

# WOLF CREEK RURAL FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT STRATEGIC PLAN

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*Prepared for:*

**Wolf Creek Rural Fire Protection District**  
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## STRATEGIC PLAN PURPOSE

The Wolf Creek Rural Fire Protection District (WCRFPD) strategic plan is intended to help direct the District's efforts for fire protection. The WCRFPD strategic plan will serve as a living document that is referenced and updated as needed so that it maintains its relevance and functions as a useful management tool for the District.

Resource Innovations at the University of Oregon helped to develop the structure for the WCRFPD strategic plan after a careful examination of other strategic plans from rural fire departments both nationally and internationally, as well as the WCRFPD 2004 action plan. Resource Innovations also identified strategic issues from individual interviews with WCRFPD Board members, the fire chief, and a representative of Rural/Metro Fire Department, and discussions with some of the volunteer firefighters. This input brought to light important information about the internal strengths and weaknesses of the District, as well as external opportunities and threats that it faces. Additionally, strategic planning activities focused on clearly defining participants' future goals for the District and developing specific strategies to achieve these goals.

## DISTRICT OVERVIEW

The guiding mission of the district is: **to provide significant fire protection services to the community.**

The Wolf Creek Rural Fire Protection District was created in 1977. The Wolf Creek Rural Fire Protection District (WCRFPD) covers 32 square miles of mountainous terrain, including 10 miles of Interstate I-5, and serves approximately 700 residents.<sup>1</sup> As a rural, remote district nestled in the hills of southern Oregon, the majority of WCRFPD's coverage area encompasses wildland-urban interface and intermix areas. The true cash value of the WCRFPD service area is \$16,085,000 and the true cash value of operating the district is \$2.19/\$1,000.<sup>2</sup>

The WCRFPD protects two facilities considered to be state critical infrastructure. The first critical state infrastructure is a natural gas pipeline that carries over 3,000 billion cubic feet (bcf) of natural gas. This pipeline crosses two roadways within the district and supplies gas for the entire southern Oregon region with a population of over 300,000 residents. The second piece of the state critical infrastructure that the WCRFPD is responsible for is the primary access to the King Mountain telecommunications facility located at the top of King Mountain, Oregon. The facility contains several transmitters including several television stations, commercial/public radio, cell phone, and transmitter operated by the Federal Aviation Administration. The WCRFPD is by far the closest responder available to serve the King Mountain facility.

## MUTUAL AID

The WCRFD receives and gives local mutual aid to Rural/Metro Fire Department, American Medical Response, and the Grants Pass Department of Public Safety. Additionally, through the Rogue Valley Fire Chief's Association, a mutual aid agreement exists between all fire districts within Jackson and Josephine counties. In the event of a major emergency situation, the WCRFPD could potentially receive assistance from agencies throughout the state through Oregon's Conflagration Act.

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<sup>1</sup> Josephine County Integrated Fire Plan, November 2004

<sup>2</sup> Oregon Fire Service Resource Directory, 2004, [http://egov.oregon.gov/OOHS/SFM/docs/Data\\_Services/Reports/2004\\_RD.pdf](http://egov.oregon.gov/OOHS/SFM/docs/Data_Services/Reports/2004_RD.pdf)

## EQUIPMENT

The WCRFPD has made major improvements to its equipment over the past 10 years, including replacing an old pumper and water tender and acquiring a Quick Response Truck. The District currently has 5 vehicles staged in its station, including a 3,000 gallon water tender, two Type I engines and one Type VI engine. One vehicle is equipped with rescue tools and 3 feature emergency medical services capabilities. Additionally, the engines have a total of 6 Self Contained Breathing Apparatuses (SCBAs). See more detailed information regarding the District's apparatuses in Tables 1, 2, and 3 below.

**Table 1. Engine**

Apparatus #	Type	Pump GPM	Tank Gallons	Supply Hose Size	Supply Hose Length	SCBA Brand	SCBA PSI	Quantity	Rescue tool	EMS
5901	1		1000	2 ½"					No	
5902	1	1240	1000	2 ½ "		Scott	2216	4	No	Yes
5930	6		230	2 ½"	50'	Scott	2216	1	Yes	Yes
5960			500			Scott	2216	1	No	Yes

**Table 2. Tender**

Apparatus #	Type	Pump GPM	Tank Gallons	Port-a-Tank	Transfer Method
5940			3000	Yes	Pump/Quick Dump

**Table 3. Apparatus Misc.**

Apparatus #	Type	Description
5970		Support Services

## STAFF

The WCRFPD is a small, volunteer-run department with eleven volunteer firefighters, including the fire chief. Four of these volunteers are trained as "First Responders" and two have completed Basic Emergency Medical Technician training.<sup>3</sup> Currently, the Fire Chief receives a modest monthly stipend to support his efforts. In addition, the WCRFPD Board considers the development of a paid, part-time position for a Financial Officer as a necessary next step for the District in order to alleviate financial management difficulties.

