

**NORTH SAN JUAN
FIRE PROTECTION
DISTRICT**

*Professional Service
Volunteer Dedication*



MASTER PLAN

STRATEGIC PLANNING GOALS AND OBJECTIVES FOR THE
PERIOD 2017 - 2022

MAY 2017

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MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF

I am pleased to present the 2017 Master Plan for the North San Juan Fire Protection District (NSJFPD). This plan focuses on identifying and communicating the Department's specific strategic goals and objectives through 2022 to best position it to meet our mission to serve and protect our community. This includes structural and wildland fire control, first response medical care, and appropriate assistance to other agencies during emergency incidents.

In light of the challenges we are facing: tough economic times that make it difficult to recruit and retain volunteers along with years of intense drought that have seriously lengthened our firefighting season, it is critical that we firmly establish our vision and develop a plan to ensure our continued progress.

This 2017 Master Plan is a guide that will help the Department to focus on our mission, vision, core values, and primary goals and objectives. It will assist us in being proactive as new challenges present themselves.

As a guide, this plan is a living document that will be reviewed periodically and adapted as we respond to changes in our community, the economy and the climate.

This 2017 Master Plan lays the groundwork for our success over the coming years but it will be up to all of us in the NSJFPD to make sure we get there.

My sincere thanks to everyone who has worked on this important document in an effort to ensure continued delivery of quality services to the community in our district.

Jason Flores
Chief, North San Juan Volunteer Fire Department

OUR DISTRICT

A Short Background

Founded in 1862 with the construction of a firefighting water reservoir in the mining town of North San Juan, the North San Juan Fire Department is the oldest volunteer fire department in Nevada County. It is also thought to be the second oldest continuously operating volunteer fire department in California.

In 1986, the Volunteer Fire Department was incorporated as a public agency, becoming the North San Juan Fire Protection District. It currently operates from three stations. District offices are in the station on Tyler Foote Road near its intersection with Oak Tree Road. Other stations are in central North San Juan, and in the community of French Corral. The District receives most of its revenue from state and local tax distributions, approximately \$295,000 total revenue per year.

We continue to be a volunteer fire district. Our firefighters, Board of Directors, Auxiliary members and several District residents who help with office tasks all donate their time. The Chief and our two Battalion Chiefs are paid a small stipend for what is almost a full-time job. The District Manager and District Secretary are paid part-time positions.

We provide emergency services for 250 – 300 incidents per year. Over 50% of the calls involve medical emergencies, 25% are for vehicle accidents, 10% of the calls are for actual fires, and the remainder are for Department response to miscellaneous emergencies.

In addition to Medical Aid, Vehicle Accident, Wildland and Structure Fire response, the District responds to calls for Search and Rescue, Swift-water Rescue, and Hazardous Material incidents, as well as providing training in fire prevention, safety and injury prevention and first aid.

Our Mission

As committed volunteers, we are dedicated to serving and protecting our community through the delivery of professional firefighting and emergency medical services.

Our Vision

The vision of the NSJFPD is to provide quality professional service with volunteer dedication to our community by:

- Providing our firefighters with the training, equipment, and technology needed to do their job;
- Fostering full and open cooperation between the Board of Directors and Department Officers, volunteers, and staff to ensure we are working together toward common goals; and
- Communicating with our constituents to assess their needs, assuring them that they are an integral part of District planning and operations, and that their tax money is being used responsibly.

Our Values

The core values of the NSJFPD are reflective of its mission to serve and protect.

- We are committed to the safety and well-being of our firefighters and the public.
- We encourage a level of training and preparedness that reflects our high regard for professionalism.
- We believe in the democratic process, in equality for all and the responsibility and accountability that it requires.
- We value and respect the diversity that each individual brings to the District as well as the diversity of our wider community.
- We believe in the spirit of cooperation with our neighbors as well as with other agencies with whom we work.

CHALLENGES FACING THE DISTRICT

The purpose of strategic planning is to identify the operations that need to be carried out today to create a theoretically ideal future. To accomplish this, an organization needs to have a complete understanding of the challenges it faces and the environment in which it functions. Then its plan can provide both guidance and direction in fulfilling the organization's goals.

