

CHAPTER 2

LOCAL HEROES:

THE VOLUNTEER

FIRE DEPARTMENTS

OF MENDOCINO COUNTY

LOCAL FIRE DEPARTMENTS: MODELS OF SERVICE AND SACRIFICE

Mendocino County owes very much to its local fire agencies, many of which are staffed completely by volunteers and whose personnel are often the first to arrive at wildland fires and other emergencies. Most of these agencies are in Fire Protection Districts (FPDs) or Community Services Districts (CSDs) which are governed by elected boards of directors and have authority to levy taxes to support their work.

Only 3 of the county's 21 local fire agencies have paid firefighters or a chief on duty around the clock: the Ukiah City Fire Department, with 5-6 firefighters on duty at a time for calls within the Ukiah city limits; the Ukiah Valley Fire District, which serves the greater Ukiah Valley area with 2 paid firefighters on duty at a time; and the Redwood Valley-Calpella Fire District, which has paid Chief Officer staffing of one person 24 hours a day. The rest of the departments' coverage outside of weekday business hours is on a volunteer basis.

The map at the end of this chapter shows the locations and boundaries of these districts. Areas adjacent to a district but not included in it are referred to as the agency's "sphere of influence." Although they pay no taxes or fees, people in these areas still receive services, because the county's emergency responders never refuse to help someone in need. As is noted repeatedly in this chapter, however, such situations can become very frustrating to cash-strapped departments and can be a source of irritation to those who pay their share for emergency services. Most departments supplement their tax base income with at least one major fundraiser a year – usually barbeques with live music, which are well-supported, extremely popular social events.

Fires in wildlands, structures, vehicles, dumpsters, and similar situations account for only 10% to 20% of the calls to which local agencies respond. Medical aid calls are by far in the majority – an average of 80% for most departments -- with traffic accidents and other rescue situations following. Consequently, county firefighters undergo training in medical response, extricating patients from vehicles, responding to hazardous materials ("haz mat") incidents, and a variety of other emergency skills – thus the common term "Fire-Rescue." A high percentage of volunteers are First Responders or Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs), both of which require significant training. Fire departments on the coast are often called to assist in cliff rescues and other water-related emergencies and have equipment and volunteers to meet that need.

Firefighter training or "drill" in most of the county's departments involves one night a week plus additional trainings on weekends. Firefighters often train with other departments,

especially on training burns, in which abandoned buildings or wildland fields are burned for training purposes. Some firefighters travel out of county to obtain training and certification in specialized fields. In addition, trainings are brought into the county. An example is the 40-hour Wildland Fire Academy held in Ukiah for two weekends in April 2005, during which 50 firefighters (including the MCFSC Executive Director) received introductory hands-on training in all aspects of wildland fire behavior, suppression tools and techniques, and firefighter safety.

The County Training Officers – see www.mendocinocountyfiretrainingofficers.com – meet regularly. The County Fire Chiefs’ Academy, held every January through March for new volunteers or those needing a refresher, consists of a demanding 10 to 20 hours of training each weekend for 12 weeks. Classes are hosted by departments around the county and taught mostly by volunteers. Costs of travel and accommodations are usually borne by the students – just one example of the sacrifices made by the County’s volunteer firefighters.

The Mendocino County Fire Chiefs’ Association, which includes both local and CDF chiefs, meets on the second Wednesday of every other month and is newly headed, as of November 2005, by Fort Bragg Fire Chief Steve Orsi. Attendees include representatives of other County emergency services: CALSTAR, Coastal Valleys Emergency Medical Services, Office of Emergency Services, Redwood Empire Hazardous Incident Team (REHIT), California Highway Patrol, County Sheriff’s Office, and most recently the Fire Safe Council.

Mendocino County has an extraordinarily strong and effective mutual aid system, among all agencies and for all types of emergency response. Local fire departments are quick to assist each other and CDF, and vice versa, most often within the Mutual Aid Zones around which this Plan is organized, but beyond those as needed. In August 2005, the Fisher Fire in timber in the county’s southwest corner attracted a strike team of “immediate need” local fire department engines outside of Mutual Aid Zone boundaries. On wildfires, CDF and local firefighters, paid and volunteer, work side by side as equals, all in yellow Nomex fire resistant clothing and barely distinguishable from each other in appearance and skill. On medical aid calls, local fire departments, local ambulance services, CDF, and CALSTAR’s or REACH’s emergency transport helicopters all work as one team.

