

SFY 2025

Governor's Recommended Budget

Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation Danielle Fitzko,
Commissioner



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Department of Forests Parks and Recreation

The mission of the Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation is vital to Vermont's as our forests, parks, and outdoor recreation play a vital role in what makes Vermont special. The looming climate crisis and the effects of the pandemic and flooding have only increased the importance of FPR's mission. Healthy forests provide habitat for abundant wildlife, the foundation for our world-renowned recreational opportunities, clean air and water, carbon storage and sequestration that helps mitigate climate change, and forest products that we use and enjoy every day while supporting local economies. Our state park system is unparalleled - providing quality outdoor experiences at 56 managed parks to nearly one million registered visitors last year and thousands more in the off-season. Together, our forests and parks are a powerful engine for health, community and economic development.

Mission Statement

The mission of the Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation (FPR) is to practice and encourage high-quality stewardship of Vermont's environment by:

- Monitoring and maintaining the health, integrity, and diversity of important species, natural communities, and ecological processes.
- Managing forests for sustainable use, including providing and promoting opportunities for compatible outdoor recreation.
- Providing related information, education, and service.

FPR is responsible for the conservation and management of Vermont's forest resources, the operation and maintenance of the State Park system, and the promotion and support of outdoor recreation for Vermonters and our visitors. In addition, FPR is responsible for FPR land acquisitions, and planning coordination and administration of all Agency of Natural Resources lands. Department employees are stationed throughout Vermont, including offices in Montpelier, five regional locations, and additional satellite locations.

Description of Divisions, Appropriations, and Programs

The major components of the Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation appropriation are:

Administration

The Administration Division is responsible for leadership, management, and oversight of all Department divisions, programs,

financial management, personnel management, policy development, and legal services.

Forests

The Division of Forests programs affect a broad and expanding constituency concerned with the sustainable use, management, protection, and health of Vermont's forest landscape, which represents 74% of the state and confers enormous climate and economic resilience benefits. These forests provide the resource base for Vermont's diverse forest economy through sustainable forest management (\$1.4 billion annually and over 10,000 jobs) and the foundation of the state's recreation and tourism economies. Vermont's actively managed forests also provide critical biological diversity, natural communities, and wildlife habitat, as well as important ecosystems services that benefit water supply and quality, flood resilience, air pollution prevention, and uptake and storage of carbon dioxide.

The Division of Forests has responsibility for the administration and oversight of over 16,000 parcels covering more than 2 million acres of private land enrolled in the Forestland Category of Vermont's Use Value Appraisal (current use) program; stewardship and public access and recreation activities on over 360,000 acres of state-owned land (state forests, state parks, and wildlife management areas); assisting municipalities in the management of urban and community treescapes and municipal forests; forest health monitoring and technical assistance; preparing and responding to wildland fires; and assisting forest economy enterprises including the wood energy sector.

State Parks

The State Parks Division is a highly complex business enterprise responsible for planning, staffing, operation, construction, maintenance, and marketing of the State Park system and the conservation and interpretation of the natural and cultural values within it. The State Park system includes 56 developed Parks across the state providing public access to some of the most special places in Vermont. Parks provide a safe, healthy and affordable recreation opportunity and serve as a valuable haven for relaxation and connecting to Vermont's natural world. Visitation and demand continue to rise with the increased interest in outdoor recreation since the pandemic. During the 2022 season parks received record paid in-season attendance with over 1.17 million visits to the system's woodlands, trails, vistas, waterfronts, campsites, cabins, picnic pavilions, event halls, and nature interpretive programs. Paid, operating-season admissions are only a subset of total, year-round visitation and use. Collectively state parks incorporate the scope of a small city of infrastructure and facilities – \$250 million in infrastructure assets - dispersed throughout all geographic regions of the state. During the busier periods, the park system hosts 50,000 to 60,000 visitors in a given week. Beyond their direct benefits to health and wellness, Vermont State Parks also drive some \$100 million in related visitor spending supporting local communities.

