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## 2017 - Montana: Closing Capability Gaps

### SUMMARY

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In 2013, Montana Disaster and Emergency Services (DES) and the Montana Fire Wardens Association invested State Homeland Security Program (SHSP) funds to develop Situation Analyst Montana (SAM), a web-based platform that enables emergency managers, public health, fire, and law enforcement stakeholders to access a common operating picture of ongoing statewide incidents in real time. This project addressed a capability gap in maintaining operational coordination of wildfire response efforts.

### DESCRIPTION

Montana is home to many rural communities spread across large areas of land, so the State encounters challenges with coordinating communications and incident response over long distances. To address this gap, the Montana Fire Wardens Association invested \$120,000 in Fiscal Year (FY) 2013 SHSP funds to launch a pilot project to develop SAM—a software system that can distribute real-time geospatial information about fire incidents. Montana later expanded SAM's scope to include all-hazards incident management using a total of \$117,960 in FY 2014 and FY 2015 SHSP funds.

Using geographic information systems (GIS) technology, SAM produces a graphical representation of incidents, allowing users to track response assets, activities, and personnel. Other features of SAM include the ability to apply different GIS layers to provide multiple perspectives of an incident. These perspectives support planning, incident management, risk assessments, damage assessments, training, and incident operations.

Montana has used SAM to improve responses to several real-world incidents. For example, emergency management personnel activated SAM to analyze the July 2016 Roaring Lion wildfire. The program helped emergency managers determine the fire's location and movement (including whether the fire was occurring on Federal or non-Federal lands), and

the number of structures at risk in the disaster zone. Gallatin County also used SAM to discover and alert Federal, state, and local stakeholders to the 2015 West Fork Fish Creek fire, a nearly 12,000-acre fire that had previously gone unnoticed in a remote area of Mineral County.

SAM enabled firefighters to identify the 2015 West Fork Fish Creek fire by displaying the fire's satellite heat signature  
(Source: Montana DES)

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In addition to wildfires, jurisdictions have employed SAM to assist with law enforcement activities. For instance, Lewis and Clark County used SAM to identify homes at risk during a manhunt in 2015. This capability allowed the counties to alert the homeowners to the potential danger and coordinate the manhunt from a bird's eye view. During each of these incidents, SAM allowed emergency managers to accurately assess the incidents' scope and potential impacts, and facilitated real-time communication among stakeholders.

At the conclusion of the pilot, Montana used \$38,000 of FY 2016 SHSP funds to sustain SAM. In FY 2017, Montana designated SAM as a project with statewide benefit, allocating \$70,000 in SHSP for maintenance purpose to Gallatin County, which is responsible for sustaining and upgrading the system's capabilities.

## REFERENCES

FEMA National Preparedness Assessment Division. Stakeholder Interview with Montana Disaster and Emergency Services. August 9, 2017.

West Fork Fish Creek Fire; National Wildfire Coordinating Group; September 15, 2015; Accessed on August 40, 2017. <https://inciweb.nwccg.gov/incident/4577/>

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