



LOCAL AGENCY FORMATION COMMISSION
550 Main Street, Suite E. Placerville, CA 95667
(530) 295-2707 • lafco@edlafco.us • www.edlafco.us

July 22, 2020

Honorable Suzanne N. Kingsbury
Presiding Judge of the El Dorado County Superior Court
1354 Johnson Boulevard
South Lake Tahoe, CA 96150

Dear Judge Kingsbury,

The El Dorado Local Agency Formation Commission has received the recent Grand Jury Report on fire districts, titled "WEST SLOPE FIRE PROTECTION UPDATE," Grand Jury Case No. 19-06. On behalf of this Commission, I thank you for the opportunity to comment.

El Dorado LAFCO has carefully considered the report, the methodology, its findings and each of the recommendations submitted by the Grand Jury. While the report does not include LAFCO as a respondent to this report, LAFCO was invited to respond and therefore respectfully submits this response:

Findings

F1: Long term fiscal sustainability of fire protection on the West Slope of the County is highly questionable.

Response: El Dorado LAFCO agrees with this finding.

Explanation: Fire service is labor intensive and firefighting requires a certain degree of intensive and ongoing training. Couple those demands with National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standards that volunteer firefighters receive the same level of training and equipment as paid firefighters, then you have a tremendous amount of pressure that is placed upon districts with modest financial means. Districts are making do for the moment but it is unknown how long this can be kept up without introducing, among other things, more efficiencies in the system.

S:\LAFCO Commission Meetings\2020\5 July 22 2020\Item 7 Staff Memo Attachment B (Response to Judge Kingsbury)_SIGN.docx

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F2. County citizens on the West Slope experience a wide disparity in fire protection services often masked by Automatic Aid, based on their location and their specific fire district.

Response: El Dorado LAFCO agrees with this finding.

Explanation: It is well known that there are areas within the county that are more likely to receive a response from a neighboring fire crew than their own fire department. This scenario becomes more acute during times when fire districts do not have enough volunteers to staff a fire station. If districts are not open to consolidation, in two studies so far, El Dorado LAFCO has encouraged districts to – at least - consider adjusting their boundaries to reflect the resources on the ground.

F3. Efforts to improve fire protection on the West Slope of the County have been ongoing for many years with limited success.

Response: El Dorado LAFCO agrees with this finding.

Explanation: For the past 15 years, there have been many aborted consolidation efforts, with only one successful story so far. This is true whether the consolidation discussion involved a limited number of districts or the entire Western Slope.

F4. Cal Fire has the infrastructure, staffing and expertise to be a major component of a solution to the County's fire district disparities.

Response: El Dorado LAFCO agrees with this finding.

Explanation: CALFIRE has demonstrated its openness to being a partner to the local fire agencies.

F5. Improvements in the existing fire protection model for the West Slope requires all fire protection districts to take a holistic view of fire protection and the political will to embrace change.

Response: El Dorado LAFCO agrees with this finding.

Explanation: There is a substantial amount of cooperation in the fire suppression system already, from joint grant applications to joint equipment purchases. In addition, to their credit, fire personnel staff and directors have undertaken various efforts to explore solutions, from consolidation (as discussed before) to administrative and operational efficiencies that districts can voluntarily implement. Efforts in the latter categories have borne some fruit. The more ambitious proposals have not.

F6. Fire protection districts on the West Slope have not displayed the ability to take a holistic view of fire protection or the political will to embrace change, to the detriment of all County citizens.

Response: El Dorado LAFCO partially agrees with this finding.

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Explanation: Privately, some directors and high-level personnel have taken a holistic view of the fire service model in El Dorado County and concluded that a unified structure is likely the best model for fire service. Very few individuals are willing to say so publicly.

Recommendations

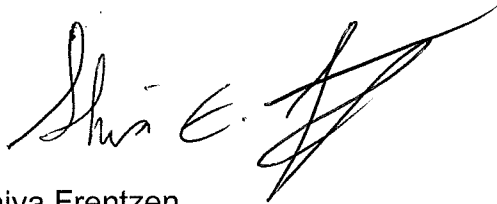
R1: Fire Protection Districts, Cal Fire, BOS and LAFCO should continue discussing ways to improve County fire protection services.

Response: El Dorado LAFCO agrees with this recommendation.

Explanation: LAFCO can have a role to play in these ongoing discussions and will definitely be involved if there has to be some type of governmental reorganization as part of the solution.

We thank the Grand Jury for its time and attention to this matter.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Shiva E. Frentzen". The signature is stylized and written in a cursive-like font.

Shiva Frentzen
Chair