Lands Administration and Recreation

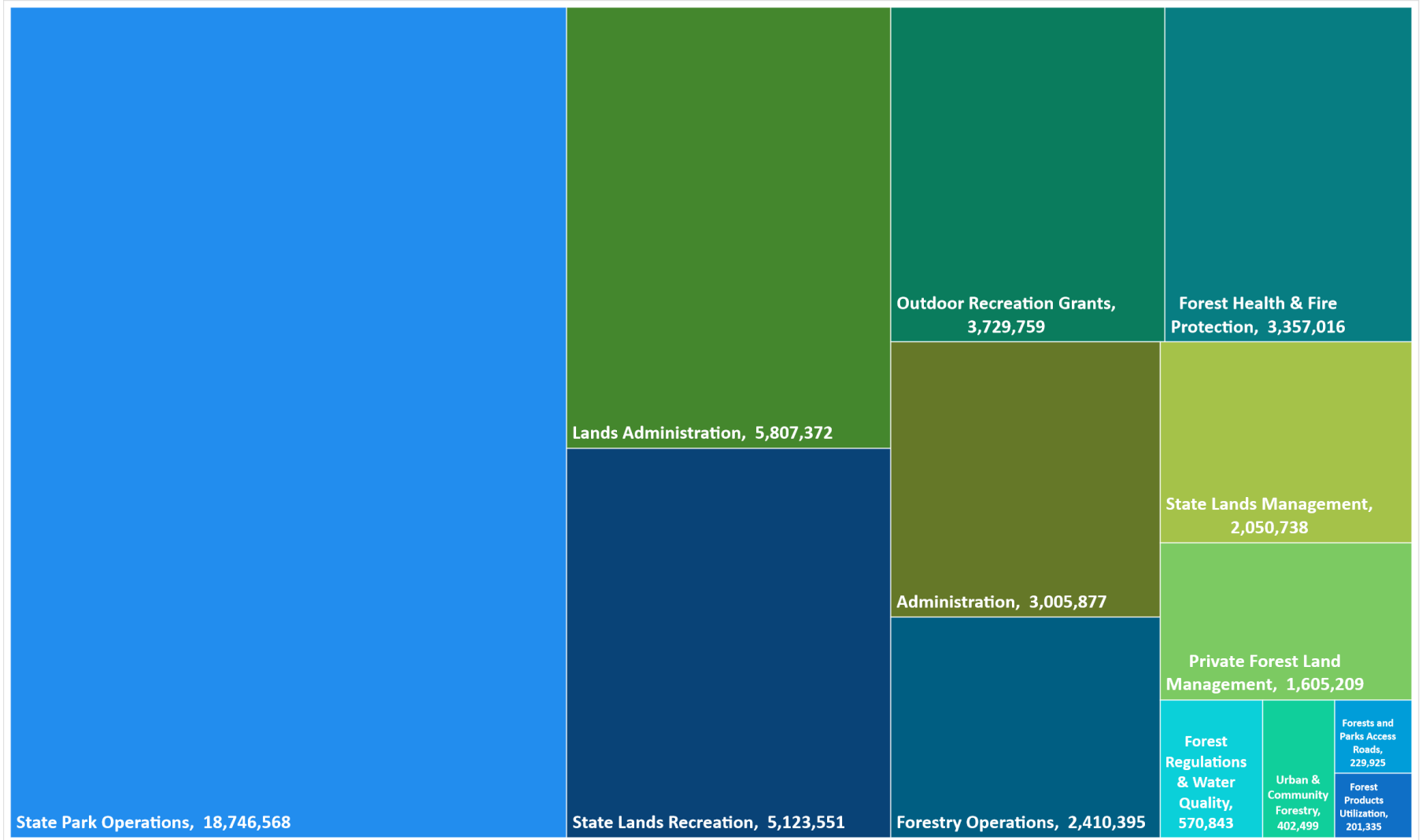
The Lands Administration and Recreation Division is responsible for the administration and land records of state-owned lands managed by the three departments within the Agency and management of recreation across all FPR program areas. The Agency holds approximately 360,000 acres of lands in fee-simple ownership and an additional 140,000 acres of conservation and recreation easements on private lands. In this capacity, the Division maintains the Agency's property records and maps; administers leases, licenses, and special use permits for a great variety of uses and activities on state lands; carries out FPR land acquisitions and other property transactions; administers the Agency's Payment in Lieu of Taxes to towns (PILOT) program; coordinates long-range management planning for Agency lands; conducts land surveys and coordinates responses to boundary and title issues on Agency lands; and coordinates the development of Agency lands administration policies.

