

# Consulting Services for Josephine County Fire Protection

Josephine County, OR

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**PUBLIC**  
CONSULTING GROUP



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## SECTION I: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Public Consulting Group (PCG) is pleased to submit this final report to the Josephine County Board of County Commissioners (BCC) for their review and consideration of five recommendations offered to address the long-standing issue of structural fire protection services to the 330 square mile area of Josephine County designated as “unprotected.”

### Background and Significance

The State of Oregon defines any area of a jurisdiction not protected by a municipal fire department or rural fire protection district as “unprotected.” For Josephine County, this involves an area approximately 330 square miles in size, encompassing 16,000 properties and affecting more than 35,000 of 87,000 county residents. There is a noticeable service imbalance when comparing the population covered by the existing four fire districts and the municipal fire department in Josephine County with a population estimated at just under 31,000 residents.

Considering the status of the unprotected area has been in existence for decades, the issue begins to take on a greater level of concern for many residents affected. Another factor is that multiple attempts by previous Board of County Commissioners to address the situation have failed.



As a result of the void of public structural fire protection over 50 years, several private, for-profit companies have ventured into providing fire protection services to property owners on a contractual basis. Beginning in the late 1970s, one company, Valley Fire Service, developed a business model which has grown over 40 years into a highly successful fire service company that today, provides what can be classified as an “All-Hazards” response level of service. In 1995, an international corporation that was the largest private, for profit, fire service provider in the world, Rural Metro, purchased the company. In 2015 Rural Metro was purchased by American Medical Response (AMR), which currently operates as the private EMS provider in Josephine County. In 2018, AMR rebranded itself to Global Medical Response (GMR). GMR opted to retain use of the name Rural Metro Fire for the department operations in Josephine County. Rural Metro Fire Department (RMFD) has a service area that encompasses an area of the county 250 to 300 square miles in size and currently maintains 11,000 service contracts with property owners with an annual operating budget of \$4.38 million dollars. The department operates out of seven fire stations, three of which are staffed full time, one staffed part time and the remaining stations staffed on a call-when-needed basis like a volunteer fire station. The department responds to an average of 2,700 incidents per year.

Also operating in the unprotected area of the county is a second, smaller, private service provider called County Fire Department (CoFD). This company currently holds just under 1,900 service contracts covering an area of 120 square miles from a single fire station staffing two engine companies that respond to an average of 150 incidents per year.

When the Oregon Revised Statute outlining formation of fire districts was created back in the 1940s, the legislation that defined “unprotected areas” only recognized municipal fire departments and rural fire districts. Because both departments are private companies, this poses one of the more significant challenges leading to the classification of unprotected area status – the lack of legal jurisdictional authority. Neither department has the authority to enforce either Oregon Statutes or Administrative Regulations such as the Oregon Fire Code, [Oregon Forestland-Urban Interface Fire Protection Act](#), nor can they enforce Josephine County Ordinances such as [Chapter 19.76.010 – Wildfire and Emergency Safety Standards](#). Another equally important authority issue is that neither of the companies can conduct cause and origin investigations of fires. Private fire service providers cannot legally enter a person’s property without the owner’s approval, and to do so could be considered trespassing. Private companies cannot issue citations for property owners committing violations of any of the codes, statutes, or ordinances previously mentioned.

Another concern is what happens when a property owner experiences a fire and one or both private companies respond to extinguish the fire. If the property owner does not have a subscription/contract with the company who responded, the owner may be presented with a bill for any services rendered but could dispute the bill, this could result in the services cost being passed on the subscription customers.

An estimated 65-70% of the properties and businesses in the unprotected area have a subscription with either private provider. The remaining 35-30% of properties in the unprotected area have not purchased subscriptions from either company. This creates a subsidy issue for those property owners who do subscribe.



Perhaps the greatest threat facing Josephine County residents is the increasing fire severity hazard for areas designated as Wildland Urban Interface (WUI). Much of the unprotected area in question is classified by both the State of Oregon and the federal government as WUI. Over the recent summer months, Oregon experienced a total of six fires classified as “mega fires,” meaning that each fire consumed 100,000 acres or more. PCG will provide context of this threat and the potential impact to Josephine County throughout this report as it relates to allowing the area to remain classified as unprotected.

Because of the ever-increasing fire threat to rural areas such as Josephine County, PCG consultants conducted additional research into the potential impact this mounting threat could have on Josephine County residents.

### Addressing the Need for Fire Protection in the Unprotected Areas



In May 2019, the BCC asked voters an advisory question: “*In your opinion, should Josephine County begin the process to form a Rural Fire Protection District in currently unprotected areas?*” In the May 2019 election, 35% of registered voters turned out and 65% of the voters agreed that the County should address the issue. Accordingly, the BCC established a Fire Protection Committee to “assess and study fire protection in the unprotected areas.”

The Fire Protection Committee thoroughly analyzed the different options detailed in Oregon Revised Statutes for providing coverage to unprotected areas including: status quo, regulation through ordinances, franchise agreements, contracts for services, annexation to other fire districts, creation of a rural fire district and creation of rural fire protection zones.

The members of the Fire Protection Committee were very methodical in their approach and provided PCG consultants with exceptional research materials including historical documents, analysis and copies of all meeting notes and access to audio recordings of all meetings held. PCG consultants conducted one-on-one interviews with each of the committee members to provide further clarification and context of their efforts.

PCG also conducted interviews with other key stakeholders from Josephine County including Fire Chiefs from each of the four existing fire districts, Deputy Chief from Grants Pass Fire & Rescue, who also serves as the Chair of the Josephine County Fire Defense Board, representative from the Oregon State Fire Marshal, Oregon Department of Forestry, US Forest Service, leadership from both of the private service providers – Rural Metro and County Fire, County Emergency Management, and each of the Josephine County Commissioners.

Combined, these interviews provided PCG consultants with extensive information regarding the question of fire protection in the unprotected area from a variety of differing perspectives and provided PCG with the ability to begin formulating the basis for its findings and recommendations.

PCG also provided Josephine County residents with an opportunity to express their views on the questions of fire protection through a 12-question, non-scientific survey. Survey results are provided in section VII of this report. Hard copy surveys were sent to 1,000 randomly selected registered voters from communities in the unprotected area and was also made available on the Josephine County website and Facebook page. It was the intent of PCG to receive at least 400 survey responses to ensure a statistically relevant number could be achieved. Between the two formats, a total of 417 responses were received, providing consultants with the desired number of survey responses. Consultants were very pleased with the survey results as they provided validation of the questions and the desired outcomes explained in section VII. Of the 417 completed surveys, 31% were completed by residents of the unincorporated areas of Grants Pass and 18% were completed from the Merlin area. Of those surveyed, 61% have lived in Josephine County for 10 or more years. Of those surveyed, 81% support the adoption of minimum standards. Of those surveyed, 84% have service contracts with Rural Metro and 7% have contracts with County Fire.



## Findings and Recommendations

To address the current and critical fire severity hazard conditions in Josephine County, the Board of County Commissioners should consider initiating the following actions over the next 90 days.

1. Direct the County Legal Counsel to develop a resolution accepting and executing the **minimum performance standards** for private fire service providers. These standards were developed by the Josephine County Fire Protection Committee. The standards are very similar to the standards developed by the Rogue Valley Fire Chiefs Association and accepted by the Josephine and Jackson County Fire Defense Boards.
2. Establish a permanent Josephine County Fire Advisory Board to serve as citizen oversight of fire authority administration and operations. The BCC has the option of creating a board consisting of elected members or can appoint members.
3. Establish the position of Josephine County Chief Fire Official to ensure the County has a position consistent with Oregon Statutes requiring Fire Districts and/or Fire Departments as legal entities. These Oregon Statutes specify that fire districts or fire departments have the position of "Fire Chief." To address this statutory requirement, this recommendation is made to ensure Josephine County has a position designated with proper jurisdictional authority to enforce all provisions of the Oregon Fire Code and Josephine County Ordinance in Chapter 19.
4. Pass and execute a resolution under the Zone 2 option for establishment of a Josephine County Fire Authority with a tax rate not to exceed the current rate of \$1.94 per \$1,000 of assessed property value paid by Rural Metro Fire customers. Although the Zone 2 option allows for an assessment of the market value of a property, BCC will ensure that the resolution is drafted in such a way that it ensures a property tax rate not to exceed the current rate of \$1.94 per \$1,000 of assessed property value.
5. In accordance with Josephine County Resolution No. 2005-017, Section 8. 8.D and 8.E that the BCC directs the "Solicitation Agent" to execute a sole source contract with Rural Metro Fire Department to fill the critical need of providing an "All Hazards" emergency response service. The proposed service area would encompass all areas of Josephine County not currently covered by one of the four existing fire districts and Grants Pass Fire & Rescue. PCG proposes initial contract period of 10 years with the discretion of providing and optional extension for an additional five years.

Several important considerations inform the framework for these recommendations.

