

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

Public Safety Subcabinet

METHODOLOGY

- ✓ Problem-Scoping
- ✓ Solutioning
- ✓ Aligning & Approving
- ➔ **Legislating**
- ➔ **Implementing**



The fire service is long-overdue for a system-wide reflection and adjustment. Individual fire protection districts have been, to varying degrees, limping along for decades. With no single headship within state executive branch, agencies, associations, and departments work together based on the current relationships of those in their posts—with varying degrees of success. It’s a tenuous system.

From a rocky start in the initial Emergency Services Response Committee, leaders across the Fire Service continuum have been able to successfully right the ship. The Public Safety Subcabinet came alongside the Committee to run a parallel discovery into the current state of the fire service followed by a collaborative solutioning session. We are seeing strong alignment and powerful momentum throughout the North Dakota Fire Service, ready for solutions, ready for change.

“Man, if we could accomplish even 25% of this I’d be happy. It’s a good run-down. In all honesty what you’re doing here should have been done 10 years ago.”

Bottineau Fire Chief

PROBLEM STATEMENTS

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.



The Five Big Rocks

Statewide Mutual Aid

Create an opt-out statewide mutual aid agreement so that during an emergency, paperwork does not impede load balancing response across the state.

Surge Capacity

Clarify authorities for state agencies to direct assistance during disasters, and increase authorities, funds, and assets available for surge response.

Long-term State Structure of Public Safety

Consider structure of various state agencies, departments, and associations for appropriate fire response & representation.

Recruitment & Retention

Build upon success of recruiting in schools, protect job status for extended volunteer deployment, and incentivize volunteerism with meaningful benefits.

Minimum Training Standards

Establish statewide minimum training standards for firefighters with shared record management system.

Statewide Mutual Aid

Greenlight from Gov's Office

Task	Purpose	Fiscal
Statewide Agreement	Opt-out agreement in code enabling rapid mutual-aid for all political sub-divisions	
Local Mutual Aid Reimbursement Program	Discretionary Exec Branch program to reimburse locals for heavy local-to-local mutual aid	~\$200K from DRF / biennium
Mutual Aid Box Alarm System	A coordinated system that allows rapid mutual aid assistance and response growth for locals	~\$50K

Surge Capacity

Greenlight from Gov's Office

Task	Purpose	Fiscal
Clarify NDFS Authorities	Provide positive authority for NDFS to proactively coordinate fire response	
Clean Up Red Flag / Fire Danger	Correctly assigns responsibility for fire danger rating, used in local declarations	
Pre-Stage NDNG	Generate low-cost capacity	Existing appropriation
Wildland Taskforce Fund	Dedicated funding to support activation of Wildland Fire Task Force	~\$100K, from DRF
Training up Fire Supervisors	Multi-year training to establish cadre of qualified leaders for fire response, allowing greater surge with NDNG	~\$150K, NDFS direct appropriation
Training Incident Command Support Teams	Training to create regional incident command support teams to help local fire depts	~\$150K, NDDDES direct appropriation
Contracted Aviation Firefighting	Proactive use of annual contracting to secure aviation assets beyond the NDNG	DRF

Minimum Training Standards

Greenlight from Gov's Office

Task	Purpose	Fiscal
Establish Minimum Training Standard	Increase response capacity through training. Influenced by either statute (stick) or funding eligibility (carrot)	~\$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

Recruitment and Retention

Legislative Body to Continue

Task	Purpose	Fiscal
USERRA-like Employee Protection for Volunteer Firefighters	Establish discretionary or automatic program to protect volunteer employment during extreme fire seasons.	
School-based Programs Like CERT, Fire Camp, Junior Fire-Fighter Program, Elective Credits	Build upon successful recruitment by investing into existing programs within schools to recruit the next generation of firefighters	Increase or reallocate existing programs
Firefighter Benefits	Suite of incentives to encourage volunteerism	TBD

Long-Term State Structure of Public Safety

Long-term Strategic Planning

Task	Purpose	Fiscal
Public Safety Agency Alignment	Reimagine existing public safety structure to facilitate better coordination and decision making	TBD
Public Safety Building		TBD
Public Safety Regional Administrative Support	State admin and grant support for volunteer and small departments	FTEs
Fire Protection Districts Alignment	Right-size districts using data driven analysis	TBD