

**EASTERN ALPINE COUNTY
FIRE SERVICES PLAN
PART I**

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I Introduction

The Alpine Fire Safe Council has been augmented with appointments from the community, the Board of Supervisors and public agencies associated with fire protection. This group met in June, 2004 and determined that a Fire Services Plan was needed for eastern Alpine County. This includes the area now served by fire equipment and volunteers operating from Woodfords and Markleeville. Following discussion of the proposed Fire Services Plan it was concluded that the process of completing it should consist of two phases:

Part I) establish a data base regarding current conditions; unmet needs; organizational options; financing alternatives and constraints; and design the contents and required elements of a comprehensive fire services plan.

Part II) develop a fire services plan for short, intermediate and long term fire service that includes emergency medical service, hazardous material management and disaster responses.

This report is Part I of the intended two phases. The material set forth is intended to serve as the foundation for the comprehensive fire services plan that is to follow. Appendix A, attached, is a request for proposals to complete that plan utilizing this report. The committee identified the following goals to guide the fire services plan:

Planning Goals

- 1. Develop a comprehensive plan for fire prevention and fire suppression serving eastern Alpine County that has support and awareness from the entire community being served.*
- 2. Address emergency operations planning including medical events, natural disaster management and hazardous materials management.*
- 3. Integrate these services with the Sheriff, County Health Officer and other appropriate public agency providers serving the eastern Alpine County area.*
- 4. Set forth a reasonable and rational financing program.*
- 5. Identify a recommended organizational structure from among the alternatives available.*
- 6. Establish a workable implementation program and time table so the plan can be achieved.*

II Report Methodology

The committee supported the consultant recommendation to use the following methodology in assembling both parts of the fire services plan:

- 1. Understand attitudes/concerns of Fire Safe Council members.*
- 2. Survey local public officials to define scope of planning issues and constraints.*
- 3. Conduct inventory of available staff and equipment.*
- 4. Measure current calls for service; forecast possible future service calls for fire staff.*
- 5. Consult with established fire service guidelines and standards to determine level of unmet needs.*
- 6. Assemble a roster of possible financing alternatives with a description of uses/impacts/advantages/disadvantages and a summary of how similar communities have used them.*

III Fire Services Plan Contents and Requirements

This document is intended to become the guide for completing the comprehensive fire services plan. Data provided will serve as a base for future planning. The information also will set forth the subjects requiring more detailed analysis, investigation and recommendation. Appendix A is a Request for Proposals to be circulated to qualified consulting firms. The Appendix directs all such proposers to incorporate this report in their work program and the comprehensive fire services plan. The minimum number of plan elements is: fiscal, organization, staffing & equipment and implementation. Each of these elements are set forth below.

A.) Financing the Plan

Following is a listing of possible resources that could be used to pay for implementation of the fire services plan. However, a note of caution is required. Nearly all of these alternatives require consent either from voters or from property owners in addition to the Board of Supervisors. Therefore, in developing the fire services plan, there is a need for a more detailed analysis of these alternatives and consideration of the barriers that seemingly diminish ease of adoption.

- County General Fund The Board of Supervisors can, through the annual budget adoption process, commit funds to the fire services plan implementation. Only a majority vote is required. However, the fire service competes with all the other demands upon county government. Prior history of fire services financing from general fund sources has demonstrated both a limit in amount as well as variances from year to year that make long term program planning very difficult. This limitation on fire service funding indeed was one of the issues that generated the need to develop a fire service fire services plan.

State financial support for counties continues to be restricted. In turn that imposes major limits on allocation of funds for local needs. Alpine County, like all California counties, is severely impacted by a combination of legislative reductions in traditional revenues, higher costs for existing services and the need to pay for state mandated services. These are major factors that control how much funding might be forecast as being available for an improved fire services program from general fund resources.

