Strawberry Fire Protection District

News and Information 2018

Our fire district has come a long way since our shutdown in2010 and grand reopening in 2011.

* Purchased new structure fire engine (Engine 711).
* Purchased updated protective equipment for all volunteer responders
* Outfitted both engines with new NFPA approved equipment
* Purchased a fill station to refill our air breathing equipment (SCBA’s)
* Applied for and received FEMA grants that allowed the purchase of above items
* Continually apply for Grant funding to offset major purchases
* Purchased the land the fire station sits on
* Upgraded/repaired smaller squad (Engine 714)
* Established a well trained staff of volunteers
* Developed and implemented working agreements with all local area fire districts
* Rebuilt and continue to grow reserve contingency accounts for the future of the district

All of those accomplishments won’t mean a thing if we don’t continue to strengthen our district. This means many things. First and foremost, we need a strong Board to set the goals of the district, ensure the financial stability of the district and complete the administrative duties required. A small rural district like ours has difficulty getting people to serve on the fire board mainly because the pool of eligible people is so small. This is a direct result of our community being mostly vacation homes where owners live elsewhere. It is not enough to merely own property within the district. In order to serve on the Board you need to be registered to vote within the Strawberry Fire Protection District Boundaries. That boundary isn’t as big as you might think.

**A Bit of History** – Our district was established in 1957. At that time all the properties and residences in Strawberry were located within an area bounded by Camp Bray on the West and the commercial area to the East (the inn, store and cabins along Old Strawberry Road and Old Mono Highway). Georges Drive was included at a later date. When the Strawberry Ridge Tract (Summerhill) was developed in the 1970’s, it was never added to the Strawberry Fire District but was instead annexed into County Fire responsibility area (Pinecrest station). The reason is unknown. There are letters in our historical files between the District and County officials indicating Strawberry Fire District was ready to accept responsibility when the development was proposed to County planning offices, but that never happened. Whatever the reason the fact is all properties west of the old Camp Bray Boy Scout Camp on Old Strawberry Road (near the Sugar Pine Railway Trail), are not included in our district. ***This doesn’t mean we do not respond to emergencies to your residences and properties, of course we do!*** The Strawberry Ridge Tract area’s primary response for emergencies comes from Pinecrest (a County Fire Station), but through Local Area Protection Agreements, Strawberry responds as well. Through mutual and automatic aid agreements Mi-Wuk, Twain Harte and Cal-Fire will also respond to emergencies in our area as necessary.

**Some Difficulties** – Because the residents of the Strawberry Ridge Tract do not live in the Strawberry Fire Protection District they cannot serve on the Board of Directors. That further limits the eligible pool of potential Board members. That’s just one issue.

There are several areas of overlap in our daily lives. Strawberry Fire Protection District and Strawberry Ridge Tract share the same water company. If the fire department wanted to collaborate with other entities to improve fire and emergency protection we may be limited to only improving the district boundary area. It just gets messy. The fire board was already prevented from spending district funds to purchase the Pinecrest School building since the building is not included in the SFPD boundaries. The old school building is also included in the Pinecrest Fire area of responsibility. Luckily the building was purchased by the Pinecrest Permittees Assoc. and was kept “in the family” so to speak.

We are one town that shares one Zip Code, one water company and one Homeowners Association. Shouldn’t the Fire District be the same?

**More Education** – Currently the property tax money from the Strawberry Ridge Tract allocated to fire protection goes to County Fire. Pinecrest is a County Fire Station; they are not their own district. This means the property tax money Strawberry Ridge Tract pays for fire protection is pooled into the general County Fire fund and distributed throughout the entire County Fire system; the bulk of which goes to the more populated areas. If Strawberry Ridge were a part of the Strawberry Fire Protection District the property tax money that is allocated to fire protection from that area would come back to the Strawberry District, benefiting you and all of us in this community directly.

**Working together** – Regardless of Strawberry’s designation as a special district and Pinecrest being a County Fire station, Strawberry and Pinecrest have been working together since the SFPD began rebuilding in 2010 and will continue to work as one in the future. We are continually training together and strengthening our local area protection agreements to provide the best possible emergency services to the residents and visitors in this area. Pinecrest does not receive the support it should from County Fire and that is something that the Pinecrest Permittees Association has been trying to address and improve upon with County Fire officials but with little luck. The biggest “lack of support” issue that affects all of us in the upper Sierra communities is the fact that during the height of fire and tourist season, Pinecrest is often left with only one fire engine to respond to all fire and medical emergencies along the Hwy 108 corridor from Long Barn to the top of Sonora Pass. County Fire, through their contract with Cal-Fire, borrows the equipment from Pinecrest station to utilize in other fire stations. Even worse those stations may not even be in Tuolumne County. The Cal Fire/County Fire contract allows the engine to be utilized anywhere in the State. There are many issues with that particular process that we will discuss another day. The point is this redistribution of equipment leaves Pinecrest very vulnerable and is one of the reasons why Strawberry is a vital part of emergency response with Pinecrest from Little Sweden to the top of Sonora Pass. You can imagine how difficult the logistics become when multiple emergency calls are received at the same time. If your one and only engine is responding to Kennedy Meadows or on the pass somewhere and now there is a 2nd accident/call on Hwy 108 near Little Sweden and someone else at the lake needs medical assistance….well, you get the idea. This is why the mutual and automatic aid agreements that we mentioned earlier are in place. Twain Harte Fire, Mi-Wuk Sugar Pine and Long Barn Fire are all included with Pinecrest and Strawberry Fire in these agreements. The individual Boards and Chiefs of these districts have had the forethought to protect their districts by retaining their individuality and separation from County Fire. That thought process must continue. Fire Boards need to be strong and continue to provide thoughtful and clear direction for their districts and citizens while maintaining fiscal responsibility. Once again that leads us back to the issue of needing people to serve on those Boards in order to continue providing the districts with a realistic representation of the community and bringing forth fresh ideas.

**Moving Forward –**

The current vacant Board position needs to be filled immediately.

We need more property owners need to get involved with the district – volunteer for the Operational Support Unit or to help with fundraising activities. Please complete an interest and contact sheet for additional volunteer opportunities.

The Board will begin discussion with property owners in our district and the Summerhill area to gauge interest for the potential annexation of the Strawberry Ridge Tract into the Strawberry Fire Protection District. An annexation would increase the pool of people who are eligible to serve on the Board of Directors. It will also put all Strawberry property owners under one umbrella for water and fire services. Also all property owners in Strawberry are represented by the same homeowners association (SPOA) so any issues regarding the Strawberry Fire District would now have all Strawberry residents included, thus making a stronger representation to the County.

In closing let us remember that it takes all of us to make our community safe and have the ability to continue providing emergency services to the residents and visitors of Strawberry. Keeping the district as an Independent Special District is a must if we are to have any say in the resources that are available to respond to our emergencies. Being an Independent Special District allows us to keep our equipment and money here in our own community, available for us to use when needed. We cannot let that change and that will take each and every one of us to step up and be a part of the Strawberry Fire Protection District.