Interest in outdoor recreation in Vermont continues to grow. The Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account (ORSA) released data detailing the economic impact of outdoor recreation in 2021. Vermont's outdoor recreation represented 4.1% of state gross domestic product (GDP), which is an increase from 3.7% in 2020. The value added by outdoor recreation to Vermont's GDP is the 3rd highest in the nation behind HI and MT, and outdoor recreation employment from 2020 – 2021 grew 17.6 percent. The increasing interest in recreational access to the state-owned lands managed by FPR coupled with the overall growth in outdoor recreation in Vermont has led to the department's current focus on expanding and improving access to recreational opportunities on department lands and in conjunction with private landowners and statewide recreation partner organizations. It is also paramount to maintain stewardship of public recreational infrastructure commensurate with new and expanding uses to maintain environmental quality and user experience, and the economic and wellness benefits they drive.

Forest and Park Access Roads

FPR oversees the management of a valuable infrastructure asset in the state – over 600 miles of state forest and park access roads. These roads provide access to over 360,000 acres of public lands and are the backbone that supports our recreation and forest economies, serving as major recreation trail access and connectors, and critical access to support our working forest landscape. These roads are also vital commuter routes in some local communities, provide access for tourists seeking opportunities to explore Vermont, and support critical emergency response access.

This chart summarizes the SFY 2025 Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation budget by program:



FPR Summary of Budget Changes – SFY 2025

The Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation (FPR) State Fiscal Year 2025 (SFY25) budget totals \$47,241,087, an increase of \$12,341,410 over SFY24. Of that total, \$796,204 is general fund dollars, and the remaining increases are comprised of federal, special, and interdepartmental funds. The general fund increase is primarily utilized for increased benefits costs across the board, increased staff costs for new administration staff hired into range, inflation, and overhead for fixed costs for FPR's administration appropriation. Federal funds are increasing by \$8,872,966, clean water funds are decreasing by \$134,622, utilization of special funds (which include the Parks Special Fund) have increased by \$2,517,693, and interdepartmental funds are increasing by \$289,169. We have prioritized federal and special funds to address upward cost pressures wherever possible.

The increase in staff benefits from SFY24 to SFY25 is an increase of \$752,682, (of which \$341,807 is general funded). Of that, \$450K is an increase in health benefits, and \$65K is attributed to the new Vermont Family & Medical Leave Premium, and the new Child Care Contribution. Additional cost pressures across the divisions include an increase in contracting and operating costs. A common theme in operations and contracted services continues to be inflation, increased energy costs, and supply chain limitations and challenges.

Below, please find descriptions of key budget changes by appropriation.

Administration: The Administration Division oversees a vast number of workflows, including all operational and finance related functions. The division oversees five appropriations with 13 different funding streams, administers 259 contracts (plus umbrella contracts), 180 outgoing grants and hundreds of grant programs including federal grants from four different federal agencies, while efficiently handling over 13,000 accounts payable transactions each year. This high level of activity underscores the division's critical role in the Department's operations and the need to sustain and enhance our services. The Division has recently expanded to meet the demands associated with the growing number of funding streams, grants and contracts. This expansion includes the hiring of new staff, nearly all of whom were transferred from other State of Vermont Departments and Agencies. While building a skilled workforce to meet our needs is essential, it does have budgetary implications, particularly when considering rising benefit costs and higher salaries to bring on the necessary talent. Lastly, along with the rising cost of doing business, the Agency's annual legal counsel fee increased by almost \$24K.

