

PUBLIC TESTIMONY: Natalie Baumgartner, McGrath, Alaska

These requests that you are hearing today to reconsider the DNR Fire Suppression budget are not asking for additional money, but asking that DNR be directed to re-allocate the 5% to 8% budget cuts across the board and to not virtually eliminate the one strategically located facility that serves to protect 88 MILLION acres of the Southwest Area.

The FY2016 Budget cuts for Fire Suppression made by DNR and included in both Governor Parnell and Governor Walker's versions of the budget submitted to you, will have devastating consequences in the ability of DNR to provide adequate fire suppression measures as mandated for the entire 88 MILLION acre Southwest Region.

DNR did a great job of making the financial cuts look good on paper, but did not make those cuts "across the board" and in a way that would not jeopardize the lives and lands of the many communities within the Southwest Area. Instead, they made small cuts in several locations with the main cut being the elements that provide for the full functioning of the strategically located McGrath Fire suppression facility. Those functions eliminated or result in a facility that would have nowhere near the ability to be well-prepared to respond to one or more quickly spreading wildfires. This drastic cut includes the helitack base, supply warehouse, the full service staffed kitchen and mess hall, retardant base tanker base, aircraft fueling, BLM smokejumper staging facility, the Wildfire Training Academy and nearly all of the Southwest Area Regional office complex staffed by the fire managers, administrative staff, dispatchers, aviation supervisors, logistics coordinator, public information officer, site maintenance employees to just name a few.

We have experienced the devastation of wildfires firsthand, that have not had quick enough response to prevent horrible losses of structures, livelihoods, timber, wildlife; the very means for the sustainability of the residents of this vast 88 MILLION acre region. Response delays can easily result in unthinkable consequences. That is an obvious reason that the McGrath facility, located on the west side of the Alaska Range within the Southwest Area, can respond quickly and efficiently by the well trained staff and emergency firefighters who know the area well.

Existing agreements will be nullified if this budget line is not revised, mainly the Alaska Master Cooperative Wildfire Management and Stafford Act Response Agreement co-signed by the

State of Alaska Department of Natural Resources,
Department of the Interior – BIA,
BLM Land Management,
Alaska Fish & Wildlife Service,
Alaska Region National Park Service, and the
USDA Alaska Region Forest Service.

What can you do?

Please consider advising DNR Forestry Division

- To reinstate the McGrath Wildfire Suppression facility into the budget
- And to then go back to the desk and re-distribute the 5% - 8% cuts "across the board" throughout the Interior, Southwest and Southeast AK.

Thank you very much for this opportunity to hear this testimony.