Geography

Our District covers the largest territory with the smallest budget of any fire district in western Nevada County. It is defined by the South Yuba River on the south, by the Middle Yuba River on the north and by the Yuba River itself on the west. The District encompasses nearly 70 square miles of the San Juan Ridge and includes the historic communities of French Corral and North Columbia as well as the town of North San Juan. Our location in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada mountains contains elevations that vary from 600 feet at the western edge to as high as 4500 feet in the eastern portion of the District. There is little or no break in the wildland/structural interface throughout most of the District, potentially allowing fire to spread rapidly through brush, grass, and timber.

Climate

Our climate usually provides hot dry summers and snow-packed winters. Snow can be heavy in the east end of the District, and hard freezes can occur throughout the entire District. Vegetation varies from heavy brush, chaparral and grasslands in the south to dense forest in the east. Steep and rocky river canyons, with 100% side slopes occur along the rivers while wide sand and gravel beds occur along Shady Creek drainage.

Population and Development

Currently (2016) the total estimated permanent population of the District is about 2500 people. Most residents live at altitudes below 3500 feet, with large pockets of population within the Ananda Village, the North San Juan area, and the Purdon/Tyler Foote/Oak Tree Road area. However, summer visitors, estimated to be as many as 500,000 person-visits per year, use park facilities at Bridgeport, North Columbia, Oregon Creek and numerous swimming and fishing sites along both rivers. This influx clearly increases demand for our services, particularly for water rescues, vehicle accidents, and hiking injuries. In addition, although our resident population is not expected to increase much within the next 10 years, our residents are aging, increasing the demand for the District's emergency medical services.

The District is comprised of 1,972 parcels. Of these, 919 are residential, 36 are commercial and/or industrial, 5 are mixed residential/commercial, 697 are vacant (open/agricultural) and the remaining 315 parcels are either not assessable or exempt from local parcel taxes. The total number of habitable structures within the District is

estimated to be 1003. Of these, 924 are homes and 36 are commercial buildings, with the remainder being churches, historic sites, a few classes of outbuildings, and the like. Since current zoning regulations limit growth in our area to existing parcels, and since there is an emphasis on maintaining a rural atmosphere, unless there is a significant shift in our county's General Plan, major development in our area is unlikely.

Disadvantaged Unincorporated Communities (DUCs)

Since the passage of SB 244 in 2012, North San Juan has been identified as a DUC. NSJ has a median household income of \$28,500 or 46% of the statewide median household income, well below the 80% limit required for designation as a DUC.

The purpose of SB 244 is to begin to address the complex legal, financial, and political barriers that contribute to regional inequity and infrastructure deficits within DUCs. Including these communities in the long-range planning of a city or county, as required by SB 244, will result in a more efficient delivery system of services and infrastructure including but not limited to sewer, water, and structural fire protection.

In our case, the core community of North San Juan has a septic sewer system in need of extensive upgrade, and relies on local well water since it is not near any other municipal source of potable water. Structural fire protection is provided by NSJFPD, with help as needed from neighboring fire departments under several Mutual Aid agreements.

Firefighting water is an issue for future development in North San Juan because there is no public water service within the rural center. However, a study has been completed identifying a potential system for storage and delivery of firefighting water through hydrants in the downtown NSJ area. Construction is awaiting funding.

Roads and Bridges

State Highway 49 and six improved county roads (Tyler Foote, Pleasant Valley, Oak Tree, Purdon, North Bloomfield, and Cruzon Grade) provide the major arterial routes through the District. More than 150 private roads provide access to home sites. Many are narrow, steep, unsurfaced, unmarked, and difficult to locate.

The two bridges serving the District at Edwards and Purdon Crossings will not support the weight of firefighting apparatus. Nevada County should undertake improvements at these locations to allow passage by firefighting equipment, and to provide secondary evacuation routes.

Communication Services

The mountainous terrain often makes radio and cell phone communications difficult. In some areas, there is no cell coverage at all. There is also a lack of broadband communication systems. GPS mapping services are also incomplete and can sometimes lead one to dead ends, or to roads gated for private use only.

