

North Dakota Fire Service – Solutions for the Needs of Today, Foundation for the Next 30 Years

Public Safety Subcabinet

The fire service is long-overdue for a system-wide reflection and adjustment. Individual fire protection districts have testified to the strain they face from shifting demographics, financial pressures, and increase in environmental threats.

Not wanting to assume from a state perspective, the Public Safety Subcabinet conducted polls and interviews to better understand the diversity of challenges across population densities, geographies, and governing boards. Distinctive patterns emerged:

Training

No state training standard for firefighters means each department sets their own – causing disparity and sometimes enmity between jurisdictions.

Mutual Aid & Surge Capacity

Each department must maintain mutual aid agreements with each of the other 360+ departments. Locals are coming to expect state assistance, especially from the small rural jurisdictions leading large, complex disasters.

People

92%+ of ND firefighters are volunteer, 2nd highest in the nation. Volunteerism has declined while turnover has increased-causing significant operational difficulties.

Funding discrepancies and challenges underscore each of these problem areas.



North Dakota National Guard Red Card Certified Soldiers
Deployment Alongside North Dakota Forest Service April 2026

Following discovery, the Public Safety Subcabinet has led several collaborative solutioning workshops to pressure-test solutions; ensuring those put forward are solving real, boots-on-the-ground issues and have as much buy-in from the fire service as possible.

Task	Purpose	Legislative Action
Statewide Agreement	Opt-out agreement in code enabling rapid mutual-aid for all political sub-divisions	Century Code Bill
Local Mutual Aid Reimbursement Program	Discretionary Exec Branch program to reimburse locals for heavy local-to-local mutual aid	Approve ability to pull ~\$200K from DRF / biennium

Task	Purpose	Legislative Action
Clarify NDFS Authorities	Provide positive authority for NDFS to proactively coordinate fire response	Century Code clean up
Clean Up Red Flag / Fire Danger	Correctly assigns responsibility for fire danger rating, used in local declarations	Admin code clean up
Pre-Stage NDNG	Generate low-cost capacity	Fix existing appropriation
Wildland Taskforce Fund and Supervisor Training	Dedicated funding to support activation of Wildland Fire Task Force Multi-year training to establish cadre of qualified leaders for fire response, allowing greater surge capacity	\$250K NDFS Budget Request

Task	Purpose	Legislative Action
Establish Training Benchmark	Increase response capacity through training.	~\$450K per biennium general funds to NDFA
Shared Record Mngt System & Learning Mngt System	Multi-agency system to track personnel, credentials, equipment, capabilities, and training certifications, with the ability to schedule training.	~\$200K initial, \$60K ongoing NDDes and NDFA Budget