- ✓ The recommendation that the BCC initiate each of the recommendations within the next 90 days. Consultants stress this point because of the ending of a term of service for one BCC member and the undecided election results for a second BCC member. Should two new board members begin service in January 2021, all historical knowledge of the current processes being undertaken would be lost. It would require educating new BCC members of all efforts undertaken to this point. Consultants applaud the current BCC for posing the question on the May 2019 ballot. In doing so, the BCC took the critical first step towards addressing, and potentially resolving, a decades-long deficiency in public safety and community risk reduction. Current BCC members should be afforded the opportunity to see their vision come to fruition and certainly be acknowledged for their efforts.
- ✓ PCG's recommendations ensure that funding/taxation to support formation of a countywide fire authority is set at a rate that most property owners can support. In the public input survey, several respondents indicated that the cost of service is of great importance to them.
- ✓ PCG's recommendations address the issue of funding equity and removes subsidy challenges and frustrations currently experienced by those who hold service subscription contracts while at the same time, offering an "opt-out clause" for those property owners who have legitimate reasons for not participating.
- ✓ PCG's recommendations provide for citizens to have representation and a voice for addressing all matters concerning fire protection for a county facing a growing wildfire hazard severity threat.





## SECTION II: METHODOLOGY

PCG's approach to this study consisted of six key elements: kick-off meeting, stakeholder interviews, public input, data collection, analysis and background research. All information was collected from interviews, documentation provided by stakeholders, fire services national and local standards research and best practices. This information was analyzed to inform the recommendations made in this study. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, most of the interviews were conducted using video conferencing.

### Project Startup

#### *Kickoff Meeting*

The purpose of the kickoff meeting was to review and confirm a detailed understanding of the project scope, as well as to present a detailed project work schedule. Under the guidance of Josephine County Commissioner Darin Fowler, Fire Protection Committee Chair Richard Wharton and County Executive Office Manager Annette Sorensen, who served as the primary contacts for the study, PCG sought to obtain an understanding of the motivation and vision for this study and any desired outcomes not stated in the RFP. PCG also gained a deeper understanding of the County's needs for enhancing fire service delivery and the governance of the County's fire services as it related to the use of private-for-profit companies to provide fire protection. PCG was provided a list of stakeholders to interview, which was examined in detail to understand the role of each stakeholder played in the study.

### Data Collection & Analysis

#### *Stakeholder Interviews*

Stakeholder interviews are essential to studies such as this and particularly relevant in the case of Josephine County, given the complex issue of providing fire protection services to the unprotected area of the county. Josephine County staff provided PCG consultants with contact information for each of the Fire Protection Committee members. Each committee member was interviewed by consultants to provide history, context, and opinion on the matter of fire protection. Consultants also wanted to gain insight as to what motivated individuals to participate with the committee. Although interviews with the Fire Protection Committee members formed a solid foundation for the consultants, they also provided opportunities for consultants to cast a much broader net, which aided greatly in gaining a fuller sense of the challenges posed with this highly complex issue, which dates back to the 1970s, or perhaps even longer than that.



#### *Public Input*

In collaboration with the Fire Protection Committee, PCG developed a public input survey with 12 questions. The survey was not intended to be a scientific analysis, but rather an opinion survey and a tool to gauge the level of public interest and understanding of certain issues facing their community: in this instance, gauge interest and understanding of public fire protection. The survey focused on: location of resident in the county, duration of residence, whether the resident owned or rented and if they did or did not have insurance protection, assessment of their knowledge of fire protection issues and services in the county, and whether they have a contract with one of the two private fire service provider companies. PCG also asked for comments the participant wanted to share. The key premise of the survey is that the longer residents live in an area, the more informed they should be regarding local concerns/issues and as such, should be able to articulate an opinion on such matters in enough detail.

#### *Documentation Collection*

In addition to the information provided in the RFP by Josephine County and insight collected via stakeholder interviews, PCG requested data and documentation such as personnel rosters, training records, organizational charts and maps showing customer locations throughout the county. This request was made with each of the private service providers. Consultants also requested information such as levels of certification for each full and part-time employee, apparatus/equipment inventories, fire station location maps and fire loss statistics, inter-governmental and mutual aid agreements, labor and staffing contracts, mobilization guides, among other documents. Consultants also collected a substantial volume of data produced and provided by the Fire Protection Committee which included an analysis of the six different options available to consider formation of a fire service organization under Oregon Revised Statutes as well as previous feasibility studies and possible district boundary maps. Consultants also reviewed information collected and analyzed by the committee for a seventh option which was "status quo."



**Background Research**

PCG fire subject matter experts consulted the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standards, Insurance Services Office (ISO) standards, as well as state and local requirements for providing fire services and for the possible creation of a fire district. Best practices for fire services were reviewed at both the local level but also fire service industry standards as well. These standards and benchmarking guidelines are documented in **Section IV, Applicable Standards and Benchmarking Guidelines**. A literature review was completed resulting in newspaper and other media articles about fire protection in Josephine County. PCG's fire subject matter experts contributed more than 60 years of combined experience to the creation of the findings and recommendations in this report.



## SECTION III: BACKGROUND

### Overview

Josephine County is located in southwest Oregon along the California border to the south, Douglas County to the north, Curry County at the coast range summit on the west, and Jackson County on the east. Josephine County is predominantly mountainous, but has two major valleys created by the Rogue, Illinois, and Applegate rivers. The U.S. Census Bureau estimated that the 2019 population in the county was 87,487. The county consists of 1,640 square miles with 330 square miles that are not included in any municipal or public fire protection district response area. These 330 square miles have been designated as an “unprotected area” because the Oregon Office of the State Fire Marshal (OSFM) does not recognize private fire protection companies that offer “structural” fire suppression services. In the event of a wildfire that reaches the conflagration stage, Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) provides fire suppression. ODF does not engage in structural firefighting. Structural fire suppression services have been available for decades in Josephine County through subscription service contracts with private fire protection companies.

Two private for-profit fire protection companies currently provide structural fire suppression services to residential and commercial properties in the unprotected areas: Rural Metro Fire Department (RMFD) and County Fire Department (CoFD). Josephine County does not have any ordinances or regulations establishing minimum standards for these private companies and has no ability to regulate their operations or their fees. Consequently, the private companies have different methods and standards for the delivery of services, specifically emergency medical services (EMS) first response, technical rescue operations, and fire prevention and public education activities. Of the two provider companies, RMFD does deliver “all-hazards” emergency response services. The term “all-hazards” means that the fire department responds to other types of emergencies, such as a medical situation, and not just fire situations. The second provider company, CoFD does not currently meet criteria to be considered an “all-hazards” response organization. Since there is no tax base to fund fire protection services in the unprotected areas, both companies are funded by selling subscriptions to individual property owners. It is estimated that between 65 and 70% of residents have subscriptions with either Rural Metro Fire or County Fire. These homeowners and businesses are subsidizing the 30 to 35% that do not have fire protection subscriptions and although they may be invoiced by the providers, there are no guarantees that payment will be made.

Board of County Commissioners (BCC) placed an advisory question on the May 2019 election ballot asking voters: “*In your opinion, should Josephine County begin the process to form a Rural Fire Protection District in currently unprotected areas?*” Thirty percent of registered voters participated in the election and 65% of those were in support of the county forming a RFPD. In July 2019, the BCC established a Fire Protection Committee to assess and study fire protection service options in the unprotected areas. The Committee consists of 13 citizens and ex-officio member representatives from the private fire protection companies, the Josephine County Fire Defense Board, the Oregon State Fire Marshal, the Oregon Department of Forestry, and the US Forest Service. Many of the Committee members have tremendous knowledge and experience regarding fire protection services from their previous careers with local, state, and federal firefighting agencies.

Oregon laws provide various options for providing fire protection services in unprotected areas including: regulation through ordinances, franchise agreements, contracts for service, annexation to other fire districts, creation of rural fire protection zones, and the creation of a rural fire protection district. Josephine County officials have contemplated one or more of these options in the past but have never formalized any ordinances or regulations related to fire protection services provided in the unprotected areas.

In May 2020, after a competitive request for proposals (RFP) process, Public Consulting Group (PCG) was selected by the BCC to analyze all options for providing fire protection services, including fire prevention and suppression in the unprotected areas. The culture and economy of the area has been taken into consideration. Consultants worked closely with members of the Fire Protection Committee regarding their analysis of the six options under Oregon Revised Statute and the seventh option of “status quo”. This report will detail those efforts and provide analysis by PCG consultants. PCG consultants also believe that given the current wildfire severity hazard threat Southern Oregon currently faces, it is important to provide contextual relevance to the overall issue of fire protection services to the unprotected areas of Josephine County so that BCC can make fully informed decisions regarding this critical public safety issue. A final report with analysis of the options as well as findings and recommendations for the delivery of comprehensive fire protection services will be provided to the Board of County Commissioners (BCC) and the public in as timely a manner possible.



