

# Row River Rural Fire Protection District

P.O. Box 44  
Dorena, Oregon 97434  
541-510-2359

May 8, 2025

Re: SB-5531

Honorable Senator Cedric Hayden  
Honorable Representative Darin Harbick  
Honorable Members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Capital Expenditures.

Thank you for consideration of Capital Funding for a Fire Station such that the Row River Rural Fire Protection District, can better serve our rural community with fire protection services.

**As Fire Chief of the newly created Row River Rural Fire Protection District, I support SB-5531 and the funding for a critically needed fire station for the Row River community near Cottage Grove Oregon.**

The Row River Rural Fire Protection District (RRRFPD), a special rural fire protection district in accordance with ORS 478, was formed by a community initiative—to ensure fire response services for our community. Our community east of Cottage Grove, Oregon historically lacked structure and wildland urban interface fire response services as recently as 2022. The community is a narrow river valley about 25 miles long and the nearest structure fire response agency, South Lane County Fire and Rescue, (SLCFR), is a minimum of 20-45 minutes away.

Recognizing the need for a quicker fire response, our community partnered with SLCFR in 2023 and formed a public private partnership to advance these services in our community and by June 30, 2024, our organization evolved into the Row River Rural Fire Protection District, an **all-volunteer response** agency. SLCFR mentored and trained our organization so we could begin response coverage as a volunteer battalion of SLCFR and later transition to our own district as a response ready agency when the district formed. Our District is developing a strong partnership with ODF receiving training skills that allow our agency to contribute to fires in the urban/wildland interface; indeed, in our community a structure fire is a potential wildfire and vice-versa until proven otherwise.

As an official district:

- We have established fire protection services for our entire district with trained and DPSST/NWCG certified volunteers.
- We responded to 54 dispatches in 2024, all out of a temporary shed loaned by a willing community member including calls for:
  - 10 dispatches for structure fire including mutual aid.

Established July 1, 2024

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- 6 brush/vegetation or other fires including mutual aid.
- Right 'out of the gate' our District was the nearest Fire Agency Cooperator in the response to the **Lane 1 Complex Fire**, one of the largest fires in Oregon in 2024.
- We have established 911 communication, dispatch systems, our official designators, and incident command systems; all components of our operation are consistent with professional levels of standards, including certifications, reporting, continuing education, recertifications, et. cetera.

**All the RRRFPD fire services are provided by unpaid volunteers, committing to the time, training, and work to provide this essential service to our neighbors.**

Our community is:

- Rated **High** for 2020 Communities at Risk Assessment.
- Rural and underserved. Approximately 1100 residents.
- The community was the largest unprotected community for fire risk in Lane County until we started this process. A historic advancement!!
- There are two elementary schools in this community with a past unacceptable fire response time from Cottage Grove to the nearest school of *20-45 minutes*. In contrast, our newly formed local main fire station is within a 2-3-minute drive time to both schools.
- The Row River Valley demographic has 20+% of the population over the age of 65 with 49% of those living below the poverty line. 29% of the population is aged 0-19, with 55% of those living below poverty level.
- **We are motivated to help ourselves with 23 community firefighters all DPSST and/or National Wildland Coordinating Group trained. A testament to our community driven will!**

Thank you for considering a Capital Funding Grant for a Fire Station in our community. I can assure you that the funds will be well appreciated and put to good use for protection our community and to extend our service capacities through well established and coordinated Mutual Aid reciprocity service throughout Lane County.

Walter Bernard

Fire Chief  
Row River Rural Fire Protection District  
541-510-2359