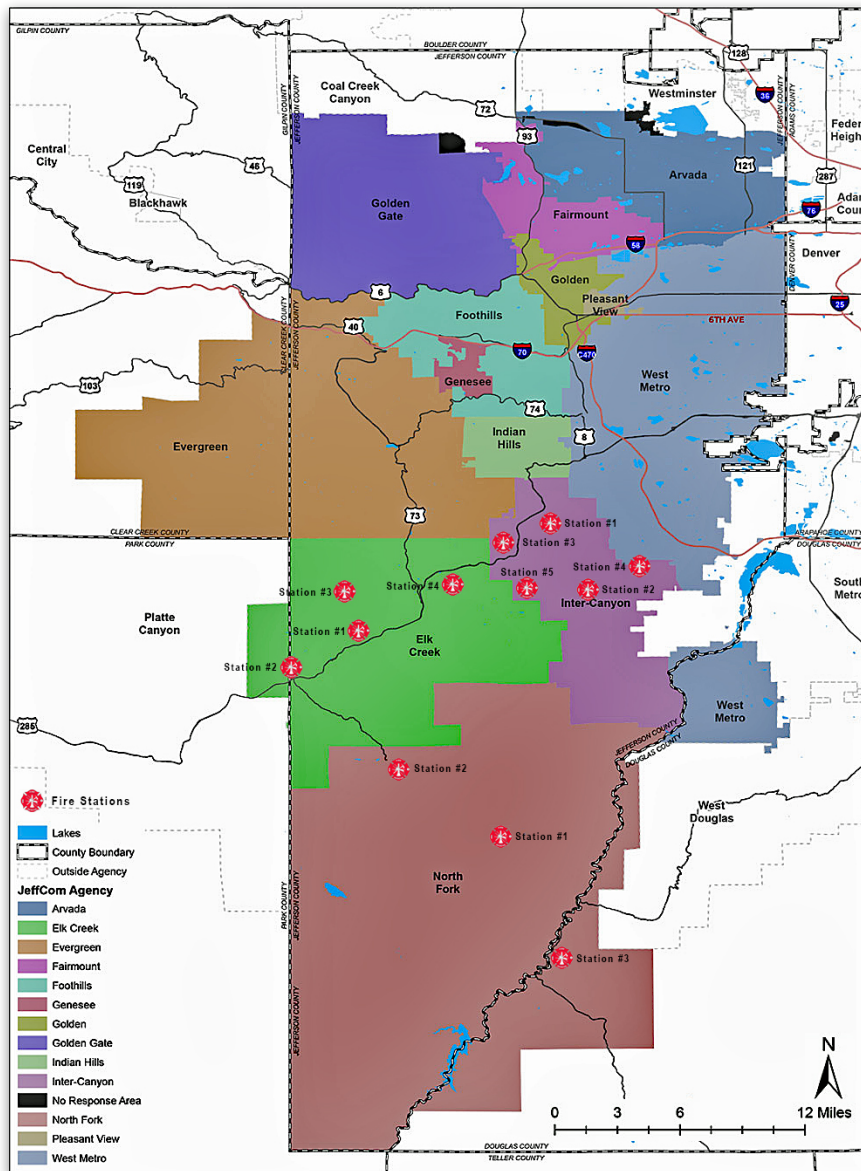


## ANALYSIS: PROPOSED FIRE DISTRICT CONSOLIDATION PLAN

**INTRODUCTION:** As you may know, the Fire Chiefs Ware, Shirlaw, and Rogers of the [Elk Creek](#), [Inter-Canyon](#), and [North Fork](#) Fire Protection Districts (FPDs) advocate the merger of the fire districts with an increase in the property tax mill levy to a common 16 mills, Figure 1 shows a map of the districts. However, despite repeated requests, the Fire Chiefs have refused to conduct a community engagement process that would create a much needed common vision for improving fire protection and emergency medical services for the residents of our mountain area.



**FIGURE 1:** Elk Creek, Inter-Canyon, and North Fork FPDs, source [JeffCom GIS](#).

**FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT DEMOGRAPHICS:** A summary of the key demographics for each of the three individual fire protection districts is listed under the green column headers of Table 1 while a summary of comparable demographics of the proposed consolidated/merged fire district are listed under the orange column header.

