

GREER RURAL FIRE DISTRICT

Community Newsletter, July 2024



To Be or Not to Be?

That was the question posed at the GRFD community meeting on June 28th in Greer Park.

To be an active and functional fire district, with a Fire Chief and a fire department of our own - or not. To accept the status quo and dissolve the fire district, or to rally around an effort to make this work for the 3rd time in our history. **How should we decide?**

Jenne Byrne and Mike Thacker, both Commissioners of GRFD, laid out the facts, including the 28-year history of GRFD, the reasons why we should care, the problems and the opportunities we face today.

Our guests from Orofino Fire Department backed up the information presented, 20 minutes at best to Greer, longer to get up the Grade with a fully loaded water tanker. The same would apply for Weippe coming down the Grade. Looking at the specifics of the existing contracts, it was pointed out that that no-one was legally obliged to respond to a fire 2.5 miles up the Grade in July 2014, but they did. We have been fortunate to benefit from that goodwill in the past, but we cannot rely on it as times get tougher for all the fire departments.

Jenne added that Version 2 of GRFD also faltered after a land deal fell through and, more importantly, we again failed to muster enough human effort for firefighting readiness and activity, despite some early interest. It was mostly our Fire Chief plus 1, even though several more trained on the truck at the beginning. The Greer team were even last to the first fire in the district!

With thanks to all those who have volunteered and carried the fire district through the last 28 years, we need to decide right now to go forward or give up! **We stand on the verge of failure unless we can rally a new community-supported effort for Version 3 of a fire department.**

Facts About Greer Fire District:

- A taxing district of Clearwater County - 0.09% levy on homes, not bare land.
- The smallest of 10 fire districts; the only one without its own fire station or crew.
- All are volunteer based.
- **Objective: Fast first response.**
- Orofino City & Weippe are contracted to support us. CPTPA covers wildland fires.

About Greer Rural Fire District:

Commissioners:

District 1:

Mike Thacker
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District 2:

Jenne Byrne
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District 3:

Tommi Newman
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Fire Chief: VACANT

Secretary:

Marci Martin
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Treasurer:

Christine Betts
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Contact us:

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Agendas and minutes of meetings are posted on the Clearwater County website:
https://clearwatercounty.org/greer_rural_fire_district.php

28+ Years of History:

- 1996 GRFD set up after a fire in Greer
- 1996 to 2004 - V1 - no secure truck storage; vulnerable to theft & weather; lack of folks to man the truck
- 2004 - Collapsed. Contracted with Orofino and Weippe; gave equipment away
- 2014/15 - new efforts for Greer after latest fire events
- 2017- V2 - Fire Chief rallied some support; 2 fire trucks and a site; erected a mobile maintenance tent
- 2021 - Fire Chief term ends; lack of volunteers; land deal fell through
- **2024 - searching for new Fire Chief to seize new land opportunities**

We struggle with the priorities - if we build it, will they come? If we enthuse people, will they lose interest with no fire station to rally around?

There is new energy at present and the potential for more if we can rally more neighbors to this cause. One significant difference is that we have the funds to build a fire station. We have a clear goal to be fast, first response. We simply need to get there fast, assess the situation, and put water on it until the support trucks arrive. Our firefighters can train to whatever level they feel comfortable. Orofino and Weippe open their training to everyone. Over time, with an emphasis on fire safety and fire prevention, success may be measured by our team not needing to be called out at all.....we need a Fire Chief.

How do we move forward? There are 3 main options:

- 1) **Accept Defeat – disband the fire district:...**Accepts the status quo...All funds go back to Clearwater County to be spent on the roads...Would probably trigger insurance re assessments...Every household for itself... **All fire support will drop; the contracts with Orofino & Weippe will be null and void.**
- 2) **Continue with efforts to raise our own fire department, centrally located for equidistant access: ...**2 land options are available at present...Could get most homes to an insurance Class of 8, provided the fire station can be considered active BUT can we raise and sustain the human resources to be categorized as an “active” fire station?
- 3) **Continue with efforts to raise our own fire department, at either top or bottom of the Grade: ...** Clearwater County has offered land next to Greer Park. ..Land may be offered at the top of the Grade (MM8?). Land could be available at either or both locations...Could get most homes to an insurance class Class of 8 or 9, provided the fire station can be considered "active"...

