



ELK CREEK FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT **STRATEGIC PLAN**

2024-2029

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MESSAGE FROM THE FIRE CHIEF

Jacob Ware, Fire Chief

I am excited to present you with a new strategic plan for the Elk Creek Fire Protection District. Developed through extensive collaboration and informed by staff and community feedback, this plan represents our unwavering commitment to serving and protecting our community.

It is important to keep in mind that a strategic plan is a living, breathing document. It will guide our actions, but we will continue checking and modifying our course along the way, pivoting to match inevitable or unforeseen changes in areas such as fire industry developments and introduction of modern technologies.

We serve and protect a mountain community that is growing. We collaborate closely daily with our partners at Inter-Canyon and North Fork Fire Districts. As this growth occurs, it is important that the fire protection district's capabilities match that growth, so we can continue the quality emergency response this community has come to know and expect. This is a comprehensive strategic plan that recognizes the unique attributes and needs of a district of our size and purpose.

Our community is unique in many ways. Some items we need to consider are:

- The District, located in parts of Jefferson and Park Counties, lies in the Wildland Urban Interface. Our risk of wildfire is greater than 99% of the communities in the United States. It is critical that the District and residents keep working together to reduce wildland fire threat to the most manageable level we can, and to strive for ways to live safely with wildfire.
- Concerns also include an ever-increasing number of outdoor recreation enthusiasts as well as an aging population, both of which are likely to produce a rise in the demand for EMS services over the coming years.
- And of course, we want to take exceptional care of our staff and volunteers, both for their own wellbeing, and so we can remain a competitive employer and retain and attract quality fire and EMS professionals to care for this community that we all love.

It is helpful to look at our history and where we came from as an organization and our proud achievements. We have made considerable progress in providing our community with the best services possible within our limited resources. We have done this not only through our own efforts but also through our relationships with our neighboring districts, agency partners and community members including the utilization of Intergovernmental Agreements.

Together, we now have several key resources including:

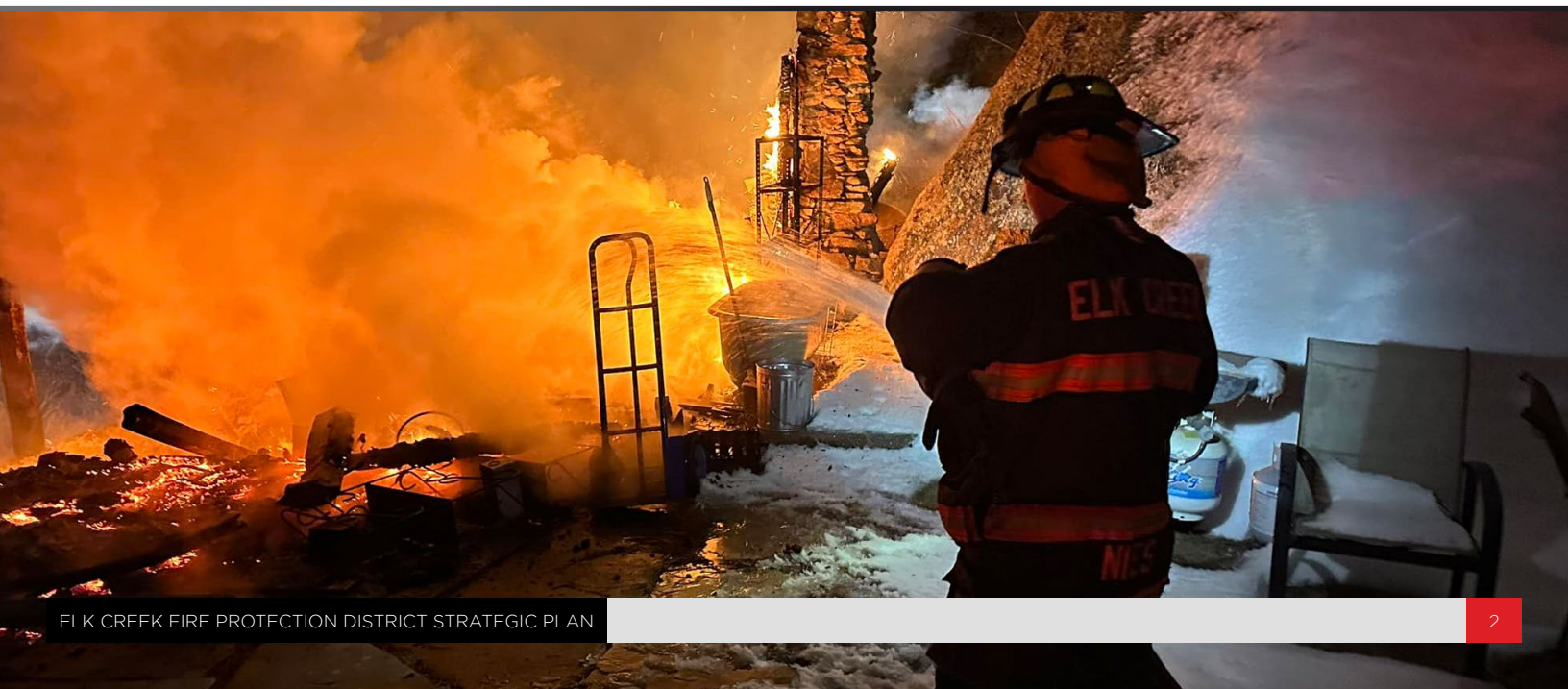
- A Fire marshal that is ensuring code adoption and coordination within the three fire districts
- A Fleet program that has streamlined our maintenance of infrastructure in all three fire districts
- A Training division that has improved our skills and response capabilities
- A Wildland Division that is directed by a Community Wildfire Protection Plan comprising two of the three districts and working towards a combined update to include North Fork. The Division has a host of tools to guide risk reduction efforts and more effective fire response within the 400 square mile area
- A budding Honor Guard program to properly remember the work of our first responders
- Standard mutual aid agreements to support us in our times of need