Forests: As previously mentioned, the predominant factor affecting the Division of Forests budget is the rising cost of staff benefits. The total increase in benefits from the general fund amounts to \$232,436, with a cumulative impact of \$472,020 across all funds. Given available revenues, we have primarily maintained our operating costs at current levels, despite ongoing inflationary pressures.

Additionally, we've proactively implemented strategic cost-saving measures wherever feasible, including closing a county forester satellite office in Middlebury. Additionally, we have incorporated an allocation of \$13,000 into our budget for forester licensing fees, which will recur biennially and is now a requirement included in the collective bargaining agreement. A federal increase in Urban and Community Forestry subrecipient grants will empower communities to mitigate the impact of the emerald ash borer and provide vital support to disadvantaged communities.

Vermont State Parks: The 2023 operating season was challenging, with unprecedented widespread flooding and one of the wettest summers in Vermont history. The effects of the flooding closed several parks for extended periods, including Camp Plymouth, which did not reopen in SFY24. As a result, park visitation was down 18% from the previous season. Mirroring the pressures experienced by FPR's other divisions, personnel costs, increases in benefits, and expenses associated with temporary staff created upward pressure of \$1.1 million in the State Parks Special Fund. The total increase in contractual and operating costs is \$569,500. In addition, the park system will assume responsibility for managing the southern portion of Lake Willoughby and develop the support structures necessary to manage this popular, fee-free recreation area. As part of the SFY25 budget, to support the nearly 17,000 annual visitors to the Lake Champlain Island Parks (Burton Island, Wood Island and Knight Point), the State Parks Special Fund will be tapped for \$1.2 million to purchase a landing craft that is critical to our ability to operate these parks. This vessel will be used to manage solid waste removal, maintain septic systems (including septic pumping for wastewater permit compliance), haul firewood, and facilitate the transfer of equipment and construction materials from the mainland. Other initiatives include celebrating the park system's centennial and beginning to implement the recommendations of the 2023 Parks Modernization Study conducted by consulting firm Berry Dunn and Associates which analyzed Vermont's park system, focusing on operations, funding, opportunities, and efficiencies. Depending on visitation and revenues, we will use a portion of the Parks Special Fund balance, if available, to support initial implementation of some of the high priority recommendations such as providing electric and water hookups for RVs.

Lands Administration and Recreation: The Lands Administration and Recreation Division also saw increased benefits costs, and an increase in staff costs for a Conservation Forester funded with federal funding. Two new federally funded land acquisitions are slated for SFY25, the Worcester Woods III Conservation Easement and the Chateauguay Project, with a \$7.3M associated cost. Other increased costs are due to increased federally funded grants.

FPR Budget Summary

	FY 2023 Actuals	FY 2024 Budget	FY 2025 Gov Rec	24-25 Change
Major Object				
Personal Services	21,537,580	24,081,917	25,708,708	1,626,791
Operating Expenses	7,992,658	6,755,715	16,040,197	9,284,482
Grants	3,162,614	4,062,045	5,492,182	1,430,137
Total	32,692,852	34,899,677	47,241,087	12,341,410
Funds				
General Funds	10,189,684	10,740,789	11,536,993	796,204
Special Funds	17,909,207	18,371,860	20,754,931	2,383,071
Federal Funds	4,057,225	5,324,335	14,197,301	8,872,966
Interdepartmental Transfer	536,736	462,693	751,862	289,169
Total	32,692,852	34,899,677	47,241,087	12,341,410

