



MONTANA FOREST OWNERS ASSOCIATION

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Environmental Quality Council
State Capitol, Room 317
1301 E 6th Ave
Helena MT 59601

Mister Chairman and Committee Members:

Please accept this submission by the Montana Forest Owners Association (MFOA)¹, concerning the September 12, 2018, topic of “options for landowner assessment fees.” The MFOA supports the concept that each taxpayer pay his or her fair share for fire preparedness costs. Exhibit A summarizes the current system for assessing fire preparedness fees, the three draft bills, and the MFOA’s position. In short, the MFOA supports assessing fees:

- for 1/3rd of fire preparedness costs
- up to \$1 million annually for aviation equipment replacement
- across Montana including municipalities
- for a dwelling
- for forest land, and
- with a discount for owners who manage their forest lands to enhance fire protection.

MFOA does not take a position on

- per parcel versus per acre base fee.

None of the bills (LCFPA1, LCFPA2 or LCFPA3) has the combination of fees that MFOA supports. LCFPA2 includes municipalities and that is an important point. None of the bills contains a discount for managed forest lands.

What percentage to assess? – Assess only one-third

The MFOA supports the recommendation to pursue special assessments for only one-third of the fire preparedness budget. Since November of 2017, there have been various proposals at EQC meetings to fund 100% of the fire preparedness funds (the most recent proposal being \$13.9 million) by “assessing fees” (not taxes) to landowners throughout the State. The proposals to assess fees without at the same time reducing taxes or fees to Montana’s General Fund were met with resistance by various parties including the MFOA. The MFOA supports the current draft bills to limit the assessment to one-third of the fire preparedness budget (at this time being \$3.8 million of the total \$13.9 million budget).

¹ The Montana Property Owners Association, has been a Montana non-profit corporation since 1995. The MFOA’s sole purpose is to protect and serve the interests of non-industrial private forest landowners. There are more than 29,000 non-industrial private forest owners that individually own forested parcels of 10 acres or more and cumulatively own in excess of four million forested acres in Montana. For more information, google MFOA or go to www.MontanaForestOwners.org.

Up to \$1 million for aviation equipment replacement

The MFOA supports the recommended annual funding of up to \$1 million for aviation equipment replacement.

Who to assess? - wildland and municipalities

The MFOA supports Representative Chas Vincent's recommendation that everyone who benefits from the fire preparedness dollars share the burden. Further, it is most equitable to include parcels within municipalities because fires do not recognize boundaries. Wildfires can and do spread from rural to urban settings and vice versa. Everyone is hurt by poor air quality caused by smoke and everyone stands to gain by preparing for all fires.

Reward forest lands management

Per Dr. Peter Kolb at the July 26, 2018, EQC meeting, most fires are caught and contained on private lands. No recognition or consideration has been given to those timber owners who incur the expense and effort to manage their properties to reduce the risk and severity of fire. Rural private forests that have been managed for fuels reduction and access allow for effective and inexpensive fire containment and suppression. Those parcel owners should be given an opportunity to request a discount on the forest land fee.

Thank you for your consideration and time.

Sincerely,



Mike Christianson
President

Funding for Fire Preparedness

Document	Includes Funding For		Those Parcels Assessed			Types of Assessments						
	Up to 1/3 rd of Fire Preparedness Appropriation	Up to \$1 million annually for aviation equipment replacement	Parcels in "Wildland Protection Districts"	Parcels in Wildland	Parcels in Incorporated Municipalities	Base Fee per Owner	Per Acre Fee Over 20 Acres	Base Fee per Parcel	Base Fee per Acre	Dwelling	Forest Land	Discount for Managed Forest Land
Currently	Yes	No	Yes			Yes	Yes					
Draft LCFPA1	Yes	Yes		Yes				Yes		Yes	Yes	
Draft LCFPA2	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes			Yes		Yes	Yes	
Draft LCFPA3	Yes	Yes		Yes					Yes	Yes	Yes	
MFOA's position	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes			?	?	Yes	Yes	Yes