In sum, the combination of paid and volunteer staff provides excellent emergency response services to the county’s residents and those visiting or passing through. Mutual Aid Zone coordinators are Chiefs Jeff Smith of Little Lake Fire (Zone 1), Dan Grebil of Ukiah Valley Fire (Zone 2), Robert Beacon of Greenwood Ridge (Zone 3), and Steve Orsi of Fort Bragg Fire (Zone 4). As of November 2005, Chief Grebil is the new Mendocino Operational Area Fire & Rescue Mutual Aid Coordinator, taking over the reins from Chief Orsi.

THE VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENTS

A description of each of Mendocino County's local fire agencies follows, listed by alphabetical order within each Mutual Aid Zone. Data and comments were provided primarily by their Chiefs. Note: Insurance Service Office (ISO) ratings are assigned to localities by the insurance industry according to their fire suppression capabilities, available water supply, and other factors, with a rating of 1 indicating the best possible situation. Homeowners' fire insurance costs are calculated in part according to these ratings.

MUTUAL AID/ PLANNING ZONE 1

BROOKTRAILS FIRE DEPARTMENT, under Chief Daryl Schoeppner's leadership, is part of the Brooktrails Township Community Services District. Its 20 volunteers include 11 Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) who serve 4200 residents and 1750 homes in heavy forest fuels covering 7.5 square miles. Calls per year average 300, five of which are wildfires; and Fire Prevention Officer Captain Jon Noyer heads an aggressive weed abatement program to reduce the impact of these. The Chief, Captain, and a part-time office assistant are the only paid personnel. Six pieces of equipment, including a new Ferrara Type 1 structure protection engine, one Type 2 engine, one Type 3 wildland engine, one squad (a sturdy pickup with a small pumper and water supply), a reserve Type 1 engine, and a water tender (tanker), are deployed from two stations. Insurance Service Office (ISO) ratings are 5 within the district and 9 outside; the rating of 5 is due to the abundance of water and an excellent system of fire hydrants.

One of the department's valued members is Eddie the Arson Dog, a beautiful Golden Retriever who is one of only 100 dogs in the United States certified by the Canine Accelerant Detection Association to the level that evidence from his work is admissible in court. Eddie is available to assist outside his area – "will work for food!" -- and may be reached at (707) 459-4441 or firedept@btcsd.org.

Chief Schoeppner and Captain Noyer, with input from their local Fire Safe Council, CDF, and others, have recently accomplished a milestone for their densely-populated area with limited evacuation routes: the printing of full-color, glossy evacuation brochures with maps. The brochures, funded by the Community Services District, were mailed to all District households in August 2005, and are available on-line at www.btcsd.org; go to the fire department link.

COVELO FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT, led by Chief Bill Baker, serves 50 square miles and 3200 residents in the Round Valley area, near the Mendocino National Forest.

Responders include 21 volunteers, of whom 12 are EMTs and 2 are First Responders. Medical calls are numerous. An ambulance service with 2 Basic Life Support (BLS) units is part of the district, whose medical response area extends from the 8-mile bridge on Highway 162, to the Tehama County line, to the Trinity County line, and to the top of Forest Highway 7 in the National Forest. More than 600 Round Valley residents are CALSTAR subscribers, paying \$55 per year to be eligible for helicopter transport services for no cost beyond their insurance coverage. The nonprofit CALSTAR is truly a God-send for this and other remote areas from which ground transport would take much more than the maximum “Golden Hour” within which to save the lives of persons in critical need of hospital care.

The only persons reimbursed for services are the Fire Chief and the records billing officer, both part-time. Response equipment is 1 water tender, 2 Type 1 heavy engines, 2 Type 3 wildland engines, 2 Type 1 ambulances, and 1 chief’s “squad” pickup truck with a 150-gallon tank. A new Type 3 engine will arrive later this year, as will a Type 3 ambulance. Calls total about 670 a year, with 60% of the 70 fires being in the wildland. The District’s ISO rating is 9 for businesses and 8 for residential areas. Current concerns are the closing by the Department of Fish and Game of a critical fire access road, and that fact that most of the many calls to the Indian Tribes in the Valley are not reimbursed. Chief Baker may be reached at (707) 983-6719 or covelofire@pacific.net.

