

BACKGROUND AND HISTORY OF GREER RURAL FIRE DISTRICT 1996-2021

Greer is one of those places in Idaho that thrived in its early days, recorded in 1898 as a townsite, but faded to a small village with time. It flourished as a connection point between the railway on the prairie to the south and the goldfields on the Palouse to the north. A ferry connected the two narrow, steep windy roads at the bottom of the Clearwater River canyon. A railway line connected Greer to the west and to the east.

In its early days Greer had a hotel, restaurant, 2 hardware stores, a telephone exchange, post office, school, livery stable, and other amenities to serve the town and goldfields. However, just before 1920, a fire broke out and destroyed about half the town. It started in the hay of the livery stable and spread via cloth insulation on the phone wires.

By the mid-1990's, the people who had experienced the fire were nearly all gone, but the story lingered. Fortunately, the townsite and surrounding homes up hill had not been threatened by fire again – until one late night in the winter when an old cabin in the townsite caught fire from an overheated wood stove. By word of mouth the townspeople were alerted and came to help, but 2 garden hoses on a 5 gpm well were no match for the flames. Fortunately, the night was still, and the fire did not spread to surrounding buildings. However, the fire impressed people enough to take action.

In 1996 a meeting was called at the old hotel and café (a survivor of the Big Fire) to discuss forming a fire district. In the next election, the vote in favor of formation was nearly unanimous, with only 1 negative vote. There was much enthusiasm for the district, but also a dearth of able-bodied firefighters. A proper fire truck was brought from California, but inadequate storage left it vulnerable to theft and to freezing. Self-contained breathing apparatus and boots were stolen off the truck. The pump froze and cracked. The district also had a tanker, and ultimately both trucks were housed in private garages. In 2004, because of the difficulties of housing the trucks and having trained people to man them, Greer Rural Fire District decided to contract for fire protection with two neighboring, highly functional fire departments, Orofino and Weippe, and to give the trucks to other departments.

New housing up the canyon has brought new talent and energy to the Fire District but also expanded the need for fire response. Two separate incidents, a house fire in a newly constructed home and an encroaching major wildfire, have rekindled interest in our fire protection. We now have a fire chief and volunteers to man 2 trucks, which are stationed on highway 11 grade, halfway up the hill, but we need a permanent building to shelter the trucks, for a place to train, and for a place for the community to meet.

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