Public Services

Currently there is no public transportation service in our District.

Except for a small medical clinic on Tyler Foote Road, the closest hospital is located in Grass Valley, a thirty-minute drive minimum. Thus, having helicopter ambulance service in our area is essential.

Land Use

Land use is primarily rural-residential. There are some large ranches and land developed for agriculture as well as commercial businesses operating on commercially zoned properties. There are a few mining operations. Most residents are either employed at cottage industries within their own homes or commute to work in Nevada City, Grass Valley, and beyond.

There are 5,187 acres of public land, located primarily along the South Yuba River. Recreational areas in our District include the South Yuba River State Park, the Middle Yuba River, Malakoff Diggings State Park, and Bridgeport State Park. The District provides emergency services to all these recreational areas, and quite often to visitors who are not residents of our District.

Over the past 10 years there has been a major increase in marijuana grows and clandestine drug labs that can pose problems for firefighter safety when responding to emergency calls.

Recruiting Volunteers

Because of the rural nature of the District, its low population results in a small pool of potential firefighters and limited tax revenue. For over 150 years the District has relied on community pride and a sense of neighbor helping neighbor to encourage individuals to become volunteer firefighters. However, all our lives are becoming more complicated by the day, and in a tough economy, many people do not have the available time required to become a volunteer firefighter, let alone continue with the training certifications and be on call once the basic requirements are fulfilled.

The District still relies heavily on dedication to community to provide volunteers, but in addition our training program is excellent, and can prepare volunteer firefighters to become successful paid firefighters in the future. The District also provides financial benefits, although these are limited by law in the case of volunteers.

Mandates

The District exists to serve and protect our community and thus needs to do everything within its power to carry out those ends. The District must also respond to county, state and federal requirements as it carries out its mission. These requirements are becoming

increasingly demanding. Often there is no additional funding provided to fulfill them but noncompliance can incur a potentially large fine.

The District's challenge is to comply with all Local, State, and Federal mandates to the best of its ability.

STRATEGIC GOALS

As a public agency created to provide emergency services to our community, our Master Plan is based on strategic goals designed to meet the need to successfully adapt to changes in our climate, society, demographics, and economy. Realization of several of these goals will result in lowered risk of fire for District homeowners and businesses. This may be reflected in better ISO ratings for areas of our District. These ratings, calculated by the Insurance Services Office, a subsidiary of Verisk Analytics Inc., provide information for insurance companies, mortgage lenders and other transactions that require estimations of various kinds of risk.

Keeping in mind our mission, vision, core values, and challenges, we have identified the following goals.

- **Improve our ability to deliver fire protection services.**
- **Annex our 2014 Sphere of Influence.**
- **Improve recruitment and retention of firefighters.**
- **Improve our active engagement with our community.**
- **Renovate Station #1.**
- **Analyze and improve District water supplies.**
- **Design on-going metrics for performance evaluation.**

GOAL: Improve our ability to deliver fire protection services

Rationale: To ensure the safety of our firefighters and be better equipped to serve the community's fire protection needs with a more effective and efficient response, we need a program to provide, maintain, replace and increase firefighting equipment with newer, more efficient and up-to-date technology.

Objective: Purchase more efficient fire-fighting equipment.

1. Purchase Fire Engines.
 - a. Type 1 and/or 2 to meet ISO requirements.
 - b. Type 3 to provide better wildland fire response as well as to allow our District to participate in a strike team to fight fires outside the District.
2. Purchase a tactical water tender.
3. Purchase other support vehicles as needed.

GOAL: Annex our 2014 Sphere of Influence

Rationale: We are already serving the residents in this area. Annexation would officially recognize this fact, and would result in greater community unity as residents would be able to actively participate in District actions by voting, as well as by supporting delivery of services through their taxes. This furthers our vision of the democratic process. Annexation could also result in recruitment of more volunteers from the eastern reaches of the District, thus improving response times in this area.

Objective: Annex our 2014 Sphere of Influence in 2017.

1. Prepare & submit paperwork, maps, etc. for LAFCO and County approval.

GOAL: Increase recruitment and retention of firefighters

Rationale: We have a limited pool of potential firefighters due to the limited economic opportunities in our District. Because there are few employment opportunities within our District we have a difficult time retaining volunteers. Many will go through the initial training and stay a year or two but then they are compelled to look for paid work within the firefighting or emergency medical services field outside the District. As we are unable to offer full-time paid positions we need to find other ways to maintain and build our team of excellent firefighters.

Objective: Continue to offer high quality training opportunities.

1. Advanced EMT (Spring 2017).
2. Class B Driver's License or FF endorsement to drive engines and water tenders.

3. Continue with State Certification Volunteer FF program.

Objective: Explore ways to expand our cooperative efforts with Camptonville Fire, such as creating a job-share position.

Objective: Increase monetary rewards and/or benefits.

Objective: Update Job Descriptions to increase volunteer opportunities.

Objective: Establish a Recruitment Committee.

GOAL: Improve our active engagement with our community

Rationale: To ensure the continued support of the community, we must first understand the needs of the community, assure our constituents that they have a voice in District planning and operations and that their tax dollars are being used responsibly. Soliciting greater participation of the community may also provide the District with more volunteers, increased fundraising contributions, and voter support.

Objective: Carry out a community needs assessment.

1. Develop a survey to determine community needs and level of satisfaction.
2. Distribute survey via social media, website, mailings, and/or meetings.
3. Analyze survey results, and develop action plans as needed.

Objective: Get to know our community: commercial operators, residents, renters, and seasonal workers.

Objective: Develop a Community Fire Plan (**OBJECTIVE MET 4/2017**).

Objective: Create a regular system of communication with our community using the District website, newsletter, social media and face-to-face events.

GOAL: Renovate Station #1

Rationale: Station #1 is strategically located in the town center of North San Juan. Its presence helps to lower the ISO rating for local residents and businesses. During emergency situations, the building can serve as an Emergency Command Center as well as a Red Cross Shelter. The wide clear space around the station creates an ideal safety zone and also provides a landing zone for helicopters.

There are no residential quarters at Station #1. And, currently, no firefighter lives in town. If a firefighter were resident, he or she could act as caretaker, making sure the grounds and buildings were secure. This would discourage people from parking at the station overnight or misusing the grounds. A resident firefighter would also improve response capabilities in the vicinity of downtown North San Juan

In addition, the assembly area at Station #1 has historically served as a Community Hall, providing a venue for a myriad of social functions and organizational meetings. This contribution to our community would be greatly enhanced by a much-needed renovation.

Objective: Improve emergency response to North San Juan area.

1. Create living quarters for a firefighter.
2. Create additional engine bays.

Objective: Improve community meeting hall

1. ADA compliant restrooms.
2. Upgrade kitchen.
3. Improve acoustics, interior finishes, etc.

GOAL: Analyze and improve District water supplies

Rationale: Having additional sources of water throughout the District would enable the department to improve response and refill times in areas where we currently need to truck in water. Additional water sources could also reduce the risk of fire, leading to improved ISO ratings, thus potentially lowering the rates residents are currently paying for fire insurance.

Objective: Establish water sources strategically throughout the District, using water storage tanks with hydrants.

GOAL: Define ongoing metrics for performance evaluation

Rationale: We need to be able to objectively evaluate our level of service, deployment of delivery, and response times on an annual basis.

Objective: Compile and analyze our current response times and areas/zones of response via NFIRS.

1. Identify weak areas and improve response.

Objective: Provide an ongoing metric of performance by gathering statistics on response times, number of responders, and level of service provided.

Objective: Develop presentational comparison methods to analyze data.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The 2017 NSJFPD Master Plan details the District's strategic goals and objectives to guide the decisions made in response to the varied challenges facing the delivery of emergency services to the citizens of the North San Juan Fire Protection District.

This Master Plan will be the guiding document for the North San Juan Fire Protection District over the next five years. It is a dynamic document that is responsive to change and will be adapted as we face new challenges down the road. The District's Board of Directors along with the Chief are charged with the responsibility of reviewing the Plan on a bi-annual basis, assessing the progress, and making recommendations for change.