LEGGETT VALLEY FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT, headed by Chief Ely Reighter and Captain Steven Doyle, is located in the county’s north-northwestern corner, where Highway 101 and Highway 1 converge. During the period when Piercy’s fire department was not functioning, Leggett’s all-volunteer department of 9 firefighters responded to many of Piercy’s calls as well. Lack of funding is a major concern. The county contributes \$18,000 a year, but the district’s tax base is very small. Funding for a long-awaited new four-wheel-drive wildland fire engine was awarded through a federal Assistance to Firefighters grant, and the unit will be delivered in January 2006. Gaining the required 10% match amount for the engine took significant effort and funds from many sources.

Until the new engine arrives, the department’s resources consist of only a very old CDF Type 3 engine, a federal excess 3000-gallon water tender, and a 4-wheel-drive rescue unit which carries up to five volunteers, the “jaws of life” tool for extricating trapped passengers, and other emergency rescue equipment. Traffic accidents account for a large percentage of calls, at approximately 50 per year, out of a total of 120 calls. Four to five small vegetation fires and one or two structure fires occur in most years, and the balance of calls are medical aids. The area’s ISO rating is 9. The department may be reached at leggettfire@gmail.com.

LITTLE LAKE FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT, headed by Chief Jeff Smith and located in the center of the County, serves both the City of Willits and the surrounding areas, and is funded by property taxes, a special fire tax, and fundraisers. The District encompasses 380 square miles and over 10,000 residents. Three paid personnel are the Chief, training

officer Carl Magann, and mechanic John Thomen. Of the 37 volunteer firefighters, the average age is 35, but some have up to 35 years of fire experience. The department boasts two stations housing a 75' ladder truck, 5 engines, a 4000-gallon water tender, 2 quick-attacks, 1 command unit, 1 utility, 1 hazardous materials (haz mat) unit, and a swift water rescue unit. Volunteers include one paramedic and 15 EMTs, and the rest are First Responders. Of the 600 annual emergency responses, about 50, or 12%, are to wildfires. Personnel respond to many vehicle accidents outside the district, especially on Highways 101 and 20, which intersect in Willits and see heavy tourist traffic. Assistance to emergency calls in the area just south of Willits is also supplied by the Ridgewood Ranch Volunteers, who live in the beautiful pastoral area which was once home to the famous race horse Seabiscuit.

The District's ISO rating is 4 inside the City of Willits and in outlying areas with hydrants, and a Rural 8 in outlying areas within 5 miles of the stations. Within the boundaries of the District are BLM lands, two Indian Rancherias, a large wildlife habitat at the north end of the valley, and three subdivisions of special concern: Pine Mountain Estates, the Ridgewood Subdivision, and the String Creek Subdivision. Due to the District's high fire risk, there is a strong need for planning requirements more stringent than those currently used by the County Planning and Building Department or imposed by California Public Resources Code section 4290. Chief Smith may be reached at (707) 459-6271 or willitsfire@sbcglobal.net.

LONG VALLEY FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT, led by Chief Jim Little and locally known as the Laytonville Fire Department, has 26 dedicated volunteers, 15 of them EMTs, who respond to 425 calls per year, of which 20 are wildfires. Chief Little is also Chief Forester for Harwood Products in Branscomb and a member of the County Planning Commission. Two paramedics are paid staff 8 hours a day with a 16 hours a day callback. Equipment includes 5 engines, 1 rescue unit, and 2 Advanced Life Support (ALS) ambulances, located at the main station in Laytonville and a second station in Branscomb to the west. One of the county's three California Office of Emergency Services (OES) fire engines is located at the Laytonville station. Having one of these engines brings the responsibility of providing firefighters to respond with the engine when an OES strike team is requested. The District includes 250 square miles and 3000 residents, with an additional 1000 in the extended sphere of influence.

Areas of special concern to fire personnel are the Nature Conservancy's Wilderness Lodge and the subdivisions of Ten Mile Creek, Woodman Canyon, Jack of Hearts Creek, and Cherry Creek. The department serves the large Bell Springs area without reimbursement. ISO ratings are 5 in Laytonville proper, 9 in areas beyond five miles from the station, and 10 outside the district. The department may be contacted at (707) 984-6055 or laytfire@mcn.org.

PIERCY FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT, headed by Chief Robert Kirk, is a story of perseverance and success. Located just south of the Humboldt County Line in the county's

far northwestern corner, the district encompasses only 8 square miles but serves the traffic on Highway 101, at least 200 residents beyond its boundaries, and Richardson Grove State Park without reimbursement. The department experienced a break in service in 2004-2005 due in part to burnout of its volunteers after responding to a series of terrible highway accidents. Several Piercy residents, however, rallied by resident Jeff Hedin, refused to be defeated and began serious efforts to re-establish service. Mr. Hedin eloquently presented the district's plight to the County Supervisors at their workshop on local fire departments in February 2005; see the last section of this chapter for details on that event.

