

DONALA (Cont. from 12)

district's work on aquifer storage and recovery, a technology that pumps excess water back into aquifers for storage and future use.

The next board meeting is scheduled for Thursday, April 18 at 1:30 p.m. Generally, board meetings are held the third Thursday of the month at 1:30 p.m. and include online access; call (719) 488-3603 or access www.donalawater.org to receive up-to-date meeting information. The district office is located

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El Paso County Regional Loop Water Authority, March 21**Board debates relationship to CS**

By James Howald

At a brief meeting in March, the El Paso County Regional Loop Water Authority (EPCRLWA, or the Loop) board heard a progress report from John Kuosman, a water practice leader with Merrick and Co., who also serves as the Loop Water Authority's project planning and workflow manager. Board President Jessie Shaffer gave a financial report. The board also held an executive session.

Alignment study underway

Kuosman told the board that the alignment study, which will address the locations of pipelines and easements required to convey water from Fountain Creek northward to customers in the participating water districts, is underway and he expected it to be complete by the end of March.

At a previous meeting, Rebecca Hutchinson, a consultant with Merrick who is working on pipeline and easement issues for the Loop, told the board that she has contracted with two companies that specialize in easement investigations and acquisitions. Kimley-Horn is working on the pipelines and easements for the southern half of the project and Western States Land Services LLC is working on the

northern half of the project, she explained.

Kuosman asked the board members to have their thoughts on the commitments that will be required of the participating water districts submitted to attorney Russ Dykstra of Spencer Fane LLC by March 28. Dykstra is drafting the contract that participating districts will sign to formalize their participation in the project.

Kuosman said progress had been made in defining treatment options for the water that will be diverted from Fountain Creek and he would provide details during the executive session.

Finances reviewed

Shaffer told the board that the Loop's accountant, Kathy Fromm, of Fromm and Co., had suggested two companies for the board to consider as auditors: Haynie and Co. and Stockman Kast Ryan + Co. Shaffer said the federal grant money received by the Loop required more rigorous auditing procedures and the board would need to advise Fromm about choosing between the two auditing companies. The board voted to authorize Shaffer to continue to work with Fromm on this decision.

Shaffer said he had received invoices for the

month totaling \$32,932, with Bishop Brogden and Associates, Fromm and Co., and Merrick Inc. being the largest service suppliers. The board authorized Shaffer to pay the invoices.

Executive session

The meeting ended with an executive session to receive legal advice from the Loop's attorney regarding negotiating strategies and to hear a discussion of water treatment options from Kuosman. No votes were taken after the executive session.

The next regular meeting is scheduled for April 18 at 9 a.m. Regular meetings are held on the third Thursday of each month at 9 a.m. at the Monument Town Hall at 645 Beacon Lite Road. Workshop meetings are held the first Thursday of each month at 9 a.m. at the Cherokee Metropolitan District offices at 6250 Palmer Park Blvd., Colorado Springs. Please see loopwater.org or call 719-488-3603 to verify meeting times and locations.

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Donald Wescott Fire Protection District, March 6**Real property exclusion/inclusion approved**

By Natalie Barszcz

The Donald Wescott Fire Protection District (DWFPD) board met on March 6 and conducted a public hearing on the proposed exclusion of the majority of real property within the district's jurisdiction pursuant to Colorado Revised Statute 32-1-501(1.5) so that it may be included into the jurisdiction of Tri-Lakes Monument Fire Protection District (TLMFPD) dba Monument Fire District (MFD).

Director Mike Forsythe joined the meeting at 4:52 p.m.

Real property exclusion/inclusion proposal

The district's attorney, Emily Powell of Ireland Stapleton Pryor Pascoe PC law firm, attending in person, said the district and TLMFPD had been working since 2022 to merge the two agencies into a single fire protection district that will provide fire protection services to the combined area. TLMFPD will be the surviving district and will officially change its name to "Monument Fire District" to reflect the broader geographic area of the district.

Powell said the merger process is at the point of the inclusion and exclusion of real property, a process that is similar to the way a municipality might annex or de-annex property. Shortly before the meeting, the TLMFPD board held a public hearing and the board agreed to include all the properties within the Wescott area into its boundaries. All except two properties will remain within the district after the inclusion/exclusion process is complete. Those properties belong to the two board members who will continue as directors to assist her in the final dissolution of DWFPD. Upon completion of the dissolution process, the two remaining properties will be included into the MFD boundaries. The inclusion/exclusion process will take place on the same day to prevent any lapse in fire protection services, she said. See www.ocn.me/v24n1.htm#dwfpd.

Public hearing

The board opened the public hearing on the exclusion and inclusion of property, and Powell confirmed the notice of the hearing had been published as required by law.

Volunteer Pension Board Trustee Dennis Feltz said 14-year former Wescott volunteer firefighter Dan Milano had passed away on Feb. 20, 2024. Milano and several firefighters had survived with injuries from falling through the burning roof of the Yorkshire Apartments in May 1976, but the fire claimed the lives of firefighter Donald Wescott and

three occupants. DWFPD was built by the community and volunteers, and the district adopted the name Donald Wescott in 1981 to memorialize the loss of Wescott.