This initial strategic plan proposes and identifies high-level goals. Each goal will require substantial investment and additional planning to properly and holistically address our organization's ability to meet community needs.

This planning effort does not yet provide us with detailed information as to direct our organization in the short term. We will continue to rely on our internal experts and division leads to provide our short-term goals and inform our upcoming budget discussions. These near-term discussions will be directed by the key goals which we have identified.

This plan was developed collaboratively with community, staff, and volunteer firefighter participation, and I am truly thankful for their dedication and input. To be successful, we must all continue to work together.

Jacob Ware
Fire Chief



AGENCY BACKGROUND



“In 1948, a volunteer bucket brigade lost the Will o’ the Wisp restaurant down Highway 285 to fire. That spurred a group of determined men of the area to found the Elk Creek Fire Department. The same year, two of them, Rudy and Harlan Long, sons of pioneer Charles Long and partners in Long Brothers Garage at today’s Kings Valley exit, provided the land for \$10. Volunteers built the white firehouse with its two wide doors on the hill across the street, a landmark for everyone leaving town for an outing in the mountains.

There was also the question of getting medical help for the ill, or, in a more severe case, getting a sick person to a hospital in time for help. In 1950, May and Rudolf Long were confronted with that problem, when there was no ambulance to transport their ill mothers to a hospital, where they would receive needed care. As true pioneers, they started their own service and soon became known as the Mr. and Mrs. Red Cross of the Mountains. For many years, their ambulance service would be the only one between Denver and Salida. When, in 1963, a new house for the Elk Creek Fire Station #1 was built near Richmond Hill, the Longs bought back the original fire house for \$10 and out of it began to conduct their ambulance services. They retired from ambulance service in 1978.

In 1999, the Elk Creek Fire Station #1 fire house was declared eligible to be listed in the National Register for Historic Places. It was designated a Jefferson County Historic Landmark in 2004.”

Sadly, that station was destroyed by an out-of-control semi-tractor trailer in 2007.

Source: <https://historicjeffco.files.wordpress.com/2013/02/2007histjeffco.pdf>

Completely volunteer and dependent on donations in the beginning, and using WW II surplus equipment, the Department provided a much-needed service to the community. Elk Creek Fire Department later became Elk Creek Fire Protection District, funded by property taxes that offered critical income stability to better serve a growing district.

In the last 74 years the call volume has increased to approximately 1,325 calls per year. The department now has career, full-time firefighters that work 48 hour shifts as well as a highly trained and dedicated volunteer staff. The department has state-of-the-art firefighting and EMS equipment as well as a love of service to our mountain community.

