12 States. In addition, three more States (Delaware, New York, and New Hampshire) have signed cooperative agreements to participate in the FFP.

Future Direction:

- *Help Communities Prepare for Wildland Fire:* Help communities identified as being at risk from wildfire develop Community Wildfire Protection Plans, enact protective ordinances, and plan fuel treatments. Work with partners to develop an integrated planning approach to address the full range of resource issues facing NA S&PF's communities.
- *Improve Community Suppression Capabilities:* Provide equipment, training, or other assistance to communities identified as being at risk from wildfire to improve their ability to suppress wildfire and respond to local incidents without the help of State or Federal resources.
- *Protect Communities:* Reduce hazardous fuel loading that is threatening communities at risk from catastrophic wildfire.

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