

# NORTHWEST

IDAHO  
EDITION

## State OKs 2003 fire payment

### Logging companies settle claims for \$1.5 million

BY JOHN MILLER  
Associated Press

BOISE - A North Idaho logging operation is one of two companies that must pay \$1.5 million to the state to settle negligence claims stemming from a 2003 wildfire.

The Hunt Creek fire torched nearly a square mile of state-owned timber on the eastern shore of Priest Lake.

Babbitt Logging Inc., based in Coeur d'Alene, and Portland-based Stimson Lumber

Co. signed the settlement Oct. 9. The state had alleged that the companies caused the fire by improperly rigging logging equipment.

The money represents the largest forest-fire-related settlement Idaho has ever received, said Roger Jansson, head of state Department of Lands' northern operations.

Still, the agreement is for less than the \$2.5 million the Department of Lands said it spent to fight the Hunt Creek blaze when it began July 25,

2003, between Coolin and Indian Creek.

Crews from Babbitt were wrapping up logging operations on state land there when the blaze started. An investigation showed that a cable rubbing against rocks likely ignited the flames, Jansson said.

"The sale was nearly complete, but it was a partial cut, so there were reserve trees that were left," Jansson said. "Most of those burned, and it also burned outside the sale boundary."

The blaze burned 590 acres and took nine days to contain. It was the second-most expensive of 2003 for the state agency and accounted for most of that year's total of \$516,000 in fire-related losses suffered by state-endowment lands, according to state documents.

Earnings from endowment lands, including from timber sales, benefit state schools, universities, hospitals and prisons.

A spokeswoman at Babbitt Logging declined to comment.

Stimson Lumber in Portland didn't immediately return a phone call seeking comment.

### At a glance

In the settlement, \$500,000 was paid into the endowment to cover the cost of damaged timber and planting erosion-controlling vegetation to help protect water quality in Priest Lake.

The remaining \$1 million went into the Department of Lands fire-preparedness account, which goes to pay for future fire suppression efforts.



ELECT  
COEUR D'ALENE

Hass  
long  
vis  
for

BY ERICA  
Stal

Coeur d'Alene  
and former M  
isn't done wor  
he has more ic