Additionally, the department works and trains closely with Inter-Canyon and North Fork Fire Protection Districts, sharing many programs. Elk Creek participated in a pre-consolidation study with Inter-Canyon and North Fork Fire Protection Districts to evaluate the need for combining efforts. This study recommended consolidation due to staffing, recruitment, training, and infrastructure needs of all three departments. Ultimately, the 2023 ballot measure was narrowly defeated.

The Elk Creek Fire Protection District is a combination fire department. It is staffed with:

- 1 Career Chief Officers
- 1 Part Time Logistics Chief
- 14 Career Line Firefighter/ Paramedics/ EMT's
- 30 Volunteer Firefighter/ EMS Providers
- 8 Career Wildland Firefighters
- 8 Seasonal Wildland Firefighters
- 34 Community Ambassadors
- 2 District Administrator
- 1 Full Time Fleet Manager
- 1 Full Time Mechanic
- 1 Fire Marshal
- 1 Public Information Officer

MOVING FORWARD

This strategic plan is a living document that will be continually worked on to make our vision a reality. As we move forward, you can expect:

- Frequent updates on the execution of goals outlined within the plan.
- A public-facing platform to provide updates and more in depth information to interested members of the community.
- Future planning efforts reflective of our existing relationships with neighboring districts and agency partners.



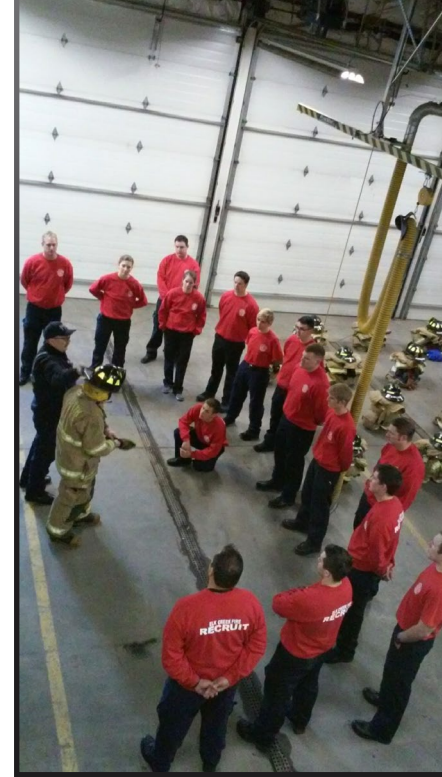
THE PROCESS

The development of this plan, at the behest of the District Board of Directors, began with a consultation between the department and an independent consultant who specializes in public safety strategic planning.

An internal staff survey was distributed to full-time staff, volunteers, and Fire District board members. This survey asked staff to:

- Review the current mission statement and department values for present and future relevancy.
- Provide perspectives by completing a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) Analysis of the organization.
- Identify the top three issues that the department needs to address during the next five years.

This survey was completed during the months of February and March 2024 by 45 respondents. The survey and responses are in [Appendix A](#).



45 *respondents*

This survey was completed during the months of February and March 2024 by 45 respondents.

194 *responses*

The community survey was distributed via social media and website messaging and had 194 responses.

17 *people*

A community forum was held on 4/30/24, to gather additional feedback. 17 people attended the forum.

Following the internal survey, a community survey was distributed via social media and website messaging and was open to responses during April of 2024. Community members were asked to:

- Rate, on a scale of 1 to 5, the performance of the department.
- Provide perspectives by completing a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) Analysis of the organization.
- Rank order six issues that the department should address during the next 3-5 years
- Suggest what the department needs to do to be successful in addressing the previous issues.

The survey had 194 responses, and its results are in [Appendix B](#).

A community forum was held on April 30th, 2024, to gather additional feedback from those who had not completed the online survey. The attendees provided responses to the questions in the community survey and those responses were recorded. Attendees identified several additional issues for the department to consider in the next three to five years. Combined with those listed in the survey, members of the forum rank ordered the issues.

The forum was attended by 17 people, and its results are in [Appendix C](#).

On May 1st, five internal focus groups were conducted. Focus groups were 5-7 people in several functional areas who met with the consultant to gather different perspectives and input on current and future issues and to make recommendations on improving the agency's ability to provide the highest level of service to the community. The focus groups were members of the Emergency Medical Services (EMS staff, firefighters, wildland team, administration, and volunteers).