**TABLE 1:** Summary of Fire Protection District Demographics.

DEMOGRAPHICS	ECFPD	ICFPD	NFFPD	MERGED FPD
<b>POPULATION<sup>a</sup></b>	17,000	5,250	1,700	24,000
<b>GEOGRAPHIC AREA</b>	98 sq-mi	52 sq-mi	240 sq-mi	390 sq-mi
<b>CURRENT MILL LEVY</b>	12.54 <sup>b</sup>	13.56	12.08	16.00 <sup>c</sup>
<b>2022 ANNUAL REVENUE</b> <b>PROPERTY VALUATION<sup>f</sup></b>	\$5,800,000 <sup>d</sup> \$366,826,000	\$2,313,000 \$170,575,000	\$450,000 <sup>e</sup> \$37,252,000	\$9,700,000 (projected)
<b>CASH RESERVES</b> <b>[CAPITAL EXPENSE LOANS/BONDS]</b>	\$6M [\$390K]	\$3M [\$315K]	\$500K [\$95K]	\$5M [\$30M] <sup>g</sup>
<b>ISO RATING</b>	5/10	4	5/10	5/10
<b>CAREER FIREFIGHTER/EMT PERSONNEL</b>	12 3 shifts of 4 24/7 service	3 no 24/7 shifts	2 no 24/7 shifts	30 <sup>h</sup> 10 shifts 24/7 service
<b>VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER/EMT PERSONNEL</b>	35	30	30	50 <sup>h</sup>
<b>WILDLAND FIREFIGHTER PERSONNEL</b>	3 full-time 5 seasonal <sup>i</sup>	3 full-time 5 seasonal <sup>i</sup>	na	4 full-time 14 seasonal
<b>ADMINISTRATIVE PERSONNEL</b>	5 <sup>j</sup>	3 <sup>j</sup>	3 <sup>j</sup>	15
<b>FIRE STATIONS</b>	4	5	3	12 <sup>k</sup>
<b>AMBULANCES</b>	3	3	2	8
<b>FIREFIGHTING APPARATUS</b>	11	10	6	27

DEMOGRAPHICS	ECFPD	ICFPD	NFFPD	MERGED FPD
<b>UTILITY VEHICLES</b>	10	5	6	21
<b>BOARD OF DIRECTORS</b>	5	5	5	5 <sup>1</sup>

**ANALYSIS OF PROPOSED CONSOLIDATION PLAN:** Using the plan information recently released by the Elk Creek, Inter-Canyon, and North Fork FPDs along with available demographic data, an analysis performed by the Committee reveals that the ill-conceived "Consolidation Plan" put forth by the Fire Chiefs will have significant negative financial, emergency response, and level-of-service related impacts on not only on the 17,000 residents of the current Elk Creek FPD but the 5,250 Inter-Canyon and 1,700 North Fork FPD residents as well. Table 2 below summarizes the long-term, negative impacts that the proposed Consolidation Plan will create for our mountain community.

**TABLE 2:** Summary of Consolidation Plan Impacts.

ANALYSIS: CONSOLIDATION PLAN IMPACTS
<b>Citizens of the Conifer, Aspen Park, South Evergreen, &amp; Pine Junction Communities Will Lose Local Control While Paying \$640 of Every \$1,000 Spent by the Consolidated/Merged Fire District</b>
<b>Unnecessary Addition of 26 Career Firefighter/EMT, Administrative Staff, Equipment, &amp; Construction Places an Unfair, Long-term Financial Burden on the Mountain Community</b>
<b>Personnel Additions Require New Construction of Two Fire Station HQs, a Third Fire Station Must be Refurbished, &amp; Equipment Purchases Create up to \$30M in Long-term Indebtedness</b>
<b>Property Taxes at 16 Mills Projects Revenues of \$9.7M per Year but Debt Service on a ~\$30M Debt Load Requires ~\$3M Yearly Debt Service or Revenues of &gt;\$13.5M Yearly Requiring 20+ Mills</b>

While the citizens of the Conifer, Aspen Park, South Evergreen, and Pine Junction communities will bear the vast majority of the economic burden envisioned by the Consolidation Plan, the communities of Morrison, Pine Grove, and Buffalo Creek will also be economically burdened for years to come. Moreover, as described in the next sections, the entire population of the proposed, newly consolidated district will be locked into to a Consolidation Plan that has not been designed to meet the needs

of our mountain communities, instead, the plan that the Fire Chiefs have created is narrowly focused on raising property taxes in order to pay for \$22M in unnecessary, new capital spending costing the taxpayers up to \$30M when loans/bonds are repaid over the next 20 years.