Piercy's efforts have been successful. As of August 2005, the district is functioning again, and enthusiasm is continuing to build. Nine volunteers, all of whom are First Responders, plus a volunteer mechanic and volunteer secretary, serve the area. Interestingly, only half of these actually live inside the district. Mr. Hedin notes that they would like to expand the district's boundaries to include several WUI housing developments, but the cost of related elections would be higher than the benefit gained. The County contributes \$8,000 to the district each year, and the musical Reggae on the River and the motorcycle Redwood Run events contribute significant donations in exchange for provision of emergency services.

Equipment includes a Type 3 wildland engine, a Type 1 engine, and a small "quick attack" vehicle. A small grant was recently received for much-needed personal protective equipment, which is now being purchased. The department responds to about 20 calls per year, of which 10% are wildfires. A location of special wildfire concern is BLM's Red Mountain area to the southeast. Chief Kirk may be reached at (707) 247-3449, 247-3020, or rkirk@humboldt.net.

WHALE GULCH VOLUNTEER FIRE COMPANY, headed by Chief Leif Larson, is located in the far northwestern corner of Mendocino County, west of Piercy. Due to the locations of roads in that area, Whale Gulch volunteers are dispatched from Humboldt County and work in conjunction with Humboldt County fire departments.

MUTUAL AID/PLANNING ZONE 2

HOPLAND FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT, led by Chief Hoss Milone and Assistant Chief Steve Leonard, serves 5000 residents across 110 square miles, plus an additional sphere of influence of 1200 residents on another 100 square miles. Of 300 calls per year, about 10 are to wildfires. Personnel respond from three locations: the main station in downtown Hopland, the Retech engineering complex several miles north, and the CDF fire station on Highway 101 north of Hopland. Land for a much-needed new fire station has been obtained on the southwest edge of town and construction should begin in 2006.

The only paid position is one part-time Captain. Currently, out of an authorized 24 volunteers, only 15 positions are filled. Five volunteers are EMTs and 7 are First Responders. Fire equipment includes 4 engines, 1 rescue unit, 1 utility pickup, and 1 water tender. ISO ratings are 7 within the community of Hopland itself and 8 in the rural areas. Areas of special concern regarding wildfires are McNab Ranch and the Hopland Indian Rancheria, plus the Bell Track and Russian River Estates WUI communities. The department's major needs are additional funding and more volunteers available during daytime hours. Chiefs Milone and Leonard may be reached at (707) 744-1222 or hoplandvfd@pacific.net.

POTTER VALLEY FIRE DEPARTMENT, headed by Chief Bill Pauli, is a nonprofit corporation providing fire protection under an agreement with the Potter Valley Community Services District. As Chief Pauli was until very recently President of the California Farm Bureau, Assistant Chief Danny Thornton has shared the department's leadership. Volunteers number 24, of which 6 are EMTs, and the department strives to ensure that at least 8 volunteers are available at any given time. The department serves 3500-4500 people spread over 275 square miles, including the portion of Mendocino National Forest within Mendocino County. Very remote areas accessed only by unpaved roads, including but certainly not limited to Sanhedrin Mountain, Hull Mountain, and Lake Pillsbury, also receive their services. Mutual aid is provided to the Upper Lake area in Lake County to the east when requested.

The apparatus fleet includes 2 structure engines, 2 Type 3 Model 1 engines, 1 Rescue, and a 4400-gallon water tender. One engine is stationed at the home of a volunteer who is usually available round the clock. The district has no fire hydrants, but the huge water tender and many agricultural ponds throughout the valley floor give the area an ISO rating of 8. Calls per year are about 143, 83% of those being medical aids. Wildfires typically number 12-14 per year and structure fires 8-10. Chief Pauli may be reached at (707) 743-1173.

REDWOOD VALLEY-CALPELLA FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT, headed by Chief Tom Hession, serves 82 square miles and 7500 residents. Its 3 paid staffers provide 24-hour Chief Officer coverage, and its 25 volunteers include 18 First Responders and 7 EMTs. Several of the volunteers work in public safety positions with other departments, some have up to 25 years of firefighting experience, and 2 volunteers and 2 young Explorers are women. Five engines, 2 rescue/medical units, 2 350-gallon patrol units, and a 2000-gallon water tender respond to approximately 500-600 calls per year, of which up to 15% are wildfires.

