

July 11, 2006

Internal Audit Report 2006-12
Wildfire Mitigation
Anchorage Fire Department

Introduction. Since 2001, the Anchorage Fire Department (AFD) has received \$14,573,000 in Federal appropriations. Of the \$14.6 million received, about \$3.5 million remains unspent as shown in the table below.

Wildfire Mitigation Funds Received 2001 - 2006 (as of April 2006)			
Year	Amount Received	Amount Spent	Remaining
2001	\$ 1,750,000	\$ 1,749,907	\$ 93
2002	5,000,000	4,674,195	325,805
2003	4,173,000	2,741,704	1,431,296
2004	1,975,000	1,857,199	117,801
2005	493,000		493,000
2006	1,182,000		1,182,000
Totals:	\$ 14,573,000	\$ 11,023,005	\$ 3,549,995
Source: Funding authorization letters and PeopleSoft Web-Based Reporting.			

According to the AFD's Wildfire Mitigation Office's (Office) 2005 Program Report, these funds have been and will be directed toward: 1) forest treatment of private residential and Municipal lands; 2) Firewise education to empower local residents; 3) continued helicopter support in summer

and wildfire training for AFD firefighters; and 4) program administration. The 2005 Program Report further stated that, “Since 2001, AFD has used a portion of wildfire funds to augment the suppression fleet. These additional apparatus support the primary role of AFDs structural suppression force by adding smaller vehicles to accommodate those neighborhoods with limited road widths and small-radius turn around areas.”

According to the Office, sustainability and maintenance will be the focus of program planning for the years 2006 - 2008. In addition, Office staff stated that when Federal funds “dry up” AFD’s intent is to incorporate the wildfire program into the AFD operation budget and become part of the tax supported Municipal budget.

Objective and Scope. The objective of this review was to provide information concerning AFD’s wildfire mitigation efforts resulting from the Federal Funding received since 2001. This review was performed during the period of April through May 2006. The review was requested by the Municipal Assembly.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

To help understand the Office’s work accomplishments, we asked them to provide some program information. In response, the Office provided the following program information.

Program Statistics Wildfire Mitigation (Unaudited)							
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	TOTAL
Number of Firewise Home Assessments	N/A	287	150	264	343	111	1,155
Number of Homes Treated	N/A	N/A	18	84	189	10	301
Total Reimbursement to Homeowners/Private Property Owners	N/A	N/A	\$12,184	\$79,846	\$402,966	\$19,570	\$514,566
ACRES TREATED							
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	TOTAL
Number of Private Acres Treated	5.3	12.5	129.74	168.79	480.92	46.39	843.64
Number of Public Acres Treated	324.5	124.5	153.5	36.6	31.6	18.5	689.2
Total Acres Treated:	329.8	137.0	283.24	205.39	512.52	64.89	1,532.84
Source: AFD Wildfire Mitigation Office.							

We also requested the following information: the number of dead and dying trees removed as a result of the spruce bark beetle on public land as well as on private land, and the number of hazardous trees removed from public land as well as private land. However, this type of information is not tracked by AFD. AFD only tracks the number of acres treated.

Funding Has Few Guidelines.

The funds received by AFD were direct appropriations from the Federal government with few, if any, reporting requirements or detailed stipulations on how the money was to be spent. Reporting requirements were only required for the 2005 and 2006 funds focusing on key results (e.g., acres of hazardous fuel reduction).

The funding received for the first year focused on wildfire suppression, such as equipment, and not on mitigation. After the first year, the funding focused more on mitigating the threat of wildfire through hazardous tree removal, especially those trees affected by the spruce bark beetle. Below is a table showing the funding received each year and the language stating how the funds were to be spent.

