

# *Rio Dell Fire Protection District*

## *Municipal Service Review*

*January 2008*



Prepared for Development of the District Sphere of Influence Report

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   | <u>Page</u> |
|---|-------------|
| Local Agency Formation Commission Authority ..... | 1           |
| Agency Profile .....                              | 3           |
| Growth and Population .....                       | 4           |
| Services.....                                     | 4           |
| Financing.....                                    | 6           |
| Service Rates .....                               | 7           |
| Local Accountability.....                         | 7           |
| Municipal Service Review Determinants .....       | 8           |

# **LOCAL AGENCY FORMATION COMMISSION AUTHORITY**

## **Latent Powers, Enabling Legislation and Empowered Services**

The fundamental role of the Local Agency Formation Commission is to implement the Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Act (The Act) consistent with local conditions and circumstances. The Act guides LAFCo's decisions. The major goals of LAFCo as established by The Act are to:

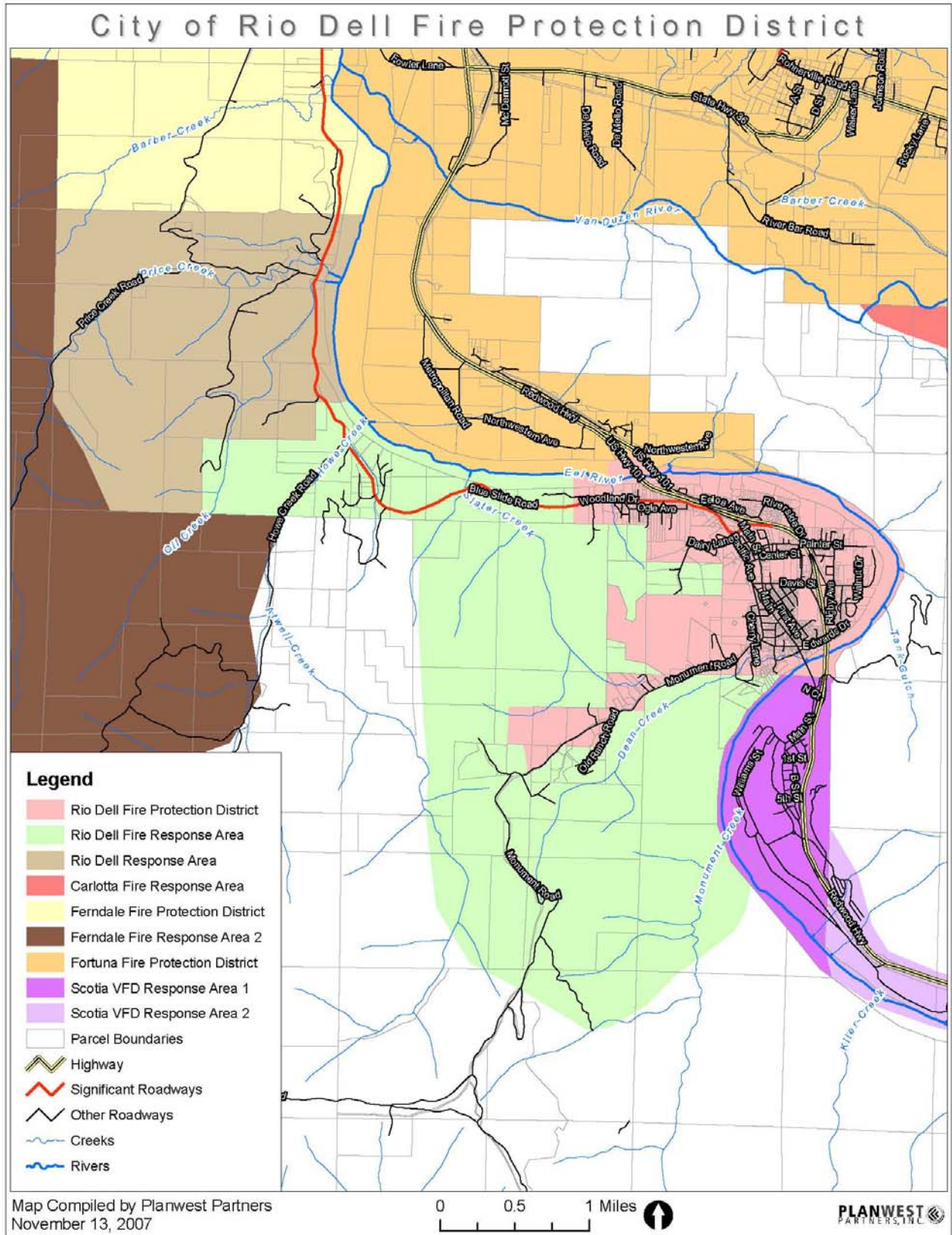
- Encourage orderly growth and development;
- Promote orderly development;
- Discourage urban sprawl;
- Preserve open-space and prime agricultural lands by guiding minimizing resource loss;
- Exercise its authority to ensure that affected populations receive efficient services;
- Promote logical formation and boundary modifications that direct the burdens and benefits of additional growth to those local agencies that are best suited to provide services;
- Make studies and obtain and furnish information which will contribute to the logical and reasonable development of local agencies to provide for present and future needs;
- Establish priorities by assessing and balancing community service needs with financial resources available to secure and provide community services and to encourage government structures that reflect local circumstances, conditions and financial resources;
- Determine whether new or existing agencies can feasibly provide needed services in a more efficient or accountable manner and, where deemed necessary,