Four community members currently sit on the WCRPFD Board. The District filled one additional position during the completion of this document.

## SERVICE CALLS

WCRFPD responds primarily to structural fires. Over the last 5 years, volunteers have also responded to over 100 outdoor fires, including 62 vegetative fires. Wolf Creek is a small, remote community located

<sup>3</sup> Wolf Creek Rural Fire Protection District

approximately 20 miles north of Grants Pass, Oregon. The WCRFPD is the only emergency response service available to this rural community for rapid response. The closest alternative is located 10-15 miles away.

The WCRFPD is responsible for providing emergency response services for accidents occurring between mileposts 70 and 80 on Interstate-5 (I-5). The District receives over 100 emergency calls of this nature each year. The focus of these calls ranges from providing assistance to commuters to toxic spills and fires caused by freeway traffic accidents. The section of I-5 includes 2 mountain passes, the higher of the 2 being Smith Hill at an altitude of approximately 1,730 feet. According to the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT), traffic volume in this area now averages about 22,000 vehicles per day, an increase of 10% in just the last 4 years. ODOT crash rates confirm that this section of I-5 has a higher than average crash rate as vehicles often negotiate these passes in inclement weather. In the stretch of I-5 from milepost 71 to 75 (including Smith Hill Pass), crash rates from 1991 to 2001 showed an alarming increase of 430%.<sup>4</sup> Call volumes for WCRFPD over the last several years reflect a higher proportion of accidents and fires on I-5, paralleling an increase in traffic .

## INSURANCE SERVICES OFFICE RATING

The Insurance Services Office (ISO) collects and maintains information on the fire protection capabilities of communities throughout the United States. The ISO assigns a Public Protection Classification (PPC) to communities based on their ability to suppress fires on a scale of 1 to 10. Communities with a rating of 1 are considered to have the highest degree of protection while those with a rating of 10 have the least amount of protection.<sup>5</sup> As of June 2003, the ISO Fire Hazard Rating classification for Wolf Creek as of 2003 was 8B/10.<sup>6</sup>

## CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS

The WCRFPD station is 25 years old. Due to the age of the station and the financial situation of the District, the station lacks some basic safety features. The District recently submitted a grant application to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in order to make necessary capital improvements to the station. Funding for a vehicle exhaust fume extraction system and a propane-powered generator were included in the proposal. The generator is a critical need for the District. Currently, if a power outage occurs, both the phone system and the well are inoperable, crippling the District's ability to respond to emergencies in a timely manner. The proposal budget also included funding for an emergency base station communication system that would operate regardless of power outages or disrupted phone service.

## DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF WOLF CREEK

Wolf Creek is reported to have one of the highest poverty levels of any community in Oregon. Levels of unemployment in Wolf Creek are twice as high as the state average while incomes are 60% of the state

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<sup>4</sup> Crash Analysis and Reporting, Oregon Department of Transportation, Transportation Development Division

<sup>5</sup> Insurance Services Office, Public Protection Classification, <http://www.isomitigation.com/fire1.html>

<sup>6</sup> CMC Manual Plus Community Report, Personal email communication from [DThomas@iso.com](mailto:DThomas@iso.com) (June 2005)

average.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, nearly 79% of students who attend the Wolf Creek Elementary School qualify for free or reduced lunches due to low-income levels.<sup>8</sup>

Specific census data is not available for the unincorporated community of Wolf Creek. However, a census area designated by zip code and including both Wolf Creek and Sunny Valley indicates a 2000 population of 1,586 people, 656 households, and a median age of 44.5. Of 749 housing units in this tract, the 2000 Census listed 93 units as vacant. In addition, 21.8% of the population is listed as civilian veterans, 30% of the population is on disability status, and 73.7% of female-headed households with children under 5 have incomes below the poverty level.<sup>9</sup>

These statistics illustrate the special needs and poverty issues of the people of Wolf Creek, which are imperative to consider when developing strategies to strengthen the WCRFPD. One interviewee indicated that the District has the opportunity to “unify the community.” This task may be expedited if the District has a greater understanding of the area’s demographics and economic growth trends.

## Population and Economic Growth

Census data for the year 1990 does not include geographic boundaries by zip code. Therefore, in order to make comparisons in terms of the area’s overall growth from 1990-2000, it is necessary to apply a larger geographic area. For the purposes of this comparison, census tract number 3601 will be utilized. This area includes the three small communities of Wolf Creek, Sunny Valley and Galice. In 1990, the Census reported a population of 1422 for this census tract. As of 2000, the census indicated a population of 1936 for this area.<sup>10</sup> This indicates a dramatic overall population increase of 36%.

