

Continued

# Hobble Fire

enforcement reserve officers are not usually paid, said Bjorndal. However, Sweet Grass County Commissioners elected to pay them regular hours and overtime for this fire.

This decision was made because of the severity of the fire and the long duration of the volunteers' services.

Regular law enforcement officers and ambulance personnel were paid overtime hours only from FEMA expenses because they would normally be paid their regular hours in any case.

All expenditures submitted to FEMA are broken down below by volunteer fire departments, county road crew, law enforcement, and ambulance.

## Volunteer Firemen

The charges incurred by the Big Timber Volunteer Fire Department for the Hobble Fire totaled \$79,732.52.

The largest expense was \$41,600.15 for the firefighting equipment used in the fire's suppression.

The fee paid for the equipment's use is determined by using rates set forth in the NWCG Handbook.

Material costs were also incurred by the department in the amount of \$22,424.72.

This covers the price of repairing or replacing equipment, supplies, and materials that were lost, damaged, destroyed, or consumed in the performance of fire suppression activities, as well as fees charged for aerial reconnaissance used during the fire.

Manpower costs, which in non-monetary considerations may be the most valuable considering the personal risk involved, only accounted for \$15,707.65.

The rate paid to the firefighters is governed by the NWCG Handbook and determined by each fire department's skills and training.

The Reed Point Volunteer Fire Department was involved in the fire and incurred an expenditure of \$29,282.84 in this endeavor.

Equipment expenditures for this department were \$19,838.50 for the

use of county firefighting equipment and are governed by the NWCG Handbook.

Material charges in the amount of \$2,656.34 were incurred for fuel for firefighting vehicles, food for firefighters, and the monetary toll for replacing tools, materials, and supplies lost, damaged, or consumed during firefighting activities.

Two other fire agencies, Columbus Rural Fire District and Park City Rural Fire District, were also involved in fire suppression.

These agencies incurred expenses in two categories - equipment and manpower. No material costs were paid to these entities.

Expenditures incurred by Columbus were \$4,749.23 for the operation of fire district equipment and \$1,796.75 for manpower, for a total of \$6,545.98.

Park City's total was \$3,142.75, comprised of \$2,314.00 in equipment charges for the use of one Type 2 Engine and \$828.75 for manpower.

## Sweet Grass County Road Department

In general, according to county documentation, the County Road Department used regular employees and unpaid volunteers who operated county owned equipment to cut out perimeter fire lines for containment of the fire.

Equipment rates for the use of county equipment accounted for the largest portion, \$77,243.00, of the total expenditure of \$82,668.72. All reported equipment time was charged at a rate governed by the NWCG Interagency Incident Business Management Handbook.

Labor charges reported to FEMA reflect only those paid for overtime hours worked by regular county employees and total \$3,822.75.

Material costs of \$1,602.97 consist of fuel costs for the county owned equipment used in cutting the perimeter fire lines.

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## Sweet Grass County Sheriff's Department

During the Hobble Fire the Sweet Grass County Sheriff's Department was responsible for providing labor, equipment and materials to set up and man emergency roadblocks, warn residents of changes in the fire's behavior, help with evacuations, and provide security in the fire area.

This was done using regular law enforcement and dispatch personnel, and by the use of reserve deputies.

Payment received by regular Sheriff's Department employees for overtime was the only type eligible for reimbursement by FEMA.

While the Sheriff is not usually paid overtime, Commissioners elected to pay his overtime during the emergency fire duty.

Charges for the regular Sheriff's Department employees were reported as \$1,638.54.

The pay rate of \$10 per hour for reserve deputies was governed by the NWCG Interagency Incident Business Management Handbook and was judged to be that of a Security Specialist.

Total costs for this contract labor was \$4,163.72.

In addition to labor expenses, the Sheriff's Department also incurred equipment fees of \$2,010.00 for the use of Sheriff's Office vehicles during the Hobble Fire.

The rate paid for vehicle use is set forth in NWCG Handbook and

provides that the allowable rate for each vehicle will consist of a daily rate plus a cost-per-mile for the miles driven by the vehicle.

However, no mileage records were kept for the vehicles so no mileage costs were allowed as equipment expenditures.

One vehicle used by a reserve deputy was damaged during the fire but no reimbursement was allowed by FEMA because the damage occurred the night before FEMA took control of the fire.

Material charges of \$1,616.15 were also incurred by the department and covered food, water, vehicle fuel, and three blown tires.

Also covered by the FEMA guidelines was the expense of replacing CD-R discs used by the Sheriff's Office during the fire and reported fees for cell phone calls made by deputies on the fire line.

## Sweet Grass County Ambulance

Costs incurred by the county ambulance service during the fire were \$1,663.58.

These charges are for the ambulance service providing Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) personnel on a continuous standby basis for the emergency medical treatment of firefighters and others for the first two days of the fire incident period.

To this end a total of 10 EMTs worked varied two person shifts from 8:00 am on August 10, until 10:00 pm on August 11.

The personnel were paid at the rate of \$10 per hour for the fire standby hours worked, for a total of \$886.58.

Equipment fees of \$777 were incurred during this period for an ambulance to be available as an on-site emergency medical facility by the EMTs working the fire.

## The bottom line

Although the county can verify and document charges in the amount of \$212,464.80, that does not mean it is eligible to receive the total amount from FEMA in reimbursement.

FEMA will only reimburse the county for 75 percent of the monetary outlay and has, according to Bjorndal.

She stated funds in the amount of \$159,348.60 were deposited into the county's account last Thursday, leaving the county with a monetary toll of \$53,116.20 for the Hobble Fire.

Bjorndal is still using the money received from FEMA to replace that removed from the road, law enforcement, fire, ambulance and payment in lieu of taxes funds that were used to meet expenditures from the fire.

Although landowners and those living on land the fire took for its own are not charged by the county for firefighters and others who came to their aid, many of their losses are those that cannot be measured in dollars and cents, making the county the luckier of the two. For the county, this chapter can be closed.

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