

## Arizona Department of Forestry and Fire Management

Department has not established statutorily required fire safety inspection program, implemented recommendations to help Arizona communities with wildfire planning, or developed complaint-handling process, increasing the risk of fire-related deaths, injuries, and property damage

### Audit purpose

To determine whether the Department regularly scheduled and timely performed required fire safety inspections, implemented recommendations to assist Arizona communities with wildfire planning, complied with State conflict-of-interest requirements, and developed complaint-handling processes; and to respond to the statutory sunset factors.

### Key findings

- The Department's statutory responsibilities include monitoring and conducting forestry projects, wildfire prevention through education and outreach, wildfire suppression, and enforcement of the State fire code through regularly scheduled fire safety inspections of schools and other public buildings.
- Our review of a sample of 29 transactions between fiscal years 2021 and 2023 found the Department used appropriated monies related to its statutory objectives and purposes for allowable wildfire emergency response and wildfire mitigation purposes, such as for wildfire suppression equipment and staff.
- The Fire Marshal's Office, housed within the Department since 2016, has not established a statutorily required fire safety inspection program for State and county public buildings and schools—despite our recommendations that it do so in our 1988, 1999, 2001, and 2011 performance audits of the Fire Marshal's Office—increasing the risk of fire-related deaths, injuries, and property damage.
- The Department has not implemented most recommendations from a consultant report it commissioned related to helping Arizona communities develop Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs), which are important for helping communities develop and implement strategies to reduce their wildfire vulnerability.
- The Department did not comply with some State conflict-of-interest requirements, and its conflict-of-interest process was not fully aligned with recommended practices, increasing risk that employees and public officers had not disclosed substantial interests that might influence their official conduct. Additionally, the Department lacks complaint-handling processes to ensure it investigates and resolves all complaints, including complaints related to State fire code violations, increasing public safety risk.
- The Department had not implemented most of the recommendations from our 2016 procedural review related to internal controls over financial reporting, payroll processing, and capital assets, increasing risk of errors and fraud.

### Key recommendations

The Department should:

- Require the Fire Marshal's Office to develop and implement a plan outlining key steps and deadlines to establish a fire safety inspection program, and hold the Fire Marshal's Office accountable for implementing the plan.
- Fully implement its consultant's recommendations to help communities develop and implement CWPPs.
- Develop and implement policies and procedures that align with State conflict-of-interest requirements and recommended practices, and policies and procedures for handling complaints.
- Implement the recommendations from our November 2016 procedural review and align its implementation of these recommendations with applicable *State of Arizona Accounting Manual* requirements.