Census data from 2000 for the tract including Wolf Creek and Sunny Valley also indicates that 12.9% of the residents had lived in another state in the Western U.S. in 1995.<sup>11</sup> Anecdotal evidence characterizes many of the new immigrants to Josephine County as wealthy. Recent increases in home sales and in area housing prices in Josephine County (median of \$230,000) at the end of 2004 support this belief.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, census data indicates that for the census tract 3601, including Wolf Creek, Sunny Valley and Galice, the median value of homes increased from \$54,500 in 1990 to \$121,600 in 2000.<sup>13</sup>

According to census data on industry in the zip code area of Sunny Valley and Wolf Creek there has been an increase in the growth of industry in the area. In 1994, there were 12 established businesses and 60 employees recognized by the census. In 2002, census data indicates 19 businesses and 73 employees.<sup>14</sup>

The available data illustrates that the community of Wolf Creek faces some significant challenges. Population and industry growth may be very beneficial to the area’s economy and to the tax base of the WCRFPD. However, growth also contributes to the risk of wildfire. Additionally, the current poverty rates

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<sup>7</sup> Office of Community Development: Best Practices 2002, USDA Rural Development <http://www.ezec.gov/>

<sup>8</sup> Schools By Poverty Levels: Oregon High-Need LEAs and High-Need Schools for USP RFP (2003-2004) <http://www.ous.edu/aca/TEpdf/highneedschools04.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Population and Demographics of zip code 97497, Sunny Valley and Wolf Creek, Census 2000, <http://www.census.gov>

<sup>10</sup> Population and Demographics of census tract 3601, Census 1990 and 2000, <http://factfinder.census.gov>

<sup>11</sup> Place of Birth and Residence in 1995 for zip code 97497, Sunny Valley and Wolf Creek, Census 2000, <http://www.census.gov>

<sup>12</sup> Median Home Prices Jump to \$230,000, Grants Pass Daily Courier, November 11, 2004

<sup>13</sup> General and Housing Characteristics, Census 1990 and Profile of Selected Housing Characteristics, Census 2000 for census tract 3601, <http://www.census.gov>

<sup>14</sup> Census County Business Patterns Data of zip code 97497, Sunny Valley and Wolf Creek, CenStats Databases, <http://censtats.census.gov/>

are alarming, especially considering the recently established connections between poverty and wildfire.<sup>15</sup> The demographics of those moving to the Wolf Creek area may also pose future challenges. Demographic information can help to inform the future planning efforts of the Wolf Creek Rural Fire Protection District.

## STRATEGIC PLAN METHODOLOGY

The WCRFPD worked with Resource Innovations at the University of Oregon and Rural/Metro Fire Department to develop a process for the strategic plan over a six-month period. The process began with research on strategic planning and the identification of existing rural fire district strategic plans for comparison. Most small, volunteer and rural fire districts do not have the resources to develop a strategic plan. The Molalla Rural Fire Protection District #73 Strategic Plan served as an example strategic plan, despite the fact that their District serves a much larger population than the WCRFPD and therefore has a much larger resource base.<sup>16</sup>

At a preliminary meeting with the WCRFPD Board of Directors and the Fire Chief in March 2005, Resource Innovations shared information gleaned from the initial research. The meeting also involved a brief introduction to strategic planning and its potential benefits for the District. All parties involved agreed to be interviewed separately in order to focus the direction of the strategic plan and identify pertinent issues.

Resource Innovations completed interviews by telephone and email with the Fire Board members, Fire Chief, and a representative from Rural/Metro Fire Department. The interview questions focused on internal strengths and weaknesses of the District as well as external opportunities and challenges that the District faces in the coming years. Participants also were asked about how the WCRFPD has changed in the past decade and about their future goals for the District. *(See Appendix A for the full list of interview questions.)*

Additionally, Resource Innovations conducted a small focus group with three volunteer firefighters and completed brief telephone interviews with seven firefighters to gain their perspective on the District's strengths and weaknesses, their ideas for improving the District, and their reasons for volunteering with the District. Common themes obtained from the interviews, email, and discussion group helped to identify seven strategic issues for the WCRFPD to focus on.<sup>17</sup>

The Board members and Fire Chief discussed the seven strategic issues at another Fire Board meeting to ensure their relevance, as well as the Fire District's commitment to working on each individual issue. After this discussion, each Board member, the Fire Chief, and a volunteer firefighter completed a dot process activity to designate their priorities. Each person was given three colored dots and was instructed to pick their top three issues by placing the dots next to the issues on a flip chart. A red dot symbolized the first priority, a green dot was used to indicate second priority and blue was used for third. The group generally agreed that communication is the most significant issue, followed by community perception and volunteer retention. Table 4 illustrates the prioritization of the strategic issues.

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<sup>15</sup> Center for Watershed and Community Health, "Wildfire and Poverty: An Overview of the Interactions Among Wildfires, Fire-Related Programs, and Poverty in the Western States," December 2001.