Feltz said that in the past, a downfall happened (when revenue was lost along with rooftops) and the department was mismanaged, but since the merger began the district stations on Gleneagle Drive and Highway 83/Stage Coach Road are now fully staffed with professional firefighters. A lot of changes have occurred since the paid professional staff took over, and Feltz thanked Fire Chief Andy Kovacs for ensuring the firefighters are always turned out professionally and the on-duty volunteer firefighters are no longer spotted in gym shorts and flip-flops at King Soopers.

The growth is significant within the region, and a study recommending Wescott merge with the Monument departments in the 1990s only resulted in the Woodmoor/Monument Fire Protection District (WMFPD) being taken over in 2008 by TLMFPD. Since the initial study, further studies recommended the triangle be completed to include the Wescott district. Feltz hopes everything keeps growing and the chief extends the leadership into the future, and history will repeat itself with another successful merger, he said.

Note: A brief history on the formation of the DWFPD can be found at <https://monumentfire.org>.

The board approved the resolutions in the certified order.

Powell said a 30-day waiting period would ensue before anything happens legally, even though both boards have agreed to the exclusion and inclusion of property. The El Paso County District Court will issue a public order after recognizing all the correct steps have been made. The boundary change will be official after the documents are recorded at the El Paso County Clerk and Recorder Office. The process is dependent on the court's calendar, but it is hoped that it will be completed in April.

Treasurer Duane Garrett said the districts have gone back and forth for years to make the merger happen, and finally the right people were in place. He is excited for the future of the district and ready to move onto the next chapter as an MFD board director.

President Mark Gunderman said the concept of a merger had been 20 years in the making and both boards had been working on the merger for

four years. The department is modernizing the stations, providing better pay for the firefighters, and implementing new technology. The merger was the right thing to do for the community and the firefighters, he said. The district only encountered a few minor bumps in the road along the way, and he thanked Powell, the executive staff, and the combined district firefighters for their efforts.

Powell thanked the staff, the board directors, and the attendees at every meeting for their support during the merger process. "It was a heavy lift for everyone" and she was currently involved with four fire department mergers, she said.

Chief's report

Fire Chief Kovacs said:

- Battalion Chief Micah Coyle had moved from shift commander to an administrative role as the Executive Battalion Chief on Jan. 1.
- On Jan. 6, the district responded to an out-building structure fire off Stepler Road that resulted in about \$35,000 in property loss.
- The Type 6 brush truck had deployed to Bent County for about 36 hours on March 4.
- The Career Fire Academy was well underway with eight students from the district on track to graduate on May 3. A district student had returned to shift duty due to an injury sustained during the training.
- The district's combined staff completed 628 hours of training in January.
- The Station 4 remodel is underway, and completion is expected in August.

Note: The Station 4 (Gleneagle Drive) Engine Company is operating from Colorado Springs Fire Department Station 22 (Voyager Parkway and Copper Center Parkway) during the remodel. See www.ocn.me/v24n2.htm#mfd and the MFD article below for additional information.

The meeting adjourned at 5:06 p.m.

Meetings are typically held on the fourth Wednesday at Station 1, 18650 Highway 105. The next regular meeting will be held on April 24 at 4:30 p.m. For Zoom meetings instructions, agendas, minutes, and updates, visit www.monumentfire.org or contact Director of Administration Jennifer Martin at 719-484-9011.

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Monument Fire District, Feb. 28, March 6 and 27**Wescott property inclusion approved; land purchase agreements discussed**

By Natalie Barszcz

At the Monument Fire District meeting on Feb. 28, the board held a public hearing before approving the inclusion of two unincorporated El Paso County properties in the Forest View Acres subdivision, approved the 2024 Employee Handbook, and received an update on the Station 3 rebuild land purchase agreement.

The board held a special meeting on March 6 to conduct a public hearing for the Tri-Lakes Monument Fire Protection District dba Monument Fire District (MFD) and Donald Wescott Fire Protection District (DWFPD) inclusion/exclusion of real property process.

On March 27, the board received information about the land purchase costs to rebuild Station 3, received an after-action storm report for the mid-March snow event, and held a lengthy discussion on the opportunity to purchase acreage for a future sixth station.

Fire Chief Andy Kovacs was absent for the Feb. 28 and the March 27 meetings.

President Mike Smaldino and Secretary Jason Buckingham were excused on March 27.

Property inclusions—Forest View Acres

At the Feb. 28 meeting, the board held a public hearing for the following two properties seeking to be included into the district:

- Resolution 2024-06 Gould property, 738 Forest View Way.
- Resolution 2024-07 Thulin property, 4035 Deer Creek Valley Court.

Hearing no comments in favor or opposition, the board closed the hearing. In a roll call vote, the board approved the real property inclusions. Vice President John Hildebrandt abstained in the roll call vote due to audio difficulties via Zoom.

Note: The district received a list of properties from the El Paso County Sheriff's Office (EPCSO) identifying properties within the greater district boundaries that had not been officially recorded within the district. The district informed each of the prop-