The focus groups summary of issues is in [Appendix D](#).



On June 20th, a workshop was conducted with department staff. The staff reviewed and updated the mission statement. The values and value statements were reviewed and remain unchanged as they continue to reflect the core values of the department.

The workshop attendees proposed a bold new vision for the District. The vision statement was created by brainstorming concepts and forming a clear image of what the Department intends to be. It will guide the agency moving forward, including working with our partner agencies and the community.

The attendees then reviewed the three Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analyses that were done previously. The focus of the review was on the weaknesses identified in the internal survey, community survey, community forum, and focus groups.

There were consistent areas of opportunity listed in each assessment that were identified by the attendees. Those included staffing, communication, training, risk reduction, facilities, equipment, recruitment, retention, and volunteers.

The SWOT review led to the identification of the most important issues to address over the next five years by the group.

Those critical issues are:

- Workforce (Career and volunteer staffing, recruitment and retention, training, and wellness)
- Infrastructure
- Community Risk
- Communication

From those issues, goals and strategies were established. The group identified the expected outcomes should the department be successful in achieving each goal.

CRITICAL ISSUES & SERVICE GAPS



The service gaps identified in the data gathering process were discussed during the workshop during the SWOT reviews. The intention of the goals and strategies is to bridge as many gaps as practical while at the same time focusing on priorities and goal achievement. Those gaps, considered weaknesses in the SWOT analyses, and related issue to reduce the gap, are contained in [Appendix E](#).

DEPARTMENT **STRATEGIC PLAN**

MISSION STATEMENT

Our mission statement describes our purpose and how we serve our community and our members. Our mission is:

To encourage and promote life safety and risk reduction; to provide fire suppression and emergency services; and to make our mountain community a safe place to live, work and play.



VISION STATEMENT

Our vision describes our future as we achieve our goals and create a better future:

Our vision is to provide the most effective services to our evolving community. We do this by valuing our members, promoting positive leadership, and cultivating relationships with other agencies and community partners.



DEPARTMENT **CORE VALUES**

Our values guide our decision-making and create the standard of what we represent. Our core values are:



SAFETY

Above all else we will maintain the highest possible standards in all aspects of Elk Creek Operations. Members are the most valuable resource Elk Creek Fire has.



INTEGRITY

Do what is needed and right when it is required or expected. Do your best and expect no less from those around you. Support your team and do more than your share.



PROFESSIONALISM

Perform each task completely, accurately, and safely. Hold yourself and those around you accountable.



HONESTY

Be truthful, trustworthy, and forthright. Honesty strengthens relationships with one another.



EXCELLENCE

Elk Creek will strive to deliver more than is expected. Strive for the highest quality and continuous improvement. Be thoughtful and decisive in leadership, accountable for all actions, willing to admit mistakes, and rigorous in correcting them.



GOALS, STRATEGIES AND EXPECTED OUTCOMES

ISSUE STAFFING

GOAL Evaluate current staffing needs and develop a program to recruit and retain qualified members.

STRATEGIES

1. Analyze the current workload on staffing for all positions in the department.
2. Evaluate industry standards and local data to determine minimum staffing levels.
3. Conduct a gap analysis on current challenges to the recruitment and retention of career and volunteer staff.
4. Create a desired staffing model that accounts for current community and agency needs and projected community growth.
5. Conduct a cost analysis of the desired staffing model.
6. Present the plan and analysis to the Fire Chief for consideration and implementation.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

1. Improved safety for both responders and community
2. Improved service to the community
3. Better performance
4. Improved retention



ISSUE INFRASTRUCTURE

GOAL Develop a cost-effective plan to acquire, maintain, and replace equipment, fleet, and facility needs.

STRATEGIES

1. Create an end-user committee to identify and evaluate the current infrastructure resources.
2. Determine and assess the agency's current conditions and processes for the acquisition, maintenance, and replacement of equipment, fleet, and facilities.
3. Conduct a gap analysis of the current state with industry standards and legal requirements, such as ADA for example.
4. Conduct a needs assessment of the infrastructure's ability to meet current and future service needs and wellness impacts, including the need for affordable seasonal housing.
5. Create a plan that addresses the needs assessment and gap analysis, including a cost analysis and funding recommendation.
6. Present the plan to the Fire Chief.
7. Evaluate and modify the plans as needed.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

1. Have a shareable capital development plan
2. Have formal infrastructure plans that support the future goals of the District



ISSUE COMMUNITY RISK

GOAL Create and implement a community risk reduction plan that normalizes risk reduction practices in the community encompassing Elk Creek, Inter-Canyon, and North Fork Fire Protection Districts.

