



Washington State Patrol

State Fire Service Mobilization Report - 2023



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Washington State Patrol (WSP) is required under RCW 43.43.965 to report on an annual basis the following information for each emergency or disaster in which the Washington State Fire Service Mobilization Plan was used for purposes other than fire suppression, and reimbursement was made under RCW 43.43.961:

- The type and nature of the disaster or emergency.
- The reasons why the host jurisdiction and mutual aid resources were exhausted.
- The additional risk resources provided under the mobilization plan.
- The cost incurred by WSP.
- The amount of reimbursement made under RCW 43.43.961 to the host jurisdiction and each non-host jurisdiction providing all risk resources and
- An assessment and any recommendations of actions that can be taken by the host jurisdiction and its mutual aid network to prevent future use of the fire mobilization plan for similar disasters or emergencies.

STATE FIRE SERVICE MOBILIZATION

State Fire Service Mobilization was not authorized for an incident other than fire suppression. State Mobilization was used on one occasion to preposition firefighting resources.

On **August 17, 2023**, Chief John R. Batiste authorized the use of the Mobilization Plan to preposition firefighting resources in Yakima and Kittitas Counties. This authorization was subsequent to a request from fire chiefs in those two counties, based on current and forecasted weather, combined with fuel moisture indices that presented a high likelihood of rapid growth of any new wildfire in those areas.

The firefighting resources sent to those two counties engaged in two new wildfires started the morning of their arrival, augmenting local fire resources during the initial attack. The local fire chiefs cited the assistance of those prepositioned resources as being critical to containing the fires during the initial attack phase, which likely prevented more costly mobilizations.

Those resources were later reallocated to other new wildfire incidents, significantly reducing the time it took to get additional resources to the Gray and Oregon Road fires in Spokane County.

RESOURCES

The resources provided to Yakima and Kittitas counties were two task forces of wildfire engines, with two additional overhead supervisors.

COST

As of November 30, 2023, the overall Mobilization cost incurred by WSP is \$25,405,000 (estimated). Of that amount, an estimated \$75,000 was for prepositioning resources in Klickitat/Yakima counties. The remaining \$25,330,000 (estimated) was for traditional wildfire mobilization response.

The amount already reimbursed to local jurisdictions is \$5,289,000. The WSP anticipates reimbursing an additional \$19,576,000 (estimated) for invoices yet to be received from local jurisdictions and state agencies. Estimated WSP costs are \$232,400.

In 2023, No host entities received reimbursement for non-wildfire uses of the Mobilization Plan.

ASSESSMENT

Most fire departments across Washington State are experiencing staffing challenges at near-crisis or crisis levels, as both career and volunteer fire departments and state and federal agencies struggle to recruit and retain qualified personnel. These challenges impact their ability to consistently provide resources for routine mutual aid requests, mutual aid requests through their Fire Defense Region plan, and state mobilization authorizations.

Additionally, the length of the traditional fire season continues to expand, with a constant increase in incidents and the duration of those incidents. This increase in response workload further exacerbates the challenges described above.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The WSP recommends that local fire agencies continue to enhance local and regional mutual aid agreements and participate in updating their local regional plan. The WSP also recommends that regions exercise their regional plans (through tabletop exercises or other means) for all types of incidents they may encounter, including non-wildfire, natural disasters, and hazardous materials responses.

The WSP also recommends that the legislature makes its authority to preposition resources in anticipation of wildfires or other potential disasters permanent to lessen the severity and lower the cost of those responses.