**Unjustly Requires Local Citizens/Taxpayers to Give Political Control/Taxing Authority to Outsiders** - The Consolidation Plan requires that - in November of 2023 - the 17,000 citizens of the Conifer, South Evergreen, Aspen Park, and Pine Junction communities give political control, taxing authority, and operational decision-making over to a five-member board-of-directors, three of whom local voters did not elect. Additionally, the voters will not have an opportunity to elect new directors until 2025, but then only two, while the remaining three directors do not stand for election until 2027, please see Section 5.3 of the so-called [Pre-consolidation IGA](#) approved by the respective district boards.

**Unnecessarily Places an Enormous Debt Burden on the Community** - The Elk Creek, Inter-Canyon, and North Fork FPD Fire Chiefs have created a Consolidation Plan that calls for the follow key initiatives:

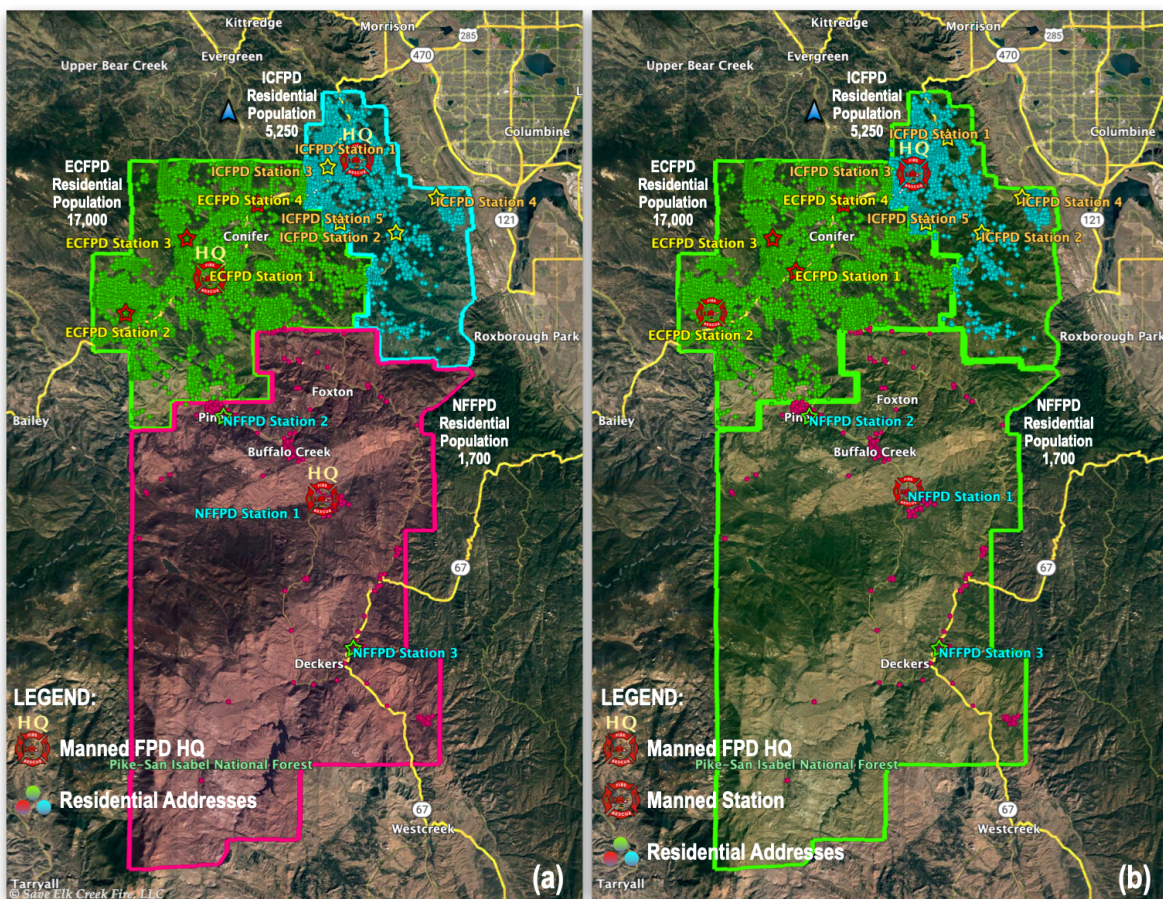
1. Hire 24 new career staff including Firefighters/EMTs, a Fire Chief, 3 Battalion Chiefs, & Administrative Staff.<sup>1</sup>
2. Construct a new three-story, 14,000 sq-ft "Flagship Fire District HQ" at Inter-Canyon FPD Fire Station 3, at Settlers Drive & U.S.-285, Morrison CO (nextdoor to the Compassionate Dharma Cloud Monastery), please see Figure 2.<sup>2</sup>
3. Construct a new multi-story, 7,000 sq-ft "Fire Battalion HQ" at Elk Creek FPD Station 2, 650 Mt Evans Boulevard, Pine CO.<sup>3</sup>
4. Refurbish the currently one-story 7,500 sq-ft "Fire Battalion HQ" at North Fork FPD Station 1, 19384 CO HWY 126, Buffalo Creek CO.<sup>4</sup>
5. Purchase new fleet engines, tenders, & ambulances.<sup>5</sup>