As set fourth in Section 56425 (g) of The Act, on or before January 1, 2008, and every five years thereafter, Humboldt LAFCo shall review and update each Sphere of Influence (SOI). Additionally, an MSR shall be conducted with, or in conjunction with the action to establish or to update a SOI pursuant to The Act. Together, the SOI and MSR documents analyze the District's ability to serve existing and future residents.

In order to prepare and to update Spheres of Influence in accordance with Section 56425, Humboldt LAFCo shall conduct a service review of the municipal services provided in the Rio Dell Fire Protection District (FPD). The commission shall include in the area designated for service review any other geographic area as is appropriate for an analysis of the services to be reviewed, and shall prepare a written statement of its determinations with respect to each of the following:

- (1) Infrastructure needs or deficiencies;
- (2) Growth and population projections for the affected area;
- (3) Financing constraints and opportunities;
- (4) Cost avoidance opportunities;
- (5) Opportunities for rate restructuring;
- (6) Opportunities for shared facilities;
- (7) Government structure options;
- (8) Evaluation of management efficiencies; and
- (9) Local accountability and governance.

**Figure 1** Rio Dell FPD Map-District Boundary and Sphere of Influence



## **AGENCY PROFILE**

Figure 1 (above) shows the district boundary, service boundary, sphere of influence and other service providers that are near the Rio Dell FPD.

The Rio Dell Fire Protection District was originally formed On January 12<sup>th</sup>, 1943 under the name of “Wildwood” Fire Protection District. The name was officially changed to the Rio Dell Fire Protection District on December 19<sup>th</sup>, 1961. The District was formed under Health and Safety Code Division 12, Part 3, Chapter 1 for the purpose of providing fire prevention and suppression.

The Humboldt County Board of Supervisors appointed the first three-member board of trustees, and now the District is governed by a five member independently elected board of directors and provides services through the Rio Dell Volunteer Fire Department (RDVFD), with most resources provided by the RDFPD.

The Rio Dell Fire Protection District consists of approximately 5.36 square miles with a response area of approximately 9.98 square miles, covering a total area of 15.34 square miles. Rio Dell is located along Highway 101 and is bordered by the Eel River to the north, east and south, and by Dean Creek to the west. The district’s current boundary begins at the Eel River and ends at Howe Creek and the response area extends to Price Creek. The district is approximately two miles southeast of the City of Fortuna.

The District has a regular volunteer force of 23 members. All of the District’s personnel must undergo continual training in all phases of fire protection, rescue techniques, and first aid. District fire fighters participate in a regular drill on the first and fifth Thursdays of each month, with two 8 hr basic skill drills per year for all personnel. Training schedules consist of general operations, safety and medical. The drills are planned and conducted by the department training officers.

### **Existing Facilities**

The Rio Dell Fire Protection District currently operates out of a single fire department located at 50 West Center Street in the City of Rio Dell. The facility is sufficient for providing fire protection and suppression services, and is unique to Rio Dell.

### **Facility Functions**

The existing fire station is currently used for equipment storage, volunteer training, city functions, and is occasionally rented out to private entities for a use fee.

## **GROWTH AND POPULATION**

### **Demographics**

According to the 2000 Census, the total population in Humboldt County was 126,518. The Building Communities Report for the Humboldt County General Plan Update includes a complete discussion of County Population Trends. According to that report, “Between 1985 and 1990, the County grew by about 8,000 people (7.3 percent), with an average annual increase of 1.4 percent.” The US Census projects population growth in Humboldt County to increase to 135,600 by 2010 and 143,100 by 2025.

