

East Fork Fire Protection District

# PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tod F. Carlini, District Fire Chief

775-782-9048

## **East Fork Fire Protection District Adopts Budget**

Minden- For the first time in its 36 year history, the East Fork Fire Protection District adopted its Final Budget for the upcoming fiscal year independent of Douglas County. In August of last year, the Douglas County Board of Commissioners, who had served as the governing body of the district, adopted an ordinance which caused the creation of an independent Board of Directors. The first board was appointed by the County Commission and has been serving since January 4, 2017.

The new board adopted the fiscal year 2017-2018 budget at its May meeting as well as conducted a second public hearing on the proposed and now final budget. The budget supports 72 employed personnel, 8 volunteer fire departments, administration, all fire suppression, emergency medical services, training and safety, technical rescue needs, hazardous materials response and fire prevention and totals \$14,952,934. The budget follows the guidelines established by the East Fork Fire Protection District Board of Directors and as provided for in NRS 474. The Final Budget includes a 1.5% (\$187,288) contingency and a 12.4% (\$1,546,273) ending fund balance. Traditionally, most government entities carry an ending fund balance of 8.3% while the State minimum is 4%. The district is currently in contract negotiations. Personnel costs for the district account for just over 77% of the fund allocations. While the district has some critical needs, financial sustainability is even more critical. The 12.4% ending fund balance hopes to ensure sustainability and also to cover some future volatile revenue projections which are based on current reimbursements of some federal programs, in particular Medicaid.

The District, like some other health care providers, has been financially impacted by the implementation of the Affordable Health Care Act and continues to work internally to make adjustments in expenditures to compensate. Over the past several years and through the recession, the district was forced to dip into reserves and forgo the replacement hiring of five full time positions including three Firefighter Paramedic positions, a fire inspector, and most recently a Deputy Fire Chief. The three critical Firefighter Paramedic positions have since been re-filled. The district's staffing is critical and with the loss of its one time strong volunteer force due to demographic changes, lack of affordable housing, and training requirements, additional career staff is needed. District Chief Tod Carlini noted **"The district is geographically challenged. We provided service over 650 square miles and our call volume is escalating at a rate of 3% to 4% per year. We staff 19 positions per day between five staffed stations."** The district ran 6,300 calls last year and is on pace to run 6500 calls this year. Chief Carlini stated that, **"Collectively, our ambulances are on the road 21 out of 24 hours each day."** Over 85% are emergency medical calls. With the sharp decline in all-hazard response volunteers, the district simply will require more paid positions. The district does intend to roll out a new volunteer program with an emphasis on wildland fire response and logistical support provided by volunteers. Carlini stated that the district needs additional staff to respond to the all hazard needs of the

community and volunteers to logistically support those responses. All of that will require additional funding for staff and for people in the community to step up and volunteer.

The district has a tax rate of .4874 cents, one of the lowest rates for fire and emergency medical services protection in the region. Property taxes and sales taxes account for over 72% of the district's funding. While the district does charge for ambulance service, the rate of return on collections is low in as much as over 50% of the patients served are on some type of federally supported program, which limits the district from collecting the entire fee for service.

The district's budget supports one of the most progressive and complete firefighter training programs within the state. Training offerings include all entry level logistical and support training for our volunteers and supports specialized, recertification, and routine training for career staff. The District now participates in a regional training academy for all of its new employees. While an expensive option, the quality of training is unsurpassed and the recruits that complete the academy add an entirely new and positive cultural change for the district.

The final budget provides for an increase in Ambulance User Fees and Fire and Life Safety Plan Review Fees. The district has not raised its plan review fees since 2005 and its Ambulance Fees since 2013. The District will also be making its seventh out of ten annual payments on its District Office facility. Only a limited amount of funding is dedicated to capital maintenance and acquisition.

Under an inter-local agreement, the Fire District provides Douglas County with Emergency Management Services. Funding provided by Douglas County for this obligation is included in the District's budget and is now a key revenue source. The current arrangement works well for both the District and the County with respect to levels of service provided, including 24 hour on-call responsibilities by of the District's Chief Fire Officers and as part of their weekly "duty chief" assignments.

As the district winds down its current fiscal year, they work to complete the transition from being a component unit of Douglas County government in virtually all areas of the operation. The district will continue to receive Information Technology Services (IT) from Douglas County under a fee contract service agreement for just over \$110,000 per year. All other services once provided by the county and paid for under a cost allocation/recovery program have been assumed by the district, either internally, or through contract services, such as legal counsel and auditing.

Copies of the East Fork Fire Protection District Fiscal Year budget and both tentative and final budget presentations can be found on-line at [eastforkfire.org](http://eastforkfire.org). The East Fork Fire Protection District Board of Directors meets the second Tuesday of each month at the District Office, 1694 County Road in Minden. Agenda's for meetings can be found at [eastforkfire.org](http://eastforkfire.org).