### History of Fire Protection in Josephine County's Unprotected Area

Fire protection services in the unprotected areas of Josephine County has been discussed and debated for decades. Public interest peaks every time there is a large wildfire in the county or in neighboring counties. PCG reviewed local and regional newspaper articles that provided some background information for this study and provided the consultants with a sense of the culture in Josephine County regarding government operated fire protection services. One article reported that there were attempts to establish a public fire department in the early 1970s that failed because of lack of public support, primarily because of potential property tax increases needed to support a full-time fire district/department.

In 1976, the BCC established a Fire Protection Study Committee in response to numerous citizen complaints regarding poor service provided by Grants Pass Rural Fire Department (GPRFD), at that time the only private fire department in Josephine County. Walter and Bertha Miller took over ownership and operations of GPRFD in 1958. The Fire Protection Study Committee released a report in September 1976 that was extremely critical of GPRFD's equipment and performance. Despite the critical nature of the report, no actions were taken by the Josephine County BCC regarding the recommendations in the report.

In October 1978, another Fire Protection Committee was formed by the BCC. According to a March 1983 article "[Feet to the Fire](#)" published in Reason Magazine, at its first meeting Phil Turnbull showed up with a brand-new, shiny yellow fire truck with "Valley Fire" on its door. Mr. Turnbull let the committee know that Valley Fire Service was going into business, regardless of what the committee did. Valley Fire Service was incorporated in the state of Oregon in August 1978. Valley Fire started marketing efforts and selling subscriptions, resulting in Josephine County being the only county in the nation to have a competitive environment for fire protection services. In 1995, Valley Fire was purchased by the Rural Metro Corporation and has continued to provide fire protection and emergency medical services in the unprotected areas since then. Over the years, Rural Metro Fire and GPRFD had several conflicts including disputes about who would fight a fire already underway. In 2014, GPRFD went out of business and Rural Metro absorbed more than 1,000 of GPRFD customers. In 2012, County Fire and Security emerged after Inland Fire, another private fire protection company, disbanded.

In 2006, the Josephine County BCC established the third Fire Protection Committee to research establishing structural fire services in the areas of the county not served by fire districts or cities. In the fall of 2007, the Hugo Neighborhood Association and Historical Society formed an independent RFPD Exploratory Committee to investigate the potential of forming a RFPD in the Merlin-Hugo region. The committee conducted a significant amount of research and completed a report consisting of a series of web-based "educational brochures" for the public that addressed sixteen components related to fire protection services and formation of rural fire protection districts. That report can be accessed [here](#).

In 2008, the issue was once again placed on a ballot and again residents voted down the proposal to create a fire district. A similar effort did not make it to the ballot in 2010. According to the chair of the current Fire Protection Committee, the 2008 initiative likely failed due to two important factors. First, the initiative did not specify the taxation rate needed to support the fire district. Second, there was a lack of information presented to voters on the importance of creating a fire district and removing the designation as an unprotected area. As a result of these two issues, voters turned down the ballot measure.

Several barriers existed for resolutions or actions. These barriers have included turnover of BCC members. Previous BCC's have initiated actions but whenever a commissioner's term of service ended so too did the momentum for acting. With a BCC of only three commissioners it mandates that at least two commissioners must agree for any actions to be moved forward. If the BCC is moving forward with an important issue and this coincides with an election resulting in the loss of two commissioners, then resolution of that critical issue may take a completely different course.

Another major issue remaining unresolved is the fact that are a substantial number of residents/voters in Josephine County who are opposed to any programs or services that require an increase in either taxation or an expansion of government, even a fire district.

The threat of legal action by citizens to prevent new taxes has also blocked previous attempts to remedy conditions. Under this current effort, legal action has been threatened regarding the possibility of taking business away from either Rural Metro Fire or County Fire should an option be proposed that does not involve contracting



or franchising with either of the current providers. Past efforts to resolve the issue have also resulted in threats of legal action by the private service providers.

### Josephine County's Severe Wildfire Risk

Josephine County and in particular the unprotected areas, is rated and/or classified by both the federal government as one of the severe fire threat areas in the nation. Located in southern Oregon in an area known as the Siskiyou Pass along the Interstate 5 corridor. Grants Pass is the largest city in Josephine County with a 2019 US Census population estimated at 38,170 and is the county seat. The majority of Josephine County is classified as rural and remote as the county is comprised of large areas of heavy timber and steep mountainous canyons with mostly unimproved logging roads. Many of the roads that crisscross the county represent the single ingress and egress routes for residents living in these rural/remote portions of the county. This poses considerable challenges for firefighting resources attempting to respond to fires while at the same time, residents are using these roads to evacuate. This is just one of many factors to be considered when conducting a thorough analysis of the fire problem in Josephine County.

This report will identify key factors contributing to the wildfire severity hazard and serves as a critical element to the public education and community risk reduction programs essential to saving lives and property in Josephine County.

Essential to understanding the wildfire severity hazard threat in any geographical area is the ability to compare and contrast with other geographical areas sharing commonalities. To that end, PCG compared Josephine County to Butte County located in Northern California, the site of the devastating Camp Fire, which occurred on November 8, 2018. The Camp Fire remains the single deadliest fire in California history. The recent fires throughout the western US are having similar, if not more devastating impacts, with respect to loss of structures and acres burned (but not loss of life). The fast-moving Camp Fire engulfed the towns of Paradise, Concow, Magalia, and Butte Creek Canyon, consuming a total of 153,336 acres (240 square miles), destroyed 18,804 structures, and took the lives of 85 residents. Total economic loss is estimated at \$16.65 billion with one quarter of this consisting of uninsured residences. The fire suppression costs alone for this single fire exceeded \$150 million.

The speed and ferocity with which the Camp Fire moved makes it unique among "mega fires." Pushed by 50 mph winds, a 200- to 300-foot-tall wall of flame moved well beyond the typical fire advancement in heavy timber of six mph, and through light flashy fuels at 14 mph. The Camp Fire is estimated to have moved at two to three times these rates and produced a hailstorm of embers, which advanced a half to one mile downwind resulting in fire advancement that literally outran evacuation orders issued by town officials. Because of the rapid succession of evacuation orders, the limited access and egress routes around Paradise very quickly became chokepoints. Roads that could easily accommodate 1,800 vehicles per hour moving at normal highway speeds were clogged by 50,000 residents attempting to escape. Of the 85 fatalities, 11 were found either inside their charred vehicle or on the roadways next to their vehicles. The limited number of roadways and the fact that some were already inaccessible when evacuation orders were issued was determined by investigators to be a contributing factor. This resulted in a simple mathematical challenge, too many vehicles attempting to occupy too limited a space at the exact same time complicated by zero visibility and a rapidly advancing fire front.

Another similarity is the age of residents. Older residents require more time to evacuate. Of the 85 fatalities in Paradise, **62 were age 65 or older and 36 were over the age of 75**. This is a population group that requires special considerations for evacuation. Given the challenges of health conditions, limited or no ability to drive themselves and reliance on family members to come and collect them placing more lives at risk. This also factors in that many elderly individuals have disabilities that make rapid evacuation all but impossible in assisted living facilities, nursing homes or hospitals. In Paradise, it is estimated that 25% of all residents were classified as disabled in some manner, this is also a characteristic shared by Josephine County where 23% of residents are classified in some way as disabled. Josephine County has a 26.4% population of residents who are 65 or older and 86.6% of residents live alone according to the US Census Bureau.

Mobile homes are another critical factor for wildland fire severity ratings. Even when constructed to code, mobile home communities pose a severe hazard of fire spread due to the materials used to construct these structures and the way these communities are laid out. Parks are set up placing units in very close proximity to one another, resulting in very rapid fire spread through these communities. In Paradise, there were a total of 30 mobile home parks totaling 1,300 households, or one in eight households. **Of the 85 fatalities in Paradise, 37 were residents in living in mobile homes.**



Because of the extreme fire threat throughout every region of California, the state has some of the nation's most stringent fuels abatement ordinances requiring residents in fire prone areas and Wildland Urban Interface Zones (WUI) to maintain not less than 100 feet defensible space zones around homes and out-buildings on their property. Such ordinances are written in a manner to provide homeowners/residents with clear and specific recommendations on how best to protect their homes and out structures.

On September 30, 2020 the Josephine County BCC took the step of addressing defensible space and fire protection issues and enacted resolution #2020-034 which acknowledges ORS 477.059 (1),(c) – Obligation of landowners to comply with standards and states that, “all property owners within unprotected areas should adequately safeguard against fire, including structural fire, by procuring protection from a professionally trained and equipped fire defense service.” Additionally, Oregon Administrative Rule (OAR) provides additional guidance on defensible space in the [Oregon Forestland- Urban Interface Fire Protection Act](#).

The county does have a clearance ordinance in place under Chapter 19 of the Josephine County Ordinances, specifically [Chapter 19.76.010 – Wildfire and Emergency Safety Standards](#). However, neither of the private companies have legal authority to enforce such an ordinance, including with contract customers. Neither of the private companies have legal authority to issue citations to property owners for illegal activities such as burning of vegetation or garbage nor can they enforce fire and life safety or building code violations.