**FIGURE 2:** [Flagship Fire District HQ](#) at Settlers Drive & U.S.-285, Morrison CO, source F&D International.

Crucially, the Committee estimates that the baseline cost for this new spending \$22M but the interest paid on bonds/loans will increase the project baseline spending to a taxpayer indebtedness of up to \$30M when repaid over the next twenty years. Additionally, an indebtedness this large will require an additional \$3M in tax revenue yearly, just to service this level of debt, thus necessitating an additional mill levy increase to 20 mills or possibly more.

**Improperly Reduces the Current High-Level-of-Service to the Elk Creek FPD Community** - The reduction in the level-of-service that the residents of the Elk Creek FPD will experience - as envisioned by the Consolidation Plan - is clearly illustrated by contrasting the before and after situations shown in Figures 3(a) and (b).

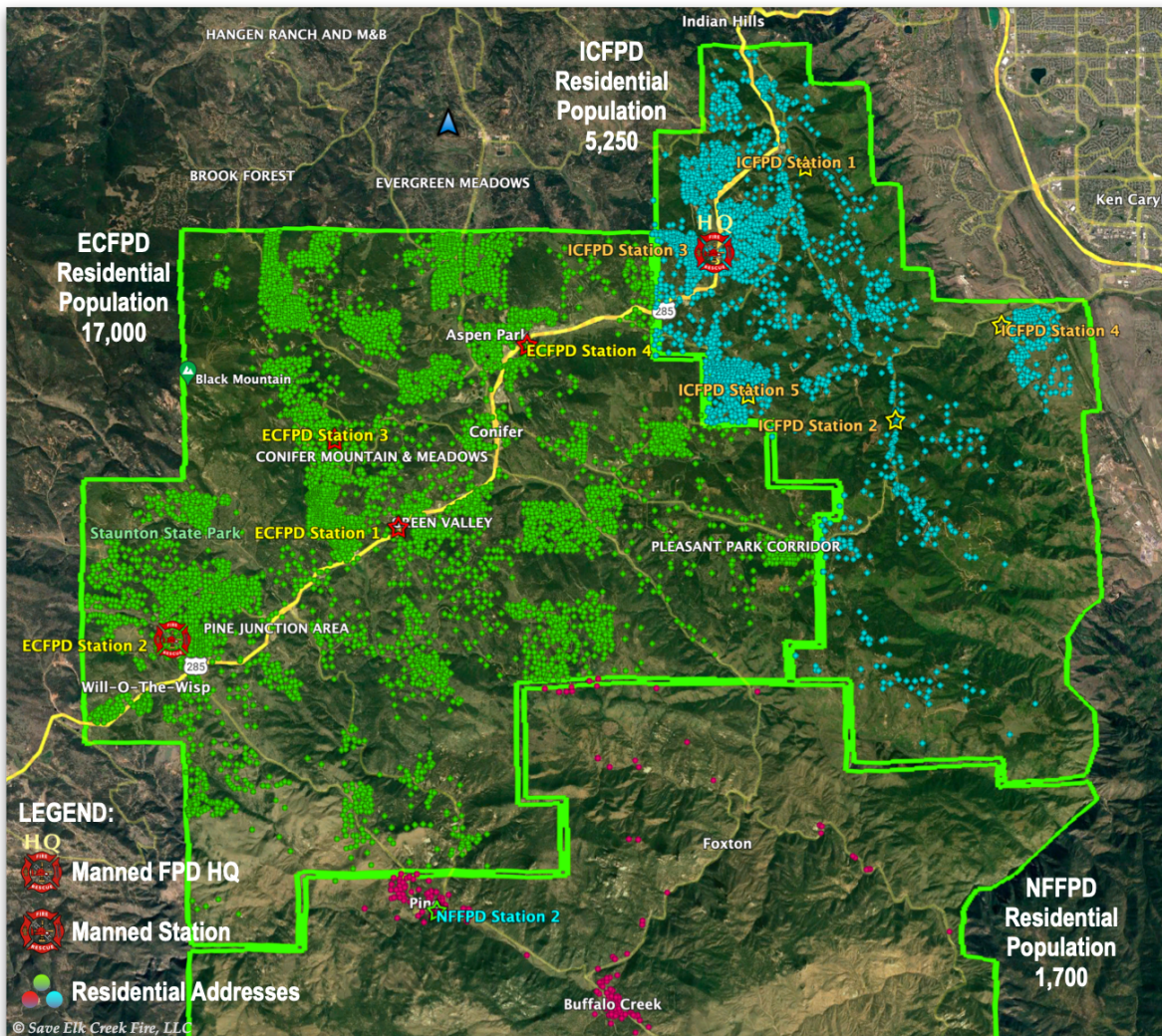


**FIGURE 3:** Elk Creek, Inter-Canyon, & North Fork FPDs: (a) Pre-consolidation & (b) Post-consolidation.

Importantly, note that whereas prior to consolidation, the Elk Creek FPD fire stations with firefighter/EMT personnel are well located relative to the populations they serve, immediately following consolidation essentially the same 24/7 shift personnel would be required to serve - instead of a 98 sq-mi they will serve a nearly 400 sq-mi service

area - indeed, residents of the former Inter-Canyon and North Fork FPDs will have every right to demand that they receive an equal, even if, a seriously degraded level of emergency service. Note also that the residents/taxpayers of the former Elk Creek FPD will pay, out of their pockets, \$640 of every \$1000 of services provided to the new fire district.

Moreover, before consolidation, the manned HQ stations for the Elk Creek, Inter-Canyon, and North Fork FPDs are appropriately located near their population centers, as shown in Figure 3(a). However, shown below in Figure 3(b), after consolidation the level-of-service for the 17,000 residents of the Elk Creek FPD will be degraded due to the fact that the nearest manned station - the newly to be construction at Elk Creek FPD Station 2 in Pine Junction - is now located much further from the Conifer, Aspen Park, Green Valley, Conifer Mountain, and Pleasant Park population clusters (more easily visualized by the Figure 4 enlargement).



