

Millions in CalFire prevention funds not spent

By Jim Miller, Sacramento Bee

Amid a drought that has created bone-dry conditions across much of California's wildland area, a state fire prevention account has ended recent fiscal years with tens of millions of dollars unspent.

The money has been generated by a contentious, 4-year-old fee pushed through by Gov. Jerry Brown and legislative Democrats over the objections of Republicans and rural property owners. The state collected more than \$300 million through June and spent about \$260 million, including roughly \$228 million on administration and statewide prevention activities, vegetation clearing, defensible space inspections and other programs. About \$22 million went to a state tax agency to cover collection costs.

But as fires burned hundreds of thousands of acres this year, the state ended the fiscal year in June with an estimated \$43 million in fee money left over.

More than 800,000 property owners pay the fee, most of them \$117.33 a year for each habitable structure.

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