

County supports fire training center

August 29, 2019



The Curry County commissioners on Aug. 14 unanimously approved a resolution to support a Rogue-Siskiyou Regional Fire and Training Facility project.

Curry County Emergency Manager Jeremy Dumire and Gold Beach Fire Chief Tyson Krieger had submitted a plan to build a fire training and emergency operations center in Curry County. The project would provide higher levels of protection to the community, but also could bring economic benefits as the facility developed into a regional training center for the Pacific Northwest.

Dumire identified the old Champion Mill site, on the south bank of the Rogue River up Jerry's Flat Road, about 5 miles from U.S. Highway 101 in Gold Beach, as a prime property for the facility.

The property encompasses about 150 acres and its owner has already agreed to a sale price, the commissioners were told.

The site has a large water supply available because it is adjacent to the City of Gold Beach water plant.

In the past two years, Curry County, along with Josephine County, has seen the Chetco Bar, Klondike and Taylor Creek fires, which combined included some 400,000 acres, said Dumire.

"In terms of overall fire hazard, we tend to get the large fires," he said. "One of the issues we have is the lack of training available."

Currently, all of the training available to personnel for fighting structural or wildland fires is outside of the area. Firefighters are unable to get their needed training locally, said Krieger.

“We have the resources to be able to put on the classes here with Coos Forest Patrol, but also the Forest Service,” he said.

The location is particularly suitable because in addition to serving as a firefighting training compound, it can “include water rescue training with the two ponds, the Rogue River nearby for jet boat training, and the ability to house firefighters and incident management teams away from the fairgrounds, which have been taken over for the past two years,” said Dumire.

Plus, the site is centrally located to where fire incidents occur, and the size of the property would allow for a heli-spot and helicopters staged on the south side of the property. There, they could store retardant, gel and AVGas for air resources inland and away from the coastal fog belt.

Plans for Phase 1 include a burn tower where firefighters can practice with live fire without having to wait for a “burn-to-learn” opportunity to arise.

In addition to firefighter training, proponents said the facility would benefit other emergency operations:

- Law-enforcement capabilities would be enhanced to provide tactical and firearms training, with a secure indoor shooting range and active-shooter training facility.
- In the event of a major incident, the planned facility could serve as a center for emergency operations for centralizing finance, logistics, operations, planning and communications.
- Search and rescue would benefit not only from water rescue training, but also by having a rappelling tower for cliff rescues.
- The facility could also offer training to regional agencies from as far away as Washington and Idaho, given the presence of a dormitory, commercial kitchen, classrooms and conference rooms.

The proposal has been in the making for more than three years through meetings with an informal advisory group that has been honing the proposal to the point where they are now “funneling their ideas into all working on the same concept,” said Krieger in a phone interview.

“The informal group will give way to a more formal advisory group that will involve all of the emergency personnel stakeholders in the community, plus the (Bureau of Land Management) and Forest Service.”

Because the project would foremost provide training and support for emergency personnel throughout Curry County, county officials will advance the concept to the state fire marshal, the Oregon Department of Public Safety Standards and Training, and the fire chiefs and law-enforcement agencies in Curry County to ask for their support.

“We’re not asking you guys for funding, but for basically your signature and a nod of support for this concept here,” Krieger told the county commissioners. “The more people who get behind the project, the more funding opportunities we can have to build this project.”

Krieger said there already are grants in place to cover the initial portion of Phase 1. “Once we purchase the property, we will be able to apply for tons of infrastructure grants from the federal government, as well as some matching-grant opportunities,” Krieger said in a phone interview.

“Construction for Phase 1 of the project will cost between \$2.5 million and \$3.5 million.

“There is no other facility like this that is all-in-one,” he said.