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Cost to battle Duckett Fire estimated at \$5.2 million

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The cost to fight a wildfire can be staggering, and thus quickly drain local, regional and state funds.

U.S. Forest Service officials say the cost to fight the Duckett Fire here is estimated at \$5.2 million.

To help offset the cost of wildfires in Colorado, several years ago the state legislature set up the Emergency Fire Fund administered by the Colorado Forest Service.

Each year most Colorado county government entities and the state put dollars into the EFF. Custer County puts in about \$2,000 a year. Those collective dollars are then used to fight fires that crop up within the state.

During last week's regular Custer County commissioners' meeting, Mike Harvey and John Grieves with the Colorado State Forest Service informed commissioners Lynn Attebery, Jim Austin and Allen Butler this year's Emergency Fire Fund had been depleted. Also at the local commissioners' meeting was Fremont County commissioner Ed Norden and sheriff Jim Beicker.

However said the two, the good news is that Governor John Hickenlooper has authorized \$500,000 to fight the Duckett Fire. Since then Gov. Hickenlooper has guaranteed an additional \$850,000 bringing the total to \$1,350,000 for the two counties.

The bad news said Harvey and Grieves is that in order to receive those funds, Custer and Fremont counties must itemize their costs to fight the Duckett Creek fire.

"You need to be clear as to what the two counties are contributing and what you are protecting by fighting the fire," said Harvey.

As a result, each Custer County agency involved has been asked to keep an itemized expense sheet and to be prepared to submit that list when needed. Those cost estimates would include county employee salaries, overtime and benefits; operation and repairs of county equipment; and emergency shelter costs including animals.

The Wet Mountain Fire Protection District, West Custer County Hospital District EMS, search and rescue and posse hours will also be documented.

Harvey and Grieves also said the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management would also be kicking in dollars since the fire is on those public lands, too.

In hopes of receiving additional state funds, as well as federal funds, to offset the cost of fighting the Duckett Fire, earlier this week commissioner chairman Lynn Attebery signed a resolution declaring the fire a local disaster. Fremont County commissioners also took similar action.

That resolution was immediately e-mailed to the Colorado Division of Emergency Management office to be hand delivered to Governor Hickenlooper.

– Nora Drenner