<sup>16</sup> Molalla Rural Fire Protection District #73 Strategic Plan, <http://www.molallafire.org/District%20Info/Strategic%20Plan/strategicplan.html#district%20overview>

<sup>17</sup> Bryson, John M., *Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations: A Guide to Strengthening and Sustaining Organizational Achievement*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1995). *This method involves a consideration of possible consequences if each issue is not addressed as well as identifying possible strategies for addressing the issues.*

**Table 4. Prioritization of the WCRFPD Strategic Issues**

Strategic Issue	Meeting Participants (9 participants)
Communication	19 points
Stabilize Organizational Structure	5 points
Policy and Procedures	2 point
Community Perception	9 points
Volunteer Retention	9 points
Financial Stability	6 points
Recognizing Limitations	4 points

Red dot=3 points Green dot=2 points Blue dot=1 point

The community of Wolf Creek is also an important stakeholder in the District’s future plans. Therefore, as a final phase of the strategic planning process, the Board formulated a list of questions to ask the community regarding its perceptions of the District (*see Appendix A for the list of questions*). Board members disseminated the questions at the 2005 WCRFPD Fire Fair and talked with about 15 people from Wolf Creek and Sunny Valley about their perspectives and concerns related to the fire district.

### ISSUES IDENTIFIED FROM THE WCRFPD STRATEGIC PLAN ACTIVITIES

The strategic issues identified from the strategic planning activities are presented here as present or future challenges that the District has the opportunity to address, along with the potential consequences of inaction, the potential solutions or actions that may be used as “next steps” to address each issue.

What is the issue?

- **What factors (mandates, mission, external and internal influences) make it a strategic issue?**
- **What are the consequences of failing to address the issue?**
- **What are the strategies for the Board to address these issues/challenges?**

#### Issue #1) Communication

**Why is this strategic?** Internal communication can make or break an organization and also affects external perceptions (e.g., how the community views the District)

**Consequences:** Increased division between the Board and volunteer firefighters results in an “us vs. them” mentality; an environment of distrust weakens an organization’s structure and effectiveness

**Strategies:** Mediation; more social opportunities to enable the Board, firefighters, and community to interact and build relationships and trust

#### Issue # 2) Stabilize Organizational Structure

**Why is this strategic?** Internal stability demands that roles and responsibilities be clearly and realistically defined; roles should focus on individual strengths

**Consequences:** Unstable organizational structure and unrealistic expectations can set an organization up for failure

**Strategies:** Delineate the responsibilities of finance and operations; hire a part-time financial officer for the financial issues

#### Issue # 3) Policy and Procedures

**Why is this strategic?** Current lack of policies and procedures related to a range of issues (personnel, equipment, etc.) makes addressing problems time-consuming

**Consequences:** Lack of well-defined policy results in the Board spending large amounts of time on small issues; lack of policy may also result in lack of accountability

**Strategies:** Adopt a manageable set of policies specific to the District's needs and size

#### Issue # 4) Community Perception of the District

**Why is this strategic?** External support is necessary for the District's survival

**Consequences:** The District is not trusted by the community; fails to recruit volunteers, and fails to gain continued financial support

**Strategies:** Host more community gatherings with the Board and firefighters; retain more volunteers; educate the public

#### Issue # 5) Volunteer Retention

**Why is this strategic?** A stable volunteer base is needed to achieve the District mission

**Consequences:** The District may lose volunteers and be unable to meet future service demands

**Strategies:** Improved intra-agency communication and relations; enhanced volunteer coordination; volunteer incentives as well as regular recognition

#### Issue # 6) Financial Stability

**Why is this strategic?** Sufficient funding is necessary to meet growing demands for services

**Consequences:** The District cannot sustain an adequate level of service; this increases community distrust of the District

**Strategies:** Identify and pursue grants; bill non-patrons for services

#### Issue # 7) Recognize Limitations

**Why is this strategic?** A clearly defined and relevant "scope of practice" is important for success

**Consequences:** The size and tax base of the District limit its possibilities; an all-volunteer agency cannot expect to provide the same level of service as a larger, paid department; high expectations that cannot met lead to eventual burnout of volunteers

**Strategies:** Define the services and abilities of the District considering its current financial state and demographics

## ISSUES IDENTIFIED BY THE WCRFPD FIREFIGHTERS

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The initial firefighter discussion group consisted of three volunteer firefighters. Due to the small number of participants, the discussion was informal. Topics covered included the WCRFPD's perceived strengths and weaknesses. There were similar themes in the responses of the firefighters and the Board, especially in terms of identifying strengths and weaknesses. The firefighters also discussed their goals for the District and strategies they had for improvement, as well as their motivation for volunteering with the WCRFPD.

The volunteer firefighters view the District's call response rate as one of its biggest strengths and communicated a sense of pride at this significant accomplishment. They also indicated that communication among themselves and recognizing each other's strengths and weaknesses allows them to excel in providing services to the community. They noted a strong sense of teamwork among firefighters. In addition, they pointed out that community perceptions of the District have come a long way in recent years.

In terms of weaknesses, the main issue raised was the lack of weekday availability of current volunteers. Most of the WCRFPD firefighters work full-time; therefore, a few volunteers must make considerable sacrifices in order to respond during this time of need. Other weaknesses discussed by the firefighters included safety issues with the available equipment and Board/firefighter communications. The firefighters expressed that the Board seems to lack a comprehensive understanding of the day-to-day operational needs of the firefighters. The firefighters indicated that they do not always have the Board's financial support for necessary equipment and supplies. Some firefighters also expressed that they have been made to feel inferior as a result of interactions with Board members.

