

Kneeland Fire Protection District



Strategic Plan 2024-2030

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Introduction

History of the Kneeland Fire Protection District

Prior to 1982 no fire or emergency services existed in the Kneeland areas east of Eureka. Fire and ambulance response was at least 30-40 minutes or longer depending on the location of the emergency. The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF, now referred to as CAL FIRE), responded to structure fires in the Kneeland Area from Fortuna or Trinidad and Humboldt Fire Protection District would also respond, if available. Response time was well over an hour. During these years, as now, the primary mission of CDF was wildland fire protection; however, its engines were not equipped to fight structure fires so they could only take action to prevent a fire from escalating into the vegetation or forest area.

Between 1982-84 due to a continuing increase in population and residential development community members saw the need and formed the Kneeland Volunteer Fire Department. The volunteer fire fighters had no personal safety gear (PPE) and a 1943 fire truck that needed to be coasted on a hill to get it started. In the 1980's in Humboldt County there was one paid department and one paid/volunteer department the remaining departments were all-volunteer. During this period, a good many of these volunteer departments not associated with local agencies went through the process to become fire districts including Kneeland, allowing for improved funding. The Kneeland Fire Protection District was formed after the registered voters of the community approved Measure D in June 1990 establishing the Fire District and approving a special tax to support ongoing operations.

Funding the KFPD

During the 1990's, the Kneeland Fire Protection District (Kneeland Fire) continued to develop and grow with newer equipment, better trained volunteers, and the urgent need to build a firehouse to protect the apparatus and equipment and support a thriving Kneeland community. In 2014 Measure "L" was passed by 84% of the Kneeland voters to increase the per-parcel fee to meet the future demands of a growing department and community.

In 2016, Humboldt County Measure "Z" (later Measure "O"), passed which enacted a temporary County Sales tax increase. Kneeland Fire benefited tremendously from these Measures which provided substantial funding to erect the Kneeland Fire House, purchase new equipment, and replace old equipment. In addition to funds from Measure Z, Kneeland Fire also replaced two of our oldest engines when Humboldt Bay Fire and Sacramento Metropolitan Fire made them available to the Kneeland Fire at near zero cost to Kneeland taxpayers. Through these funding streams and generous donations from the community, Kneeland Fire was able to update their apparatus and equipment to today's standards.

The Kneeland Fire District currently consists of 36 square miles of mountainous rural properties and Kneeland Fire also provides “good will” emergency response to homes, ranches and areas around the district where no organized first responder fire department exists. This Goodwill Response Area increases the Kneeland Fire response area to well over one hundred square miles. This Goodwill Response Area places a significant financial burden on Kneeland Fire and its taxpayers.

After the Maple Creek Volunteer fire department closed down operations in the early 2000’s and the Goodwill Response burden to Kneeland fire became more apparent, the County Supervisors approved a pilot program to help financially support Kneeland Fire for out-of-district responses through Measure “Z” funds. Since 2017 Kneeland Fire had received fiscal support from Measure Z and O funds to support our out-of-district response. However, due to the changing nature Measure Z/O funds allocations, these funds were longer available to the District as of July 1, 2023. The implications of this reduction in funding are significant for the District as out-of-district costs represented approximately 35% of the KFPD budget (equal to the proportional number of calls KFPD responds to in the Goodwill Response Area).

Kneeland Fire Now and In the Future

Kneeland Fire’s call volume has quadrupled over the last 30 years and we have developed into a well-trained and respected volunteer fire department. Through the passage of Measure L and with support from the community and Measures Z and O, we now have a solid fleet of engines, we have secured updated gear for wildland and emergency medical response, and we were able to build the Kneeland Fire House. To increase our resilience we utilized grant and volunteer funding to develop our on-site water supply, added solar, battery, and generator capacity for electrical independence, and extended our communications capability to benefit both our district and regional responders. In addition, Kneeland earned the distinction of being recognized as a Firewise community which it has maintained since 2016.