A key finding in our analysis of this problem was identified during an on-site visit to Josephine County and specifically, the unprotected areas. PCG consultant observed numerous properties requiring extensive effort to bring industry standard clearance zones up to levels that will minimize propagation of a vegetation fire. Observations validate the findings that there are minimal enforcement efforts in place throughout the unprotected areas, which increase the wildfire severity hazard conditions.

Context as to the severity of the wildland fire threat that currently exists in Josephine County is described in an article published in AZCentral.com entitled, [Wildfire Risks: Look up every Western Community](#) which references a US Forest Service study that compares the town of Merlin to Paradise. Merlin has a population of 1,615 with 671 households. In the article, the Forest Service used a rating scale between 1 (minimal hazard) and 5 (severe hazard). **According to the article, Merlin currently has a wildfire hazard severity rating of 3.77, Paradise had a wildfire hazard rating of 3.81.** The median rating of the 500 communities studied by the US Forest Service is 2.08. Merlin's rating places it in the 75th percentile, well above the median rating.



Because there are many striking similarities between the two counties, Butte and Josephine, the article provides relevant context regarding the wildfire severity hazard potential facing residents of Josephine County. There have been multiple studies conducted by the US Forest Service, including the study conducted and referenced in the AZCentral.com article that provides all of information that is both specific, (Merlin) and relevant to our analysis of the wildfire severity hazard threat confronting Josephine County.

Considering the recent Alameda Fire that swept through the communities of Ashland, Talent, and Phoenix resulting in the loss of 2,357 residential, 190 commercial structures that resulted in three deaths, the need of addressing fire protection services in the unprotected areas takes on a stronger sense of urgency and importance.



## SECTION IV: BENCHMARKING GUIDELINES

Identifying applicable and appropriate benchmarking standards of service, performance, and operations is critical to assessing/evaluating performance of existing fire service organizations. The PCG team reviewed National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Standards, Insurance Service Office (ISO) Fire Suppression Rating Schedule (FSRS), International Code Council Fire Codes, Oregon Office of the State Fire Marshal (OSFM), National Wildfire Coordination Group, (NWCG) standards and regulations, as well as regional and local standards to determine which benchmarks are applicable to Josephine County.

### National Fire Protection (NFPA) Standards

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) has more than 300 consensus codes and standards related to eliminating death, injury, property, and economic loss due to fire, electrical and related hazards.

#### *NFPA 1710 Standard*

One of the key benchmarks of any fire department is the National Fire Protection Association's (NFPA) 1710: *Standard for the Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression Operations, Emergency Medical Operations, and Special Operations to the Public by Career Fire Departments*. The NFPA 1710 standard is based upon a combination of accepted practices and more than 30 years of study, research, testing, and validation. NFPA 1710 defines minimum staffing levels and response times for fire companies, initial full alarm response levels, and extra alarm response levels for municipal fire and emergency medical services apparatus.

The standard also defines minimum response times to an emergency and minimum fire company and EMS staffing levels. For municipal fire departments, NFPA 1710 calls for fire companies to be staffed with a minimum of four on-duty personnel. "Companies" are defined as groups of members (engine companies, ladder companies, squads, etc.) "operating with one piece of fire apparatus except where multiple apparatus are assigned that are dispatched and arrive together, are continuously operated together, and are managed by a single company officer." In addition, NFPA 1710 requires five to six personnel to staff fire apparatus in a "hazardous" or "high-risk" area. The response time objectives for fire suppression, EMS response, and other operations are:

- Turnout time (the period between the time firefighters are notified of an emergency and the time they initiate response): **1 minute**
- Arrival of first engine company at a fire: **4 minutes (travel time)**
- Deployment of a full first alarm assignment at a fire: **8 minutes**
- Arrival of EMS first responder: **4 minutes**
- Arrival of advanced life support unit at an EMS incident: **8 minutes**

In addition to these time intervals, call processing time is added to the overall response time. Call processing should be accomplished in **one minute**.

The NFPA-1710 Deployment Model is below.



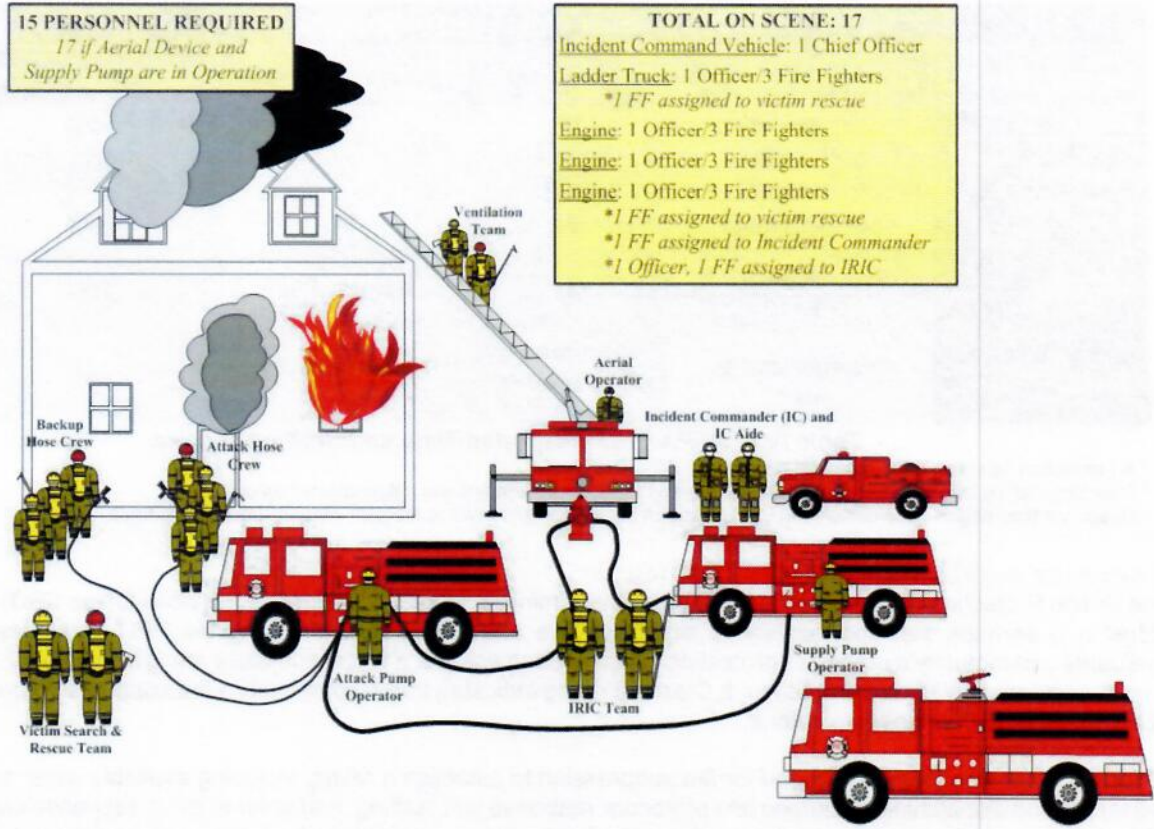


Figure IV.1: NFPA-1710 Deployment Model

**NPFA 1720 Standard**

One of the key benchmarks for any rural fire department is the NFPA 1720: Standard for the Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression, Emergency Medical Operations and Special Operations to the Public by Volunteer Departments. The NFPA 1720 standard is based upon a combination of accepted practices and more than 30 years of study, research, testing, and validation. NFPA 1720 standard defines minimum staffing levels and response times for fire companies, initial full alarm response levels, and extra alarm response levels for combination and/or mostly volunteer fire departments.

The standard also defines minimum response times to an emergency and minimum fire company staffing levels. For combination and mostly volunteer fire departments, NFPA 1720 calls for fire companies to be staffed based on the "Demand Zone" Classification. Demand Zones are determined by the number of residents per square mile. The Demand Zone then determines minimum staffing required for each zone classification as well as response time performance objectives and the percentage of time performance objectives are to be met.

The table below provides details for how NFPA 1720 classifies communities protected by volunteer fire departments, then sets standards for the minimum number of fire personnel required to combat a fire in a typical residential structure fire. NFPA 1720 defines the Low Hazard Occupancy or "typical residential structure" as a 2,000-square-foot, two-story, single-family home without a basement or exposures.

NFPA 1720 Response times and staffing guidelines are outlined on the next page.



NFPA 1720 Response Time and Staffing Guides				
Demand Zone <sup>a</sup>	Demographics	Minimum Staff to Respond <sup>b</sup>	Response Time (minutes) <sup>c</sup>	Meets Objective (%)
Urban	>1000 people/mi <sup>2</sup>	15	9	90%
Suburban	500–1000 people/mi <sup>2</sup>	10	10	80%
Rural	<500 people/mi <sup>2</sup>	6	14	80%
Remote	Travel distance ≥ 8 mi	4	Directly dependent on travel distance	90%
Special Risks	Determined by AHJ	Determined by AHJ based on risk	Determined by AHJ	90%

**Table IV.1: NFPA 1720 Response Time and Staffing Guides.**

<sup>a</sup> A jurisdiction can have more than one demand zone.