**FIGURE 4:** Consolidation Plan Reduces Services for Residents of the Elk Creek FPD.

Specifically, note that while the newly constructed, manned Flagship Fire District HQ station located at Inter-Canyon Station 3 does help serve the 5,250 nearby residents - as a result of the long response time related to its distance from the population cluster of Conifer/Aspen Park - this new station will not compensate for the degradation of service resulting due to the mis-location of the newly constructed Elk Creek FPD Station 2.

**Unfairly Requires Elk Creek FPD Taxpayers to Subsidize Attempts to Upgrade the Services at the Inter-Canyon and North Fork FPDs** - Given the demographic disparities among the Elk Creek, Inter-Canyon and North Fork FPDs it is clear that - due to its concentrated population of 17,000 residents, \$367M property tax base, and already high-quality firefighting/EMS infrastructure - the Consolidation Plan envisions that the taxpayers of the Elk Creek FPD will be required to subsidize, at a ratio of \$640 for every \$1,000 spent, the future daily operations plus capital improvements planned for the other two fire districts just to bring those districts up to a reasonable standard-of-service. That is, for every \$1,000 in spending, the taxpayers of the current Inter-Canyon and North Fork FPDs will be required to spend only \$300 and \$60 per \$1,000 respectively, truly, a bargain.<sup>6</sup>

While the citizen-taxpayers of the Elk Creek FPD have for years enjoyed a very-high-level of firefighter/EMS services on a 24/7 basis, the adoption of the Consolidation Plan will require those taxpayers to take on the very significant difficulties that have troubled the Inter-Canyon and North Fork FPDs for years:

- Inter-Canyon FPD, despite its well-clustered population of 5,250 residents across 52 sq-mi, relatively high \$171M property valuation, more than adequate fire protection/EMS apparatus/equipment, & low call volume, has for years struggled to deliver an average-level-of-service with no 24/7 responders.
- North Fork FPD with its small population of 1,700 residents scattered across 240 sq-mi of the most hard-to-reach, mountainous areas of Jefferson & Douglas Counties, has a low property valuation of only \$37M & a high proportion of federal lands within the fire district, thus will need a large infusion of resources in order to improve its average-level-of-service with no 24/7 responders.