The main goals firefighters have for the District include recruiting more volunteers capable of weekday response and improving Board/firefighter relations. Strategies for meeting the stated goals included the need to move beyond the District's past problems, volunteer recognition, and having Board members go out to observe and experience service calls (for the purpose of seeing what firefighters address on a regular basis.)

A common theme in the volunteer firefighter interviews was their desire to assist fellow community members. One firefighter gave his reasoning for volunteering in one short sentence, *"To give back- to be a part of the community."* The other two main reasons that the firefighters gave for volunteering with the District included the opportunity for training and education and pride in the volunteer firefighter role.

Lack of recognition was brought up as a concern by some of the firefighters. Volunteers noted that recognition used to happen more frequently in the District. One volunteer suggested that the Board could reinstate the annual volunteer Christmas dinner or give the firefighters t-shirts with the District logo as a gesture of thanks and recognition. Additionally, increased Board involvement in the annual pancake feed was brought up as a way to improve relations.

## ISSUES IDENTIFIED BY THE WOLF CREEK COMMUNITY

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Wolf Creek community members were given an opportunity to provide input into the strategic plan at the July 2005 Wolf Creek Fire Fair. The Fair attracted a large group of community members. A station was set up in order to obtain community feedback about the District. The station included copies of the draft strategic plan and a flip chart with a short list of questions developed to elicit a community dialogue. Community participants brought up some key issues for consideration. For example, the community indicated a desire for the WCRFPD to expand its service area to include Sunny Valley. Participants also wanted to know whether or not the District could come out to assess their homes for fire risk. Community members were supportive of the District responding to medical calls.

## FINDINGS

### Trust

An underlying theme of the WCRFPD strategic planning activities both with the Board and the firefighters involved the importance of trust and a perception of distrust within the organization's history. Past problems with theft and misuse of District resources as well as perceptions of disrespect provide a historical basis for this distrust. Additionally, a long history of non-communication between the Fire Board and the firefighters has contributed to a lack of trust. An organizational culture of distrust can increase feelings of vulnerability and antagonism and discourage cooperation. Building intra-agency trust is a primary effort that the WCRFPD can address. There are a number of strategies that can enable this process, including: mediation, reaffirming each volunteer's level of commitment to the agency, recognizing volunteers for their efforts, and developing a shared identity with common goals for the District among the Board and firefighters.

Through the interviews and discussions, each of the WCRFPD staff members contacted affirmed their commitment to the agency. One board member commented *"If I want the District to be better, then it is only right and proper that I devote some time and energy to support the District."* This suggests a huge opportunity for the District because all parties involved have a strong desire to help the District move forward. The strategic issues culled from the staff's opinions provide the District with a set of common future goals.

### Volunteerism

A second and related key theme of the strategic planning activities is the belief that the WCRFPD's main strength is its volunteers- including both the firefighters and the Board members. Participants commented on the diversity of talent, desire for success, and dedication of the volunteers. A Board member noted *"The ability of volunteers to respond (to virtually all calls) is our brightest star."*

This energy and commitment may not be channeled effectively to strengthen the District. A culture of distrust and a mentality focused on *"us vs. them"* can undermine the opportunity to work with well together.

Other common concerns relayed in the interviews included low volunteerism, low rates of volunteer retention, and the need for more volunteers that can work during weekdays and business hours. Recruiting new volunteers and retaining existing ones will be a key challenge for the District in the coming years, especially given the increasing demands for service. All volunteers need to feel respected and appreciated for the work that they do, and providing incentives is critical for volunteer retention. These incentives do not necessarily have to be costly. For example, recognition is an incentive that can be as simple as a verbal affirmation of a job well done or a "thank you" note for an instance of outstanding service. The firefighters pointed out that historically the Board has shown their appreciation in the form of a Christmas dinner for the firefighters. In recent years, however, the dinner has not occurred. Recognition is widely acknowledged as a key factor in retaining volunteers; therefore, the Fire Board could commit to making volunteer recognition a priority. For example, the Board could act proactively by delegating a responsible party to organize volunteer recognition events and activities.

### Communication

Strengthening communication within the District is a vital strategy for improving its effectiveness. Adopting adequate written policies and procedures and ensuring that they are known and understood by all staff is a key piece of accomplishing this goal. A lack of clear financial policies and procedures has created problems and fueled distrust within the WCRFPD. The District may need to adopt internal management

control policies such as a clear audit trail, a specified authorization threshold for purchases, and a strict reimbursement policy.