Looking to the future, Kneeland Fire has many aspirations we would like to achieve by the end of this decade. The most significant achievements we hope to attain include the following:

- Expand the fire house to include bathrooms, a kitchen and turnout washers (necessitating a septic system, building design, permitting, construction materials and labor, and appliances) to make training and response more convenient and support the health and safety of firefighters,
- Develop the capacity for the fire house to act as an emergency response center in the event of a natural disaster or other widespread emergency,
- Develop collaborations and secure more funding to support community implementation of fuels reduction and fire prevention activities,
- Purchase a Type III engine to support medical, rescue, and all-risk fire response in the more rugged parts of our response area and, most importantly,

- Pursue strategies that will ensure a long-term community-based and locally controlled revenue source to support the sustainable delivery of fire protection services for the entire Kneeland response area.

This strategic plan is intended to support the ongoing operations of Kneeland Fire, and the goals and aspirations set forth in the sections below. The Kneeland Fire strategic plan is organized into different Areas of Focus of importance to the District. For each Area of Focus we have identified goals that we hope to achieve and actions through which we plan to achieve our goals.

Area of Focus: Readiness for Emergency Response

Goal: Expand Facilities and Capacity of the Kneeland Firehouse to Meet Current and Future Needs of the Community

ACTIONS

1. Prepare a capital improvement program for the Kneeland Firehouse.
2. Explore options to address and accelerate retirement of Fire House debt.
3. Finalize plans and secure permits for a septic system.
4. Finalize plans, secure funding, and build restroom, kitchen, washroom expansion.

Goal: Secure and Maintain High Quality Equipment, Gear and Tools for Emergency Response

ACTIONS

1. Explore funding options to support purchase of a Type III Engine.
2. Maintain and/or replace equipment.
3. Conduct annual assessment of engines and equipment to review current and future life cycle costs regarding durability, dependability, and efficiency of operation. In addition to supporting appropriate long-term budgeting, this information is used to support decisions made in Actions 4, 5, and 6 below.
4. Develop and implement an apparatus replacement, operations, and maintenance plan for existing equipment to ensure all are in good, working order.
5. Ensure adequate funds are budgeted to support the operations and maintenance plan.
6. Annually evaluate the need for new equipment.
7. Digitize and improve the KFPD + Response Area Map Book.
8. Identify & map primary and secondary evacuation routes & sites (e.g., large animal, shelter-as-last-resort).
9. Map areas of dispatch deficiency & seek support to improve.

Goal: Maintain and Support An Adequate Roster of Well-Trained Volunteers

ACTIONS

1. Maintain a force of 10, ideally 15 well-trained volunteers for the KVFD that are regularly able to respond to calls.
2. Develop a succession plan for leadership of the KVFD.
3. Cultivate skills for transition of leadership of the KVFD.
4. Continue robust training program.
5. Ensure adequate annual funds are budgeted for training.

Goal: Annex the Kneeland Goodwill Response Area

ACTIONS

1. Pursue ballot initiative to revise the KFPD Special Tax to support the goals and actions outlined in this strategic plan.
2. Pursue annexation of the KFPD Goodwill Response Area to formalize our response area and stabilize funding for the KFPD.
3. Evaluate the feasibility of a “sub-station” for equipment in upper Kneeland.

Area of Focus: Fire Prevention

Goal: Reduce the Number of Annual Ignitions

ACTIONS

1. Regularly review fire calls to better understand “ignition sources” and any related trends.
2. Review cases to evaluate potential need to further educate the community on ignition risks.
3. Outreach to increased risk land users to prevent and reduce ignitions.
4. Maintain communications with Residents and Industrial Timber companies regarding prescribed burns.
5. Provide education for landowners regarding safe implementation of slash burning including the need for adequate water during burn events.

Goal: Reduce Fuels and Support Community Fuels Reduction Efforts

ACTIONS

1. Conduct fuels reduction & slash collection events; secure funding from community partners & businesses.
2. Provide information regarding fuels reduction techniques and service providers.
3. Seek funding to support landowner fuels reduction and defensible space projects.

