

Budget cuts totaling \$6.9 million in place

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The Department of Corrections is one of 23 state agencies to have its budget reduced in an effort to deal with steep declines in government revenue due the recession.

The cuts, announced in early April by Gov. Brian Schweitzer, total about \$41 million. The corrections share is \$6.9 million, with the bulk of that decrease coming in the budget year that starts July 1.

The largest single reduction was a \$2.4 million savings by putting on hold plans for development of a prerelease center in the Kalispell area. That project had been delayed by public opposition to the original proposed site.

Other reductions included withdrawing planned increases in the daily per-offender rate paid to operators of treatment programs, prerelease centers, regional prisons, Missoula Assessment and Sanction Center, and the privately run prison in Shelby. Those increases, mostly 1 percent, were scheduled to take effect starting in July.

In addition, the department will reduce its use of treatment programs for women offenders in the coming budget year to save \$365,000. The Elkhorn meth treatment center in Boulder will have funding for four fewer beds, the Passages Alcohol and Drug Treatment (ADT) program in Billings will be reduced by four beds, and the felony DUI treatment program in Glendive (WATCH east) will be cut by two beds.

The department still will have 36 women at Elkhorn, 38 at Passages ADT and 48 offenders at WATCH east.

Mike Ferriter, department director, said the focus remained on the women's correctional system because it – unlike the men's system – has available space. The Montana Women's Prison is operating at about 80 percent capacity and will be able to provide chemical dependency treatment for women who might otherwise be in the community-based programs targeted for the reductions.

"These are difficult decisions, but necessary ones in light of the budget and revenue picture confronting the state," Ferriter said. "Treatment will still be offered to women needing it.

They will not be denied the treatment they need."

Other corrections reductions include \$200,000 from the budget for inmate medical expenses that occur outside of secure facilities, \$200,000 in spending for information technology equipment replacement, \$300,000 in the Juvenile Delinquency Incentive Program, and a \$330,000 cut in Montana State Prison's operating budget. Using supervision fees and parental contributions to offset some personnel costs will save \$1.6 million.

Although the department accounts for about 9 percent of the total general fund budget, corrections represents 17 percent of the spending cuts because school funding is mostly exempt in this budget-cutting process.