

# Wildland Fire Policy

## Participation Match Options

### Policy Proposal

State pays the suppression costs of large/extended attack wildland fires on all lands other than federal (upon delegation of fiscal authority by local jurisdiction). In exchange, participating counties and municipalities maintain initial attack responsibilities as well as implement locally-driven prevention, preparedness and *mitigation* actions that are proven to reduce overall fire costs.

### Prevention, Preparedness & Mitigation Actions (for example)

- Trained and certified wildland firefighters
- National equipment standards
- Community Wildfire Protection Plans
- Fuels reduction & maintenance
- *And many, many other possibilities*

The new policy will not be mandated; counties and municipalities will have the option to participate.

### Current System counties pay the following costs:

- *county warden* – typically split 50/50 with state
- *Insurance Fund payment* (“premium”) – assessment based on 1) number of acres of privately- or county-owned land in the unincorporated area of the county and 2) taxable value of real property in the unincorporated area of the county (neither of which have anything to do with actual fire risk...)
  - multiple counties do not participate with the Insurance Fund, likely due to extremely high taxable valuations (“non-participating counties”)
- *suppression budget* (“deductible”) – based on 7-year average county suppression costs; this amount is budgeted but often not spent

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Let's take a look at three (at least) options to consider for the "participation match":

OPTION	PROS	CONS
<p><b>I. county/city class</b> (population- or budget-based)</p>	<p>easy to understand</p> <p>equitable assessment based on population or budget</p> <p>plenty of latitude to negotiate match "rate" (valuation)</p>	<p>too simple (just population) to capture differences in communities</p> <p>nothing to do with fire risk or occurrence</p> <p>no built-in incentive for initial attack or risk reduction/mitigation</p> <p>difficult to hold counties "harmless" with this option</p> <p>seems to be a "lowest common denominator" approach</p>

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<p><b>II. risk assessment by acres</b></p> <p>using the new, Utah-specific wildfire risk assessment being developed by FFSL for the Governor's <i>Catastrophic Wildfire Reduction Strategy</i></p>	<p>very specific based on actual risk (but is it equitable?)</p> <p>visually appealing (the actual risk map)</p> <p>strong built-in incentive for risk reduction &amp; mitigation actions, and somewhat for effective initial attack</p> <p>plenty of latitude to negotiate assessment rate (valuation)</p> <p>raises awareness of actual local risk and at-risk areas (only acres within a jurisdiction would be assessed; in other words, no county or municipality would be assessed for another jurisdiction's acres)</p>	<p>more difficult to understand</p> <p>will need to be updated "regularly" to accurately reflect on-the-ground risk-reduction progress (maybe not be an issue as it will be done regularly through CatFire)</p> <p>also seems to be a "lowest common denominator" approach</p> <p>(need to ensure tool "can't be used against us")</p>

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<b>OPTION</b>	<b>PROS</b>	<b>CONS</b>
<b>III. historic suppression cost average by jurisdiction</b>	similar to how the current system works  understandable by counties  strong built-in incentive for initial attack and somewhat for risk reduction/mitigation	unfamiliar to municipalities  how do we bring municipalities into the system? (there is no suppression cost history)

*Desire to make the new policy “objective-based” not “budget-based”; meaning, local investment in prevention, preparedness & mitigation actions (i.e., the “match”) should be based on meeting objectives set forth in local Community Wildfire Protection Plans, not on an arbitrary budget amount tied to a match option that doesn’t necessarily incentive desired outcomes.*

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**A fourth option** considered could be a hybrid of the:

- 1) risk assessment by acres *and*
- 2) historic suppression cost average by jurisdiction.

### **PROS**

- very similar to how we currently do business, so somewhat understandable already
- municipalities could be phased in (historic suppression cost)
- VERY strong incentive for initial attack AND risk reduction/mitigation. Minimizing fire costs through effective initial attack combined with actively reducing the number of acres at risk through mitigation will measurably reduce a county's participation match – this is exactly what we're trying to accomplish with this new approach.
- would be a fair way to get non-participating counties and municipalities involved because it focuses on actual acres at risk and recent fire suppression costs, not an arbitrary assessment based on total acres and/or taxable value
- the wildfire risk assessment being developed will be Utah-specific and used throughout the state through the CatFire initiative and associated Regional Work Groups; it will be a staff-supported, widely used and understood tool
  - visual appeal of risk assessment

### **CONS**

- will be somewhat complex and somewhat difficult to understand, particularly at the outset