The district includes several Wildland-Urban Interface areas of concern. The CDF Battalion 3 report in Chapter 3 describes an effort to address the problem of life safety in the event of a large wildfire in two of the area's most problematic locations: Cave Creek and Greenfield Ranch. In some areas evacuation will not be possible, so safety zones are being identified and prepared. The heavily-fueled wildland area at the north end of Lake Mendocino is

another one of special concern to the district. ISO ratings are always an issue, and the district believes that some residences on the valley floor deserve more beneficial ratings than they currently have. Chief Hession may be contacted at (707) 485-8121 or redwoodvlyfire@pacific.net.

UKIAH FIRE DEPARTMENT, headed by Chief Kurt Latipow and Fire Marshal Chuck Yates, operates as a department of the City of Ukiah. Its response area is the 4.5 square miles and 15,060 residents within the Ukiah city limits. However, as Ukiah is the largest government, business, and services center for the county, thousands of additional persons may be in Ukiah during weekday office or shopping hours. The department has by far the largest paid staff in the county, with 18 firefighters working 56-hour shifts. Fifteen volunteers balance out the response force, which includes a total of 15 paramedics and 5 EMTs. Apparatus includes 2 engines, 1 ladder truck for reaching taller buildings, 3 ambulances, 2 patrols, and 1 rescue unit. A California Office of Emergency Services engine is located at Ukiah Fire, which boasts an ISO rating of 3.

Personnel respond to 2300 calls per year, a large majority of them medical. Areas of special concern are Low Gap Park on the city's northwestern boundary and the new homes in the highly-flammable hills to the west of the valley. The department may be contacted at (707) 463-6274 or ukiahfire@cityofukiah.com.

UKIAH VALLEY FIRE DISTRICT, under Chief Dan Grebil, responds to emergencies in 80 square miles outside the Ukiah city boundaries, including the valley floor and the surrounding hills which hold hundreds of homes scattered among heavy vegetative fuels. Seven paid staff and 26 volunteers serve 15,000 residents and respond to 1030 calls per year, of which about 3% are Local Responsibility Area wildfires. Medical calls are handled by 2 paramedics, 16 EMTs, and 5 First Responders. The district operates 5 engines, 2 rescue/support units, four utility vehicles, and a water tender – the newest addition being a brand new Type 3 wildland engine built to district specifications, their first new emergency response vehicle.

The district has two locations: a main station at the south end of town plus another at the north end, staffed primarily by CDF personnel during fire season. An excellent cooperative relationship exists with both CDF and the Ukiah Ambulance Service to provide a full complement of timely emergency response in the District. Areas of special wildfire concern in the District are the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Lake Mendocino recreational area, and BLM's Cow Mountain Recreation Area, both of which may see numerous fires each summer.

Additionally of concern are the populated Wildland-Urban Intermix areas of Greenfield Ranch, Orr Springs Road, Oak Knoll and Fircrest Drive, and Robinson Creek Road along the valley's western hills; and Redemeyer Road, Deerwood, El Dorado Estates, Vichy Springs, Vichy Hills, Rogina Heights, the City of 10,000 Buddhas, and Talmage in the eastern hills.

All these areas have severe ingress/egress problems. Further, the entire area *east* of the Russian River from Lake Mendocino south to Hopland is served by departments based *west* of the river, which could result in a cutoff of services during a major flood or earthquake. The District is currently seeking to establish a station in the Talmage area to close this gap. Chief Grebil and his staff may be reached at (707) 462-7921 or uvfd@mcn.org.

MUTUAL AID/ PLANNING ZONE 3

ANDERSON VALLEY FIRE DEPARTMENT, headed by Chief Colin Wilson, is part of a Community Services District. The District covers 200 square miles and 4000 residents, and responds to about 300 calls per year, of which 20 are wildfires. Many responses are outside the district and unreimbursed. The 40 volunteer firefighters include 13 EMTs, two female captains, and a female battalion chief. The Chief is the only employee, and two volunteers staff the office. ISO ratings are 5 in downtown Boonville and 8 in most of the rest of the district. Equipment includes 14 engines, 2 rescue/ medical units, 2 water tenders, 1 utility, and 1 patrol stationed at 9 locations throughout the district.