The interviews indicated that the WCRFPD Board meetings have become long and tedious. Although the responsibility involved in sitting on a Fire Board is sizeable, it is important that Board meetings not be overwhelming. Timely, well-organized, and fun meetings are essential to preventing Board burnout. Creating a positive meeting culture could include incorporating some type of social event (ex. potluck) so that members can reconnect with each other and reaffirm their motivation for volunteering. In addition, clearly established meeting procedures would help the Board to spend less time on small details that detract from their core responsibilities.

Interviews indicated the need to differentiate between the WCRFPD's core functions. District responsibilities can be separated into categories such as finance, operations, and Board duties. Matching people with duties that align with their personal strengths is a recommended strategy for success. Additionally, developing clear job descriptions that spell out each position's responsibilities may be helpful.

The strategic planning activities designated improving intra-agency communication as a crucial future priority for the District. Interviews indicated that communication among the Board members, as well as internal communication among the firefighters and with the fire chief was good. However, communication between the Board and the Fire Chief and between the Board and the firefighters were viewed as needing improvement. A key recommendation is for the Board to incorporate both a business approach and a social approach in communicating with the fire chief and the firefighters. The importance of having a "chain of command" for business matters and also having a separate social aspect to the department emphasizes that success requires both efficiency and community.

### **Community Support of the Fire District**

The strategic plan interviews relayed concerns with the WCRFPD's community image. Past District problems and heavy staff turnover fueled a negative community perception of the WCRFPD for some time. The WCRFPD staff understands the significance of community support to the District's sustainability and has recently focused efforts on changing community perceptions. One interviewee stated that the fire district now has the opportunity to *"unify the community or divide it."*

The recent passing of a tax levy is evidence of growing community support for the District. The levy's passage is a huge success, both financially and in terms of public opinion. A Board member reflected on this strength, *"The people are in favor of the District. While the District is small financially (not much assessed value of property in the district) the residents who live in the District do actively support operations financially."* Community participation at the Fire Fair in 2004 also indicates changing perceptions of the District. The District has the opportunity to build on this successful momentum. Maintaining a presence at community events, hosting an annual Fire Station "open house" and making the Fire Fair an annual event are key ways to foster pride and support for the District.

A fundamental way of enhancing the WCRFPD's community image identified in one of the Strategic Plan Board meetings is to highlight what the District **can** do for the community, rather than focusing on its limitations. Participants noted that the District should be *"the best of who we are"* and *"be proud of who we are."* Ideas for communicating this to the public included publishing call statistics and creating a Board position for a public relations officer to organize ongoing public outreach activities.

Finally, giving the Wolf Creek community an opportunity to provide input for the strategic plan at the 2005 Fire Fair demonstrates the District's ongoing commitment to the people it serves. Community support for the District will increase if members are invested in the long-term planning efforts of their fire district.

## WCRFPD ACTION PLAN

This action plan is based on actions identified by the Wolf Creek Rural Fire Protection District in 2004 and refined through the strategic planning process in 2005. The Wolf Creek Fire Board will review the action plan at regular board meetings to identify timeline, progress, and lead coordinators.

### 1) Communication

Action/Objectives		Performance Indicators	Timeline / Progress	Lead
1.1	Identify ways to mediate conflict or challenging situations within the district	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Resolution of past conflicts</li> <li>Increased sense of teamwork</li> <li>More productive meetings; less Board burnout</li> </ul>	<b>Ongoing</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A meeting facilitator has been identified.</li> <li>Meeting notes sent in advance so that reports are not read aloud during meetings</li> </ul>	
1.2	Increase interaction and communication between Board and volunteers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish regular meetings with firefighters to discuss concerns and needs,</li> <li>Establish social opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enhanced mutual respect and trust between firefighters and Board</li> <li>Number of meetings and social events</li> <li>Feeling of teamwork</li> <li>Volunteer retention</li> </ul>	<b>Ongoing</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Paul is surveying firefighters on how they would like to strengthen communication</li> <li>Board members are identifying strategies for professional and social interaction with firefighters</li> </ul>	
1.3	Establish a shared vision and set of goals for the District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased volunteer participation and sense of teamwork</li> <li>Annual review of goals</li> </ul>	<b>TBD</b>	

### 2) Stabilize Organizational Structure

Action/Objectives		Performance Indicators	Timeline / Progress	Lead
2.1	Review District Mission and Charter	Mission and charter reflect new values	TBD	
2.2	Clearly define roles and responsibilities of Board, Fire Chief, and firefighters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Job descriptions</li> <li>Annual reviews (<i>are responsibilities fulfilled?</i>)</li> </ul>	Ongoing	
2.3	Financial Transparency <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Appoint Treasurer responsible for financial oversight</li> <li>Hire Financial Officer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased financial accountability</li> <li>Less focus on small finance matters at Board meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New Treasurer appointed 8/05</li> <li>Office administrator to start 9/05</li> </ul>	
2.4	Understand and monitor community growth and development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>District activities that anticipate growth over time</li> </ul>	Ongoing	

