

Be Advised

By Janice Schultz

The feasibility study to determine if it is economically feasible for the BFVFD to form a rural fire district is complete. The entire study is available for review at City Hall, but a short and sweet summary follows.

Economic feasibility depends on hitting the right balance among three factors: the assessed value of properties in the area to be served; the costs of supporting the fire district; and the ability of residents to shoulder those costs. Fire districts charge a particular tax rate; the higher the number and value of improvements (structures) and land, the more money there is to support a fire district.

The major steps in this study were:

- Mapping fire district boundaries
- Calculating the assessed value found within those boundaries
- Envisioning the facilities, equipment and personnel needed to operate the district
- Developing estimated budgets and tax rates for those operations, and
- Assessing their relative feasibility

The determination of district boundaries was guided by a desire to provide fire protection to the highest number of homes in the Butte Falls area. Insurance companies consider a residence protected from fire if it is within 5 road miles of a fire station. Any home located more than 5 miles from the current Fire Station in Butte Falls is considered unprotected, even if they subscribe to the department. Few insurance companies will provide homeowners' insurance to homes further than 5 miles from a station; those that do charge handsomely. For more homes to qualify for insurance, more fire stations must be built. To cover the majority of unprotected homes, it was decided that three new stations/substations would be built on Crowfoot, Obenchain and Cobleigh Roads. Using the station in town as a base station, we mapped four different boundary scenarios (the map of these boundary scenarios is available for review at city hall).

With boundaries mapped, the assessed value of all tax lots within each scenario was calculated. This was done on a lot by lot basis, using the Front Counter application on Smartmap, Jackson County's online tax lot information database.

The assessed improvements and land value for each scenario were as follows:

• Town Scenario.....	\$15,326,620
• Crowfoot Scenario.....	16,645,790
• Obenchain	1,549,973
• Cobleigh	<u>2,528,390</u>
Combined tax base.....	\$36,050,773
10% increase in assessed land value	<u>753,000</u>
	\$36,803,773

This study has produced an estimated budget for operating and maintaining a modest, volunteer-based fire district (budget available at City Hall). The district's budget Grand Total would be \$105,408. This translates to a tax rate of **\$2.864 per \$1000** of assessed value. Under this budget scenario, a homeowner with \$80,000 assessed value on his tax lot would pay a total of \$229.12 a year for fire protection.

Is this feasible? Do the math and determine your cost. Then talk to your insurance company and see what the difference in your premium would be if you were within 5 miles of a fire station. Most of you received a letter explaining this process in more detail, and asking for your thoughts. Please read the letter and respond to it, or respond to this article. Got any ideas on how to go forward? Let us know! If we can't form a rural fire district, how can we get to where we want to be? What can we do to provide the level of fire protection explained above? The BFVFD is looking towards the future to increase quality of life for everyone we serve.

Thank You for your support. **See you at the lasagna dinner!!!!**

The Hazardous Fuels Reduction Grant is Still Available to Butte Falls

Did you know that you could have a good portion of the hazardous fuels around your home **eliminated** by this Fire Season? The Butte Falls Volunteer Fire Department still has grant money available to pay for fuel reduction activities such as brush cutting, thinning and pruning up to 300 feet around a home site. You could get your driveway brushed out too.

This is a great opportunity, especially for those who live in the wildland-urban interface, which around here is most of us. All you have to do to qualify is live in the Fire Protection Subscriber Area, which includes the Town or anywhere outside of town where the fire department responds. Then call Chief Jeff Gorman at City Hall – 865-3262, or the Fire Office – 865-4383 and talk to him about your options for completing the work. If he is unavailable, leave your number and he will call you back.

DO NOT miss out on this great chance to make your defensible space safe so firefighters will come in and protect your home when a fire breaks out in your area. You will be glad that you did.