<sup>b</sup> Minimum staffing includes members responding from the AHJs department and automatic/mutual aid

<sup>c</sup> Response time begins upon completion of the dispatch notification and ends at the time interval shown in the table.

### Insurance Services Office (ISO) Standards

The Public Protection Classification (PPC) program administered by the Insurance Services Office (ISO) is the oldest and perhaps the most familiar to city managers and administrators. Using the PPC measures, ISO evaluates a community's public fire protection capability and assigns a protection class rating from 1 to 10. Class 1 represents exemplary fire protection; a Class 10 rating indicates that a community's fire suppression program does not meet ISO's minimum criteria.

ISO evaluates all resources required for fire suppression to establish a rating, including available water supply, call taking and dispatching resources and protocols, response unit staffing, firefighter training, response capacity and coverage, and other factors. A key element of coverage evaluation is the location of engine and ladder apparatus in relation to the development within the jurisdiction. The PPC was developed by the insurance industry and is used to set fire insurance premiums. It does not evaluate EMS capabilities or other emergency services a modern American fire department routinely provides.

For full credit in the PPC program, a fire department must provide an engine within 1.5 miles and a ladder within 2.5 miles of each property in the jurisdiction. Staffing for this level of service delivery is prohibitively expensive and, outside dense urban cores of large cities, probably unnecessary. An astute fire chief will not base performance standards on ISO alone but will use more direct methods of evaluating community risks and resources. Figure IV.2 includes a distribution of ISO classifications throughout the U.S.

### U.S. ISO Classification Distributions



**Figure IV.2: U.S. ISO Classification Distributions.**

Source: ISO Public Protection Classification distributions in 2017 (Courtesy/ISO)



Fire departments are evaluated in about 75 different areas that fall into four general categories, weighted accordingly: **fire department (40%), water supply (35%), fire safety control (16%) and emergency communications (9%)**. An additional 10 points can be gained by having a Community Risk Reduction (CRR) program in place. The fire department category includes things such as the number of stations, number, type and age of apparatus, staffing levels, training, hose and equipment, vehicle maintenance, etc. Water supply evaluates water flow, hydrant locations and condition, operation, and maintenance of the water systems. Fire safety control encompasses prevention programs such as code enforcement, plan review, business inspections and public education programs. The final category, emergency communications, evaluates the department's dispatchers and dispatch center operations.

### **Commission on Fire Accreditation International (CFAI)**

The Commission on Fire Accreditation International (CFAI) provides a self-assessment and evaluation model that enables a fire department to evaluate past, current, and potential future service levels and performance and compare them to fire industry best practices so that a department may:

- Determine community risk and safety needs and develop community-specific standards of cover.
- Evaluate the performance of the department in relation to the standard of cover.
- Establish a methodology for achieving continuous organizational improvement in relation to the standard of cover.

CFAI provides the tools for a fire department to assess its performance against national standards or locally adopted performance goals. The program is voluntary and does not set standards. A successful process leads to accreditation; compliance reports must be made annually, and the assessment process is repeated every five years. A progressive fire department will be familiar with these and use them to establish response goals and performance measures appropriate for the community and the fire department in a standards of cover document.

### **International Code Council (ICC) Fire Code**

The International Code Council's (ICC) Fire Code has been adopted, with amendments, by the State of Oregon and updated in 2018. The State Fire Code addresses life safety in new and existing building structures. It establishes the minimum criteria for the design of facilities to facilitate prompt escape and provides strategies to protect people and minimize effects of fire and other hazards.

### **Oregon Revised Statutes and Administrative Code**

Oregon's Defensible Space Law enlists the aid of property owners to better protect their homes and firefighters during encroaching wildfires. The law requires property owners to reduce excess vegetation, which may fuel a fire, around homes and other structures. In some cases, it is also necessary to create fuel breaks along property lines and roadsides. The Act is fully described in [Oregon Revised Statute 477.015 through 477.061](#) and [Oregon Administrative Rules 629-044-1000 through 629-044-1110](#).

### **Josephine County Charter and Ordinances**

The Josephine County Charter was adopted January 5, 1991 and was last amended in May 1996. The current County Charter does not address emergency services or fire protection.

The 2018 edition of the Josephine County Code does not include an ordinance requiring the county to provide fire protection services in the unprotected areas. There are also no ordinances that establish minimum standards for private, for-profit fire protection companies. In *Title 19: Rural Land Development, Chapter 19.76 - Wildfire and Emergency Safety Standards* mentions contract fire protection in Section 19.76.060 – Fire protection service or on-site fire protection plan as an option to satisfy the requirement for fire protection if a new development property or major renovation of a property is located outside of an established fire district. If the property cannot be located within a fire protection district, but fire protection service is available from a commercial fire service provider that is listed on the state fire marshal roster and the owner provides a contract for fire protection to cover the property before the development of any construction begins.

In the state fire marshal roster dated September 1, 2020, RMFD is listed but CoFD is not. Separately, the contract for fire protection services with a private company is only required for the duration of the construction phase of the project. Once an owner receives their final approval from the county building official/inspector, the fire protection contract can be terminated.



The county does have an ordinance for emergency medical services that is contained in *Title 5: Business License, Chapter 5.10 – Emergency Medical Services*. The Josephine County BCC determined that the “health, safety, and general welfare of the citizens of Josephine County requires ambulance services be regulated to provide prompt, effective, efficient and safe service.” The same considerations should also apply to fire protection services.

### **Rogue Valley Fire Chief’s Association Mutual-Aid Agreement**

The Rogue Valley Fire Chief’s Association (RVFCA) originally developed provisions of the Mutual Aid Agreement in 1996 and then revised the document in April of 2010. The Mutual Aid Agreement includes 21 fire departments and fire districts between Josephine and Jackson Counties. The Mutual Aid Agreement establishes standards that are applicable to all participating agencies. In June of 2014, the RVFCA developed a set of standards that are specific to private fire departments wishing to participate in the mutual aid system. Mutual Aid Agreements are in place across the united states as a fire service industry standard because very few fire departments can contend with large conflagration type incidents. Even the largest fire departments in the United States have, at some point, had to rely on assistance from neighboring fire departments, such as FDNY on September 11, 2001, or the Los Angeles City Fire Department in the aftermath of multiple major earthquakes. Perhaps the greatest example of mutual aid in action on a grand scale occurs on California on what has become an almost year-round basis.

Safety is one of the critical tenants of a mutual aid system – safety for communities by having access to greater levels of resources to respond to incidents sooner and thereby attack the fire quicker with greater numbers of resources. But most importantly, safety for citizens and firefighters as it is a proven fact through comprehensive studies, NIST 2010, that a specific minimum number of firefighters are needed within a specific period of time, NFPA-1710 to combat even a “routine” structure fire. If a fire department, private or public, believes they can protect their customers or their community with just the resources and personnel on-duty each day, then that organization is destined for tragedy.

PCG consultants reviewed the standards developed by both the RVFCA and the standards developed by the Josephine County Fire Protection Committee. The RVFCA standards meet the minimum requirements set by the Oregon Association of Special Districts, while those developed by the Fire Protection Committee do not. The main difference between the two sets of standards in question is in the levels/amounts of insurance required. These are the minimum standards that would be necessary if the BCC were to choose the option of forming a fire authority. A set of minimum standards need to be adopted so that current and future private service providers can safely operate while providing fire protection services throughout Josephine County with the two most important factors being the “Standard of Care” and safety of citizens and firefighters.

The following is the criteria the RVFCA developed for private fire service providers operating in Josephine County. Although these minimum standards were presented to the Josephine County BCC they have yet to be officially adopted:

1. Documentation verifying that private fire service provider is a legal entity to conduct business in the State of Oregon. Included shall be any assumed business names under which the private fire service provider operates, together with a statement identifying the members of its Board of Directors, partners, and limited partners, managing members or other persons having a financial interest in its operations.
2. Submit completed Standards of Cover template showing documentation of the private service provider's level of service provided to the community (standard of cover) to include a map of the area served by the private fire service provider. The map will identify station locations and a list of vehicles by type, utilizing the vehicle typing standards of the Oregon State Fire Marshal's Mobilization Plan. (See attached standard of cover template) RVFCA recommends a standard form that outlines what services the private fire service provider will provide to the community.
3. Documentation verifying an Insurance Services Office (ISO) rating of at least a class 9 in the best rating area and a map indicating the area graded by ISO.
4. If the private fire service provider is providing **any** emergency medical services as identified in their Standards of Cover, they shall provide documentation verifying that the private fire service provider has secured the services of an approved Supervising Physician, and registration with the Oregon State Health Division as an entity responding to emergency medical incidents.