- Impact Fees These fees are imposed at the time of issuing a building permit. The fees are based upon a formal capital improvement plan adopted by the County Board of Supervisors and pro-rate the cost of furnishing capital improvements between the demand for service required by existing residents and the demand for service required to serve new residents. The impact fee is intended to pay for that portion of the capital needs that benefit the new population. The fees can be adjusted annually to reflect inflation. The Board of Supervisors can impose these fees without voter consent. However, legislation authorizing this revenue mandates that only capital improvements and the cost of preparing the plan and its periodic update can be allowed expenditures. In other words, impact fees do not provide any resource for operations and maintenance. Alpine County currently has a modest impact fee for fire facilities but this fee does not appear adequate to finance present needs. The fee was adopted several years ago and needs to be updated for consistency with Government Code 60000.
- Property Tax Override The law provides that voters may approve a special tax dedicated to specific purpose. In this case the tax would be dedicated to fire protection and suppression. A special tax requires a 2/3 approval of those voting on the issue. The county cannot change the intended use of those revenues

without voter approval. The ballot measure seeking approval of a special tax can provide for a required annual, external audit of financial and operational measures to confirm if the tax is producing the expected results.

- Property Assessment The county may form a benefit assessment district to raise funds for certain public improvements. Fire plan implementation is one of those services. Each parcel of property within the assessment district is allocated a proportional benefit from the planned fire suppression/prevention program and costs required are distributed in accordance with that formula. The property owners affected by this proposal consent to the assessment through a written consent form that is distributed by mail within a designated period of time. Approval to proceed with the assessment requires that a majority of the property owners being assessed consent to it. In other words, registered voters are not called upon to approve or disapprove the matter. The assessment can be used for both capital and operations and can be annually adjusted to meet inflationary changes.
- Special Legislation The county might pursue special legislation that would identify specific unmet needs, the inability to meet those needs locally, and a set of findings that would justify state intervention. This process is time consuming; does require substantial involvement with members of the legislature; and may or may not be an on-going source of revenue. A major limitation is that in all likelihood, if special circumstances could be identified justifying state support, such revenue would be of a one-time nature and tailored to specific conditions that could cause administrative problems.
- Mello-Roos District The Board of Supervisors can organize a form of special district that is established for the purpose of raising funding to pay for fire services. Called a Mello-Roos District, this type of district is managed by the Board of Supervisors. District formation and approval to borrow funds that are redeemed by a special tax within the District require voter approval under most circumstances. (Districts with less than 11 registered voters only require property owner consent.) Funds raised are usually allocated to capital assets but may be used for operations provided certain conditions are met.
- User Fees There are several options under this category (Note: these choices are not listed in any order of preference.)
 - Subscription fees charged to users of medical emergency services;
 - Telephone sur-charges for 9-1-1 call services;
 - Fees for services to newly developed property;
 - Responses to vehicle accidents;
 - Transient Occupancy Tax on lodging facilities;
 - Sales Tax

It is important to point out that these revenue sources are relatively small in volume compared to the total needs of the Fire services Plan and do not produce

consistent amounts of income from year to year. Additionally, clerical and administrative costs are required to implement these sources which diminish net income available.

- Grants There are several state and/or federal assistance programs that are available for fire services. These include: Community Development Block Grants (CDBG); Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA); Homeland Security Agency (HSA); and Rural Fire Assistance (RFA). The county shares a grant writer with the South Tahoe Public Utility District (STPUD). This position has assisted Alpine County in searching for and processing grant assistance for fire programs. This is an important element of support and should be continued into the future. It is likely that appropriate grants can be developed through that position. While further detail on these, and other, grant programs needs to be provided in the fire services plan, it must be noted that all grants require (at the minimum) local matching funds and administrative costs to provide monitoring of results, reporting requirements and management of revenues/expenditures.

In addition to defining a source of revenue for fire service needs, there will be a cash flow problem that accompanies implementation of a revenue source. Whatever source is selected, a number of fiscal years will elapse before that revenue produces sufficient income to pay for the capital requirements set forth in the plan. However, the needs for improved service are urgent and cannot wait for that accumulation of dollars. Additionally, the voters approving the revenue source want to see results.

The California Infrastructure and Economic Development Bank (CIEDB) was created by the legislature to partly deal with this problem. Temporarily suspended, this program may restart and should be looked at together with legislative representatives. CIEDB can provide start up funds for capital projects when secured by a fixed revenue source. There are other similar financing measures available to assist with cash flow requirements such as Rural Council of Rural Counties; U.S. Department of Agriculture and lease purchase agreements through American Governmental Financial Services.