FPR Budget Development Form

	General \$\$	Clean Water \$\$	Special \$\$	Federal \$\$	Interdept'l	Total \$\$
Approp #1 [6130010000] Administration: FY 2024 Approp	2,675,711	0	121,561	0	0	2,797,272
Other Changes: (Please insert changes to your base appropriation that occurred after the passage of the FY24 budget)						0
FY 2024 Other Changes	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Approp. After FY 2024 Other Changes	2,675,711	0	121,561	0	0	2,797,272
CURRENT SERVICE LEVEL/CURRENT LAW	191,655	0	16,950	0	0	208,605
<i>Personal Services</i>	<i>129,680</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>16,950</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>146,630</i>
500000: Salary & Wages: Classified Employees	68,862		25,401			94,263
500010: Salary & Wages: Exempt Employees						
501500: Health Insurance: Classified Employees	32,430		(17,391)			15,039
501510: Health Insurances: Exempt Employees						
502000: Retirement: Classified Employees	18,388		6,783			25,171
502010: Retirement: Exempt Employees						
All Other Employee Payroll Related Fringe Benefits	5,085		1,465			6,550
504040: VT Family & Medical Leave Insurance Premium	2,556		366			2,922
504045: Child Care Contribution	2,273		326			2,599
505200: Workers' Compensation Insurance Premium	86					86
508000: Vacancy Turnover Savings						0
						0
<i>Operating Expenses</i>	<i>61,975</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>61,975</i>
515010: Fee-for-Space Charge	7,882					7,882
516000: Insurance Other Than Employee Benefits						0
516010: Insurance - General Liability	12,298					12,298
516671: VISION/ISD	(1,292)					(1,292)
516685: ADS Allocated Charge	1,977					1,977
519006: Human Resources Services	1,624					1,624
523620: Single Audit Allocation	788					788
Misc Operating Expenses	38,698					38,698
						0
<i>Grants</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>
						0
Subtotal of Increases/Decreases	191,655	0	16,950	0	0	208,605
FY 2025 Governor Recommend	2,867,366	0	138,511	0	0	3,005,877
Approp #2 [6130020000] Forestry: FY 2024 Approp	6,033,830	278,622	423,607	3,098,484	220,248	10,054,791
Other Changes: (Please insert changes to your base appropriation that occurred after the passage of the FY24 budget)						0
FY 2024 Other Changes	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Approp. After FY 2024 Other Changes	6,033,830	278,622	423,607	3,098,484	220,248	10,054,791
CURRENT SERVICE LEVEL/CURRENT LAW	265,682	(134,622)	(20,392)	296,447	136,129	543,244
<i>Personal Services</i>	<i>168,299</i>	<i>(134,622)</i>	<i>(5,392)</i>	<i>(229,586)</i>	<i>133,486</i>	<i>(67,815)</i>
500000: Salary & Wages: Classified Employees	243,828	(30,307)	(814)	248,305	79,466	540,478
500010: Salary & Wages: Exempt Employees						
501500: Health Insurance: Classified Employees	122,758	(8,498)	(5,572)	112,287	24,375	245,350
501510: Health Insurances: Exempt Employees						
502000: Retirement: Classified Employees	65,102	(8,091)	(219)	66,296	21,217	144,305
502010: Retirement: Exempt Employees						
All Other Employee Payroll Related Fringe Benefits	19,699	(2,536)	(428)	24,402	7,168	48,305
504040: VT Family & Medical Leave Insurance Premium	11,448	205	870	3,144	668	16,335
504045: Child Care Contribution	10,186	183	771	2,795	592	14,527
505200: Workers' Compensation Insurance Premium	728					728