Wildland-Urban Interface areas (WUIs) of special concern include Rancho Navarro and Holmes, Sky, Yorkville, and Nash Ranches. The fire department is working closely with MCFSC to develop contacts in the valley's 20-plus WUI communities (see Appendix B); and department staff regularly conduct public education programs with individual property owners and subdivisions. The department is very proactive in encouraging development of private or community water supplies for fire suppression. The MCFSC's first vegetation management project, the Little Mill Creek Sheltered Fuel Break, is located at the north end of the district; a description of that project is given in the Battalion 5 report in Chapter 3. The department may be reached at (707) 895-2020 or avvfd@pacific.net.

ELK VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT, headed by Chief Jeff Roy, is located on the coast near the intersection of Highway 1 and the Philo-Greenwood Road and boasts 21 volunteers, including 7 EMTs. The average age of these dedicated volunteers is 50 years, and their average length of service in the department is 10 years. Department apparatus is 5 engines, 2 rescue units, and one BLS ambulance, stationed at 5 locations. About 80% of the department's funding comes from a property tax assessment on the district's 50 square miles and 400 residents, and the balance comes from fundraisers and donations.

Many volunteers work in towns outside the district, so the need is great for more persons available during the week. The ambulance successfully bills only about 5 transports a year, and reimbursement for providing mutual aid is rare. The District includes two state parks and much difficult terrain. Of the department's 70 calls a year, about 5% are to wildfires. The department recently successfully retained their ISO ratings of 7 in the town of Elk and 9 in the outlying areas. Chief Roy may be reached at (707) 877-3558 or jeffroy@mcn.org.

REDWOOD COAST FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT, led by Chief Mike Suddith, serves approximately 170 square miles on and near the coast. The district is currently working with the county's Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) to annex the Irish Beach fire district just to the north, and has already taken over that district's functions. Fifteen volunteers include 2 paramedics, 9 EMTs, and 4 First Responders; and the chief receives a part-time salary for administrative duties. Two Type 1 engines, 2 Type 2s, 1 Type 3, 2 rescue units, and one water tender make up the fleet and are located at two stations: one in Manchester and one in the City of Point Arena, to whose 500 residents the district provides emergency services. The ISO rating is 8 in Point Arena and Irish Beach where there are hydrants, and 9 in outlying areas.

The department responds to an average of 180 calls per year, 145 of which are medical in nature, and provides automatic aid to the South Coast Fire District. The area has an average of 10 wildfires per season. Of special fire concern are the area's state beaches and parks and all the district's ridges, which have not seen fire in 30 to 40 years and are "primed to burn." Chief Suddith may be contacted at (707) 882-1833 or suddith@usa.net.

SOUTH COAST FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT, headed by Chief Leighton Nelsen, is located at the far southwest corner of the county and includes approximately 25 square miles. Its sphere of influence extends 14 miles out Fish Rock Road to the east – an area that was the center of attention in late August 2005 when a fire in 100 acres of heavy commercial timber attracted several air tankers and heavy helicopters plus a large quantity of ground resources. The district's equipment is based at stations in Gualala, Anchor Bay, Iversen Ridge, and Ocean Ridge, and includes 3 Type 1 engines, 3 Type 3 engines, and 3 water tenders.

Of 22 volunteers, 3 are young Explorers who train and serve along with their parents. Seven volunteers are EMTs and 15 are certified First Responders. Medical aid calls, which account for 80% of the district's 185 calls per year, provide mutual aid to the Coast Life Support District, which has a training center in Gualala and serves the south coast round the clock. Three to four special trainings per year plus bi-weekly evening trainings keep district volunteers up to date on their skills. The lack of defensible space around homes is a major concern, as is the region's change from old growth redwood and fir forests to trees and vegetation that are much more flammable, including pine forests now dying because they have reached maturity. Chief Nelsen and his firefighters may be reached at (707) 884-4700 or leighton@mcn.org.

The **GREENWOOD RIDGE** area inland of Elk is home to a volunteer fire company which owns heavy equipment for fire suppression. This company is headed by Chief Robert Beacon, who may be reached at (707) 877-3311 or GWR7200@ISP.com.