It is simply unfair to ask the citizen/taxpayers of the Elk Creek FPD to subsidize the massive infusion of dollars over twenty years or more that it will take to bring the Inter-Canyon and North Fork FPDs into the 21st century.

**UNDERSTANDING THE "COMMUNITY EDUCATION CAMPAIGN" CONDUCTED BY THE ELK CREEK, INTER-CANYON, AND NORTH FORK FPDs:** Instead of offering a balanced presentation of the facts relating to the consolidation/merger question - that is, noting both expected benefits of a consolidated fire district along-side any foreseeable challenges - the Fire Chiefs have hired two industry-insider consulting firms, Turn Corps Political and Communications Strategies (Turn Corps) and Magellan

Strategies, to develop a "community education campaign" (the Campaign) across the three fire districts. A fact-check of two representative advertising campaign collaterals reveals how the Campaign narrative embeds half-truths, misinformation, and disinformation into its basic messaging as a mechanism designed to manipulate public perception and voter behavior, please see: [Fact-Check: Consolidation Fact Sheet](#) and [Fact-Check: Consolidation Mailer](#).

Taken from the "Consolidation Fact Sheet", Figure 5 below illustrates how the Campaign attempts to play on the emotions of local residents in order to create anxiety that is meant to lead the voter to a single conclusion: "A YES vote on the ballot question proposing consolidation - including a property tax increase to a levy of 16 mills - is the ONLY WAY to ensure that when they dial 9-1-1, someone will be there to respond in their hour of need!"

Additionally, the box shown in the figure - again, taken from the "Consolidation Fact Sheet" - with title "What's The Issue?", is emblematic of the false-narrative put forward by the Campaign: Note the one-sided presentation of the "facts" supporting a YES VOTE on the consolidation/merger ballot question and please also see the red-colored graphic box showing the "warning symbol" enclosing the statement, "Right now, NONE of our districts have the personnel to cover a large-scale structure or wildfire alone." The fact is that NO fire district ever covers a large-scale fire or similar extreme emergency "alone", since professional firefighter/EMT personnel always do so through MUTUAL AID.



**FIGURE 5:** . Representative Campaign Messaging from a Collateral Entitled, [Consolidation Fact Sheet](#), Retrieved on March 31, 2023 at [Mountain Fire Resources](#).



Moreover, throughout the 2022 - 2023 budget years, the Fire Chiefs have requested funding to allow Turn Corps to spend \$95K - \$125K in hard-earned taxpayer dollars to lobby the voters to approve a consolidation/merger while at the same time, raising their own property taxes to 16 mills, please see: [Turn Corps Contract](#). Additionally, since 2020 the fire districts have given \$60K to AP Triton to produce a [Cooperative Services Feasibility Study, by AP Triton, November 2021](#) and \$21K to Magellan Strategies to conduct a so-called community survey that was highly biased in favor of leading the respondent toward a conclusion for the consolidation/merger position and, when attorney's fees, dollars paid to fire district employees, and the efforts of Fire Chiefs are included, the Campaign for consolidation/merger has cost the taxpayers a small fortune in both dollars and opportunity costs.

It is of great concern that the conduct of this Campaign, approved and coordinated by the Fire Chiefs, lacks any sense of balance but, more importantly, falls well outside the legal guidelines provided by the Colorado Special District Association (SDA) for the fire districts regarding issues that may come before the voters, please see page 45 of the 2023 SDA Board Members Manual.<sup>7</sup>

**A FIRE AUTHORITY AS A POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVE TO CONSOLIDATION:** The proposed consolidation of our three local fire districts is a matter of great concern for residents of the community as well as other stakeholders. However, from the start of the public discussions about consolidation in 2021 - at that point, the term used was "cooperation" - there has been no discussion from the Fire Chiefs as to alternative solutions to the issues they claim will continue to trouble the fire districts for years to come. Therefore, the Committee offers the possible alternative of a Fire Authority rather than consolidation as an alternative which will maintain local citizen-control of their fire district while, if implemented properly, may result in a higher-level of overall firefighter and emergency medical services delivered to the broader community.