Because birthrates continue to fall, Humboldt County's median age is projected to rise from 36 to 41 over the next 25 years, while the median age in California is expected to remain stable at 33-34. Humboldt County's population is largely white, though one with a notable Native American population on three reservations, four Rancherias (including one in the Trinidad area), and other scattered lands. However, all minority racial and ethnic groups have been growing consistently in population share.

A total of 55,912 housing units existed in Humboldt County in 2000, with an average of 2.39 persons per household. The number of households in the county has grown 10.4 percent since 1990, compared to the population increase of 6.2 percent. Consequently, the average number of persons per household has declined 6.3 percent from 2.55 in 1980. Based on population projections, the Building Communities report projects the demand for housing units over the next 25 years to be 5,961 units in all of Humboldt County, with 3,220 units to be located in the unincorporated areas.

### **District Population**

The Rio Dell Fire Protection District has primary responsibility to protect approximately 3,411 permanent residents.

## **SERVICES**

Although the District is responsible for structural fire protection, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF) retains responsibility for grass and forest fires within the boundaries of the District with the exception of the area within the Rio Dell city limits. The District does have a mutual aid agreement with CDF as well as other adjacent fire protection agencies.

ISO Rating: As of January 1, 2008, the District's ISO rating is 4 within city limits and 9 in rural areas.

Minimum Flow Requirements: Current fire flows meet minimum compliance levels.

Actual Flows: ISO calculations indicated a flow rate of 2250 gpm.

Response Times: The RDVFD is able to respond in less than five minutes to all calls for service within the City of Rio Dell. List response times by call types, but the RDVFD states that it can respond to all calls within the City limits within three minutes. The maximum response time to incident calls within the Rio Dell Plan Area is between five and seven minutes.

On average, 7 firefighters are available to respond to calls during the day time. Most of the houses within the City limits are located within 1,000 feet of a fire hydrant.

Presently, the District maintains and operates from one fire station. The location of the station at 50 West Center Street provides adequate coverage and response time to most areas of the District. The Rio Dell Volunteer Fire Department consists of a twenty-three member all-volunteer crew and operates the following equipment and apparatus:

- Rescue Truck (crew cab 4x4)
- '96 Type I (crew cab/1,000 gal/1,250 gpm)
- '95 Type III (3 passenger/750 gal/1,250 gpm)
- '72 Type III (3 passenger/1,000 gal/1,000 gpm)

In 2006 the district purchased a type IV rescue/quick attack-2006 Ford F550 4x4 Ext Cab- 200gpm 250 gal. Currently, approximately 75% of the district's equipment is new purchases. Most fire fighters are equipped with portable radios, a personal alert safety system (PASS) device and a self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA).

### **Efficiency of Service Delivery**

With twenty-three members, the RDVFD maintains a ratio of approximately seven volunteer firefighters per 1,000 City residents. According to the Humboldt County Emergency Dispatch Cooperative, the RDVFD responded to 281 incident calls in 2002, 256 in 2001, and 230 in 2000. Approximately 80 percent of the incident calls received by the RDVFD are medical related with approximately five percent fire related calls for service. The remaining incident calls include assistance, smoke check, false alarm, and vehicle accident related calls. All members of the RDVFD have first-responder medical training and three members are Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs).

District fire fighters respond to approximately 317 calls per year, of which five percent (5%) are structural/residential fire calls, three percent (3%) are vehicle accident calls, seven percent (7%) are vegetation wildland fire calls, one percent (1%) are rescue calls, eighty percent (80%) are emergency medical/trauma/injury calls, four percent (4%) are false alarms, calls to investigate smoke or other miscellaneous types of calls. District fire apparatus are dispatched through the Humboldt Fire Net dispatch Co-op out of Fortuna. Local phones are also used to self-dispatch.

### **Maintenance Schedule**

Fire hydrants are installed and maintained by the City of Rio Dell and are inspected bi-annually by the fire department. Fire equipment and apparatuses are maintained by the fire department regularly.

### **Infrastructure Deficiencies**

The city has recently completed a Water Rehabilitation Project, which has increased the water storage capacity to have the ability to provide adequate emergency fire flows. Now there are no further deficiencies in regards to capacity.

The district has negotiated the purchase of a water tender from PALCO. The district has been successful in securing an air compressor filling station for SCBA cylinders from a FEMA grant that was awarded to the district in 2005.

### **Planned Improvements**

The district is in the process of acquiring a 3,500 gallon water tanker vehicle to service all rural areas of the district, which will be in service soon. The district is also in negotiations with a private developer who wishes to subdivide the Dinsmore Ranch area above town. Plans include the operation of a second fire station on that property with two additional engines housed in that station. One engine will be purchased by the developer and the other will be our current reserve pumper. Also, the district plans to purchase a new ladder/pumper to replace their 35 year old reserve pumper some time in the summer of 2008. The district has also negotiated the purchase of a water tender from the Pacific Lumber Company (PALCo).

