

Memorandum

TO: House Government Operations & Military Affairs Committee Members

FROM: Danielle Fitzko, Commissioner

DATE: January 30, 2025

SUBJECT: Equipment & Personnel Needs to Enhance Wildland Firefighting Capacity in Vermont

Purpose: This memo responds to a request from the House Government Operations and Military Affairs Committee for an overview of the equipment and personnel needed to ensure the Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation (FPR) has the capacity required to respond to wildland fires based on current fire trends in Vermont, using data from the last five years as a benchmark.

This document assumes the Committee is benefiting from the testimony provided [Friday January 17](#) concerning existing staffing levels and resources already in place at FPR. Additionally, an overview of [FPR's Wildland Fire Program](#) is available for reference.

I. Vermont Wildland Fire Program Equipment

Wildland fire activity in Vermont often involves firefighting in remote, hilly, forested terrain. A Type 6 Wildland Fire Engine is specifically designed for these sorts of environments, as it is equipped with high-pressure pumps, a large water storage capacity, and high ground clearance, this engine enhances wildfire response effectiveness. To maximize its capacity, portable water tanks and a Utility Task Vehicle (UTV) would allow for transport of personnel into remote areas.

Total equipment cost: \$350,000.

Cost breakdown

- **Type 6 Wildland Engine and Essential Accompanying Equipment: \$300,000**
 - Engine: \$275,000
 - KNG-M150HP radio and installation: \$3,000
 - 2 Stihl MS 500i chainsaws: \$3,000
 - BK portable 4 bank radio charger: \$1,500
 - Portable 2-Stroke Wick 100 pump: \$1,500
 - Suction lines: \$1,000
 - Tablet, case, and vehicle mount: \$2,000
 - First aid, AED: \$2,000
 - Hose, fittings, hand tools and equipment: \$9,000
 - Vehicle safety equipment: \$2,000

Cost breakdown, cont'd

- **2 Portable Water Tanks: \$6,000**
 - 1000-gallon portable folding tank: \$3,000

- **Utility Task Vehicle (UTV) with winch and portable firefighting skid unit and trailer: \$44,000**
 - UTV: \$23,000
 - Winch and accessories: \$5,000
 - Firefighting Skid Unit: \$10,000
 - Trailer: \$6,000

II. Wildland Fire Program Staffing

Effective wildland fire response requires a 1:5 supervisor-to-firefighter ratio to ensure safe and efficient operations. Currently, FPR's Wildland Fire Team has three staff members with advanced qualifications in leadership and supervision, allowing us to mobilize up to 15 firefighters. However, this past fire season did expose wildland fire fighter limitations. In 2024, FPR relied on additional personnel from New Hampshire and the Green Mountain National Forest to meet demand, and staff accrued nearly \$35,000 in overtime costs.

Beyond response efforts, additional staffing would strengthen off-season training capacity, expanding training beyond FPR and local fire department to certify more Vermont wildland firefighters. This would reduce reliance on external resources and improve statewide preparedness and response.

Adding one Forestry Professional II position would:

- Increase the number of fire line supervisors from 3 to 4
- Expand the number of staff qualified as duty officers from 3 to 4
- Increase supervised fire line capacity from 15 to 20 firefighters
- Increase off season wildland fire training
- Increase Vermont certified wildland fire fighters
- Improve regional coverage Vermont's most heavily forested area

Total personnel cost (pay grade 23, step 1): \$150,000

The Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation is not presenting this as a formal request for support. Our intent is simply to offer a clear assessment of existing challenges to facilitate informed decision-making moving forward.