5. Private fire service provider shall ensure all their firefighters engaged in firefighting activities meet State of Oregon OSHA requirements for firefighters and receive adequate training for activities outlined in the Organization's Standard of Cover document. Firefighters must also be accredited by the Oregon Department of Public Safety Standards & Training (DPSST), International Fire Service Accreditation Congress (IFSAC), or ProBoard to the level of NFPA Firefighter One and have completed the wildland S-130 & S-190 training.
6. The Rogue Valley Fire Chiefs Association strongly recommends that Josephine County develop and implement a standard for background checks that will meet the county's needs and require that all personnel engaged in firefighting activities successfully document that they meet the standard.
7. Documentation verifying that all private fire service provider emergency vehicles are titled and "registered" with the Oregon Department of Transportation and that said vehicles are designated as an "emergency vehicle" pursuant to ORS 801.260.
8. Documentation verifying that the private fire service provider can receive notification of calls for service from the local Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP).
9. Documentation verifying that the private fire service provider has a minimum of one (1) FCC frequency licensed for public safety use.
10. Documentation that the private fire service provider has adopted and utilizes the National Incident Management System (NIMS) and operates within the National Response Framework during emergency operations.
11. Documentation verifying the private fire service provider maintains minimum insurance defined by Josephine County needs/requirements. Some examples *could* include:
  - a. Comprehensive general liability coverage in the amount of \$2,000,000 per occurrence; \$3,000,000 general aggregate.
  - b. General business automobile combined single limit liability in the amount of \$2,000,000.
  - c. Employment Practices coverage combined single limit in the amount of \$1,000,000.
  - d. If providing *any* Emergency Medical services, Professional/Malpractice coverage in the amount of \$1,000,000 per occurrence and \$3,000,000 general aggregate.
  - e. Workers Compensation coverage shall be in amounts not less than required by applicable state law. Such coverage shall cover volunteers as well as full, part-time, and seasonal employees.



## SECTION V: FIRE PROTECTION IN JOSEPHINE COUNTY

### Overview

Josephine County encompasses 1,640 square miles and according to the 2019 US Census estimation the county has a population of approximately 87,487 residents. The land area and population are protected by a mix of fire service response organizations which, for the most part, meet the definition of “all-hazards” emergency response agencies. All-hazards means that the agency responds to all types of emergencies, not just fires. It is important to point out that some of the fire response agencies have a single focus such as the US Forest Service (USFS), Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF). They respond to vegetation fires and are not equipped nor trained to engage in structural firefighting operations. Given the fact that most of the land that comprises Josephine County is classified as forest and/or remote, these agencies are ideally suited for their primary role.

In Josephine County, there are five fire districts/departments that are recognized by the Oregon State Fire Marshal. Private, for-profit fire protection companies are not recognized by the OSFM. Fire protection currently is provided by four Rural Fire Protection Districts and one municipal fire department in the City of Grants Pass. Within the unprotected areas of the county there are several unincorporated communities and/or census-designated places. Communities in the unprotected areas include the following:

Unincorporated and Census Designated Places	
Fort Vannoy	North Valley
Galice	Shan Creek
Hugo	Sunny Valley
Merlin	Wilderville
Murphy	Wonder

**Table V.1: Unincorporated and Census Designated Places**

Structural firefighting in the unprotected areas is provided by two private, for-profit fire protection companies. These companies sell subscriptions for structural fire protection services.

### 911 and Emergency Communications in Josephine County

The Communications Center of the Grants Pass Department of Public Safety (GPDPS) for Josephine County is the primary public safety answering point (PSAP). The 911 Agency answers and processes all incoming 911 calls in the county. The communications center is responsible for radio communications, telephone communications, and operation of automated data systems.

In 1981, Josephine County formed a committee of community members, emergency service providers and representatives from the cities and county to develop a 911 system. Over the next six years the committee met regularly to determine the structure for a 911 organization. A final plan was adopted and submitted to the State Office of Emergency Management and the 911 program was approved in 1987. The cities and county held all 911 phone tax proceeds in trust beginning in 1981, a six-year period, to have adequate funds to establish the 911 Agency and continue its operations.

The 911 Agency is governed by a Board of Directors. The board is comprised of representatives from the City of Cave Junction, the City of Grants Pass, Josephine County, a representative of state and federal agencies, the Chairperson of the agency’s budget committee, a representative of the agency’s customer group, and a member at large representing the public. This board contracts with the City of Grants Pass for agency management, call taking, and dispatch services. These functions are assigned to the Communications Unit of the Public Safety Department. The center dispatches for the Grants Pass Department of Public Safety, American Medical Response (AMR), Rural Metro Fire Department, Wolf Creek Fire Department, Williams Fire Department, Illinois Valley Fire Department, and occasionally to the Oregon Department of Forestry.

The Josephine County Sheriff’s Office (JCSO) is a secondary PSAP, receiving transferred calls from the GPDPS Communications Center for Sheriff’s Office responses only. Calls requiring mutual response from both JCSO and EMS are coordinated between the two centers. Given the fact that the Rogue Valley Fire Chief’s Association encompasses both Josephine and Jackson County, the process for dispatching resources, even on a first alarm



assignment involves the PSAP from each county be involved. According to the dispatch supervisor and the Fire Defense Board Chair, the PSAP's do not have the ability to communicate on a computer-aided dispatch (CAD) to CAD basis but rely on direct communication via phone line. Each county maintains their own separate dispatch radio frequencies but do have the ability to monitor each other's radio frequencies as do all the field units that participate in the Rogue Valley Mutual Aid Response System.

Both PSAP's are NFPA 1221: *Standard for the Installation, Maintenance, and Use of Emergency Services Communications Systems*) compliant and have a very well defined and exercised process for filling assignments, even assignments that blend resources from each county which is done daily.

Although Jackson County has a greater number of resources, each county has pre-designated unit assignments for multi-alarm incidents and wildland fires. Each county provides one pre-designated Task Force and/or Strike Team depending on the nature of the request from an Incident Commander. In total, the two counties can fill a total of six Strike Teams or Task Forces before elevating resource requests up to the State Fire Marshal's Office for additional resources. The Josephine County Fire Protection Committee listed the communications center as a strength in their analysis and PCG consultants concur with the committee.

### **Grants Pass Fire & Rescue**

The county seat for Josephine County is the City of Grants Pass and is also the county's largest population center with a 2019 US Census estimated population of 38,170. The city encompasses 11.68 square miles. Grants Pass is divided north/south by the Rogue River with 2/3 of the city north of the river and the remaining 1/3 south of the river.

Fire protection in the city is provided by the Fire Rescue Division of the Grants Pass Department of Public Safety (GPDPS). The city uses a Public Safety model with combined law enforcement and fire/rescue under a single management structure overseen by a public safety director. The senior chief fire officer or Deputy Fire Chief is responsible for the day to day management and supervision of the department and reports directly to the Director of Public Safety. Although a combined agency, Grants Pass does not use a dual role model typical of the Public Safety department where personnel fill roles as both firefighters and law enforcement and respond based on the emergency at hand.

Grants Pass Fire/Rescue is configured and staffed as a typical municipal fire department. The department covers the city from three strategically located fire stations which are staffed 24/7/365. There are 29 full time personnel who are supplemented by a group of student firefighters. Personnel work a 48/96 shift schedule with a three platoon/shift configuration. Each apparatus is staffed by two career firefighters and one student firefighter. Minimum staffing for a shift is a total of seven personnel which includes an on-duty shift commander at the rank of Battalion Chief. The department responds to structure fires, (primary mission), wildland fires, provides advanced emergency medical care, and technical rescue. The department also has a full-time Fire Marshal who is responsible for fire and life safety inspections and fire prevention services which also includes fire cause and origin investigations. The department has an ISO rating of Class-2.

Grants Pass Fire/Rescue is an active member of the Rogue Valley Fire Chief's Association as well as participates in the automatic and mutual aid response system between Josephine and Jackson County. The current Deputy Fire Chief also serves as the Josephine County Fire Defense Board Chair and is responsible for coordination of the mutual aid response system in this role.

### **Rural Fire Protection Districts in Josephine County**

Josephine County has multiple small communities which meet the definition of Wildland/Urban Interface (WUI). Fire protection services for these areas, which make up a large portion of the county, are covered by four Rural Fire Protection District's (RFPD):

- Applegate Valley Rural Fire Protection District
- Illinois Valley Fire District
- Williams Rural Fire District
- Wolf Creek Rural Fire District

The map below shows the location and boundaries for each of these districts.