B) Organization Structure

Several options are available to consider when organizing fire services. These are:

- Independent Fire District
- Dependent Fire District
- Community Services District
- Alpine County Fire Department
- County Service Area
- Private Company Contract
- Public Safety Officers using Sheriff personnel
- Para Medic Service
- California Division of Forestry Contract

Following is a summary of these options. The listing is not intended to assign preference or ranking of benefit. The final fire services plan will need to set forth a detailed description of these options with criteria to allow a ranking of options and to support a recommendation to the Board of Supervisors. The more detailed discussion should also identify other similar, rural, low population areas where these organizational options are used. Possible barriers, constraints and benefits from implementing the options should also be presented.

In addition to a ranking of choices, the fire services plan should present the required steps needed to proceed with implementation of the preferred option, including but not limited to:

- Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) consideration
- Environmental impact analysis
- Timing to meet election calendars
- Authorization for funding concurrent with organization start-up
- Estimated lead time between Board of Supervisors approval of the recommended organizational form and the effective date that initial operation can be anticipated.

A. Independent Special District

This is a special district governed by an elected board of directors. The California Health and Safety Code provides authority, responsibility, functions and operational requirements for this type of district. The board consists of five members who can be elected at large or by area within the district. The board appoints a fire chief and adopts policies and procedures suited to the needs of the area within the scope of the state legislation.

There are a large number of these fire districts within California. They serve large metropolitan areas and small, rural areas. A number of arguments can be made for and against this style of organization:

AGAINST

- adds one more layer of government to an already crowded arena
- reduces rather than improves inter-agency cooperation
- necessary administrative support (accounting, personnel, purchasing, etc.) duplicates existing services that county can provide
- new district lacks property tax base (see note below)

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- allows district to concentrate on fire/emergency services without burden of competing functions and activities
- develops staff expertise and technology enhancements
- increases public awareness and citizen involvement
- can develop facilities and equipment without conflict from other competing capital outlay expenditures.

NOTE: Property taxes are fixed not to exceed 1% of market value plus annual inflationary adjustments or voter authorized over-rides. Within that 1% limitation all existing agencies (county, schools, etc.) receive a pro-rated share that cannot be changed without formal consent. As a new district is formed it is necessary to seek formal approval from each agency receiving property tax income to revise the formula and establish a new allocation for the new district. Failing that, the new district can only receive property tax revenue from new values added to the tax roll following district formation. This allocation is typically a small fraction of the entire revenue amount. In a low growth area such as Alpine County, the expected new revenue eligible for distribution to the newly formed district is minimal. This situation constitutes a significant barrier to the creation of a special district for fire purposes.

B. Dependent Special District

This is a fire district governed by the county board of supervisors. Where this type of district is in operation, the supervisors usually appoint an advisory committee from the service area to review policy matters and to make recommendations regarding district operations.

The board of supervisors appoints the fire chief and determines policies and procedures for operation of the district.

A distinct advantage of this type of district is that it does not require a separate administrative staff—the county offices can extend their services (payroll, personnel recruitment, accounting, etc.) to the district and recover costs from the district.

While the dependent fire district operates within the framework of county government, residents of the district may object to decisions being made by a board of directors that does not represent the district exclusively. The board of directors in this case is the county board of supervisors. Since county supervisors are elected by district it is likely that one or more county supervisors will reside outside the boundary of the fire district.

The fire district, for all practical purposes, would become a department of county government. As such, the Board of Supervisors would need to determine where the fire chief would fit organizationally—an independent department reporting to the supervisors or a subordinate of an existing county office. The fire service program would be clearly in competition with all other county service needs when seeking funds and capital asset investment. Lack of adequate funds to pay for fire services is currently a serious problem and would not be resolved with this organizational change. Clearly, a new source of revenue will be necessary without reduction of existing county services.

C. Community Services District (CSD)

This is a type of special district that can provide several services in addition to fire prevention/protection. It is governed by an independent board of directors separately elected from the board of supervisors. Many of the arguments for and against an independent fire district apply here as well. The major hurdle, of course, being the lack of a property tax base and the need to rely upon alternative revenue sources—typically requiring voter approval.