Specially, we recommend that the Elk Creek, Inter-Canyon, and North Fork FPDs:

- Continue mutual-aid collaboration and inter-governmental agreements among the three fire districts
- Develop *Strategic Plan*<sup>8</sup> & *Standard of Cover*<sup>9</sup> for each fire district
- Based on results of *Strategic Plan* & *Standard of Cover*, determine staffing, equipment, facilities, financial needs, and consider necessary adjustments
- Develop a community-driven, [Common Vision](#) from a *Needs Assessment* for fire protection and emergency medical services
- Based on the [Common Vision](#) developed above by the broader community, consider joining the fire districts into a formal Fire Authority (as provided for in Colorado Law)<sup>10</sup>

**NEED FOR DISCLOSURE OF CONSOLIDATION-RELATED INFORMATION:** The need for disclosure to the public of information relating to the proposed consolidation is clear,

please contact the Fire Chiefs to help make this happen:

CONTACT NAME	EMAIL	TELEPHONE
Fire Chief Jacob Ware	<a href="mailto:jware@elkcreekfire.org">jware@elkcreekfire.org</a>	(303) 816-9385
Fire Chief Skip Shirlaw	<a href="mailto:sshirlaw@icfpd.net">sshirlaw@icfpd.net</a>	(303) 697-4413
Fire Chief Curt Rogers	<a href="mailto:nffpd@hotmail.com">nffpd@hotmail.com</a>	(303) 838-2270

**CONTACT US:** Also, please send us your comments, questions, and concerns via email at: [contact@saveelkcreekfire.org](mailto:contact@saveelkcreekfire.org)

### Save Elk Creek Fire

**TABLE 1 NOTES:** In 2021 AP Triton, a fire services industry consulting company, performed a comprehensive study of the merits of possible collaboration between the Elk Creek, Indian Hills, Inter-Canyon, and North Fork FPDs (Indian Hills FPD subsequently dropped out of consideration going forward), the study can be found here: [Cooperative Services Feasibility Study, by AP Triton, November 2021:](#)

- (a) Residential household population estimates, firefighter/EMT personnel head counts, and firefighting/EMS equipments summaries are from the AP Triton study.
- (b) Unless reapproved by fire district voters, 2.5 mills of the current Elk Creek FPD mill levy will expire at the end of 2023 thus the fire district mill levy will revert back to total of 10.00 mills.
- (c) Estimated annual revenue is based on a 16 mill levy across the entire fire district using current commercial and residential property valuations.
- (d) The Elk Creek FPD \$5.8M in annual revenue includes ~\$1.2M of CRRF ([Colorado Resource Report Forms and Guidelines](#)) Wildfire Reimbursements for firefighting services delivered outside the fire district, thus, the 2022 revenue/spending within the fire district is projected to be approximately \$4.6M. CRRF reimbursements are for consumables (diesel fuel), salaries, and day rates for fire engines.
- (e) Estimated from \$208,000 in property taxes; \$12,000 in specific ownership taxes; \$120,000 in payments-in-lieu of-taxes (PILT); and \$110,000 in ambulance fees.
- (f) Fire district property valuations shown are the total combined commercial and residential property valuations as determined by the county assessors associated with the fire district. Due to the higher tax rate and valuation of commercial properties, a high proportion of Elk Creek FPD property tax revenues are derived from commercial properties, principally properties within the Aspen Park Village, Conifer Town Center, and Conifer Marketplace shopping centers.
- (g) Consolidation Plan mill levy increases and indebtedness due to bonds/loans for new construction plus purchase of new equipment are estimated to be:
  - 1) Indebtedness of Inter-Canyon FPD Flagship HQ at Station 3 with 20 year loan/bond at estimated cost of \$10M at 5.75% interest = \$16M
  - 2) Indebtedness of Elk Creek FPD HQ at Station 2 with 20 year loan/bond at estimated cost of \$5M at 5.75% interest = \$8M

- 3) Indebtedness of North Fork FPD HQ at Station 1 with 20 year loan/bond at estimated cost of \$1.5M at 5.75% interest = \$2.5M
  - 4) Indebtedness of consolidated fire district for purchase of new apparatus with 10 year lease/purchase agreement at estimated cost of \$5.5M at 7% interest = \$7.5M
  - 5) Consolidation Plan total new indebtedness will be up to \$34M (*for the best case scenario, this debt load can be reduced to \$30M if, as assumed in Table 1, \$4M in cash reserves are used to help fund this new spending*)
  - 6) Total new debt service per annum = ~\$2M – \$3M
  - 7) Mill levy most likely will need to go to 20 mills or more in order to cover these new obligations
- (h) While the plan for 24/7 rotating firefighter/EMT crews at locations within Conifer, South Evergreen, Morrison, and Pine Grove service areas is in flux but we understand that a crew of 30 firefighter/EMT paid staff with a reduced pool of a projected 50 volunteers is planned.
  - (i) Currently, the Elk Creek and Inter-Canyon FPDs operate a combined "Wildland Division" utilizing 3 full-time staff and 10 seasonal firefighters.
  - (j) Currently, three administrative personnel are shared among the Elk Creek, Inter-Canyon, and North Fork FPDs, even so, a consolidated district will require 15 office staff.
  - (k) Fire district facilities will need to be newly constructed and/or refurbished in order to accommodate additional firefighter/EMT personnel and administrative staff.
  - (l) Currently, the 24,000 residents of the three fire districts are represented by 15 elected board members, consolidation will dramatically reduce local representation and control.

