



CARES Act Flash Report

CARES Act Funds for DOI's Wildland Fire Management Program as of June 19, 2020



The DOI received

\$756 million

under the CARES Act to respond to impacts from the coronavirus, including \$157.4 million for DOI operations. As of June 19, 2020, the DOI had approved \$11.3 million for wildland fire operations:

- \$3.5 million for the BLM
- \$3.4 million for the NPS
- \$2.5 million for the FWS
- \$1.9 million for the BIA

The WFM program restores and maintains resilient landscapes, protects lives and properties, creates fire-adapted communities, and ensures safe and effective response to wildfires.

On March 27, 2020, the President signed into law the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act), which provided the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) with \$756 million to support the needs of DOI programs, bureaus, Indian Country, and the Insular Areas. As part of the \$756 million, the Office of the Secretary received \$157.4 million to prevent, prepare for, and respond to the coronavirus across DOI operations, which includes the Wildland Fire Management (WFM) program.

The DOI will continue to fulfill its firefighting mission during the COVID-19 pandemic. Firefighter safety is a top priority, and according to the DOI's website, the DOI created a special interagency team of medical and public health experts to review and synthesize COVID-19 guidelines used in wildfire operations. The team directs firefighters to follow the recommendations provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which state that extra precautions should be taken to protect firefighters and other personnel at fire camps from COVID-19. Fire camps are like small communities in many ways. For example, fire camps can include thousands of people living together and working collectively to respond to a wildfire, often in remote areas. Therefore, the CDC's guidance for wildland firefighters recommends using screening programs, disinfectants, quarantine periods, and personal protective equipment (PPE) when appropriate—all of which could lead to more requests for funding as the fire season progresses.

As of June 19, 2020, the DOI approved funding of \$11.3 million of the \$157.4 million for the WFM program. To date, the WFM program has obligated \$547,596 (or 5 percent) and spent \$381,431 (or 3 percent) of the \$11.3 million in approved funds. In this report, we provide details about the CARES Act funds approved for fire management, and the WFM program's progress in obligating and spending those funds as of June 19, 2020.

DOI's Wildland Fire Management Program

The DOI's WFM program is composed of the four bureaus with wildland fire management responsibilities—the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the National Park Service (NPS), and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS)—and the Office of Wildland Fire (OWF), which is responsible for program coordination, accountability, and oversight of the WFM program budget. The OWF coordinated a fire management request for CARES Act funding on behalf of the WFM program. The OWF request provided estimates of items needed upfront, as well as items needed on an ongoing basis through the end of the fiscal year. Because the OWF oversees the WFM program and coordinated most of the requests, we obtained data from the OWF.

WFM Funding

The Office of the Secretary made part of its \$157.4 million of CARES Act funds available for the WFM program. To date, the DOI has approved funding for temporary firefighting facilities needed to maintain social distancing and quarantine protocol; PPE, such as masks, gloves, sanitizers, and thermometers; additional labor costs for operations and program management during the pandemic; and cleaning services and sanitation of facilities and vehicles. As of June 19, 2020, the WFM program has obligated \$547,596 (or 5 percent) and spent \$381,431 (or 3 percent) of the \$11.3 million of approved funds (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Funding Approved Through September 30, 2020¹

WFM Program	Funding Approved To Date (\$)	Obligations To Date (\$) *	Expenditures To Date (\$) †
Temporary Firefighting Facilities			
BIA	1,856,000	0 ²	0
BLM	3,223,000	343,571	177,406
FWS	2,379,000	0	0
NPS	3,438,000	0	0
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>\$10,896,000</i>	<i>\$343,571</i>	<i>\$177,406</i>
Personal Protective Equipment			
BIA	1,000	0	0
BLM	101,000	101,000	101,000
FWS	1,000	0	0
NPS	1,000	0	0
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>\$104,000</i>	<i>\$101,000</i>	<i>\$101,000</i>

¹ The funding data presented may not fully represent the total of funds available for the WFM program because the DOI allocated CARES Act funding directly to each bureau, which then distributed it to its fire management program.

² We used zeros to indicate the DOI has approved funding, so we would expect to see an obligation or expenditure.

WFM Program	Funding Approved To Date (\$)	Obligations To Date (\$) *	Expenditures To Date (\$) †
Labor Costs			
BIA	25,000	0	0
BLM	200,000	100,025	100,025
FWS	75,000	0	0
NPS	0	0	0
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>\$300,000</i>	<i>\$100,025</i>	<i>\$100,025</i>
Cleaning Services and Sanitation of Facilities and Vehicles			
BLM ³	3,000	3,000	3,000
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>\$3,000</i>	<i>\$3,000</i>	<i>\$3,000</i>
Totals	\$11,303,000	\$547,596	\$381,431

* Obligations are legally binding agreements that will result in expenditures.

† Expenditures are payments of funds, such as when the DOI receives an invoice or a drawdown submission.

Suggested Improvement Actions

The CARES Act requires agencies to obligate all appropriations by September 30, 2021, and implementation guidance states that agencies should fund programs to meet crucial needs. Because funding for wildland fires is typically spent in response to fire emergencies, certain categories, such as temporary firefighting facilities and labor costs, may take more time to obligate and expend funding, while categories like personal protective equipment and cleaning services—which can be stored and used immediately—can be obligated and spent more quickly. As the 2020 fire season ramps up, we expect to see an increase in obligation and expenditure of approved funds.

We note that awards made in response to emergency situations are riskier than typical awards because they are awarded quickly and often without competition, and because they have a higher purchase threshold than other acquisitions. As a result, the DOI needs to carefully administer and manage CARES Act funds to ensure its bureaus spend funds effectively, considering the increased amount of money available, the potential for additional future costs, and the fast pace at which the money must be spent.

We will continue to monitor the DOI's and the WFM program's progress against significant reporting milestones that our office previously outlined in our reports, *Where's the Money? DOI Use of CARES Act Funds as of April 28, 2020* (Report No. 2020-FIN-036) and *May 2020: Where's the Money? DOI CARES Act Funds as of May 31, 2020* (Report No. 2020-FIN-046).

³ The BLM requested this funding directly and did not coordinate through the OWF.