Purpose of Wildfire Mitigation Funding			
Year	Amount Received	Purpose of Funding	Reporting Requirements?
2001	\$ 1,750,000	“ . . . for emergency fire fighting response and preparedness to respond to wildfires in spruce bark beetle infested forests . . . ”	No
2002	5,000,000	“ . . . for efforts to reduce the fire danger caused by the spruce bark beetle infestation in Southcentral Alaska. Funding is provided for fire mitigation and hazardous tree removal . . . ”	No
2003	4,173,000	“ . . . these funds are intended to perform work in areas affected by the spruce bark beetle which has created a severe fire risk to large areas of Southcentral Alaska.”	No
2004	1,975,000	“ . . . these funds are to be used primarily in areas affected by the Spruce Bark Beetle which has caused a severe fire danger in areas adjacent to communities. Further, the funds are to be used to remove dead and dying trees in areas affected by the Spruce Bark beetle.”	No
2005	493,000	“Funding to the Municipality of Anchorage is to remove dead and dying trees caused by the Spruce Bark Beetle.”	Yes. Two reports with accomplishment information.
2006	1,182,000	“ . . . to remove dead and dying trees caused by Spruce Bark beetle.”	Yes. Two reports with accomplishment information.
Total:	\$14,573,000		
Source: Funding authorization letters.			

Suppression Versus Mitigation.

As shown in the above table, from 2002 forward funds were approved for wildfire mitigation activities, with a particular focus on the removal of dead and dying trees in areas affected by the Spruce Bark Beetle. However, we found that the line between wildfire suppression activities and wildfire mitigation activities was often blurred. We identified several activities that dealt with wildfire suppression instead of wildfire mitigation. For example, the Office has, and continues to pay about \$150,000 each year to place a helicopter on standby in case of a wildfire. Also, AFD has been training fire fighters in strategies and tactics for wildfire suppression.

Expenses.

Since 2001, the Office has spent over \$11,000,000 related to various suppression and mitigation activities. Expenses have been incurred for professional services such as the wood lot operations, brush clearing, tree removal reimbursements, hazardous tree removal, wildfire fuel load studies, wildfire videos and advertising, helicopter service, fire station remodel for the Wildfire Mitigation Office, and wildfire mapping and modeling. In addition, equipment purchases included five F-350 pickup trucks, a mini pumper, a water tender, a brush rig, radio equipment, a Polaris ATV, utility trailers, and fire weather stations. Other expenses have been incurred for items such as training throughout the United States, Firewise home assessments, and personal protective equipment. Below is a table that categorizes the Office's expenses.

Office of Wildfire Mitigation Expenses: 2001 - 2006 (as of 4/13/06)		
Service	Account(s)	Total Expense
Personnel Services	1101 - 1501	\$ 1,123,744.89
Office/Operating Supplies	2101 - 2204 and 3201 - 3303	231,557.81
Personal Protective Equipment	2205 - 2206	85,799.75
Professional Services	3101 & 3104	6,657,569.53
Travel	3305 - 3337 & 3339	44,520.01
Tuition and Registration	3338, 3806, & 3828	6,191.21
Computer: Hardware & Software	2211, 3712, 5411, 5412, 5604, & 5605	48,900.64
Miscellaneous	3814	2,050.90
Equipment	5401, 5403, 5603	967,447.34
Repair & Maintenance Supplies	2301	71,058.97
Public Utilities, Repair, Rentals	3501 - 3701	3,174.49
Advertising, Binding, Dues, Subscriptions	3802 - 3805	38,490.16
Manager & Custodian Fees	3103	7,107.75
Physicals	3102	54.00
Bldg Improvements < \$50,000	5602	14,642.14
Contractual Services Other	3808	2,274.50
Library Books & Materials	3838	1,727.33
Infrastructure-Any Cost	5302	139,293.87
Intergovernmental Charges	6001 - 6352	1,577,399.04
Total:		\$ 11,023,004.33
Source: PeopleSoft Web-Based Reporting.		

Discussion With Responsible Officials. The results of this audit were discussed with appropriate Municipal officials on June 16, 2006.

Audit Staff:
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