ArcGIS Web Map

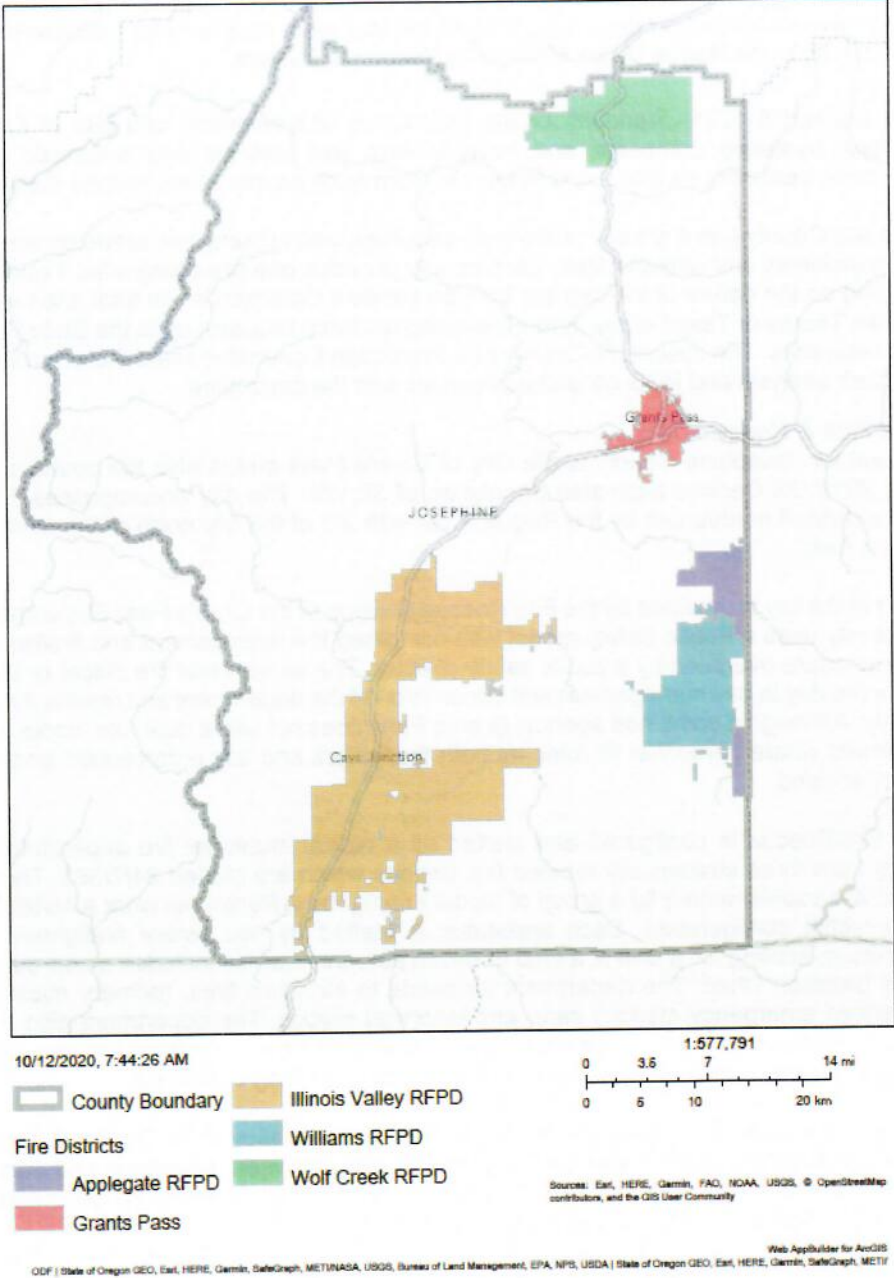


Figure: V.1: Josephine County Fire District Boundaries and Unprotected Area Designation



### **Applegate Valley Rural Fire Protection District**

The Applegate Valley Rural Fire Protection District (AVRFPD) covers a response area of 181 square miles and is situated West of the City of Medford and southeast of the City of Grants Pass. The district is intersected by two main roadways, State Route 238, and Upper Applegate Road. AVRFPD is classified as a combination department with a staff of seven full-time employees including the Fire Chief, Operations Chief, District Office Administrator, three Shift Captains and an apparatus/logistics maintenance position. Most of the district's personnel are volunteer firefighters, currently 34 and six are student firefighters. The department responds from seven strategically located fire stations and has a fully dedicated training facility. The department has an ISO Class-5 rating and is considered an "All Hazards" response organization. During the week for business hours, the department has a staffing level of six personnel and the only station staffed with full-time personnel is the main station/headquarters.

### **Illinois Valley Fire District**

The Illinois Valley Fire District (IVFD) covers a response area of 144 square miles and is situated in the City of Cave Junction, Southwest of Grants Pass. The district is intersected by US Route 199, (The Redwood Highway) and State Route 46. The district is classified as a combination department with a staff of eight full-time employees including the Fire Chief, Deputy Chief, Division Chief of Operations/Prevention, Division Chief of Logistics/Maintenance, an ASE-certified Fire Mechanic and the District Secretary. The district has a roster of 30 Paid-Call/Volunteer firefighters. The IVFD responds from six strategically located fire stations covering the communities of Selma, O'Brien, Holland, Dryden, and Takilma. Both the district website and Facebook page state that the department is a "Full-Service Fire Suppression and EMS" response agency.

### **Williams Rural Fire District**

The Williams Rural Fire District (WRFD) covers a response area of 36 square miles and is situated in the town of Williams which is located south of Grants Pass and southwest of Applegate. The district is classified as all volunteer and staffed by a volunteer Fire Chief, Captain, Lieutenant, Administrative Assistant and eight volunteer firefighters. The WRFD responds from a single station located in the town of Williams with 3,000 residents within the district. The WRFD responds to an average of 250 incidents per year. The district does not have a fire marshal or formal fire prevention programs. The district is funded through a tax levy with an annual budget of \$320,000. The WRFD responds to structure and wildland fires, traffic accidents, hazardous materials and EMS incidents, which account for most of the incidents. The district has an ISO Class-10 rating and is not considered and "All-Hazards" response organization.

### **Wolf Creek Rural Fire District**

The Wolf Creek Rural Fire District (WCRFD) is situated directly along the Interstate 5 corridor on Old Highway 99. The WCRFD Fire Chief was not available for an interview.

### **Automatic/Mutual Aid Responses and County-Wide Minimum Standards**

Original MA date is 1992 In January of 2010 Fire Chiefs from 21 fire agencies in both Josephine and Jackson County began negotiating a mutual-aid agreement. The mutual-aid agreement was developed to ensure the Rogue Valley fire departments, both in Josephine and Jackson Counties would aid with both structural and wildland fire responses, if needed. This mutual-aid agreement outlined the processes for ordering and requesting fire department resources for incidents that overwhelmed a single fire department. The document was fully executed by the end of 2010. Rural Metro Fire and its resources are included in the agreement, County Fire currently is not, but are working towards meeting the requirements from the Rogue Valley Fire Chief's Association (RVFCA) to become a participant in the agreement.

### **Minimum Standards for Private Fire Service Providers**

On August 1, 2016, the Josephine County Board of County Commissioners received a letter from the president of the Rogue Valley Fire Chief's Association pertaining to recommended minimum standards for private companies providing fire protection services. The letter provided details the processes used by the RVFCA to develop eleven standards to be applied to all private companies providing fire protection services in Josephine County. The letter presented by the RVFCA was requested by the Board of County Commissioners for their review and consideration to adopt these standards. The intent of the standards is to ensure all private service providers operations are performed in a safe and consistent manner and that companies have liability insurance coverage.

According to both the Fire Chief from Rural Metro Fire and the Chair of the Josephine County Fire Defense Board, insurance levels were not randomly selected by members of the RVFCA as has been alleged by the



previous owner of County Fire. During the minimum standard development process, the RVFCA contacted the Oregon Association of Special Districts and requested information regarding minimum insurance coverage levels. The insurance coverage levels contained in the RVFCA minimum standards document reflect coverage levels met by all special districts throughout Oregon.

To be considered/approved as a participant in the mutual aid system, a company must present the RVFCA with verification that each of the eleven conditions are met to include the insurance coverage levels. Once all documentation is verified, the company would be allowed to participate in the RVFCA mutual aid response system. Although this background information was provided to the BCC, the Board took no action on this recommendation.

To provide context to the timelines as to how one company could participate in the mutual aid agreement and the other was not, PCG spoke with members of the RVFCA and chair of the Josephine County Fire Defense Board regarding this issue.

The RVFCA were working on developing minimum standards to be applied to the private companies operating in Josephine County, as they were developing criteria for the mutual aid agreement, specifically Rural Metro Fire and Inland Fire. Rural Metro Fire was able to provide proof through documentation verifying compliance with each of the 11 articles of the developing standards even though they had not yet been formally adopted by the RVFCA. At the time, Inland Fire, (the precursor to County Fire) was unable to demonstrate that it met the same requirements and as such was not allowed participation in the mutual aid system.

In April of 2017, the owner of County Fire Department again petitioned the RVFCA for admittance into the mutual aid agreement and on April 28, 2017, the owner received a letter from the president of the RVFCA denying his request.