	General \$\$	Clean Water \$\$	Special \$\$	Federal \$\$	Interdept'l	Total \$\$
508000: Vacancy Turnover Savings	(150,000)					(150,000)
500040: Temporary Employees	57,218			(31,434)		25,784
500060: Overtime	(10,000)			10,000		0
504590: Misc. Employee Benefits	(207,668)			(295,205)		(502,873)
506199: Other Personal Services		(93,613)		(402,525)		(496,138)
Other Personal Services	5,000	8,035		32,349		45,384
						0
<i>Operating Expenses</i>	97,383	0	(15,000)	10,816	(10,105)	83,094
515010: Fee-for-Space Charge						0
516000: Insurance Other Than Employee Benefits	61,339					61,339
516010: Insurance - General Liability						0
516671: VISION/ISD						0
516685: ADS Allocated Charge	7,956					7,956
519006: Human Resources Services	23,247					23,247
523620: Single Audit Allocation						0
Misc. Operating Expenses	4,841		(15,000)	10,816	(10,105)	(9,448)
						0
<i>Grants</i>	0	0	0	515,217	12,748	527,965
Grants				515,217	12,748	527,965
						0
Subtotal of Increases/Decreases	265,682	(134,622)	(20,392)	296,447	136,129	543,244
FY 2025 Governor Recommend	6,299,512	144,000	403,215	3,394,931	356,377	10,598,035
Approp #3 [6130030000] State Parks: FY 2024 Approp	690,613	0	15,407,065	0	0	16,097,678
Other Changes: (Please insert changes to your base appropriation that occurred after the passage of the FY24 budget)						0
FY 2024 Other Changes	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Approp. After FY 2024 Other Changes	690,613	0	15,407,065	0	0	16,097,678
CURRENT SERVICE LEVEL/CURRENT LAW	270,509	0	2,378,381	0	0	2,648,890
<i>Personal Services</i>	4,262	0	830,598	0	0	834,860
500000: Salary & Wages: Classified Employees			17,313			17,313
500010: Salary & Wages: Exempt Employees						
501500: Health Insurance: Classified Employees			138,861			138,861
501510: Health Insurances: Exempt Employees						
502000: Retirement: Classified Employees			4,615			4,615
502010: Retirement: Exempt Employees						
All Other Employee Payroll Related Fringe Benefits			(472)			(472)
504040: VT Family & Medical Leave Insurance Premium			10,655			10,655
504045: Child Care Contribution			9,472			9,472
505200: Workers' Compensation Insurance Premium	4,262					4,262
508000: Vacancy Turnover Savings						0
500040: Temporary Employees			(55,794)			(55,794)
506199: Other Personal Services			409,000			409,000
505700: Catamount Health Assessment			29,948			29,948
Misc. Contracted Services			267,000			267,000
						0
<i>Operating Expenses</i>	266,247	0	1,547,783	0	0	1,814,030
515010: Fee-for-Space Charge						0
516000: Insurance Other Than Employee Benefits	291,539		45,223			336,762
516010: Insurance - General Liability						0
516671: VISION/ISD						0
516685: ADS Allocated Charge	1,998					1,998
519006: Human Resources Services	2,658					2,658