MUTUAL AID/PLANNING ZONE 4

ALBION-LITTLE RIVER FIRE DEPARTMENT, headed by Chief Oliver Seeler, is a nonprofit corporation operating in conjunction with the Albion-Little River Fire Protection District. The district, which has no paid staff, includes 44 beautiful square miles on the central coast and protects 3000 permanent residents and typically another 3000 visitors. Of their 21 volunteers, 8 are EMTs; in fact, this district was the first on the coast to provide EMT services. Their 9 response vehicles placed at 5 locations respond to just under 200 calls a year, of which typically about 8 are wildfires. The District's ISO Insurance ratings are 8 and 7, and its personnel work diligently to maintain them.

Response to wildfires is extremely aggressive -- and must be -- because the closest CDF resource is outside the district, at the Woodlands station east of Mendocino. The department is proud of their record of keeping wildfires small pending the arrival of other resources, and is in great need of funding and equipment to continue providing this response: their one wildfire response engine was recently retired because of safety problems. Areas of concern regarding wildfire and other safety issues include Paul Dimmick State Park eight miles inland, the Navarro Headlands, and The Woods, a retirement community bordering Van Damme State Park, which is heavily loaded with untreated wildland fuels. The department may be contacted at (707) 937-0888 or info@albionfire.com.

COMPTCHE VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT, headed by Chief Larry Tunzi, is a small tax district of 50 square miles and 600 residents located nine miles inland of the town of Mendocino. An additional 100 residents in the sphere of influence receive round-the-clock services free of charge. Sixteen volunteers, several of whom are women, respond to 40 calls a year, 10% of them wildfires. Twelve volunteers are First Responders and 2 are EMTs. Equipment includes 3 engines, 2 rescue/medical units, and 2 water tenders at one station. The District's ISO rating is an 8.

Comptche faces two situations common to most departments in the county's rural areas. 1) Most volunteers work in towns outside the district, causing a need for more volunteers available during the week. 2) Increasing regulations and costs are a burden on the department and make the job of volunteer firefighters a difficult one. But they continue to serve their community. Chief Tunzi and his team may be reached at (707) 937-0728 or comptchefire@pacific.net.

FORT BRAGG FIRE DEPARTMENT operates under a Joint Powers Agreement between the City of Fort Bragg and the surrounding Fire District. Four paid staff are Chief Steve Orsi, Fire Marshal Steve Wells, a secretary, and a maintenance person. Chief Orsi serves as a liaison between the California Office of Emergency Services (OES) and local fire departments; and Steve Wells is Committee Chair of the County Fire Chiefs' Training Officers' section. Of the 40 volunteers plus 4 staff, 1 is a Paramedic, 25 are EMTs, and 16

are First Responders. Nine engines and one rescue unit are located at two stations: in downtown Fort Bragg, where the county's third Office of Emergency Services engine is located, and on Highway 20 to the east.

The department serves 75 square miles and approximately 15,000 residents. Call volume is 600 to 700 a year, a very small percentage of which are wildfires. Response without reimbursement is most often to traffic accidents on Highway 20. State parks and beaches in the response area are occasionally the site of cliff rescues. Several areas surrounding the city border on heavy timberlands. ISO ratings are 5 in the City and 8b in the rural areas. The "Steve and Steve" team may be reached at (707) 961-2831 or fbfire@mcn.org.

MENDOCINO VOLUNTER FIRE DEPARTMENT is led by Chief Steve Schlafer and Fire Marshal Jeff Wall. The district covers both an historic coastal business district and numerous homes in WUI subdivisions and along roads surrounded by heavy vegetation. Public lands administered by State Parks and CalTrans are located inside the district boundaries, and these too contain high hazard fuels. A new fire station, the location of the central coast Fire Plan community meeting, recently replaced an old traditional station in this picturesque community.

The department has 31 volunteers responding to about 250 calls per year, 80% of which are medical calls and traffic accidents. Cliff and boat rescues are frequent, and the department has two inflatable boats, two kayaks, and two jet skis for this work. ISO ratings are 9 for commercial properties and 8 for residential. The lower ratings are due to the lack of a public water system and hydrants in Mendocino; however, two large tenders carry water to fires. Chief Schlafer and his team may be reached at (707) 937-0131 or mvfd@mcn.org.

WESTPORT VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT, under Chief Beck Regalia and Assistant Chief David Doriot, is the story of a fire department figuratively risen from the ashes. Problems had plagued the department for years, and a complete reorganization was begun in early 2005. Coached and trained by CDF Battalion Chief Jim Davis, the Westport Volunteer Fire Department has been revitalized by 18 firefighters, most of them new to the world of emergency response. Davis and the firefighters have devoted a huge amount of time to fire and medical training – 5 are now EMTs and 6 are First Responders -- as well as refurbishing the fire station and building a new apparatus bay. In June Chief Davis handed the baton to Regalia and Doriot following a Department election.

