

Donald Wescott Fire Protection District, March 19

Fire mitigation continues

By Lisa Hatfield

Donald Wescott Fire Protection District's firefighters, chiefs, fire marshal, and residents have prepared for the dry wildfire season ahead by thinning pines and scrub oak, creating fuel breaks, and writing grants to help pay for more vegetation mitigation. Chipping Project Day and the Wescott Safety Fair will provide opportunities for Wescott residents to do even more to prepare for wildfire in their neighborhoods. Administrative Assistant Cheryl Marshall reported at the March 19 district board meeting that the district has "carryover" funds from 2012 that need to be invested.

Director Harland Baker was absent and Assistant Chief Scott Ridings was excused from the meeting.

Safety work applauded

Fire Marshal Margot Humes said she had done many fire safety presentations and private property assessments for wildland fires. She also recently applied to the Front Range Fuels Treatment Partnership and to the state Forest Service for grants that could yield a total of \$82,000. If awarded to the district, the money would be used for more vegetation mitigation work in Pleasant View Estates and on the Wismer property around Station 2 on Highway 83 to create a shaded fuel break and improve forest health.

Matching funds for the grants require that homeowners put in either their own cash or their own time toward fire mitigation.

Chief Vinny Burns explained that the shaded fuel break could provide a defensible strategic space near Station 2 to slow down the fire in the event of a catastrophic wildfire in the wildland/urban interface. "It could eliminate the potential for a crown fire" near the fire station, he said. Humes added that Highway 83 is a main exit route, and keeping that road open in an emergency, as alternative to I-25, would be vital "so people could get out."

Pikes Peak Wildfire Prevention Partners and the Ready, Set, Go! Firewise program applauded Wescott for the 56,000 hours of fire mitigation work done in 2012, Humes said.

Humes received \$1,633 from the International Association of Fire Chiefs for a \$1,000 grant she wrote to offset printing costs for "Ready, Set, Go!," a Firewise information brochure about defensible space that she gives to residents at property assessments. The association awarded the district the extra \$633 because the grant was "so well-written." The brochure is also available at www.wescottfire.org.

Chairman Scott Campbell suggested that any grant money awarded should be kept in a separate ledger account so that its use could be tracked. Marshall said it will be outside of the general

fund in a reserved grant money fund. In addition, Humes is creating photo documentation of some of the mitigation work done with grant money.

Upcoming community events:

- Chipping Project Day — May 4 at Station 3 on Highway 83. DWFPD will provide the wood chipper and the manpower, and Wescott residents should bring slash and trees they have cut. "It's easier to chop up (the trees) when they're little. It's more expensive to take care of it later on," Humes said. Pleasant View Estates' official Firewise Neighborhood signs will also be presented at this event.
- Wescott Safety Fair — June 1 at Station 1, 15415 Gleneagle Drive. The Flight for Life helicopter, Monument Police Department, hospitals, veterinarians, search and rescue team, wildland firefighting team, and Pikes Peak Wildfire Prevention Partners are some of the invited guests for the fair.

Burns reiterated the importance of the district's work on the shaded fuel break. He explained that three-fourths of the personnel have completed the Red Card refresher class allowing them to fight fires on federal lands. Red Card holders must pass the "arduous pack test," a three-mile hike done in 45 minutes with a 45-pound pack.

Financial report

Administrative Assistant Marshall said all outstanding 2012 bills have come in, and she gave copies of the 2012 financial report to the board members for review so they can ask questions at the April meeting to close out 2012 numbers.

Total 2012 income was about \$2 million, while total expenses were about \$1.8 million. The district has approximately \$185,000 in "carryover," since expenses were about \$54,000 less than planned, and the district earned extra revenue from volunteering

for wildfire deployments outside the district.

Chairman Campbell suggested finalizing the decision in the next few months about what to do with the carryover. The board might decide to use some of the \$185,000 to help pay off the annual Station 2 construction loan. The next payment is due July 1.

Balances as of Feb. 28 totaling \$1 million: People's National Bank \$425,000, Colorado Peak Fund \$179,000, ColoTrust Fund \$439,000, Wells Fargo Public Trust \$5,000.

Expenses for February were "right on track," Marshall said.

Marshall said that Wells Fargo has completed three payrolls for the district since the transfer from a private payroll service. The first payroll issued was a learning process and required five check corrections to resolve questions about the complicated payroll calculated for the district, which involves pension funds, unemployment tax, overtime, benefits, pre- or post-tax, etc. The next two payrolls went smoothly, Marshall said.

Marshall hopes to have passwords for the Wells Fargo checking accounts soon so that the district can start to use that account.

The chief's report will be presented by Assistant Chief Scott Ridings at April's meeting.

The board went into executive session at 7:38 p.m. to discuss personnel matters and "determine positions relative to matters that may be subject to negotiations" and did not plan to make any announcements before adjourning.

The next meeting will be held at 7 p.m. April 16 at Station 1, 15415 Gleneagle Drive, with a pension board meeting starting at 6:30 p.m. Meetings are normally held on the third Tuesday of the month. Information: 488-8680.

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