

PRESS RELEASE

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FROM: The Office of the Fire Chief, Colorado River Fire Rescue

Two Local Fire Departments Take The Final Step In Merging

Since 1976 Burning Mountains Fire Protection District has provided firefighting, fire prevention and education, rescue, hazardous materials to the citizens and their property within an approximately 450 square miles service area, including the Town of Silt and New Castle. In 2009 BMFPD changed their service plan to include Emergency Medical Services and began providing EMS and ambulance services via an IGA with Rifle Fire Protection District (RFPD). Since 1976, its neighbor, RFPD has provided the same fire and emergency services to the citizens and their property within an approximately 400 square miles service area, including the City of Rifle. Each fire district is a separate local government governed by its own Board of Directors, each of which is comprised of 5 elected public officials.

More than four years ago, the fire departments began discussing merging into a single, unified fire protection district to provide even more cost effective, high quality fire and emergency services to the communities they serve. As a first step toward this goal, in the fall of 2012 the fire departments formed a separate public entity, known as the Colorado River Fire Rescue Authority. Colorado River Fire Rescue is governed by a five member Board of Directors, comprised of two RFPD Board members, two BMFPD Board members, and County Commissioner Mike Samson.

Since it was established, Colorado River Fire Rescue has been responsible for providing all of the fire and emergency services within the two fire departments' combined 851 square miles service area, utilizing a highly trained, professional workforce of 120 volunteer, part-time and full-time firefighters and EMS personnel. Colorado River Fire Rescue maintains seven stations: five staffed stations; one station staffed, through an ongoing partnership, by Interagency Wild Land Firefighters (BLM and Forest Service); one unstaffed station; and, one station used for fleet maintenance.

By creating Colorado River Fire Rescue, the fire protection districts:

- Eliminated duplicative administrative and support personnel and services, thereby substantially reducing the cost of providing fire and emergency services to their communities.
- Significantly increased their response capabilities throughout their combined service area.
- Upgraded the insurance ratings with the entire combined service area, will result in reduced insurance premiums for most people who own homes, businesses or other property within the combined service area.
- Decrease in the mil levy rate for Rifle property owners resulting in a reduction to taxpayers.

Establishing Colorado River Fire Rescue Authority has been a very successful first step in the merger process; however, there is more work to be done. Because Colorado River Fire Rescue is a separate legal entity, it must have its own Board of Directors, budget, attorney and auditor; and, because RFPD and BMFPD continue to exist as separate local governments, they must have their own Boards of Directors, budgets, attorneys, and auditors. Thus, there are three Boards, three separate budgets, three legal counsels,

etc., which is an inefficient use of resources and taxpayer funds. With a downturn in the economy and significant decrease to property values and assessed values for the two fire protection districts, we continue to evaluate areas of efficiency.

The final step is to permanently merge the fire departments into a single unified fire protection district and eliminate the need for the Colorado River Fire Rescue Authority. Over the last 6 months, the Boards have discussed this process extensively in their regularly scheduled monthly public meetings and at a two day strategic planning session held in the fall of 2012. At their combined December 14, 2013 meeting, the RFPD and BMFPD Boards formally approved moving forward with permanently merging the two fire protection districts.

To accomplish the merger, BMFPD has legally changed its name to Colorado River Fire Protection District. At a public meeting on February 11, 2014, the RFPD Board will consider whether to transfer all of its service area to the newly named Colorado River Fire Protection District. If the RFPD Board approves the transfer, the fire districts will begin the process of transferring the service area, and all of the personnel, fire trucks, equipment, etc., to the Colorado River Fire Protection District. Once that process is completed, RFPD will be dissolved and Colorado River Fire Rescue Authority will be eliminated, leaving only a single, unified fire department – the Colorado River Fire Protection District – to continue providing cost effective, high quality fire and emergency services to the Towns of Silt and New Castle, the City of Rifle, and the surroundings areas. As well, the process is being established so that the elected official representation on the Colorado River Fire Protection District board consists of representation from throughout the jurisdiction.

While there are a lot of details to be ironed out, the goal is to have the entire project completed within the next four months. Not only will the size of government be reduced by eliminating one local government and a public entity, but a permanent single, unified fire department will emerge. And all of this will be accomplished without raising taxes. In fact, because the tax rate within Colorado River Fire Protection District is lower, all of the RFPD area that is transferred to Colorado River Fire Protection District will actually see a tax reduction. Lower taxes, enhanced fire and emergency services, and reduced government – that is a goal worth accomplishing.

For additional information and details concerning this process, feel free to visit our website at www.cfrf.us; or visit us on Facebook at [www.Facebook/ColoradoRiverFireRescue](https://www.facebook.com/ColoradoRiverFireRescue)