STRATEGIES

1. Identify risks by gathering data, developing a community profile, identifying casual factors/contributing causes, and target hazards.
2. Prioritize risks by describing risk attributes and vulnerabilities and ranking targeted hazards.
3. Update the current Community Wildfire Protection Plan to encompass all three fire protection districts that participate in the Conifer Wildland Division.
4. Develop strategies and tactics to mitigate risks.
5. Create the risk reduction plan and present it to the Fire Chief.
6. Implement the plan.
7. Evaluate and modify the plan as needed.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

1. Agency and community awareness of the risks, priorities, and resources needed to reduce and mitigate their occurrence and impact
2. Tactical priorities identified and implemented where and when possible



ISSUE STAFFING

GOAL Improve the wellness of all members and their families by developing and providing a holistic wellness plan that supports psychological and physical health, encompassing their personal and professional lives.

STRATEGIES

1. Identify gaps in health and wellness outcomes from current efforts.
2. Research and assess industry best practices to include improving wellness resource access and usage.
3. Create a wellness plan model for all members.
4. Conduct a cost analysis of the new wellness plan.
5. Present to the Fire Chief for approval and implementation.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

1. Decrease in injuries and illness
2. Improved morale
3. Better performance
4. Reduced workers compensation claims
5. Improved physical, mental, and emotional health and wellness, resulting in decreased burnout and greater longevity for the job



ISSUE INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

GOAL To improve the timeliness and effectiveness of appropriate information to our members.

STRATEGIES

1. Assess the current communication and information-sharing processes.
2. Research best practices for prioritizing messages and best pathways to maximize communication.
3. Conduct a gap analysis to determine how current deficiencies can be mitigated.
4. Create a plan that includes Standard Operating Guidelines (SOGs) that will effectively communicate with the right frequency and platform.
5. Present the plan for approval.
6. Upon approval, provide training on the SOGs to ensure proficiency.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

1. Improved morale, engagement, and agency
2. Improved retention
3. Optimal use of resources.
4. More efficient operations
5. Increase in leadership mindset



ISSUE EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION

GOAL Develop a robust communications plan to better inform, educate, and engage our community.

STRATEGIES

1. Examine the current communication and education processes to our community and determine their effectiveness.
2. Research best practices and communication plans for semi-urban and mountainous communities.
3. Create an effective communication and education plan for the community that includes SOGs.
4. Present for approval and implementation.
5. Evaluate annually and revise, as necessary.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

1. External communications that foster transparency, enhance engagement and maintain trust
2. A more timely and accurately informed public
3. Staff workload is streamlined
4. Improved relationship with our community
5. Increased engagement of citizens through the Community Ambassador Program



APPENDIX **A**

Staff Survey SWOT Analysis Summary - 45 responses

1. What are the strengths of the Department?

- Forward thinking
- The people
- Quality community care
- Teamwork
- Training
- Community involvement
- Inclusion
- Medical care of patients
- Staff development
- Positive family culture
- Excellent service
- Focus on safety
- Volunteer support
- Accountability
- Interagency cooperation
- Pride

2. What are the areas where the Department doesn't do well?

- Expectations over-extending capacity & resources
- Lack of competitive pay and benefits
- Poor internal communication
- Unclear expectations
- Need feedback/evaluations
- Need to embrace new training scenarios & equipment
- Toxic board
- Workload analysis needed
- Career and volunteer relationship distant
- Accountability
- Need mentoring
- Upward mobility
- Answer office phone
- External communication
- Staffing
- Firehouse drama
- Need to better educate public
- Antiquated infrastructure

3. What opportunities exist or could exist that would positively impact the Department?

- Consolidation
- Leadership programs
- Partnerships
- Host outside/third party training
- Improve outreach to community
- Community paramedic program

4. What threats exist that could negatively impact the Department?

- Small group of vocal citizens
- