



MITIGATION Minute

FEBRUARY 2025

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Montana Receives \$3.4 Million Grant for High Hazard Dam Rehabilitation

On September 24, 2024, FEMA awarded \$3,411,574 to the Montana Department of Military Affairs for the FY 2024 Fall Rehabilitation of High Hazard Potential Dams grant program.

According to FEMA, the National Dam Safety Program is a partnership of states, federal agencies and other stakeholders to encourage and promote the establishment and maintenance of effective federal and state dam safety programs to reduce the risk to human life, property, and the environment from dam related hazards.

The [Rehabilitation of High Hazard Potential Dams program](#) provides technical, planning, design, and construction assistance in the form of grants for the rehabilitation of eligible high hazard potential dams. According to the DNRC, not all high hazard dams are the same. In Montana, a dam can be classified as “high hazard” with any potential for loss of life, including campgrounds or paved roads. However, dams with a large population at risk downstream are held to much higher standards.

This award reflects the FY 2024 state allocation for the program. All award funding was put on hold until final projects were submitted, then reviewed and approved by FEMA. Montana submitted final projects on November 21, 2024, and the projects are currently under review. Eligible subrecipients include non-federal governments and non-profit organizations.



FEMA Launches Online Dashboard on Resilience Dollars

FEMA has launched a user-friendly [online dashboard](#) showing obligations of hazard mitigation investments across the nation.

The Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) and Flood Mitigation Assistance Obligations Dashboard provides greater transparency on the agency’s two competitive grant programs. BRIC and Flood Mitigation Assistance help reduce disaster risk to natural hazards through community-driven resilience and hazard mitigation planning and projects.

The dashboard shows agency data visually and geographically to better communicate progress and allow external stakeholders to get more information on when and where these federal investments are being spent. It includes summary statistics, a dynamic explorer map, data visualizations, and detailed tables for users to gain a comprehensive understanding of hazard mitigation funding across the nation.

Visit [FEMA.gov](https://www.fema.gov) for more information on the agency’s Hazard Mitigation Assistance programs.

Notice of F...	Program	Subapplic...	Subapplic...	Subapplic...	Title	Obligated	Selected	Primary Ac...	Primary Ha...
Fiscal Year ...	Building R...	Montana	DEPARTM...	EMD-2020...	State of M...	\$112,500	\$112,500	Plan update	Uncategori...
Fiscal Year ...	Building R...	Montana	MCOED	EMD-2020...	St. Regis Fl...	\$72,822	\$71,685	Develop o...	Flooding
Fiscal Year ...	Building R...	Montana	FLATHEAD...	EMD-2020...	Flathead C...	\$30,000	\$30,000	Plan update	Fire
Fiscal Year ...	Building R...	Montana	DEPARTM...	EMD-2020...	State of M...	\$28,558	\$28,558	Managem...	



Castle Mountains Proactive Forest Management Aims to Reduce Wildfire and Watershed Contamination Risk

~ Sage Sutcliffe, Forestry Communications Assistant, Montana Department of Natural Resources



Willow Creek flows eight miles from Meagher County's Castle Mountains toward the town of White Sulphur Springs. The tributary passes through Townsend Ranch on its way, providing water for Trent Townsend's cattle year-round.

However, Willow Creek does not currently supply potable water for White Sulphur Springs. The town relied solely on treated, gravity-fed water from the Castles for decades and retains partial water rights to the creek. But, after a series of unforeseen failures of the watershed containment infrastructure 15 years ago, the town drilled two wells to supply safe water to its residents. Around the same time, much of the Castle Mountains – particularly on the Townsend Ranch – was hit by a mountain pine beetle outbreak. The infestation killed as many as 70-80% of lodgepole pine. This loss left behind dead trees and forest debris, significantly increasing wildfire risk.

Townsend, a fourth-generation Montanan, knows the stakes are high. If a wildfire were to ignite in the nearby forest, it would have devastating consequences on the Willow Creek watershed. A single storm event following a high severity fire could introduce large amounts of soils and debris to the creek, fumbling the town's forthcoming plans to restore the water source amid increasingly dry summers.

Above: Fallen lodgepole pine heightens wildfire risk.

Recognizing the risks to the Willow Creek watershed and the surrounding area, the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) helped initiate the White Sulphur Springs Municipal Watershed project in late 2023. Local leaders from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and the DNRC collaborated to address the urgent need for forest health improvements near Willow Creek.

“Partnerships are essential to landscape-scale work like this, where the issue crosses public-private boundaries,” said Jenney Paddock, NRCS district conservationist with the White Sulphur Springs Field Office, echoing a strategy of Montana's Forest Action Plan. However, inviting the landowner may not have been successful without the options and support that all of the partners bring to the table.”

Each partner plays a specific and important role in the White Sulphur Springs project, agrees Helen Smith, USFS district ranger with the Belt Creek-White Sulphur Springs Ranger District. The NRCS kickstarted the project by connecting Townsend to the other agencies, while the USFS addressed access barriers. DNRC stepped up as project lead and provided funding from HB 883, a bill passed in the 2023 Montana legislative session that increased funding toward projects aimed at reducing wildfire risk and improving forest health.