Once the above improvements are in place, the RDFPD apparatus count will be four engine pumpers, one Ladder/Pumper, one 3,500 gallon tanker, and one rescue/quick attack vehicle.

### **Funding Sources for Improvements**

The proposed services and facilities were based solely on the most cost effective way to deliver services to the District’s customers. The District recognizes that the adopted General Plan will direct all future development, and that other planning interests, like community design, economic development, timber and agricultural production, and protection of sensitive habitats will influence where development is planned and how services are delivered. Consequently, the District fully expects to modify the plan for developing new facilities, based on the adopted plan, in a way that insures the most cost effective delivery of services.

## **FINANCING CONSTRAINTS AND OPPORTUNITIES**

### **Budget**

According to the budgetary audit report, the Rio Dell Fire Protection District financial management is in compliance with Government Auditing Standards and the Minimum Audit Requirements for California Special Districts issued by the State Controller’s Office. <sup>i</sup>

**Table 1** 2004/2005 Rio Dell Fire Protection District Budget

| Assets                          | Revenues    | Expenditures        | Fund Balance |
|---------------------------------|-------------|---------------------|--------------|
| \$686,063.00                    | \$77,492.00 | \$72,537.00         | \$685,122.00 |
| <b>% Revenue Property Taxes</b> |             | <b>92.9 percent</b> |              |
| <b>% Revenue Interest</b>       |             | <b>5.6 percent</b>  |              |

Revenues. Major revenue sources include property taxes, interest income, charges for services, and grants. Property tax revenues of approximately \$72,049 account for more than 99% of the district’s total revenues.

Expenditures. Major expenditure sources include structure maintenance (\$17,444), insurance (\$16,601), and utilities (\$6,596). Insurance accounts for about 12 percent of the District’s expenditures.

Annual Fund Balance: The beginning fund balance for fiscal year 2004/2005 was 680,167, and the ending funding balance was 685,122, which results in a net increase in fund balances of \$4,955 at the end of the fiscal year.

### **Cost Avoidance Opportunities**

Dispatching for the Rio Dell Fire District is provided by the Humboldt County Emergency Dispatch Cooperative, which contracts with the CDF Fortuna Interagency Emergency Communications Center for services. Also, the RDFPD has formal and informal mutual aid agreements with Fortuna Fire Protection District, Scotia Volunteer Fire Department, Loleta Volunteer Fire Department, Eureka, Fire and Humboldt Fire District 1, and the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF).

The Rio Dell FPD has an automatic aid agreement with Ferndale Fire Protection District to dispatch both departments automatically for any 911 emergency in the unincorporated area of Blue Slide Road from Howe Creek to Price Creek. The Automatic and Mutual Aid agreements allow the departments to provide fire, rescue and emergency medical services in unison, without compensation to each other.

## SERVICE RATES

### Service Rates

The Board of Commissioners of the Rio Dell Fire Protection District has levied a special assessment for providing fire suppression services. This assessment was effective July 1, 1985 commencing with the fiscal year ended June 30, 2005. The District receives funds from the county-wide general \$1.00 tax rate based on the enabling state legislation.

The District's primary source of income is from property taxes, which was approximately \$63,334 for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2005. The district also had \$21,865 from grant revenue. The district receives 4% of 1% of the property tax within the district, as well as a fire assessment applied in the amount of \$4.00 per unit.

## LOCAL ACCOUNTABILITY

### Contact Information

| <b>Rio Dell Fire Protection District</b> |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Contact:</b>                          | <b>Fire Chief - Shane Wilson</b>                   |
| <b>Mailing Address:</b>                  | <b>50 West Center Street, Rio Dell CA 95562</b>    |
| <b>Site Address:</b>                     | <b>50 West Center Street, Rio Dell CA 95562</b>    |
| <b>Phone Number:</b>                     | <b>Station: 707-764-3329 or S. Wilson 764-3937</b> |
| <b>Email/ Website:</b>                   | <b>shawil22@aol.com</b>                            |
| <b>Types of Services:</b>                | <b>Fire protection services</b>                    |
| <b>Population Served:</b>                | <b>~3,411 permanent residents</b>                  |
| <b>Size of Service Area:</b>             | <b>15.34 square miles</b>                          |
| <b>Date of Formation:</b>                | <b>January 12, 1943</b>                            |
| <b>Staff and Facilities</b>              |  |
| <b>Number of Paid Staff</b>              | <b>0 - All Volunteers</b>                          |

The district board meets on the second Thursday of each month at 5:30 p.m. at the fire station. The meetings are posted every month by the district secretary near the front door of the fire station.

# MUNICIPAL SERVICE REVIEW DETERMINATIONS

## **Infrastructure**

The current condition of the City of Rio Dell water system is sufficient to meet minimum flow requirements needed for emergency fire flows. The Existing fire station is adequate for current development, but if the owner of the Dinsmore Plateau is successful in subdividing and developing the plateau, there will be a need for an additional facility there, which the developer is willing to provide.

## **Growth and Population**

The Rio Dell Fire Protection District provides services to approximately 3,411 permanent residents, and has maintained adequate fire flows and service levels to accommodate the projected growth within the district over the next five years. Planned growth by the City will require expanded operations, especially if the Eel River Sawmill area is annexed and the Metropolitan area is included in the Planning Area.

## **Financing Constraints and Opportunities**

The Rio Dell Fire Protection District currently has adequate funding and infrastructure to support the projected need for fire protection services within the Community Planning Area. Expanding service needs will require additional funds. The District should periodically review and adjust service fee assessments when necessary.

## **Cost Avoidance Opportunities**

Because the Rio Dell FPD is located away from other similar local agencies, there are no significant cost avoidance opportunities available to the District that would not impair the services levels that are currently provided.

## **Opportunities for Rate Restructuring**

The current budget and funding mechanisms reflect a healthy fire district, since funding constraints have not been identified at this time. However, future growth and expected service expansions may require rate restructures, and/or the creation of assessment districts.

## **Opportunities for Shared Facilities**

The City of Rio Dell is in the process of updating their General Plan, which may include the expansion of the Rio Dell Planning Area to include the town of Scotia and the Metropolitan area. Furthermore, the Pacific Lumber Company (PALCo) has applied for a General Plan Amendment and subdivision and is proposing to have a CSD operate the fire district.

Due to the close proximity of the City of Rio Dell to the Town of Scotia, the Rio Dell FPD has the potential to provide services to the Scotia area. This would require the Rio Dell FPD to absorb the Scotia fire station as an additional facility, resulting in the operation and maintenance of two facilities.

Additionally, the Rio Dell FPD anticipates future operation of an additional fire station on the Dinsmore Plateau in the event that the property owner is successful in subdividing and developing the plateau for residential use. Otherwise, there are no adjacent local agencies that could provide fire protection services to parcels within the Rio Dell FPD.

## **Government Structure Options**

The County of Humboldt provides general governmental services and law enforcement services throughout the territory of the District.

The Rio Dell FPD is within the State Responsibility area for Fire Protection service from the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CalFire), as well as having its own volunteer fire department. The City of Rio Dell provides fire hydrants to areas within the City limits.

## **Evaluation of Management Efficiency**

The district is encouraged to work with the Fortuna Fire Protection District to provide more efficient fire protection services to the Eel River Sawmill and Metropolitan area. Since the City of Rio Dell is anticipating annexation of the Eel River Sawmill, and the inclusion of the Metropolitan area in the Planning Area under the current General Plan Update, and because the Rio Dell FPD has a lower response time than the Fortuna FPD does to that area, the Rio Dell FPD is encouraged to work with Fortuna FPD to provide more efficient services to those areas.

The District has indicated the need to have additional volunteer staff. Currently, the district has approximately 23 members, but the target staffing level is 30 volunteers, according to Chief Shane Wilson. Also, given the location of the district along the Eel River, the district has indicated the need for swift water rescue training.

## **Local Accountability and Governance**

The Rio Dell Fire Protection District was formed in 1943 by the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors. The five-member Board of Directors are locally elected by the residents of the District, and the district is responsible for administering and implementing policies set by the Board in compliance with the Brown Act and other local, state and federal requirements.

Mutual aid agreements and agreements with CalFire enable the district to operate efficiently with minimal expenses. There are minimal management costs and low operating expenses in the District's adopted budget. Management of infrastructure is shared between the City and the district.

The district is encouraged to work with the Fortuna Fire Protection District to provide more efficient fire protection services to the Metropolitan area, since the City of Rio Dell is anticipating annexation of this area, and because the Rio Dell FPD has a lower response time than the Fortuna FPD to that area.

---

<sup>i</sup> Rio Dell Fire Protection District Financial Statements. June 30, 2005 and 2004. Anderson, Lucas, Somerville & Borges, LLP