Bear in mind though, **there is still no point in securing and building on any site if we don't have a Fire Chief and firefighters to man the truck.** Right now, there is no certainty of support for this summer fire season.

Next Steps

Everyone at the meeting agreed that doing nothing or disbanding the fire district makes no sense. They would like to see more about the options. The Board members committed to continue to flesh out details of the decisions regarding land and fire station options within 90 days. Everyone will be invited to the next discussion.

Feel free to call or email any one of the Board members if you have ideas that you think should be considered. (See page 1 for contact information)

**Date for the next community meeting is:
Wednesday, October 9, 2024 at Greer Park**

Treasurer\$ Report

GRFD started the year (10/1/2023) with \$59,045.52 in the bank and should end the year with about \$59,000. Levy income is capped for the year at \$7,304, the rest of our income coming from bank interest, fundraising, and a generous grant of \$1,000 from CVFDA. Expenses are on track, assuming we may close a land deal by 9/30/2024. The only significant unbudgeted amount is \$200 for storage of the fire truck. Tom & Kimille Douglass have graciously agreed to continue to store it for another year if necessary. Thank you, Tom and Kimille!

After setting aside reserves for future expenses, we should have about \$48,000 in the building fund.

Budget for FY25: Assuming a land deal can be completed in FY24, a building will be prioritized when it makes sense. A special resolution can be used to release funds from the reserves. We're early in the process. Levy income, at \$8,000, is above expectations, but the rules say you can take less but not go over. When the final numbers are released, we will re-balance our budget needs from Levy Income to local fundraising. The totals will remain the same. We will need up to \$1,500 to be raised locally. **Enthusiastic fundraisers, please step up!**

The most significant expense in value, and with a significant increase, is insurance. The ICRMP policy, that all fire districts are encouraged to have, has increased by 20%.

The full financial statements are included in the formal meeting minutes at:
https://clearwatercounty.org/greer_rural_fire_district.php

FYI Homeowners Insurance:

Homeowners in Idaho have experienced significant rate hikes over the past year, largely due to the state's increasing wildfire risk and rising home replacement costs. We found that for the customers we analyzed, the average premium that homeowners were quoted at renewal between May 2022 and May 2023 was 46% higher than the average original premium on policies we analyzed that renewed between May 2021 and May 2022.

Rising insurance costs in Idaho may be due to carriers like AIG pulling back coverage in the state due to its high wildfire risk, and higher home rebuilding costs due to sustained shortages of home construction supplies and inflation. [11]

Source: Policy Genius 2023

WANTED

Fire Chief Greer Rural Fire District

The Fire Chief is appointed by the Commissioners of GRFD and is responsible for planning, directing, and evaluating the organizations, general administration and efficient operations of the Greer Fire Department (GFD), in accordance with all relevant federal and state laws, including:

- * Lead definition of what resources - people, equipment, vehicles, buildings etc. are required to fulfill the purpose of GFD.
- * Recruit, supervise, and evaluate all employees and volunteers.
- * Plan, procure, organize, and assign equipment, and processes.
- * Maintain operational readiness - manage call-out rota, radio holdings, fire station, mobile equipment and all other firefighting assets,
- * Know the community, encourage good fire prevention behavior and knowledge of what to do in a crisis.
- * Report monthly to Commissioners re: emergency responses and expenses incurred.
- * Manage and report on financial elements of the operation.
- * Represent GRFD in Clearwater Fire Chiefs group.
- * Attend training, conferences and conventions to keep abreast of modern fire-fighting methods and administration.

* Last updated: June 2024



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