Working alongside its partners, DNRC outlined key objectives: remove hazardous fuels and decrease the potential for severe wildfire behavior within the White Sulphur Springs municipal watershed, including Townsend's property and adjacent lands.

Castle Mountains Forest Management *Continued*

Natural fire cycles help maintain healthy conditions by reducing ladder and surface fuel loads. However, the forests within the Willow Creek municipal watershed are unnaturally dense due in part to early 20th-century wildfire suppression policies. Coupled with fallen lodgepole pine in the foothills and Douglas-fir encroachment near the creek, the area exhibits extreme fire behavior conditions.

To address this, DNRC and partners aim to return the project area to a high frequency, low severity fire regime through a targeted management prescription. This plan includes treating 46 acres divided into three units with varying forest composition and slope. Crew will thin trees by hand or mechanically with logging equipment, and the resulting slash will be either burned in piles or utilized for forest products offsite.

“DNRC’s mission is to manage our forests responsibly, protecting our resources in the present and in the future. Our forest practices reflect that mission,” Harrington said. “In finding these critical SMZ areas, we’re protecting biodiversity and providing benefits for the forest as a whole.”

The Willow Creek municipal watershed is an important resource for White Sulphur Springs. “Forty-six acres of the 3,000 total acres within the watershed seems like a drop in the bucket,” Townsend said. “But it’s a significant area with rippling, positive effects for the watershed.”

The ripples have already formed. The USFS plans to expand more hand piling and pile burning upstream in the next few years to better protect the town’s water source. DNRC is confident all forest management efforts in the Castles will improve overall forest health while reducing risk of high-severity wildfire and watershed contamination.

State & Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan Updates



State Plan Update:

- Approved and Adopted

Western Regional Plan Update:

- Base Plan: FEMA Approved
- Annexes/Addendums: State Review & FEMA Review

Central Regional Plan Update:

- Base Plan: FEMA Approved
- Annexes/Addendums: FEMA APA -Pending Local Adoptions

Eastern Regional Plan Update:

- Base Plan: FEMA Review
- Annexes: FEMA Review; Addendums: State Review

To obtain updates on HMP status, please view the [MT Regions HMP Status Tracker](#).

Montana Plan to Action Workshop

Join us April 15-17, 2025
Fairmont Hot Springs Resort
[Register Here](#)

Join the Montana Disaster and Emergency Services Mitigation Bureau (MT DES) and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for the upcoming, in-person Montana Plan to Action Workshop. Leveraging the recently approved regional hazard mitigation planning efforts, this workshop will focus on local implementation. This is an opportunity for communities across Montana to navigate the "now what?" after hazard mitigation plan approval, to advance strong mitigation strategies and eligible mitigation projects and better understand how to access implementation resources.

This training is open to individuals involved in the development and implementation of their local hazard mitigation plan, including local government officials, emergency managers, land use planners, engineers, and floodplain administrators, those involved in the development of other local plans, or those who just want to learn more about hazard mitigation planning.

Upon completion of this course, participants will be able to:

- Understand your community's unique risk and vulnerabilities to hazards;
- Leverage your community's existing mitigation capabilities;
- Develop and advance mitigation strategies for your community;
- Understand MT DES and FEMA hazard mitigation grant programs and technical assistance support that your community can utilize;
- Take action to implement risk reduction investments and activities in your community!



FEMA

AICP and CFM credits pending. Reach out to DESMitigation@mt.gov with questions.

Mitigation Funding Opportunities for 2025

Funding Opportunity	Funds Available	Application Deadline
DR-4745	\$402,668	March 11, 2025
FM-5507	\$985,111	February 28, 2025 (Pending Extension)
DR-4801	*\$380,210	June 18, 2025
DR-4813	* \$424,520	July 23, 2025
Nationally Competitive Funding		
BRIC 23	See NOFO	March 21, 2025
FMA 23	See NOFO	March 21, 2025

If you are interested in any open mitigation funding opportunity, please complete a NOI (Notice of Intent) located on the [Mitigation Grants page](#) on the MT DES website and submit it to the Mitigation team. Once we receive your NOI, we will reach out to you to further discuss project eligibility and the application process.

*Current Estimated Amounts

Training Opportunities

Association of MT Floodplain Managers Conference. February 26th-28th. Missoula, MT. For more information: [Association of Floodplain Managers](#).

FEMA's Resilient Nation Partnership Network: Leveraging technology for hazard mitigation webinar. February 26th, 12:00pm. Register: [Meeting Registration - Zoom](#)

Montana Mitigation: Plans in Action Workshop - modified G318. April 15th-17th. Fairmont Hot Springs. Register: <https://forms.office.com/g/seyVKz5yZC>. POC: Andrew.Long@mt.gov

Floodplain Bootcamp Weekly Workshop: Continuing February 14th, 9am-10am and on subsequent Fridays. POC: Shylea Wingard, Shylea.Wingard@mt.gov.

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