The Westport department is the only one in the county with no authority to levy taxes to support its work. It is formally organized under the Westport County Water District but receives no funding from it. Further, 90% of its responses are to areas outside the water district boundaries, and the department receives no reimbursement for calls. At the Fire Safe Council community meeting on May 4, establishment of a fire district was the top priority.

Two engines, 1 rescue unit, and 1 water tender respond to 50 calls per year, of which 4-6 are wildfires, serving 50-60 residents inside the district and an additional 300 in their 100-square-mile sphere of influence. Of special concern are the Westport Beach RV Campground with 175 spaces, and Westport Union Landing State Park with 100 spaces, both of which are usually full in the summer; plus the Sinkyone Wilderness Area to the north. Many homes are scattered on the fire-prone hills outside of town, and a subdivision north of town is growing rapidly. Most houses are on single access roads, do not have adequate defensible space, and are not near adequate water supply for fire suppression. The Chief and Assistant Chief may be reached at (707) 964-3254 or 964-5135, or cheezhdnv@cs.com.

THE CHIEFS' CONCERNS

On February 28, 2005, the Mendocino County Board of Supervisors hosted a workshop during which local fire chiefs expressed their departments' needs. Supervisor Hal Wagenet had initiated planning for this workshop several months earlier, before becoming a Director of the MCFSC, due to his concern about the demise of some local volunteer fire departments and the shrinking number of volunteers in others.

The main issues facing local fire departments were identified as follows:

- Diminishing numbers of younger, able-bodied volunteer firefighters available in rural areas due to two main causes: a) skyrocketing housing costs which prohibit younger families from purchasing or even renting homes in rural areas, and b) lack of employment in the same areas. A case in point is the Leggett and Piercy area, many of whose younger adults commute north to Humboldt County to work and are not available to respond in northern Mendocino County during the daytime.
- Ever-increasing laws and regulations imposed upon local fire departments by the state legislature and other governmental entities. The most sweeping and difficult of these in recent years were imposed by Senate Bill 1207 (Romero, 2001), which requires, among other things, that volunteer firefighters undergo the same level of training as paid firefighters. This legislation, apparently well-intentioned for safety purposes, in essence requires volunteer firefighters to be in training all weekend, every weekend, without pay. This is, of course, impossible for men and women who have families and fulltime employment. The heightened requirements and liability resulting from such unfunded mandates have demoralized and embittered some local volunteer fire chiefs nearly to the point of resigning.
- Lack of funds to replace aging and obsolete equipment necessary for both firefighter safety and effective fire suppression. Many departments are dependent on grants from the federal Assistance to Firefighters program for the purchase of fire engines, protective gear, and other costly equipment. In the past the Mendocino Emergency

Services Authority (County OES) was very pro-active in obtaining grant funding for radios and other equipment for emergency services agencies, but that office is not currently active. Departments fortunate enough to receive grants for fire engines still face the requirement to raise 10% to 25% of the total amount as a “match.”

- A large number of emergency calls for which costs are not recovered. These are primarily of two kinds, about which details were given above:
 - a) Traffic collisions involving non-residents. Highways 101, 20, 253, 128, and Highway 1 on the coast all see numerous traffic accidents per month. As these roads are major arteries for tourists, a good percentage of their accidents involve persons from out of county; and response costs of local fire agencies may not be recoverable.
 - b) Calls to fires and medical aids outside of taxing districts. Local fire personnel routinely respond to emergency calls outside of their districts – and outside of any district -- from a sense of duty. Such services are essentially provided free of charge.
- The requirement of all special districts to complete Municipal Service Reviews every five years. These MSR's require time and the payment of fees beyond the capability of most rural fire districts. But if no current MSR exists, no development whatsoever may be allowed in the district. Frank McMichael of the Mendocino County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) is working with the districts to reduce these costs as much as possible.

Following the workshop, a Task Force of local fire chiefs, plus Supervisors Hal Wagenet and Jim Wattenburger, was established to address these issues. Future versions of this Plan will report on the Task Force's progress.

In June 2005 the Mendocino County Grand Jury issued a report on seven rural fire districts in the county. Their findings, remarkably similar to those identified in this chapter, may be found at www.co.mendocino.ca.us/grandjury/pdf/SevenFireDistricts.6.22.5.pdf.

Local Government Districts