#### EXPLAINER ENDNOTES:

<sup>1</sup> The Consolidation Plan unnecessarily plans to hire 26 new career staff including 18 Firefighters/EMTs, a Fire Chief, 3 Battalion Chiefs, & 5 Administrative Staff, please see the [Merged Fire District Organization Chart](#).

<sup>2</sup> The Consolidation Plan envisions constructing a 14,000 sq-ft Flagship Fire District HQ soon after consolidation is approved largely along the lines of the construction plans found here: [Inter-Canyon Station 3 Construction Plans](#). The estimated baseline construction cost of \$10M for this fire station is based upon the currently projected cost of a similar fire station rebuild project currently being undertaken by the building contractor originally slated to build out the Inter-Canyon FPD Station 3 project, F&D International, LLC. A description of the \$8M, 11,000 sq-ft rebuild of South Metro Fire Station 15 can be found here: [South Metro Fire Station 15 Rebuild Project](#).

<sup>3</sup> Additionally, the Consolidation Plan envisions constructing an estimated ~7,000 sq-ft Elk Creek Battalion HQ reasonably soon after consolidation approval in order to "free-up" the current Elk Creek Station 1 for seasonal use by the 18 Wildland Division firefighters. In order to house the current 24/7 firefighter/EMT crew of 12, the Committee estimates that the following facilities will be required: 2,500 sq-ft crew quarters, 400 sq-ft kitchen, 400 sq-ft exercise room, 400 sq-ft restroom/shower as well as 3,300 sq for four bay for engines, tenders, and ambulances. Since the current building at Elk Creek FPD Station 2 is unusable for rebuilding purposes, the estimated baseline cost for this project is expected be \$5M.

<sup>4</sup> While the Consolidation Plan envisions that the extent and cost to refurbish the current 7,500 sq-ft North Fork Station will be "minimal", the Committee estimates that, at minimum, the following facilities will be required: 1,500 sq-ft crew quarters, 300 sq-ft kitchen, 300 sq-ft exercise room, and a 300 sq-ft restroom/shower. Since new, add-on construction is highly likely, the estimated baseline cost for this construction project is expected to be closer to \$1.5M but could be \$2M or more.

<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the Consolidation Plan calls for replacement of firefighting apparatus/EMT equipment thus requiring purchase of new apparatus/equipment using a continuing 10 year lease/purchase agreement at an estimated baseline cost of \$5.5M.

<sup>6</sup> Since the property tax valuation total for the three fire districts is \$366M + \$171M + \$37M = \$575M, the contribution of the residents of the Elk Creek FPD fire district will be in the ratio of \$366M/\$575M = 64%; the contribution of the residents of the Inter-Canyon FPD fire district will be in the ratio of \$171M/\$575M = 30%; and the contribution of the residents of the North Fork FPD fire district will be in the ratio of \$37M/\$575M = 6%.

<sup>7</sup> Regarding issues that may come before the voters, the Colorado SDA advises that Special Districts may not "...urge electors to vote in favor of or against any issue before the electorate. ...Districts may, however, expend public monies or make contributions in kind to dispense *fair and balanced* information on any issue of official concern before the electorate. This information must be *factual; must include arguments both for and against the proposal; and cannot contain a conclusion or opinion in favor of or against any issue addressed.*" [*emphasis added*] Please see page 45 of the 2023 SDA Board Member Manual available from the [SDA of Colorado](#).

<sup>8</sup> Please see the [Red, White & Blue FPD Strategic Plan 2022 - 2027](#) for an example of a Community-driven Strategic Plan for a mountain area fire district near Breckenridge CO similar to those in our communities.

<sup>9</sup> Please see [West Metro Fire Rescue Standard of Cover](#) for a example of an excellent standard of cover document.

<sup>10</sup> For a local example of how a Fire Authority operates, please see: [Clear Creek Fire Authority](#).