One possible advantage of this form of special district is that it can provide water supply and distribution services. This means that the community could provide both water and fire services thus offering a means for gradual water system improvements that meet fire suppression standards. Bear Valley and Kirkwood are served by a community services district that provides fire services. In considering this option, it may be important to meet with those two districts.

The property tax limitations discussed above also apply here and may impose a major constraint.

Timing is an important issue. If a CSD is formed it voter approval is needed both for organizing the district, electing the board members and approval of financing authority. These voting efforts could delay implementation of the fire services plan from one to three years following adoption of the plan. This delay will not resolve the unmet needs for fire protection in Eastern Alpine county. Further, efforts to gain voter approval to organize the district can have the negative affect of causing a belief that the fire program is being managed and thus increase citizen apathy toward the program itself.

D. County Department

Without forming a district the Board of Supervisors could adopt an ordinance establishing the fire service as a separate department. Support services could be provided through existing departments. While this option might centralize staffing and authority for program management, it does nothing to improve financing from current conditions. Further discussion of this option can await completion of the fire services plan.

E. County Service Area

This is a mechanism for counties to establish an area within the county that needs services over and above those required for general county government. Service area boundaries can be drawn to serve the intended benefit area. For example, one service area could be designated for Woodfords and another for Markleeville. The county retains authority over the service area but has the flexibility to raise revenues separate from the general fund either through special taxes on property or assessments to owners. The county board of supervisors would appoint the fire chief, establish policies and procedures and manage the needs of the service area. In many respects, the service area is like the aforementioned department of county government except for the ability to generate revenue separate from the general fund.

F. Private Company Contract

In recent years several public agencies have contracted with private firms to provide emergency medical and fire services. Whether or not such a private enterprise is available to serve Alpine County is unknown and will need to be researched for the fire services plan. The fundamental issue with a private contract is raising the funds needed to pay the contractor. Organizationally, a county staff position would need to be assigned to monitor and administer the contract. This, of course, would create a work load burden not now present with anyone on staff. This option needs further research in preparing the fire services plan through discussion with county officials.

G. Public Safety Program through Sheriff

Some jurisdictions in California have combined fire and police departments to evolve a Public Safety Department. In Alpine County this would require Sheriff's personnel to be cross trained in first responder duties and be prepared to meet with and supervise volunteers responding to fire service calls. Adopting this option depends upon two major issues: the interest and commitment of the county Sheriff in undertaking this expanded set of responsibilities; and the commitment of the Board of Supervisors to assigning this activity and the resources to support it. There has not been any opportunity to meet and confer with the Sheriff or members of the Board of Supervisors on this option and further review of it will need to be postponed until the full fire services plan is developed and presented for discussion.

H. Paramedic Organization

This is an organization that is primarily formed to deal with medical emergency responses. It consists of staff certified as emergency medical technicians (EMT) who can provide basic and/or advanced life support at points where emergency events occur. There are communities served by paramedics that are not a component of a fire service and other communities where both fire and paramedic services are combined. The City of Jackson offers paramedic services through an American Legion chapter. The Foresthill Fire District has a local, non-profit organization offering this service. In those communities fire and paramedic responses are coordinated but not managed together. Given the extremely limited revenues available for enhancement of the fire service, it is not likely that in the near term sufficient funding would be available to pay for paramedic services in Eastern Alpine County but further analysis should be made for the fire services plan.

I. California Division of Forestry Contract (CDF)

The CDF can contract with local government to provide fire prevention/protection services. There are several fire districts in California that have opted for this approach while continuing to operate as an independent fire district. The analysis for the fire services plan should include discussion with CDF representatives to determine the feasibility of this approach for Eastern Alpine County and the willingness of CDF to assume this responsibility. With or without a contract agreement for CDF to provide fire protection services, discussion is needed regarding possible installation of a conservation camp under CDF direction that could provide seasonal assistance with fire prevention efforts.

C. Staffing and Equipment

(1) Fire Service

Neither Woodfords nor Markleeville are staffed with full time personnel. There is a chief for each station together with those volunteers responding from the stations. Markleeville has a roster of 14 volunteers in addition to the chief and assistant chief. Woodfords has a roster of 12 volunteers. Both Woodfords and Markleeville do not get active responses from the full roster with as few as 5 persons being the core group. The Woodfords crew responds to fire and emergency medical calls. The Markleeville crew responds primarily to fire calls and may back up Woodfords calls under some circumstances. Calls for service are skewed to the Woodfords station and equipment as shown below.

Service Calls
June, 2002 through June, 2004

<u>Type of Call</u>	<u>Woodfords</u>	<u>Markleeville</u>
Wildlands	34	19
Vehicle Event	80	3
Medical Aid	117	22
HazMat	12	3
Structure Fire	9	5
Other*	<u>60</u>	<u>4</u>
Total	312	56

* These calls can be events not correctly classified or non-fire responses such as falldowns; animal retrieval; grease disposal.

Approved 2003-2004 Budget

	<u>Woodfords</u>	<u>Markleeville</u>
Personnel	\$ 5,614	\$ 5,614
Services/Supplies	21,223	19,862
Fixed Assets	<u>3,000</u>	<u>53,300</u>
Total	\$29,837	\$78,776

Note: The amounts shown in the approved budget totals do not include funds reserved from prior years for equipment purchases (\$178,411 for a fire truck and a water tender). The amounts shown also do not include reserved funds collected from impact fees on new construction (\$30,204 for Markleeville and \$72,700 for Woodfords) nor funds transferred to fire service purposes from trust funds or contingencies during the course of the year.

Approximate Value of Assets (County Insurance Records)

Woodfords Station –	2,880 sq.ft	\$ 321,661
Markleeville Station –	4,840 sq.ft	369,677
All mobile equipment --		<u>2,925,000</u>
Total Value		\$3,616,338

Utility Truck (M) – 1970’s vintage, approx. 300,000 miles
 Water Tanker (M) – 1972, approx. 1,000,000 miles*
 Pumper (M) – 1972 Engine
 Brush Truck (M) – 1999
 1966 Truck (W)

1982 Utility**(W)
1983 Truck-750 gal (W)
1991 Water Tanker-3,000 gal (W)
1996 Pumper-300 gal (W)
1980 Pick up squad/patrol unit (M)
2004 Heavy rescue vehicle

*A new Water Tanker is on order for Markleeville; due for delivery in April, 2005..

Both fire stations have major deficiencies. Neither provides quarters to house volunteers or full time staff if added in the future. The Woodfords station lacks adequate ventilation, safety gear for servicing equipment, storage facilities, heating and hose drying equipment. The Markleeville station also lacks hose drying facility and some additional features typically found in fire stations. Woodfords does have a recently added compressed air system to support the self contained breathing devices.

(2) Emergency Medical Service

Alpine County is part of a 5 county regional system providing emergency medical response. There are 12 volunteers assigned to Eastern Alpine County. These volunteers are certified as Emergency Medical Technicians. This group is assisted with support from the fire volunteers assigned to Woodfords.

The EMS has a budget separate from the fire service. The director of the EMS reports to the Board of Supervisors and coordinates EMS efforts with the fire stations at Woodfords, Markleeville, Bear Valley and Kirkwood. An inventory of equipment used for the EMS program was not available at the time of report preparation and will need to be gathered for the fire services plan, as well as budget data and asset values established for the equipment.

D) Implementation Strategy

This section of the fire services plan may be the most important of all. Once the Alpine County Fire Safe Council ad hoc committee has determined the desired organizational option and financing plan it will need to present its recommendations to the Board of Supervisors and be prepared to respond to questions from the Board and interested citizens. Once the Board approves the plan (with or without amendments from the recommendations), a whole new process is ignited.

The ad hoc committee should stay in place to oversee and participate with implementation as considerable time and energy will be required to build support for the necessary action steps. There are a number of specific measures that can be defined to achieve implementation of the plan. Foremost, however, is the need to determine a set of policies for county adoption that set forth the importance of fire protection as a safety element for the public. These policies can frame the several steps shown below and provide a platform for carrying out those steps. All the implementation action steps will need to be detailed more completely in the fire services plan.

- building voter approval for financing
- voter attitude surveys
- community meetings
- types of materials to develop for voter awareness
- strategies for gaining support from public officials
- a calendar of events
- chronology showing priority for implementation steps
- estimated costs for implementation steps
- periodic monitoring of results with progress reports to the Board of Supervisors and to the public in general

IV Issue Statement: Concerns/Constraints

This section of the report identifies issues that were identified during the course of the study. In order to simplify presentation of those issues, individual sources are not identified and responses are clustered where possible. The following list is not presented in any order of priority. The fire services plan will need to establish criteria to assist the Fire Safe Council in ordering priorities for future achievement.

Water Supply This is one of the most important requirements for a quality fire service; at least equal to adequate staffing and equipment. At present a limited hydrant system is in existence. In Woodfords existing hydrants are subject to severe conditions of use imposed by the state Department of Health. These conditions involve decontamination of tanks storing the water, safety gear worn by fire fighters and special clean up measures where the water was used on dwellings. Exploration is needed with the South Tahoe Public Utility District to determine feasibility of removing these conditions, perhaps by advanced treatment of effluent delivered from Lake Tahoe. Markleeville is served by a mutual water companies. This type of operation means subscribers are owners. This type of water company is subject to many operating conditions imposed by state law and in Markleeville, no added customers are presently allowed.

Efforts are underway to construct a large storage tank (250,000 to 300,000 gallons) near Marklee Village. This would substantially improve pressure and volume of flow for fire emergencies. Existing Markleeville water system consists of about 200 service connections served by two 40,000 gallon tanks and two 20,000 gallon tanks.

Woodfords is served primarily by a 20,000 gallon tank and a limited distribution system serving one subdivision. All of the remainder of the Woodfords vicinity is served by private well systems. This includes Hung-a-lel-ti Community, East Fork Terrace, Crystal Springs, Sorenson's Resort and other properties.

An emergency source of water is available over the state line at Gansberg Subdivision and needs to be factored into the fire services plan.

Distribution systems (Woodfords and Markleeville) are old and subject to line deterioration. A long range line replacement program is essential for both systems.

Staffing The fire system operates entirely with unpaid volunteers. Not only is there a small pool of volunteers, many hold day jobs that limit responses to call outs. The number of calls for service and the small number of responders, particularly in Woodfords, creates a major strain on the capability of the volunteers. Additionally, these same volunteers are often called out to assist with calls other than structural fires: emergency medical service, disaster event planning and support for search and rescue services. This multiple response demand is extremely difficult for the volunteers to enjoy a family life, provide training on fire technology and meet other personal obligations. At the very least a system of compensation is needed. The fire services plan will deal with the options available to do this.

Whether a volunteer force continues or whether a combination paid and volunteer force is established, it is essential to bring both fire services under a single command. One position of fire chief can improve use of equipment; establish uniform policies and procedures for emergency responses; direct a volunteer enlistment/retention program and present to the decision makers a set of recommendations for the fire service for all of Eastern Alpine County; not just part of the area. A major goal for any revised fire service must be establishment of a paid chief responsible for the entire fire service program. For clarification, the fire chief position is separate from the position of fire marshal. The latter is a responsibility of the chief building official for Alpine County.

Volunteers The lack of a large core of volunteers is a very serious hurdle that must be overcome. It is serious both for the life safety of the volunteers as well as for the quality of fire prevention/protection that the community requires. More volunteers would move closer to the accepted national standard for volunteer personnel; improve backup for fire crews; would diversify fire fighting assignments; would also attract public interest and support for the entire fire service. The accepted standard for volunteers is a ratio of 3 persons for each position to be filled. In other words, if two volunteers report to a call on a unit of equipment, there should be 6 volunteers available within the group. The need for an active volunteer corps is very critical in a community such as Alpine County with a small population. A number of issues need to be dealt with:

- compensation
- insurance coverage
- recruitment efforts to newly arrived residents
- improved equipment to build pride in operations
- training in fire service operation
- inter-agency training and operation awareness
- turn out gear maintenance and issuance
- communications
- community outreach

One comment regarding insurance: Recently the Board of Supervisors adopted a policy for volunteers performing their duties in order to meet state law that recently imposed potential liability upon the volunteers. This has achieved protection that should assist with recruitment and retention of volunteers. With respect to training requirements, Cal-OSHA has advised that special conditions apply to a rural fire service and further information will be supplied regarding assistance available.

On-site Water Storage Building codes and state law require on-site water storage to be available in rural communities served with a volunteer fire service and limited or non-existent hydrant service. In Alpine County home builders are subject to payment of a \$2,500 fee or installation of a 2,500 gallon storage facility—usually in the form of a pond on the parcel. At locations where ponds are supposed to be in place there is no on-going inspection program to assure compliance with access, quantity of water stored and functioning of release valves. Frozen water and possible conflict with septage on the same property where the water storage is located are other problems with these ponds. Funds paid in lieu of storage construction are not authorized for

specific use and a review of the present program is needed to assign objectives and follow through with attainment.

Defensible Space Perimeter The Fire Safe Council and the U.S. Forest Service are both involved with notice to the community and home builders of the necessity to maintain a fire safe perimeter at all times. The Council also goes house to house to inform occupants of defensible space policies. However, there is no on-going inspection program that would visit sites and notify owners to comply. In some cases owners are seasonal and may need assistance in obtaining local contractors to provide the clearance work.

Inter-Agency Coordination There are several agencies engaged in fire suppression activity in addition to the Woodfords and Markleeville fire crews. These include the U.S. Forest Service; U.S. Bureau of Land Management; and California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF). There is a Lake Tahoe Regional Fire Chiefs Association that meets regularly to improve inter-agency coordination and information distribution. Alpine County fire personnel need to be actively engaged in this association. When a fire event occurs these agencies combine efforts and work together. However, there needs to be non-fire event planning, coordination, crew training and advance planning of resource utilization. For example, the USFS has a future plan to relocate its regional facilities from Markleeville to the Turtle Rock area. Much advance planning has been done to identify opportunities available for the county and the Forest Service to use the site to mutual advantage. This type of interagency cooperation is essential and can be helped considerably with a full time, dedicated fire chief.

Another example is the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF). The CDF does not operate within Alpine County by an agreement with the USFS where an exchange of territorial coverage has been arranged. The fire services plan should explore the feasibility of amending the current USFS-CDF agreement. The CDF continues to provide some limited services that would be advantageous to the Alpine County fire service. These services include: emergency planning assistance; volunteer fire training; access to used fire equipment; review and recommendation on specifications for purchase of equipment and reports on new technology available for fire suppression. The time and effort to maximize these resources are not possible with only volunteer staffing.

There are two other sources to obtain mutual assistance such as mentioned above. These are the California Fire Chiefs Association and the National Fire Protection Association. Effort should be made to contact them.

Self-help Programs A number of programs are available for residents to undertake as fire prevention steps. An aggressive effort is needed to pursue these programs wherever possible. At present the limited corps of volunteers and heavy work demand on the two fire chiefs prevents this assignment from being carried out. Examples of such self-help programs include the above mentioned defensible space clearance; formation of neighborhood councils or homeowner associations for the purpose of distributing fire preparedness information and assisting owners

with prevention measures; school visits for emergency preparedness purposes and acquaintance with fire personnel; planning department efforts to provide through road connections as property develops to enable emergency vehicle access; and building department review of code provisions that may reduce fire risk.

The Alpine County Fire Safe Council has prepared in draft form a Community Fire Plan. Within that plan are some excellent self-help measures that are presented for property owner adoption in both Woodfords and Markleeville. These measures substantially expand on the few selected here for presentation. The final fire services plan will present more of these measures and set forth a process to up-date and administer the Community Fire Plan.

Equipment The present roster of fire suppression equipment, except for the planned addition of a new utility/brush rig at Woodfords and a new tanker at Markleeville, is seriously below standards that are used by the National Fire Protection Association. These standards will be reviewed in detail for the fire services plan and guidelines set forth to bring current equipment inventory up to a reasonable level within those guidelines. It is impossible to replace existing equipment until a formal capital improvement plan is adopted. This capital improvement plan must also include provision for fire station improvements and emergency medical equipment. It is anticipated that continued residential growth in the Woodfords area may require a third fire station and this should also be part of the capital plan. A broader corps of volunteers is needed to service and maintain that fleet of equipment. Thus, volunteer recruitment and retention is integral with equipment acquisition and maintenance.

Insurance Coverage The issue of insurance coverage for homeowners was raised during discussion leading to the authorization for this report. Some owners have been notified that fire insurance cannot be renewed or issued at all if applied for on a first time basis. This notice seemingly arises from a rating by the Insurance Service Office (ISO). This agency rates fire service capability throughout the U.S. The scale ranges from 1 to 10 with the best score being the lowest number. Ratings are based upon type of equipment available, crew training, hydrant system (pressure, flow), response time to incident, emergency preparedness, inter-agency support agreements and other criteria. Fire districts can request an ISO inspection and rating but most often the ISO staff conducts their own surveys periodically. Citing a belief that the ISO rating of 10 in eastern Alpine County was likely, at least one insurance company has served a non-renewal notice. Importantly, a lowered ISO rating can reduce the cost of fire insurance premiums. Thus, if a tax increase is needed for improved service, the reduction of premium cost may offset the tax.

Inquiry to the California Insurance Commissioner was made regarding fire insurance carriers declining to issue coverage. No response has been received and this issue requires further analysis when completing the fire services plan. Contact will also be made to the ISO to determine when they may schedule a fire service review and those standards they use that apply to a rural, low density area exposed to brush/timberlands.

Winter Access Uncleared roadways pose risk to fire event responses and are a hazard for evacuation and rescue efforts. This issue needs review to identify options available to improve roadway conditions during inclement weather.

County Support and Leadership The County Board of Supervisors is an effective agent to both promote and enhance programs needed to serve the public. The fire service must be one of those programs that receive on-going and vigorous endorsement and support. While approval of funding is important, the Board should continue meeting with public groups to build support for the fire service improvements. Absent a local newspaper, the county has limitations in delivering public information and this places a burden on the county staff and Board of Supervisors not faced in other counties. Staff support to meet with and participate in regional and professional service organizations is an important means of developing a strong base of community support for the fire service program.

The fire services plan may produce some new and creative ideas for enhancing fire protection services and the county should be prepared to evaluate those carefully so that full endorsement and support can be obtained if at all possible.

This summary of major issues is not intended to be all inclusive. As the fire services plan is prepared additional issues may present themselves. Those, together with the above listing, needs full analysis and recommendation.

APPENDIX A

SPECIFICATIONS FOR PROPOSALS

The Alpine County Fire Safe Council (AFSC) invites proposals to complete a fire services plan for Eastern Alpine County. This area is served from two fire stations financed by the Board of Supervisors. Staffing is all volunteer. The service area is largely without fire hydrants or a dependable water supply. Fire insurance providers are demonstrating reluctance to re-insure property and/or denial of insurance. The AFSC endeavors to formulate a fire services plan that will encompass fire prevention, fire suppression, emergency medical assistance and hazardous materials responses as needed. The AFSC is hoping to complete the fire services plan for \$7,000 with a targetted completion date of January, 2005. The plan must include the following components.

- Organizational options and recommended preference
- Volunteer recruitment and retention strategies
- Recommended paid/volunteer staffing and equipment
- Capital facilities for short, medium and long term needs
- A financing plan that sets forth possible revenue sources consistent with the operational and capital needs set forth in the plan. Such plan should identify constraints and barriers to adopt possible revenue sources and suggest means to resolve those constraints and barriers.
- An implementation program that sets forth time lines for incremental achievement of fire services plan milestones

Interested responders should demonstrate prior work experience suitable to the above work plan and list references available for contact. Such references should show the project completed, date of completion and responsible party that accepted the completed work project.

Proposals must outline cost requirements and a time line for completion of the work plan submitted with the proposal. Persons affiliated with the proposer, either as a sub-contractor or employee must be identified clearly with references to prior projects of a similar nature.

Prior to soliciting this request for proposals the AFSC had prepared an overview entitled Eastern Alpine County Fire Services Plan, Part I. Copies of that overview will be helpful in responding to the RFP and may be obtained from the AFSC, P.O.Box 67, Markleeville, CA 96120, telephone 530-694-2289, e-mail clint@cgcelio.com.

Proposals should be submitted directly to Mr. Clint Celio, Fire Safe Coordinator, at the above address, not later than 5:00 p.m. October 15, 2004. E-mail submittals will be accepted. Further information about this request for proposal can be obtained from the address shown above.