

To Board of Supervisors and Measure Z Committee

Re: Additional Information for Willow Creek and Blue Lake Fire Protection District's FY 24/25 Measure Z Application – May 1, 2024

Willow Creek Fire Protection District and the Blue Lake Fire Protection District are respectfully submitting the following additional information for consideration of the ongoing services provided on the easternmost stretch of Highway 299 (30 miles) in Humboldt County and the future of those essential services per outcome of the Measure Z funding for FY 24-25. Both fire departments felt it necessary to adequately inform the Board of Supervisors of the current and future status of previously funded services on the 299 Corridor.

Willow Creek FPD and Blue Lake FPD have been servicing this critical thoroughfare in and out of Humboldt County for over 40 years, with the first 30 at no cost to the County and then paid a standby fee for out of district response since FY 2014/15. With the serious budget shortfall of last year and the defunding of the Fire Chief's Association and 41 fire departments, it was clear that this service would not be funded for FY 23-24. As the County's budget forecast continues to be bleak, members of Willow Creek FPD and Blue Lake FPD initiated meetings last fall with supervisor's Madrone and Wilson and County Administrative Officer Hayes and Deputy CAO Quincey in an effort to better inform the county of the ongoing essential service and strategize on ideas to solve this problem. Out of that, the following ideas were agreed upon:

1. There is clearly a significant State responsibility, and therefore efforts to obtain a legislative fix is critical and in motion;
2. To not conflict with the needs of the 41 fire departments (both Willow Creek and Blue Lake included), it was recommended that we submit a separate application;
3. Lastly, it was clarified by both departments that if funding was not provided for a second FY that, unfortunately, services would have to be reduced to maintain "in district" services as a clear and higher priority.

For further consideration, here is more data that hopefully will help expand one's knowledge of the scope of this essential service:

1. The Out of District service area is 120 square miles, including the neighborhoods of Redwood Valley/Chezem Rd., Titlow Hill, and Bair Rd.
2. 30 miles of Highway 299 from Trinity county line to the scales outside of Blue Lake
3. The only approved route for large Surface Transportation Assistance Act trucks in and out of Humboldt County
4. Averages 8,000-13,000 vehicles/trucks per day
5. Popular summer recreational area for both coastal Humboldt and Northern California;
6. We currently provide annually on average 90 +/- medical, wildland fire, structure fire, vehicle fire, smoke checks, motor vehicle accident, extrication, rope-rescue, general rescue and all 911 calls for service to that area.

7. This is achieved by each department:
 - a. WCFPD: Paid Chief since Feb. 2023 and 12 volunteers (note District parcels only 1,100)
 - b. BLFPD: Paid Chief since June 2020 and 18 volunteers (note District parcels only 1022)
8. All other emergency response agencies are at paid status: (Sheriff, CHP, ambulance, CalTrans)
9. Willow Creek FPD does not have time reasonable response from CalFire, as the nearest station is in Trinidad
10. Annexation is not the solution, especially when properties out of district are mostly owned by USFS and timber;
11. Lastly, over the past 3 years there have been 3 declared disasters- the Knob Fire in summer of 2021, Snowmageddon in winter of 2021, and the Six Rivers Lightning Complex in 2022
 - a. Mini example of County economic benefit: during these disasters, most responding agencies had to commute daily to Arcata/Eureka for lodging, food and gas, for example, PG&E data regarding Snowmeggedon stated 500 vehicles & 1000 personnel traveled daily!

In closing, Willow Creek FPD and Blue Lake FPD understand the difficulty of the current budget situation and the challenge that both the Measure Z Committee and the Board of Supervisors have before them. We are proud of our services to the people and visitors of Humboldt County and will strive to make the funding and staffing for this essential service seamless well into the future. But for now, our “in district” communities are, and will be, priority one. Without the funding we will have to entertain some degree of reduced services.

Thank you for considering this additional information.

Sincerely,

Samantha Smith

Samantha Smith, Chief, Willow Creek Volunteer Fire Department

David Vainuku

David Vainuku, Chief, Blue Lake Volunteer Fire Department

Robert Kennedy

Robert Kennedy, Board Chair, Willow Creek Fire Protection District

Peter Jackson

Peter Jackson, Board Chair, Blue Lake Fire Protection District