**3) Policy and Procedures**

Action/Objectives		Performance Indicators	Timeline /Progress	Lead
3.1	Adopt a manageable set of policies and procedures that are relevant to the District's specific needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduce conflict within the district</li> </ul>	Ongoing	
3.2	Maintain OSHA compliance, record keeping, insurance, Standard Operating Guidelines, and mutual aid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Up-to-date compliance and standards</li> </ul>		

**4) Community Perception of the District**

Action/Objectives		Performance Indicators	Timeline / Progress	Lead
4.1	a. Build community ties at local events by providing fire district support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Easter parade</li> <li>Annual pancake feed</li> <li>Oktoberfest</li> </ul> b. Maintain the annual wildfire fair/include presentation by Chief and Board President c. Survey of community to determine perception	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community interaction and participation at events</li> <li>Increased volunteerism</li> </ul>	Ongoing	
4.2	Represent the community through Board membership	Board diversity	Ongoing	
4.3	Create a welcome packet for new residents	Number of new residents contacted	Partner with local businesses and Josephine County	
4.4	Form an auxiliary	Increased volunteerism		
4.5	Create a display board and highlight recent successes	Increased awareness about fire district among Wolf Creek residents		
4.6	Designate a Board public relations Officer			
4.7	Explore local employment opportunities (fuels redux training and contracting)	Increased employment through fire-related activities		
4.8	Provide Quarterly Updates in the Sunny Wolf CRT Big News (with call statistics)	Increased awareness about fire district among Wolf Creek residents		Admin Officer
4.8	Identify, Prioritize and Implement Fuels Treatment	Increased defensible space/community safety	2005 Grant (Coordinate w/IVCDO)	

**5) Volunteer Retention**

Action/Objectives		Performance Indicators	Timeline/Progress	Lead
5.1	Board involvement in volunteer recognition <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual volunteer appreciation BBQ (or Christmas dinner) served by the Board</li> <li>• Annual volunteer awards ceremony</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attendance by Board and Volunteers</li> <li>• Did people have fun?</li> <li>• Increased volunteer retention</li> </ul>		
5.2	Develop volunteer incentives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with Wolf Creek businesses to encourage volunteerism</li> <li>• Ideas include creating a <i>volunteer-of-the-month</i> certificate or t-shirts with the WCRFPD logo</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• # of businesses who encourage volunteerism among employees</li> <li>• # of volunteers who receive incentives to volunteer from their employer</li> <li>• # of new volunteers</li> <li>• # of volunteers retained</li> <li>• Increased volunteer satisfaction</li> </ul>		
5.3	Recruit more daytime volunteers	Less burnout of volunteers		

**6) Financial Stability**

Action/Objectives		Performance Indicators	Timeline/Progress	Lead
6.1	Identify and pursue grant opportunities (existing vehicles, breathing apparatus, station replacement and tender)	Grants received and implemented	Ongoing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FEMA grant submitted in summer 05</li> </ul>	
6.2	Identify options to bill non-patrons for services	Increased revenue from billing		
6.3	Examine kind of protection the district can support and viability for expansion	Updated strategic plan	Ongoing	
6.4	Lower the ISO rating	Lower ISO Rating	Ongoing	

**7) Recognize Limitations**

Action/Objectives		Performance Indicators	Timeline/Progress	Lead
7.1	Define "scope of practice" from District's mandates and available resources	Meeting benchmarks		
7.2	Communicate limitations with the community.			

**STRATEGY FOR EVALUATING PROGRESS ON THE STRATEGIC PLAN**

Periodic evaluation of progress towards goals identified in the strategic plan will be critical in moving the District forward. The strategic plan will only be useful if it is utilized by the WCRPPD as a living document. The plan is to be used as a guide, and should be adapted as the organization and its environment changes.

The Fire Board should perform a quarterly review of the action plan, focusing on whether or not objectives have been accomplished and whether they continue to be relevant. The performance indicators listed in the action plan will help to determine whether or not objectives are being met. The plan should be revised if actions are complete, no longer relevant, or if emerging issues create new priorities for the District to focus on.

An annual review of the strategic plan should be completed by the Board and with the assistance of key stakeholders, including the firefighters and interested community members. Stakeholders will have the opportunity to provide recommendations for updates and revisions to the plan. This collaborative approach not only provides a diversity of perspectives and ideas but also assists in building relations between the parties.

Table 5 is a sample timeline that could be utilized by the WCRFPD for implementation and evaluation of the strategic issues and plan. This guide may be used to strategically focus the agenda of monthly Board meetings.

