



## Virginia City Rural Fire Department

316 Wallace St, Virginia City, MT 59755

November 17, 2023

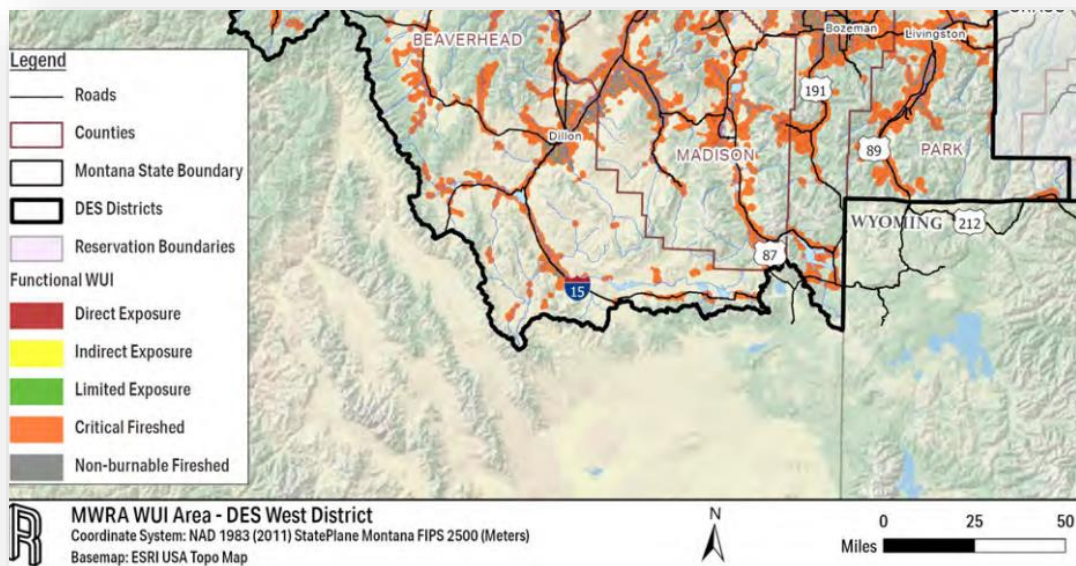
Montana Heritage Commission  
300 W Wallace St,  
Virginia City, MT 59755

Dear Montana Heritage Commission Board of Directors:

On behalf of the Virginia City Rural Fire Department, we are writing to request that you provide land for the construction of a new fire hall. This request is driven by the critical need to enhance our fire response capabilities in light of growing population and escalating wildfire risks in Virginia City, Madison County, Montana.

Recent statistics underscore the urgency of this need:

- The Virginia City Rural Fire Department's Service Area population has and continues to grow.
- The county has seen a 580% increase in high wildfire hazard areas since 1990.<sup>i</sup>
- Our community is in a Critical Fireshed<sup>ii</sup>



Given these factors, the current facilities of the Virginia City Rural Fire Department are no longer sufficient for several reasons:

1. **Accommodating Living Firefighters:** The current facility is inadequate to accommodate full-time firefighters housing, should they be required. This limitation restricts the department's ability to maintain a ready and responsive team, especially during extended emergencies.
2. **Inadequate Space for Equipment:** The existing fire hall cannot hold all the fire equipment the department needs. Modern fire departments require space for a variety of specialized equipment, and insufficient space can hinder operational efficiency.
3. **Training Limitations:** The current location is landlocked, making it difficult to conduct the necessary training on the firehall grounds. Effective training environments are crucial for preparing firefighters for a wide range of emergency scenarios.
4. **Expanded Responsibilities:** Post-September 11, 2001, fire departments have taken on more diverse responsibilities, requiring more training, equipment, and resources. This has led to a need for more comprehensive facilities.
5. **Futureproofing:** Modern fire stations are designed to last for decades, accommodating future needs and advancements in fire service. This foresight is necessary to ensure long-term effectiveness and sustainability.
6. **Health and Safety of Personnel:** Modern fire stations are designed with the health and safety of firefighters in mind, addressing issues like exposure to toxins and providing adequate rest and living areas.
7. **Community and City Needs:** The fire department's space requirements compete with the city's need for shop and community maintenance facilities.

A new fire hall is essential to address the growing demands of community and wildfire management and response. This facility would not only accommodate current needs but also be designed for future expansion and the unique requirements of Virginia City's structural and wildfire management.