The rationale for denial was provided in writing and stated the company failed to provide documentation of a contract with a licensed Department of Public Safety Standards and Training (DPSST) communications center, nor did they provide documentation that they met the minimum insurance requirements. The letter clearly stated that once County Fire could provide the required documentation their request would be re-evaluated.

#### ***Private Fire Service Responders in Josephine County***

Although not unique, use of private fire service providers in the municipal setting is rare in the US. Use of private companies for wildland firefighting across the US is, however, very commonplace and a very cost-effective way to provide fire suppression resources in combatting wildland fires. The US Forest Service, BLM and many, if not all, state firefighting agencies utilize private resources on what is commonly known as a "Call-When-Needed" or CWN basis. This is the reason for the cost effectiveness of these resources as they are used through pre-established contracts and brought to bear when an incident overwhelms full-time resources or because maintaining the personnel and equipment of a full-time resource is cost prohibitive. CWN resources typically come in the form of aircraft, (both rotor and fixed wing), water tenders, hand crews and individual resource positions such as fire line EMT's as well as support resources for long duration incidents such as mess/food service units, sleeping accommodations and even shower and lavatory facilities in remote locations.

In Josephine County and particularly in the areas surrounding Grants Pass, use of private fire service providers has been common as previously detailed in earlier sections of this report. This section will focus on outlining the current operations of the two private service providers, Rural Metro Fire Department, owned and operated by Global Medical Response (GMR) and County Fire, a locally owned and operated small business venture.

#### ***Rural Metro Fire Department***

Rural Metro Fire Department (RMFD) provides response coverage to an area of the county that fluctuates between 250 and 300 square miles in the area surrounding Grants Pass. However, it is important to point out that RMFD is committed to and provides extensive response assistance to a much broader area depending on the incident type and location. RMFD responds from seven geographically located fire stations, three of which are staffed full-time and one currently staffed during peak response periods 12 hours during the daytime. RMFD is working to construct crew living quarters at this facility and, when completed, will serve as the fourth fully staffed station. RMFD has a customer base of 11,000 properties which is also a number that fluctuates based on subscriber contracts. The department has a total compliment of 79 personnel, 57-line personnel positions from Battalion Chief to firefighter and 22 administrative/support staff including the Fire Chief, Operations Division



Chief, Fire Marshal, Business Manager, administrative staff, and fleet maintenance. Staffing on apparatus consists of two personnel, Company Officer and either a full-time or part-time firefighter.

For incidents in areas covered by paid call/part-time personnel in the remote stations, personnel are notified by text or pager of an incident and respond to the appropriate station. This notification process is also followed for multi-alarm incidents where additional personnel and apparatus are needed. Minimum daily staffing for RMFD is nine personnel during day-time hours and seven during overnight hours. The department can staff all stations during high-fire danger periods. The department maintains the following apparatus:

- Type 1 Engines (Structure) – 7
- Type 2 or 3 Engines (Wildland) – 4
- Type 6 Engines (Wildland) – 2
- Type 1 Water Tenders (Dual Role) – 5
- Specialty Apparatus for Hazardous Materials, Technical Rescue and SCBA support – 1
- Rapid Extraction Module, (REM) Unit (All Terrain side-by-side used for remote access technical rescues) – 1

The department responds to an average of 2,700 incidents per year. RMFD is a participant in the Rogue Valley Automatic/Mutual Aid Response Systems and is dispatched by the 911 communications center operated by Grants Pass Public Safety Department. They share radio frequencies with all the fire agencies that are participants of the Mutual Aid Agreement. Command staff of the department are part of the countywide Incident Management Team (IMT) which is activated for large-scale incidents. Because of these important factors, Rural Metro can meet the provisions of NFPA 1710 for having not less than 14 personnel assembled on scene with the first alarm assignment with automatic/mutual aid assistance. Rural Metro is also able to meet and exceed the OSHA 2-in-2-out requirements as well as having fully certified/qualified Incident Commanders and Incident Safety Officers. The department currently has a mixed class rating from ISO with a rating of Class-4 in areas that have fire hydrants every 300 feet between hydrants; a rating of Class-5 in areas where there is a 1,000 feet separation between hydrants; and a rating of Class-10 for those areas where there are no hydrants and properties are greater than one and a half linear highway miles from a fire station, particularly one that is unstaffed.

With regards to staffing, RMFD can provide significant enhancements to their staffing levels during major fire events. During the recent Mega-Fires that impacted both Josephine and Jackson Counties RMFD brought in additional line firefighters from their operations in Tennessee and Arizona and an additional engine from Arizona. In discussing this issue with the RMFD chief he indicated that Rural Metro has provided additional staffing from out of state three of the past four years. The RMFD Chief also stated that in addition to line-firefighters and equipment, Rural Metro can provide additional overhead personnel such as Division Group Supervisors, Safety Officers and Command Staff personnel to augment local overhead teams. The Chief also indicated that Rural Metro would continue with this policy in the future as needed.

RMFD has a fire prevention division staffed by a full-time fire marshal and three part-time fire inspectors. The department does provide and conducts cause and origin investigations. RMFD will turn over an investigation to an AHJ such as the Oregon State Fire Marshal or ODF when situations/circumstances warrant doing so, as they lack legal authority as a private company. The map below shows the locations of Rural Metro's fire stations and response area.



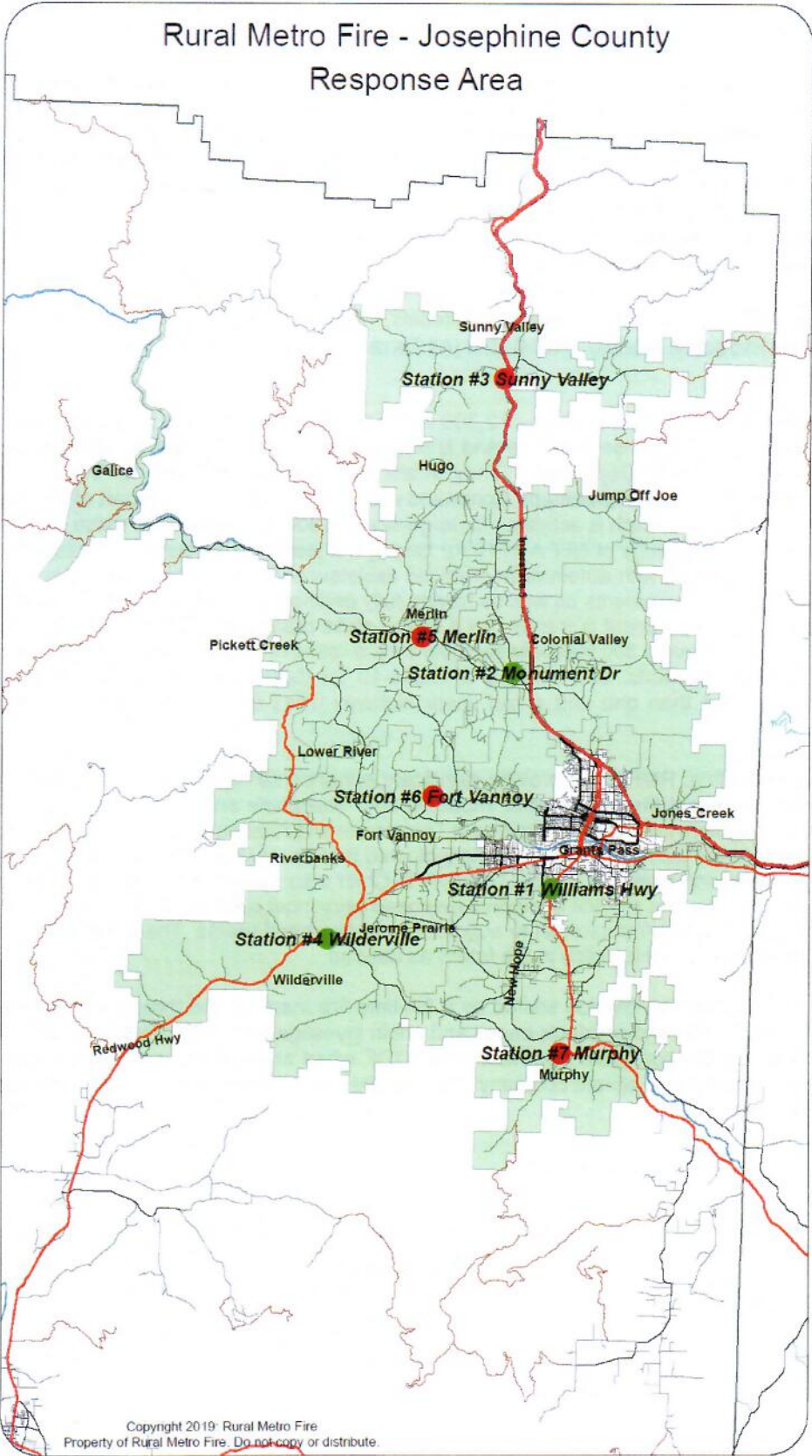


Figure: V.2: Rural Metro Response Areas and Fire Station Locations