**Table 5. Timeline for Strategic Issue Implementation**

Date	Strategic Issues
August 2005	<b>Communication-</b> consult with the firefighters to establish quarterly meetings with both the Board and firefighters; identify a facilitator to assist with meeting facilitation; designate a Board member for PR
September 2005	<b>Financial Stability-</b> research and identify potential grant opportunities; designate a Board member as treasurer
October 2005	<b>Volunteer Retention-</b> begin planning an annual volunteer recognition event; designate a Board member for organizing
November 2005	<b>Stabilize Organizational Structure-</b> create clear job descriptions for all staff
December 2005	<b>Review progress made on strategic plan;</b> make applicable updates to action plan
January 2006	<b>Recognizing Limitations-</b> adopt benchmarks to strive for in service
February 2006	<b>Community Perception-</b> organize details for Easter parade
March 2006	<b>Policy and Procedures-</b> review policies and make applicable updates
April 2006	<b>Communication-</b> review progress made on intra-agency communication, invite the firefighters for discussion
May 2006	<b>Community Perception -</b> begin annual Fire Fair planning process
June 2006	<b>Review progress made on strategic plan</b> with key stakeholders- community members and firefighters – solicit their input
July 2006	<b>Celebrate the success</b> of the annual Fire Fair with a potluck or BBQ Board meeting

## 2004 – 2005 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

In 2004, WCRFPD developed an action plan to assist in tracking progress towards goals developed by the Fire District. In 2004 and 2005, activities have been accomplished that bring WCRFPD closer to its goals.

### Financial Stability

Financial stability is an essential aspect to sustaining any organization. WCRFPD recognized the need to stabilize funding in order to increase long-term capacity for providing comprehensive fire protection services. WCRFPD plans to utilize a number of strategies to increase its financial stability. The following actions have been implemented. The most significant and exciting accomplishment to date was last year's successful passing of a tax levy to support the district.

- During the initial action planning process, Wolf Creek RFPD identified a tax levy as one key step to increasing capacity for their district. The proposed levy was put on the November 2, 2004 ballot and passed by a margin of one vote (147 to 146). The levy will be utilized to pay for improvements and repairs, and hire some administrative staff. The levy also helps WCRFPD be more competitive for future grants by providing a financial match to state and federal grants.
- Organized a meeting to educate the Board about possible grants, budget law, and taxing options.
- Developed a list of possible volunteer and paid grant writers to assist in obtaining funding.

### Community Support

One of the primary goals of the WCRFPD is to build community support. WCRFPD aspires to gain this support by strengthening its reputation in the community and increasing interactions with community members. The activities listed below have helped to foster better community awareness and a sense of pride in the fire district.

- Improved the visual appearance of the fire station by cleaning and repainting it in the spring of 2004.
- Increased public knowledge and understanding of the WCRFPD, by working to provide regular updates to the community through the Sunny Creek (write out acronym?) CRT *Big News*.
- Hosted a pancake breakfast during the Wolf Creek Easter celebration.
- Set up an informational booth during Wolf Creek's annual Oktoberfest Celebration.
- Sponsored a successful community wildfire fair and open house for the fire district on July 10, 2004. At this event, Resource Innovations and the District (?) provided information on the Josephine County Integrated Fire Plan and how residents can protect their homes from wildfire by creating defensible space. The district also took this opportunity to gather feedback from the community.
- Through its partnership in the Josephine County Integrated Fire Plan, Wolf Creek will receive funding from a 2005 National Fire Plan grant to coordinate a neighborhood fuels reduction project in the community. This effort is in coordination with Josephine County Parks and Forestry, the Bureau of Land Management, and the Illinois Valley Community Development Organization.

## Risk and Operations

WCRFPD has been examined its operations to determine strengths and areas for improvement. This has helped identify which policies should be developed to enable WCRFPD to operate in the most efficient and effective way. Accordingly, WCRFPD has recently completed a number of tasks that align with this goal.

- Reviewed the Rural/Metro Fire Department Safety Manual for guidance
- Conducted an operational audit
- Completed an audit of training records
- Reviewed equipment records
- Examined personnel records

## APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR THE WCRFPD STRATEGIC PLAN

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### Questions for the Board and Fire Chief

1. How has the WCRFPD changed in the past five to ten years?
2. What do you want this strategic planning activity to accomplish?
3. What are the **Strengths** of the district?
4. What are the **Weaknesses** of the district?
5. What are **Opportunities** for the district?
6. What are **Challenges** for the district?
7. What specific policies and procedures do you think that the district currently needs?
8. What is the single most important thing that the district should be working on?
9. What is the least important thing that the district should be working on?
10. Specifically, what are your goals for the district?
11. What strategies do you have for accomplishing your goals?
12. How will you evaluate whether or not your goals have been achieved?
13. If you had to reshape the fire district, what services do you think the district should provide to the community?

## Volunteer Firefighter Questions for the WCRFPD Strategic Plan

1. What are the **Strengths** of the district?
2. What are the **Weaknesses** of the district?
3. Why do you volunteer for the district?
4. What type of support do the firefighters need from the Board?
5. Do you have ideas or suggestions for improving the district?

## Community Questions for the WCRFPD Strategic Plan

- 1) Are you happy with the services the WCRFPD provides?
- 2) Do you know what services you are getting from the WCRFPD?
- 3) What kind of services do you expect from the District?
- 4) What would inspire you to be a volunteer for the District?
- 5) Have you had personal experience with the District responding to a fire? On a scale of 1-5, how was the service?