We believe that the state-owned land (See Map) would be an ideal site for this new facility. Its location would allow for efficient response times, and its size is conducive to housing advanced firefighting equipment and vehicles, training areas, and possibly living quarters for firefighters.

This project is not just an investment in a building but in the safety and well-being of our community. It will enable us to better protect our residents, our historical structures and our citizens' properties in a region increasingly prone to climate-driven fire hazards.

We request your favorable consideration of this land allocation to support the construction of a new fire hall for the Virginia City Rural Fire

Department. Your decision can make a significant difference in enhancing the resilience and preparedness of our community.

Thank you for considering this request. We look forward to collaborating with you to make this essential project a reality.

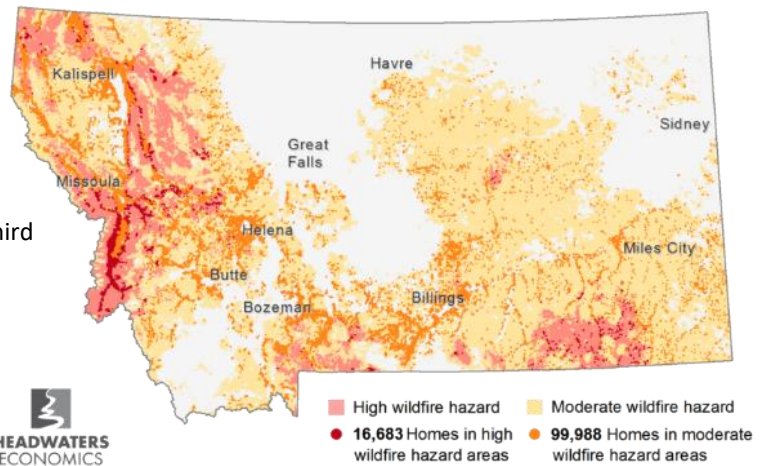
Sincerely,

Virginia City Rural Fire Department

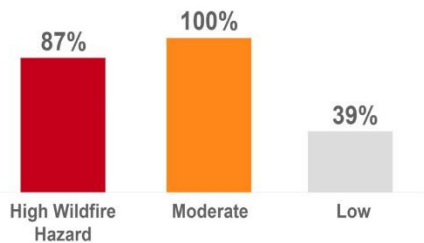
<sup>i</sup> Headwaters Economics. "Montana wildfire risk is widespread and growing." Headwaters Economics. [\[Link to source\]](#).

A new analysis of wildfire risk shows that nearly every home in Montana is exposed to some wildfire risk. More than a third of homes—nearly 120,000 homes—are in moderate to high wildfire hazard areas.

Since 1990 the number of homes in moderate to high wildfire hazard areas has nearly doubled. The rate of housing growth in moderate and high hazard areas far outpaces home development in low hazard areas.



### Percent Change in Homes by Wildfire Hazard, 1990 to 2018



The most significant growth occurred in fast-growing Madison County (580% growth in high hazard areas) and Gallatin County (367% growth in high hazard areas).

Bar chart showing that home growth is fastest in areas of high and moderate wildfire hazard in Montana.

Housing data: MT Dept. of Revenue; Wildfire data: Wildfire Risk to Communities  
HEADWATERS ECONOMICS

<sup>ii</sup> A "critical fireshed" is a concept used in wildfire management and planning. It refers to a geographical area where the physical and environmental conditions, such as terrain, vegetation, and climate, combined with human factors like land use and community infrastructure, create a high potential for significant wildfire events. These areas are often characterized by a high likelihood of fires starting, rapid fire spread, and considerable impact on communities and ecosystems.

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Key aspects of a critical fireshed include:

1. **High Fire Risk:** These areas are prone to wildfires due to factors like dry climate, dense vegetation, and frequent lightning strikes or human activities that can ignite fires.
2. **Significant Impact on Communities:** Critical firesheds often encompass regions where wildfires pose a direct threat to homes, businesses, and critical infrastructure. This includes areas where urban development intersects with wildlands, known as the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI).
3. **Ecological Importance:** Many critical firesheds include ecologically sensitive areas, where wildfires can have a lasting impact on biodiversity, habitat, and natural resources.
4. **Management Challenges:** Due to the combination of high risk and significant potential impacts, these areas often present complex challenges for fire management, requiring specialized strategies for mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery.