

19. SIERRA VALLEY FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT

Sierra Valley Fire Protection District, also known as the Sierra Valley Volunteer Fire Department (SVVFD), provides fire protection, basic life support response and some fire prevention programs. This is the first municipal service review for Sierra Valley FPD.

AGENCY OVERVIEW

Background

SVVFD was formed in 1948 as an independent special district.⁴⁰¹ The District was formed to provide structural fire and basic life support services.

The principal act that governs the District is the Fire Protection District Law of 1987.⁴⁰² The principal act empowers fire districts to provide fire protection, rescue, emergency medical, hazardous material response, ambulance, and any other services relating to the protection of lives and property.⁴⁰³ Districts must apply and obtain LAFCo approval to exercise services authorized by the principal act but not already provided (i.e., latent powers) by the district at the end of 2000.

SVVFD is one of the largest fire protection districts in Plumas County based on the total area within its boundaries. It is located in the eastern part of the County and is surrounded by territory served by the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management. The District borders Beckwourth FPD in the west, Hallelujah Junction FPD of Lassen County in the east, Lassen County in the north, and Sierra County in the south.

Boundaries

SVVFD's boundary is entirely within Plumas County. The District's boundaries encompass approximately 220 square miles,⁴⁰⁴ which include ranches, remote homes, residential sections, a mobile park, businesses and a lake/campground recreation area.⁴⁰⁵ Since its formation, there have never been any annexations to or detachments from SVVFD.

⁴⁰¹ State Board of Equalization.

⁴⁰² Health and Safety Code §13800-13970.

⁴⁰³ Health and Safety Code §13862.

⁴⁰⁴ Total agency area calculated in GIS software based on agency boundaries as of July 1, 2011. The data is not considered survey quality.

⁴⁰⁵ Assistance to Firefighter Grants, *Sierra Valley FPD Grant Application*, 2010.

Sphere of Influence

The SOI for SVVFD was adopted in 1982⁴⁰⁶ and made coterminous with the District's boundaries. In 1994, it was reduced to a significantly smaller area. The current District's SOI includes the communities of Chilcoot and Vinton along SR 70 and encompasses eight square miles compared to 220 square miles of boundary area.

Extra-territorial Services

The District provides extra-territorial fire and emergency services to Hallelujah Junction Fire Protection District (HJFPD) of Lassen County. Previously, these services were approved by LAFCo through an out-of-area service agreement (OASA). The agreement became effective January 1, 2006 and expired at the end of 2010. The territory under the agreement included areas on both sides of SR 395 and along both sides of SR 70 east of SVVFD's boundaries. These areas are shown in Figure 19-1.⁴⁰⁷ The OASA was not renewed in January 2011, because LAFCo advised the District that according to California Government Code §56133 it was not necessary to have an OASA for two public agencies.⁴⁰⁸ SVVFD will continue to provide services to HJFPD under contract, which was voted to be extended by the District's Board of Directors on January 10, 2011. The contract will be valid for three years with an automatic two year extension.

The District also occasionally responds to wildland fires when requested. Response to a wildland fire in federal and state responsibility areas is reimbursed by the federal government if the firefighters are on the fire for more than three hours.

Through an informal agreement with the Sheriff's Office, which is discussed in more detail in the Fire Service Section, the District responds outside of its boundaries to a small area along the county line in the south. The area is shown in Figure 19-1. Except for this small area that encompasses about two square miles, the District's service area is the same as its boundaries.

Areas of Interest

The only area of interest reported by the District is the Maddalena Tree Farm. Currently, the area is within the boundaries of SVVFD, but Beckwourth FPD would like to add it to its own boundaries.⁴⁰⁹ Beckwourth FD reported that it was in closer proximity to the Beckwourth FD stations than the SVVFD stations. In addition, SVVFD has to go through Beckwourth FD territory to access the Maddalena Tree Farm, which makes it even more of a challenge to serve this territory.

⁴⁰⁶ LAFCo resolution 82-07.11.

⁴⁰⁷ 2005-OASA-002.

⁴⁰⁸ Interview with John Benoit, Plumas LAFCo Executive Officer, February 3, 2011.

⁴⁰⁹ Interview with Russ Dickman, the treasurer and Tom, assistant chief of SVVFD, November 10, 2010.

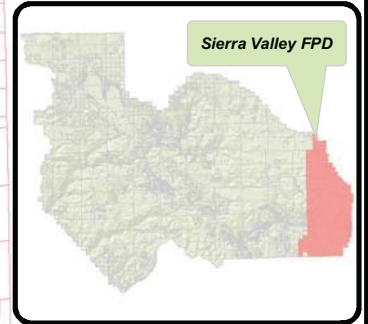
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Range 16 East

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Township 22 North

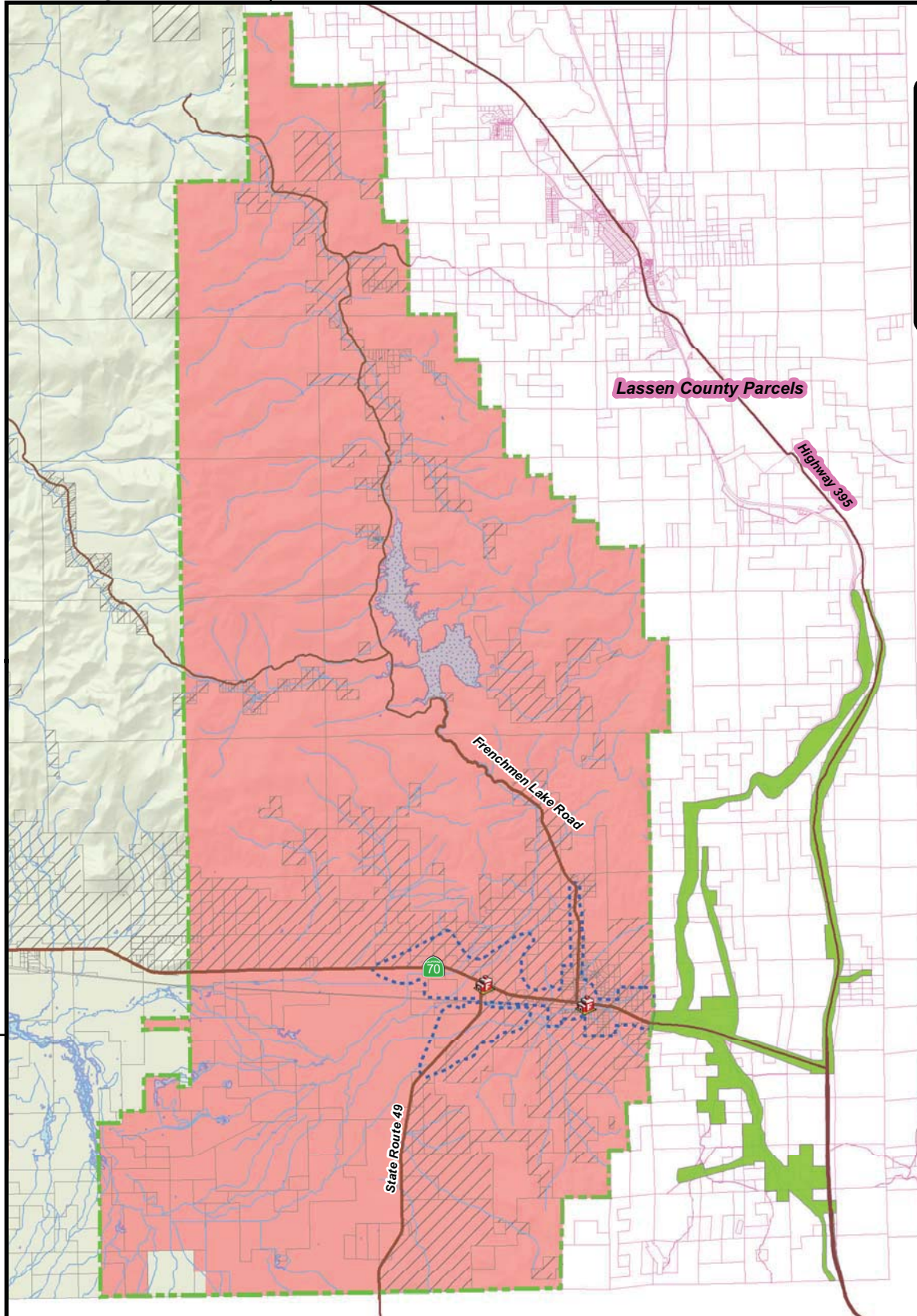
PLUMAS COUNTY



Location Map (Not to Scale)

LASSEN COUNTY

■ Service Area in Lassen County contractual agreement with Sierra Valley FPD

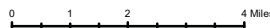


Legend

- CA State Highway
- Major Roads
- Roads
- Stream / River
- Fire Stations

- Parcels
- State Responsibility Area (Federal Responsibility lies outside hatched area.)
- Waterbodies

- Sierra Valley FPD
- Sierra Valley FPD (SOI)
- FPD Service Area
- Sectional Grid (MDB&M)



Sierra Valley FPD
Resolution:
Adopted: 1/20/1948

Sierra Valley FPD (SOI)
Resolution: 82-07
Adopted:

Source: Plumas LAFCo Map Created 4/1/2011

Accountability and Governance

The principal act orders that the governing body of a fire protection district must have an odd number of members, with a minimum of three and a maximum of 11 members. Directors may be appointed or elected.⁴¹⁰ SVVFD is governed by a five-member Board of Directors who are elected to staggered four-year terms. When board members resign before the end of their terms, the County Board of Supervisors appoints replacements. There are currently four members, all of whom were elected. The Board of Directors has one vacancy. There has never been a contested election. Current board member names, positions, and term expiration dates are shown in Figure 19-2.

The Board meets once a month on the second Monday of the month at 6pm at the Chilcoot fire station. Board meeting agendas are posted at the Chilcoot station and at the Chilcoot post office. Minutes of every board meeting are available upon request. The District has a website, but the agendas and minutes are not published there.

Figure 19-2: SVVFD Governing Body

Sierra Valley Fire Protection District				
<i>District Contact Information</i>				
Contact:	Russ Dickman, Treasurer			
Address:	P.O. Box 211, Chilcoot, CA 96105			
Telephone:	(530)993-4541			
Email/website:	www.sierravalleyfire.org			
<i>Board of Directors</i>				
Member Name	Position	Term Expiration	Manner of Selection	Length of Term
Mike Shehorn	Chair	December 2013	Elected	4 years
Russ Dickman	Treasurer	December 2011	Elected	4 years
Ron Matock	Member	December 2011	Elected	4 years
Gary Williams	Member	December 2013	Elected	4 years
Vacancy				
<i>Meetings</i>				
Date:	Second Monday of every month at 6 pm			
Location:	Chilcoot fire station			
Agenda Distribution:	Posted at the Chilcoot fire station and Chilcoot post office			
Minutes Distribution:	Provided upon request			

In addition to the required agendas and minutes, the District does public outreach through its website and occasional newsletters. The Sierra Valley Fire auxiliary also holds regular fundraisers to raise money for the District and reach out to constituents.

⁴¹⁰ Health and Safety Code §13842.

If a customer is dissatisfied with District’s services, complaints may be submitted by calling the office. After that, they are forwarded to the Board, which is responsible for resolving them. The District reported that no complaints have been submitted in the last few years (since 2008).

SVVFD demonstrated accountability and transparency in its disclosure of information and cooperation with Plumas LAFCo. The District responded to the questionnaires and cooperated with document requests.

Planning and Management Practices

Daily operations are managed by the chief. There are 15 staff—none of whom are paid. All the volunteer personnel are firefighters, including the bookkeeper. The sworn personnel include a chief, an assistant chief, three captains and 10 firefighters.

Firefighters are accountable to captains; captains are accountable to the assistant chief; and the assistant chief reports to the chief. The chief reports to the Board of Directors through monthly reports. Personnel are evaluated by the chief, and the chief is evaluated by the Board annually. The Board appoints the chief every two years.

The District tracks its staff workload through a training log and maintenance log. The District also tracks who responds to each call for service.

SVVFD reported performing no formal evaluations of overall district performance, such as benchmarking or annual reports.

The District’s financial planning efforts include an annually adopted budget. The financial statements are audited on an as-needed basis. The latest audit took place in FY 08-09. The District provided the adopted budget for FY 10-11, audited financial statements for FY 08-09, up-to-date unaudited financial statements for FY 09-10 and financial statements for its fundraising auxiliary for FY 09-10. SVVFD does not adopt other planning documents, such as a capital improvement plan or master plan. The District’s capital improvement projects are included in the budget.

Existing Demand and Growth Projections

Most of the land uses within the District are wildland and agricultural. The densest residential and suburban areas are located in the community of Chilcoot and along SR 49.⁴¹¹ The territory north of Frenchman Lake is what the District referred to as a no-man’s zone, which is part of SVVFD, but is extremely hard to reach. There are almost no residences

⁴¹¹ Plumas County Parcel Application.

approximately north of Dotta-Guidici Road and Rutting Deer Road.⁴¹² The total square mileage of the District's boundary area is approximately 220.⁴¹³

Population

There are approximately 447 residents within the District, based on the census block population in the 2000 census.⁴¹⁴ Population information at the census block level was not yet available for the 2010 census, as of the drafting of this report; however, based on the lack of growth experienced throughout the County over the last decade, and in some cases population decline, it can be assumed that the approximate population has not changed much since 2000.

SVVFD publishes on its website that it serves 684 people. The District estimates that visiting tourists add approximately 13,000 additional people to its boundaries during peak tourism seasons. The contract with HJFPD increases the population served by an additional 190 people.⁴¹⁵

⁴¹² Interview with Russ Dickman, SVFPD Treasurer, and Tom, Assistant Chief of SVVFD, November 10, 2010.

⁴¹³ http://www.sierravalleyfire.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1&Itemid=2

⁴¹⁴ Census Blocks 4597, 4603, 4606, 4584, 4599, 4590, 4595, 4585, 4593, 4592, 4591, 4594, 4586, 4573, 4315, 4316, 4374, 4285, 4314, 4238, 4615, 4288, 4283, 4284, 4287, 4263, 4269, 4286, 4292, 4299, 4278, 4291, 4289, 4279, 4280, 4283, 4284, 4287, 4288, 4313, 4285, 4311, 4312, 4507, 4588, 4589, 4605, 4590, 4604, 4586, 4313, 4277, 4272, 4271, 4281, 4282, 4265, 4266, 4267, 4398, 4309, 4305, 4294, 4223, 4268, 4217, 4207, 4206, 4218, 4222, 4204, 4224, 4226, 4227, 4230, 4268, 4269, 4228, 4230, 4229, 4199, 4203, 4292, 4992, 4202, 4295, 4296, 4212, 4216, 4215, 4210, 4207, 4217, 4222, 4260, 4228, 4229, 4243, 4336, 4234, 4230, 4243, 4185, 4186, 4172, 4171, 4180, 4184, 4214, 4180, 4186, 4170, 4259, 4194, 4192, 4207, 4203, 4199, 4230, 4243, 4245, 4246, 4247, 4194, 4198, 4250, 4197, 4248, 4200, 4201, 4203, 4245, 4199, 4243, 4116 in Tract 3, Block Group 4 in Plumas County. The Census Blocks used in the estimate are located south of Frenchman Lake because the District reported that the area north of the Lake is extreme wilderness and nobody lives there.

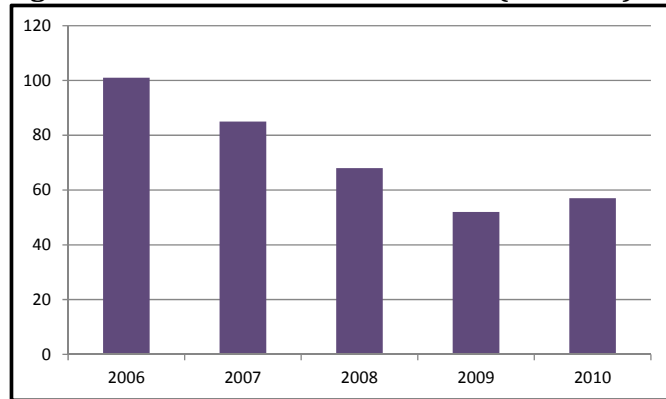
⁴¹⁵ Assistance to Firefighter Grants, *Sierra Valley FPD Grant Application*, 2010.

Existing Demand

The District reported peak demand during snow season, due to driving accidents and during fire season. Calls for medical emergencies are consistently high throughout the year, similar to other providers.

The District reported that it has observed a decrease in service demand from 2006 to 2009. The number of calls slightly went up from 2009 to 2010.

Figure 19-3: SVVFD Number of Calls (2006-10)



Projected Growth and Development

The Agency anticipates little or no growth in population and similarly in service demand within the District in the next few years; however, no formal population projections have been made by the District.

The State Department of Finance (DOF) projects that the population of Plumas County will grow by five percent in the next 10 years. Thus, the average annual population growth in the County is anticipated to be approximately 0.5 percent. Based on these projections, the District's population would increase from 447 in 2010 to approximately 470 in 2020. It is anticipated that demand for service within the District will increase minimally based on the DOF population growth projections through 2020.

The District reported that to their knowledge there is one planned development within its boundaries that consists of 21 homes, which is on hold due to economic difficulties. The subdivision was planned, but no permits had been issued as of the drafting of this report. The District does not anticipate a significant increase in demand if the development is built and populated. Currently, the Agency appears to have the capacity to serve the possible small growth in the area. SVVFD did not identify any areas within the District's future growth area to which it would be difficult to provide an adequate level of service.

Growth Strategies

The District is not a land use authority, and does not hold primary responsibility for implementing growth strategies. The land use authority for unincorporated areas is the County.

The County enforces the codes that it has enforcement power over, which does not encompass all State fire codes. The County ensures that new construction meets the requirements of the latest adopted edition of the California Building Standards. The County enforces the County codes that have been adopted in lieu of the California Fire Safe regulations. The County does not have authority to enforce PRC 4291, which requires

defensible space around structures; however, the County does have some enforcement authority over vegetation removal around buildings that was adopted prior to PRC 4291. In addition, the Board of Supervisors, through the adoption of the General Plan and county codes, regulates development standards to be followed in processing subdivisions, including fire protection.

The proposals for new developments are sent for review to the appropriate fire provider if a development is within district's boundaries. The County reported that as SOI maps have not been digitized, it has been challenging to ensure that proposals go to the appropriate district if a proposed development was within that district's SOI but outside its boundaries. The County and Plumas LAFCO are working together on a process to ensure that all appropriate districts are contacted for review of proposed developments. The County Board of Supervisors is discussing a possibility of hiring a fire marshal, part of whose responsibilities may be code enforcement and building inspections. However, thus far, no decision has been made on the responsibilities of the position.⁴¹⁶

The County has several policies in the existing general plan, which impact the fire providers of new developments.

- 1) Turnouts are now required in every new development.⁴¹⁷
- 2) The County encourages development to be located adjacent to or within areas where fire services already exist or can be efficiently provided.⁴¹⁸
- 3) The County requires new developments within areas not currently served by a fire provider to be annexed into an existing fire district or create a funding mechanism, such as a CSD, to cover the costs of fire service provision.⁴¹⁹
- 4) Sustainable timber and biomass production and harvesting as well as intensive forest management practices are encouraged to reduce the danger of catastrophic wildfires.⁴²⁰
- 5) There is a minimum requirement of two roadway access points, which are maintained on a year-round basis by the County or the State.⁴²¹

⁴¹⁶ Correspondence with Becky Herrin, Plumas County Senior Planner, September 8, 2011.

⁴¹⁷ Plumas County Code of Ordinances, Title 9 Section 9-4.604 (k).

⁴¹⁸ Plumas County, *General Plan*, 1984, pp. 28 & 29.

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

- 6) Minimum public and private road standards: roads providing access to two or more lots have to conform to a two-lane standard of no less than 16-foot traveled way.⁴²²
- 7) Bridges are required to be designed for an 80,000 pound vehicle load.⁴²³
- 8) All access roads must be marked with an approved sign; and all lots must be identified by an address.⁴²⁴
- 9) All developments within boundaries of a structural fire service provider may be required to contribute to the maintenance of the structural service proportionate to the increase in demand for fire service resulting from the development.⁴²⁵
- 10) As a condition of development it is required to provide long-term maintenance of private roads to the standards of original improvements, including roadside vegetation management.⁴²⁶
- 11) The County encourages biomass thinning programs in high fire risk areas.⁴²⁷

The District reported concerns that new developments in the County were not being required to comply with existing requirements.⁴²⁸ The County reported that only one agency had come to the County regarding these concerns, which were unfounded at the time. No conjecture is made by the authors of this report as to the accuracy of these statements. It should be noted that one of the purposes of the newly formed Emergency Service Feasibility Group is to address these concerns.

The County is in the process of updating its general plan. The suggested new policies in the General Plan update that would impact fire service providers, but had not yet been adopted as of the drafting of this report, include:

- 12) The County shall review and update its Fire Safe ordinance to attain and maintain defensible space through conditioning of tentative maps and in new development at the final map or building permit stage.
- 13) The County will consult Fire Hazard Severity Zone Maps during the review of all projects. The County will work with fire protection agencies to develop community

⁴²² Ibid.,

⁴²³ Ibid.

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

⁴²⁵ Ibid.

⁴²⁶ Plumas County Code of Ordinances, Title 9 Section 9-4.601.

⁴²⁷ Plumas County Code of Ordinances, Title 4 Section 4-2.101.

⁴²⁸ Profile comments from Chief Greg McCaffrey, May 3, 2011.

fire plans and require appropriate building setbacks and fuel modification requirements within fire hazard zones.

- 14) In order for the new development to be approved, the County must conclude that adequate emergency water flow, fire access and firefighters and equipment are available.
- 15) New developments have to show that they have adequate access for emergency vehicles to access the site and for private vehicles to evacuate the area.
- 16) New developments within high and very high fire hazard areas are required to designate fuel break zones that comply with fire safe requirements.
- 17) The County will work with Forest Service and fire districts in developing fire prevention programs, identifying opportunities for fuel breaks in zones of high and very high fire hazard and educating public.
- 18) Fire, law enforcement, EMS, resource management, and public health response partners are encouraged to conduct joint training exercises.⁴²⁹

The County has not adopted the new standards for development yet. The revised General Plan may be adopted towards the end of 2012. County zoning code will then go through a revision process in order for the zoning code to implement the General Plan.

In 2007, the Board of Supervisors formed the Emergency Services Advisory Committee to “evaluate the funding feasibility of providing uniform and comprehensive emergency services to all of Plumas County.” The Committee attempted to look for opportunities to increase funding for emergency services, but faced a considerable challenge in the difficult economic times. Most recently, it focused on mitigating efforts through building and development standards improvements and the General Plan update process, and encouraging local fire service providers to share resources and realize economies of scale in preparing grant applications, conducting training and engaging in other joint programs.

The District reported that it would like to decrease its boundary area by detaching the portion north of Frenchman Lake. This area is an extreme wilderness area, which is very hard to access in case of an incident. However, to consider this option it would be desirable to identify which agency would provide summer fire protection and medical response to the wilderness area instead of SVVFD. Additionally, the financial impacts of removing this territory should also be considered, given that the District presently receives a majority of its revenue from property taxes.

Consolidation with one or more fire districts is an option for SVVFD, but it is not formally being discussed. The District also reported that there were discussions about a

⁴²⁹ Plumas County General Plan, Draft Goals, Policies and Implementation Measures, 2010.

countywide fire chief to oversee the activities of all of the agencies, but these discussions had not come to fruition as of the drafting of this report.

Financing

The District reports that current financing levels are fairly adequate to deliver services, but would like to increase funding levels to be more prepared for a larger emergency. The financing levels are adequate for ordinary activities; however, funding is reportedly inadequate to handle large fires. The primary financing challenge for the District is the impact of the recent recession. The District faced declining property tax revenue in FY 07 and FY 08 as a result of a drop in assessed property values and little or no new development. In order to augment funding, the District applies for grants and partners with a fundraising auxiliary that raises money for its operations.⁴³⁰

Figure 19-4: SVVFD Revenues and Expenses

<i>Income/Expenses</i>	<i>FY 09-10 Budgeted</i>		<i>FY 09-10 Actual</i>		<i>FY 10-11 Budgeted</i>	
<i>Income</i>						
Property Tax	\$43,485	76%	\$53,796	66%	\$36,250	66%
Use of Money	\$650	1%	\$424	1%	\$450	1%
State and Federal Aid	\$300	1%	\$298	1%	\$300	1%
Charges for Services	\$0	0%	\$6,000	11%	\$6,000	11%
Other Miscellaneous	\$12,738	22%	\$11,726	21%	\$12,000	21%
Total Income	\$57,173	100%	\$53,796	100%	\$55,000	100%
<i>Expenses</i>						
Services & Supplies	\$78,188	100%	\$39,916	93%	\$83,393	95%
Loan Repayment	\$0	0%	\$2,877	7%	\$4,124	5%
Total Expense	\$78,188	100%	\$42,794	100%	\$87,517	100%
Net Income	-\$21,015		\$11,002		-\$32,517	

The County keeps accounts for the District's finances and tracks revenues and expenditures. The District's total revenues for FY 09-10 were \$53,796. Revenue sources include property tax revenue (66 percent), use of money and properties (one percent), state and federal aid (one percent), charges for services (11 percent) and other revenue (21 percent).

A portion of the District's revenue is donated by the Sierra Valley Fire Auxiliary—a fundraising organization that does its own accounting. In FY 09-10, the Auxiliary's total revenue from donations and fundraisers was \$8,084, \$2,334 of which was donated to the District.

⁴³⁰ Interview with Russ Dickman, the treasurer and Tom, assistant chief of SVVFD, November 10, 2010.

SVVFD provides out-of-area services to HJFPD for which it charges \$100 for each residential structure and no more than \$500 per parcel. Commercial and industrial parcels are charged \$200 per structure but no more than \$1,000 per parcel. Both charges increase two percent annually. The payments are made by HJFPD twice a year. Under the contract that is currently being written, the charges will remain the same.

The District responds to wildland fires when requested. It is reimbursed by the federal government if the firefighters are on the fire for more than three hours.

Sierra Valley Fire Protection District is authorized to collect a fee for each new parcel approved by the County within its boundaries by County Ordinance (PCC 9-3.314) and by District resolution, although neither the Planning Department nor the District seem to have a copy of the resolution. The purpose of the fee is to mitigate the impacts of development to the fire district.

The District's expenditures in FY 09-10 were \$42,794. Expenditures were composed of services and supplies (93 percent) and a Proposition 1A loan payment (seven percent).

Although the Proposition 1A loan is included in the financial statements of the District as part of the expenditures, in reality this loan to the State is not an expense. Due to the State budget crisis, in July 2009, the State legislature voted to suspend Proposition 1A, which ensures local property tax and sales tax revenues remain with the counties, cities and special districts. Consequently, all local agencies were required to loan eight percent of apportioned property tax revenues to the State with repayment plus interest by June 30, 2013. To mitigate the impact of the loss of revenues on the local agencies, the Proposition 1A Securitization Program enables local agencies to sell their Proposition 1A Receivables for cash proceeds to be paid in two installments in January and May 2010. SVVFD decided not to participate in the securitization program, and will receive its money back by 2013.

The District performs no formal capital improvement planning. Immediate capital improvement projects are included in the annual budget. Most of the projects include repair and maintenance of equipment and vehicles. In 2010, SVVFD applied for a federal grant through the Assistance to Firefighter Grants and requested, among other grant activities, funds for firefighting equipment acquisition. The District is awaiting a decision, but believes that it will be awarded the grant.⁴³¹

The District currently does not have a financial reserve or reserve policy. The District relies on its fundraising auxiliary for an emergency reserve.

The District does not participate in any joint power authorities (JPAs) or joint financing mechanisms.

⁴³¹ Assistance to Firefighter Grants, *Sierra Valley FPD Grant Application*, 2010.

FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES

Service Overview

SVVFD provides fire protection and basic life support response. The District has limited prevention programs that mostly concentrate on medical services. The District also conducts some fire inspections on buildings. Ambulance service is provided by Eastern Plumas Healthcare District (EPHCD). Care Flight and My Life Flight provide air ambulance services. Fire helicopter services are provided by USFS and CalFire.

Collaboration

SVVFD has a formal mutual aid agreement with Graeagle FPD. The District also has informal mutual aid agreements with Beckwourth FPD, Loyalton FD and EPRFPD. The District has an automatic aid agreement with EPHCD. EPHCD provides ambulance services to SVVFD. In return, the District provides fire services to EPHCD when the need arises. The District is also a member of the Fire Chief's Association. It participates in quarterly meetings with other fire agencies and fire chiefs. The District collaborates with USFS and CalFire, which provide fire services within the District's boundaries.

Dispatch

The County Sheriff is the Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP); consequently, most land line emergency calls (9-1-1 calls) are directed to the Sheriff. Most cell phone emergency calls (9-1-1 calls) are answered by CHP and redirected to the Sheriff. The Sheriff provides dispatching for most fire providers in the County except for the ones in the northern part of the County, which are served by the CHP Susanville Dispatch Center. The Forest Service has its own dispatch. The Sheriff Dispatch Center has a first responder map, which it uses to identify what provider to dispatch to an incident. All territory within the County has a determined first responder; although, many areas lie outside the LAFCo approved boundary of the districts and lack an officially designated fire provider.

SVVFD shares the same dispatch and radio frequencies with adjacent providers. The District reported that dispatch can occasionally be slow causing delayed response.

Staffing

SVVFD has 15 sworn personnel—one fire chief, one assistant fire chief, three captains and 10 firefighters. None of the personnel are paid. The median age of the fire fighters is 48, with a range from 20 to 79.

The District reports that its staffing levels have decreased in the last few years. Due to the recession, people have moved out of the County. The District is in constant search of new firefighters. It tries to recruit volunteers through posting signs.

According to the California State Fire Marshal, all volunteer and call firefighters must acquire Firefighter I certification; however, there is no time limit as to how long they may work before attaining certification. Firefighter I certification requires completion of the 259-hour Firefighter I course, which includes training on various fireground tasks, rescue operations, fire prevention and investigation techniques, and inspection and maintenance of equipment. In addition to this course, Firefighter I certification also requires that the applicant have a minimum of six months of volunteer or call experience in a California fire department as a firefighter performing suppression duties.⁴³² SVVFD has no Firefighter I certified personnel. Two firefighters are currently testing for BLS I certification.

The District has an officer who is in charge of training. SVVFD conducts training drills once or twice a week. The volunteers are required to attend a minimum of four hours per month of training. The District requires Firefighter I and II, medical EMT first responder and EMT 1 trainings.⁴³³

Facilities and Capacity

SVVFD operates two fire stations—one in Chilcoot built in 1970, and the second one in Vinton built in 1940. The District owns both stations. By 2015 the SVVFD anticipates acquiring a third station.⁴³⁴ There are no set hours when the stations are staffed. Volunteers are always on call.

The Chilcoot Station, which is the main station, was reported to be in good condition. The Vinton Station was reported to be in poor condition.⁴³⁵ Both are used to house vehicles and equipment. The Chilcoot Station houses seven vehicles—one rescue, one Type 3 brush engine, one water tender, two Type 1 engines, one air trailer, and one small Type 4 brush truck. Vinton station is used to store one out-of-service water tender.

The District's water reserves are represented by four 30,000-gallon buried tanks.

Infrastructure Needs

The Vinton Station requires upgrades. The District also identified a need for a new training facility and office space. There are currently no specific plans for facility upgrades or construction.

⁴³² State Fire Marshall, *Course Information and Required Materials*, 2007, p. 44

⁴³³ Interview with Russ Dickman, the treasurer and Tom, assistant chief of SVVFD, November 10, 2010.

⁴³⁴ 2005-OASA-002.

⁴³⁵ Facility condition definitions: Excellent-relatively new (less than 10 years old) and requires minimal maintenance. Good- provides reliable operation in accordance with design parameters and requires only routine maintenance. Fair-operating at or near design levels; however, non-routine renovation, upgrading and repairs are needed to ensure continued reliable operation. Poor- cannot be operated within design parameters; major renovations are required to restore the facility and ensure reliable operation.

With regard to equipment and vehicles, SVVFD reported that it needed a new water tender. In addition, the District reported a general need for more fire hydrants throughout its territory, similar to other rural fire districts. The District regularly applies for grants to upgrade existing equipment and purchase new equipment and vehicles.

Challenges

The District reported several constraints to providing adequate services:

- ❖ Lack of fire hydrants within boundaries and SOI,
- ❖ A potential for fires as CalFire allows burn barrels in certain zip codes,
- ❖ During the snow season, access to about 45 residences is completely cut off north of Frenchman Lake,
- ❖ Acquiring and retaining well trained personnel, and
- ❖ Obtaining costly newer equipment.

Service Adequacy

While there are several benchmarks that may define the level of fire service provided by an agency, indicators of service adequacy discussed here include ISO ratings, response times, and level of staffing and station resources for the service area.

Fire services in the communities are classified by the Insurance Service Office (ISO), an advisory organization. This classification indicates the general adequacy of coverage. Communities with the best fire department facilities, systems for water distribution, fire alarms and communications, and equipment and personnel receive a rating of 1. SVVFD has an ISO rating 8B. The District was last evaluated in 2010.

The guideline established by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) for fire response times is six minutes at least 90 percent of the time, with response time measured from the 911-call time to the arrival time of the first-responder at the scene. The fire response time guideline established by the Center for Public Safety Excellence (formerly the Commission on Fire Accreditation International) is 5 minutes 50 seconds at least 90 percent of the time.⁴³⁶

Emergency response time standards vary by level of urbanization of an area: the more urban an area, the faster a response has to be. The California EMS Agency established the following response time guidelines: five minutes in urban areas, 15 minutes in suburban or rural areas, and as quickly as possible in wildland areas. The District's response zones

⁴³⁶ Commission on Fire Accreditation International, 2000.

include rural and wildland classifications. The District reports that its response times vary due to the fact that all firefighters are volunteers and it usually takes them extra time to respond from home or work place. An area that SVVFD can improve upon is tracking of its response time for each incident, as it was unable to provide exact response times.

The service area size⁴³⁷ for each fire station varies between fire districts. The median fire station in eastern Plumas serves approximately 20 square miles. Sierra Valley FPD serves the most expansive area, with 111 square miles served per station on average. Densely populated areas tend to have smaller service areas. For example, the average service area for the City of Portola is 3.8 square miles.

The number of firefighters serving within a particular jurisdiction is another indicator of level of service; however, it is approximate. The providers' call firefighters may have differing availability and reliability. A district with more firefighters could have fewer resources if scheduling availability is restricted. Staffing levels in Eastern Plumas vary from eight call firefighters per 1,000 residents in City of Portola service area to 42 in Beckwourth FD. By comparison, SVVFD has approximately 33 firefighters per 1,000 residents.

⁴³⁷ Service area refers to the area that the agency will respond to, based on a first responder map used by the Sherriff's office.

Figure 19-5: Sierra Valley Fire Protection District Fire Profile

Fire Service				
Facilities				
Firestation	Location	Condition	Staff per Shift	Vehicles
Chilcoot Station	SR 70, Chilcoot, CA	Good	Unstaffed	1 rescue, 1 Type 3 Brush Engine, 1 water tender, 2 Type 1 Engines, 1 air trailer, 1 small Type 4 brush truck.
Vinton Station	Vinton, CA	Poor	Unstaffed	1 out-of-service water tender
Facility Sharing				
Current Practices: The District does not currently share its facilities with other agencies.				
Future opportunities: The District does not see any opportunities to share facilities with other agencies.				
Infrastructure Needs and Deficiencies				
The District identified a need for a new training facility, office space and a water tender.				
District Resource Statistics		Service Configuration		Service Demand
Staffing Base Year	2010	Configuration Base Year	2010	Statistical Base Year
Fire Stations in District	2	Fire Suppression	Direct	Total Service Calls
Stations Serving District	2	EMS	Direct	% EMS
Sq. Miles Served per Station	111	Ambulance Transport	EPHCD	% Fire/Hazardous Materials
Total Staff ²	15	Hazardous Materials	Direct	% False
Total Full-time Firefighters	0	Air Rescue/Ambulance Helicopter CareFlight		% Misc. emergency
Total Call Firefighters	15	Fire Suppression Helicopter	USFS, CalFire	% Non-emergency
Total Sworn Staff per Statio	7.5	Public Safety Answering Point	Sheriff	% Mutual Aid Calls
Total Sworn Staff per 1,000	33	Fire/EMS Dispatch	Sheriff	Calls per 1,000 people
Service Adequacy		Service Challenges		
Response Time Base Year	2010	Lack of fire hydrants. Limited access areas. Burn barrels. Lack of new equipment. Lack of qualified personnel.		
Median Response Time (min)	NP	Training		
90th Percentile Response Time (min)	NP	Trainings take place once or twice a week. The training officer is in charge of training sessions. Volunteers are required to attend at least 2.5 hours per week. The District requires Firefighter I and II, medical EMT first responder and EMT 1 trainings.		
ISO Rating	8B			
Mutual & Automatic Aid Agreements				
SVVFD has a mutual aid agreement with Graeagle FPD. The District has an informal agreement with Beckwourth FPD, Loyalton FD and EPRFPD.				
Notes:				
1) Primary service area (square miles) per station.				
2) Total staff includes sworn and non-sworn personnel.				
3) Based on ratio of sworn full-time and call staff to the number of stations. Actual staffing levels of each station vary.				

SIERRA VALLEY FPD DETERMINATIONS

Growth and Population Projections

- ❖ There are approximately 447 residents within the District.
- ❖ Over the past decade the District has not experienced a significant increase in population.
- ❖ No or slow growth is expected within the District over the next 10 years. There is a single fairly small proposed development, which is currently on hold.

Present and Planned Capacity of Public Facilities and Adequacy of Public Services, Including Infrastructure Needs and Deficiencies

- ❖ The District's current facilities appear to have the capacity to adequately serve current demand and short-term growth; however, the District's stations each serve an expansive 111 square miles, which results in lengthy response times.
- ❖ The District identified a need for a new training facility and office space, as well as a new water tender. SVVFD regularly applies for grants to attempt to address these needs.
- ❖ Currently, capital improvement projects are identified in the annual budget. The District should consider adopting a capital improvement plan to identify financing needs, as well as potential revenue sources and timing to address these needs.
- ❖ It is recommended that the County Sheriff's Office work with the fire districts to update the ESN map that is used for dispatching, in order to adequately address any communication concerns and recent boundary changes.
- ❖ As the District presently has no volunteers with Firefighter I certification, SVVFD could improve its level of service by promoting certification.
- ❖ It is recommended that all fire providers track response times for each incident.

Financial Ability of Agencies to Provide Services

- ❖ The District reports that current financing levels are adequate to deliver regular activities, but are not adequate for large emergencies or fires.
- ❖ The District may require increased revenues to finance upgrades to the Vinton station, which is in poor condition.

- ❖ The District hopes to increase funding by regularly applying for grants.

Status of, and Opportunities for, Shared Facilities

- ❖ SVVFD collaborates with other fire providers in Plumas County, and outside of it, through automatic aid agreements, mutual aid agreements, contracts and membership in the Fire Chiefs Association.
- ❖ The District currently does not share its facilities with other agencies.
- ❖ The District does not see opportunities for shared facilities with other agencies.

Accountability for Community Service Needs, Including Governmental Structure and Operational Efficiencies

- ❖ SVVFD demonstrated accountability and transparency by disclosing financial and service related information in response to LAFCo requests.
- ❖ The County of Plumas is considering hiring a countywide fire marshal whose responsibilities may include enforcing fire code and conducting building inspections.
- ❖ A governmental structure option is detachment from the District of the area north of Frenchman Lake, which generally is not accessible during the winter.
- ❖ The District hopes to improve its operational efficiency through applying for grants and purchasing newer equipment.