	General \$\$	Clean Water \$\$	Special \$\$	Federal \$\$	Interdept'l	Total \$\$
523620: Single Audit Allocation						0
Misc. Operating Expenses	(29,948)		1,502,560			1,472,612
						0
Grants	0	0	0	0	0	0
						0
Subtotal of Increases/Decreases	270,509	0	2,378,381	0	0	2,648,890
FY 2025 Governor Recommend	961,122	0	17,785,446	0	0	18,746,568
Approp #4 [6130040000] Lands Administration: FY 2024 Approp	1,110,710	0	2,141,005	2,225,851	242,445	5,720,011
Other Changes: (Please insert changes to your base appropriation that occurred after the passage of the FY24 budget)						0
FY 2024 Other Changes	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Approp. After FY 2024 Other Changes	1,110,710	0	2,141,005	2,225,851	242,445	5,720,011
CURRENT SERVICE LEVEL/CURRENT LAW	68,358	0	142,754	8,576,519	153,040	8,940,671
<i>Personal Services</i>	<i>150,117</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>(30,081)</i>	<i>563,902</i>	<i>29,178</i>	<i>713,116</i>
500000: Salary & Wages: Classified Employees	28,698		(13,205)	61,688	(3,054)	74,127
500010: Salary & Wages: Exempt Employees						
501500: Health Insurance: Classified Employees	16,704		(3,016)	20,835	128	34,651
501510: Health Insurances: Exempt Employees						
502000: Retirement: Classified Employees	7,663		(3,524)	16,470	(815)	19,794
502010: Retirement: Exempt Employees						
All Other Employee Payroll Related Fringe Benefits	2,490		(1,160)		(334)	996
504040: VT Family & Medical Leave Insurance Premium	1,924		118	938	328	3,308
504045: Child Care Contribution	1,710		106	834	292	2,942
505200: Workers' Compensation Insurance Premium	225					225
508000: Vacancy Turnover Savings						0
500040: Temporary Employees			(11,400)	(46,363)	(11,400)	(69,163)
Misc. Contracted Services	90,703		2,000	509,500	44,033	646,236
						0
<i>Operating Expenses</i>	<i>18,241</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>(40,000)</i>	<i>7,323,280</i>	<i>23,862</i>	<i>7,325,383</i>
515010: Fee-for-Space Charge						0
516000: Insurance Other Than Employee Benefits						0
516010: Insurance - General Liability						0
516671: VISION/ISD						0
516685: ADS Allocated Charge	4,813					4,813
519006: Human Resources Services	3,370					3,370
523620: Single Audit Allocation						0
Misc. Operating Expenses	10,058		(40,000)	23,280	23,862	17,200
522100: Property-Land Acquisition				7,300,000		7,300,000
						0
Grants	(100,000)	0	212,835	689,337	100,000	902,172
550220: Grants	(100,000)		212,835	689,337	100,000	902,172
						0
Subtotal of Increases/Decreases	68,358	0	142,754	8,576,519	153,040	8,940,671
FY 2025 Governor Recommend	1,179,068	0	2,283,759	10,802,370	395,485	14,660,682
Approp #5 [6130090000] Forest and Parks Access Roads: FY 2024 Approp	229,925	0	0	0	0	229,925
Other Changes: (Please insert changes to your base appropriation that occurred after the passage of the FY24 budget)						0
FY 2024 Other Changes	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Approp. After FY 2024 Other Changes	229,925	0	0	0	0	229,925
CURRENT SERVICE LEVEL/CURRENT LAW	0	0	0	0	0	0

	General \$\$	Clean Water \$\$	Special \$\$	Federal \$\$	Interdept'l	Total \$\$
<i>Personal Services</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0
500000: Salary & Wages: Classified Employees						0
500010: Salary & Wages: Exempt Employees						0
501500: Health Insurance: Classified Employees						0
501510: Health Insurances: Exempt Employees						0
502000: Retirement: Classified Employees						0
502010: Retirement: Exempt Employees						0
All Other Employee Payroll Related Fringe Benefits						0
504040: VT Family & Medical Leave Insurance Premium						0
504045: Child Care Contribution						0
505200: Workers' Compensation Insurance Premium						0
508000: Vacancy Turnover Savings						0
						0
<i>Operating Expenses</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0
515010: Fee-for-Space Charge						0
516000: Insurance Other Than Employee Benefits						0
516010: Insurance - General Liability						0
516671: VISION/ISD						0
516685: ADS Allocated Charge						0
519006: Human Resources Services						0
523620: Single Audit Allocation						0
						0
<i>Grants</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0
						0
Subtotal of Increases/Decreases	0	0	0	0	0	0
FY 2025 Governor Recommend	229,925	0	0	0	0	229,925
Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation FY 2024 Appropriation	10,740,789	278,622	18,093,238	5,324,335	462,693	34,899,677
Reductions and Other Changes	0	0	0	0	0	0
FY 2024 Total After Other Changes	10,740,789	278,622	18,093,238	5,324,335	462,693	34,899,677
TOTAL INCREASES/DECREASES	796,204	(134,622)	2,517,693	8,872,966	289,169	12,341,410
Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation FY 2025 Governor Recommend	11,536,993	144,000	20,610,931	14,197,301	751,862	47,241,087