



MACo LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

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The Montana Association of Counties (MACo) publishes this **weekly** bulletin containing summary descriptions of bills of interest to local government officials. **Each issue lists only the bills that have been introduced during the week. Please save this message or print it for future reference.**

Copies of bills are typically sent to County Clerks and Recorders and can also be found at:
[http://laws.leg.state.mt.us/pls/laws07/LAW0200w\\$.startup](http://laws.leg.state.mt.us/pls/laws07/LAW0200w$.startup)

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Many legislators have their own email addresses, which can be found at
<http://leg.mt.gov/css/sessions/60th/roster.asp?HouseID=0&SessionID=91>

Special Legislative Session Alert

House Bill 1

A heavily-amended version of House Bill 1 was passed by the Legislature. It provides \$39 million to DNRC for wildfire costs for Fiscal Year 2008, ending June 30, 2008. It also appropriated \$3 million to the Department of Military Affairs to fund that agency's firefighting costs for FY-08.

A provision to form an Interim Study was amended into the bill. The committee is to study the costs of suppression of wildfires and is to complete its study by September 15, 2008, and submit its findings to the 2009 Legislature. The committee is to meet in Miles City, Lewistown, Libby, Thompson Falls, and Hamilton. The bill appropriated \$200,000 to fund the study. HB 1 also contained a provision that DNRC submit a report to the Governor and the 2009 Legislature on its progress in implementing 27 findings of a 2004 Legislative Audit Division audit. MACo will need to follow the activities of this committee closely as it will be looking at all firefighting costs from the local response units on up.

During testimony on the bill, local fire departments and DNRC initial attack units received high praise, noting that over 95 percent of the fire starts were contained by those first initial-attack efforts. Kudos to all of your fire districts, fire departments, fire service area units and county departments. You are all doing a great job. There was quite a bit of talk in the halls about finding a mechanism to get some funding directly into the hands of those local units, but given the very short timeframe involved, it was not practical to develop an equitable method to distribute any such funding. There were attempts to amend the bills to include funding for the purchase additional initial attack trucks, additional seasonal pilots for DNRC, and fuel reduction on state and private lands.

HB 1 as introduced contained sections exempting the durational limit the Governor can declare an emergency or disaster. These provisions were amended out of the bill by the House Appropriations committee. Members of the committee felt the purpose of the Special Session was to fund wildfire costs and policy decisions such as this should be addressed in a regular session of the Legislature. The bill also proposed to increase the Governor's Disaster Fund to \$25 million. This proposal was not approved by the Legislature, however, the current provision that reimbursements received from the federal government go back to restore the fund balance was retained, rather than being placed into a special fire suppression account as was being proposed by HB 3, as introduced.

Link to HB 1: <http://data.opi.mt.gov/bills/specsess/0907/billhtml/HB0001.htm>

House Bill 2

This bill died in the House Appropriations Committee.

House Bill 3

House Bill 3 establishes a Fire Suppression Account and appropriates \$40 million into the account. Money in this account may not be used until July 1, 2008, and the Act terminates June 30, 2009. With the creation of the account and the appropriation, the Legislature is making \$40 million available for next fire season. This should eliminate a need to call a special session next year, should we have another extreme fire season. Recovery of any restitution by private parties also will go into the account and be available. As introduced, any money recovered as a reimbursement from the federal government would have been placed into this account, rather than going back to restore the Governor's Emergency Fund that is used for emergencies of many different kinds. That provision was amended out.

Link to HB 3: <http://data.opi.mt.gov/bills/specsess/0907/billhtml/HB0003.htm>

House Bill 4

AKA the "Feed Bill," House Bill 4 appropriated money necessary to fund the Special Session.

Link to HB 4: <http://data.opi.mt.gov/bills/specsess/0907/billhtml/HB0004.htm>