4. Emphasize the restoration of oak woodlands.
5. Maintain up-to-date Kneeland Fire Risk Assessment and Action Plan.
6. Crowd-source data on community fuels reduction efforts and maintain Firewise designation.
7. Implement vegetation treatment on fire suppression ridges.
8. Work with commercial timberland owners to identify priority areas for strategic vegetation treatments to increase forest resiliency to wildfire.
9. Develop a strategy to abate wildfire risk from vacant lands that pose a threat to residences.
10. Identify priority sites for Firewise Action (defensible space, home hardening, fuels reduction, access).
11. Identify obstacles for residents to complete fuels reduction.
12. Support elderly & disabled residents in defensible space compliance and fuels reduction.

Goal: Maintain Adequate Water Resources in the District

ACTIONS

1. Identify (map) any new construction after 1992 (to identify residences with 2,500 gallons dedicated for fire suppression) and ensure landowners have the appropriate connections and markings.
2. Expand the Blue Dot program.
3. Support residents in the installation of dedicated water tanks for fire.
4. Engage permitted cultivations to educate regarding water storage and fire readiness.
5. Increase the number of residents with dedicated fire tanks and invest in a network of community water tanks (or access agreements).
6. Provide education on standard connection configurations for dedicated fire water tanks.

Goal: Collaborate and Provide Information That Supports Restoring a Regime of Prescribed Fire

ACTIONS

1. Provide timely communications with community related to planned and active prescribed burns.
2. Provide support for prescribed burn events.
3. Provide educational resources to the community on prescribed burning.
4. Collaborate with landowners to cooperatively implement prescribed burns; actively encourage large landowners to participate in the Humboldt County Prescribed Burn Association.

5. Seek opportunities to use prescribed fire as training opportunities for Kneeland Fire and neighboring agencies.

Area of Focus: Disaster and Emergency Response Preparedness

Goal: Be Prepared and Help Residents Be Prepared to Respond to a Disaster

ACTIONS

1. Explore and Recruit a Community Emergency Response team (CERT) for Kneeland.
2. Develop capacity for the Kneeland Firehouse to act as a Community Emergency Center.
3. Develop a disaster response action plan addressing both in-district and out-of-district areas.
4. Develop and socialize a disaster response plan in the event of a major disaster event (e.g. Cascadia Event).
5. Actively participate in updates to the Humboldt County Community Wildfire Protection Plan to ensure that that the Kneeland-Maple Creek Planning Unit Action Plan properly reflects resource values, assets, risks and hazards and includes all priority projects to project the community.
6. Outreach to PG&E, HRC, Green Diamond for fuels reduction and fire prevention collaborations to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires.
7. Collaborate to create landscape-scale fire breaks.
8. Provide education, promote awareness, and share information sources regarding existing state, county, and other agencies requirements for private roads dimensions, construction standards, and maintenance standards.
9. Improve signage for home addresses and road names to ensure responders can respond as quickly as possible.
10. Partner with Humboldt County, CalTrans & others to address priority fuels reduction for safe ingress and egress.
11. Address fuels hotspots that threaten emergency evacuation routes (Greenwood Hts, Tim Mullen, Barry, Foss, Green, Kneeland, Upper Fickle Hill, Maple Creek, Butler Valley and Powerline roads).

Area of Focus: Community Engagement

Goal: Residents Have Access to Education Regarding Fire Safety and Emergency Response

ACTIONS

1. Collaborate to provide emergency response training to the community.
2. Educate community members regarding Ruth Dam considerations in the event of large quake.
3. Educate the community on preparedness & evacuation.
4. Ensure residents are educated about notification platforms.
5. Conduct outreach regarding the need for residents to be self-reliant in terms of water: 2,500 gallons minimum with proper fire fittings.
6. Develop educational materials to be provided to landowners at events.
7. Provide regular educational information regarding fire safety.
8. Provide education for landowners related to defensible space around homes and access routes.
9. Increase burn day education.
10. Provide information related to red flag warnings and other time-sensitive fire hazards.

Goal: Maintain A Robust Network of Supporters And the Leadership Necessary for Kneeland Fire to Thrive

ACTIONS

1. Recruit 1-3 new board members.
2. Ensure adequate succession planning for leadership.
3. Expand the Kneeland Fire Auxiliary.
4. Host Annual Firewise Event.
5. Host at least two events per year to promote community around fire safety.
6. Engage kids through area schools.
7. Produce regular communications in both print and digital formats (newsletters, emails, social media etc.) to keep the community informed and engaged.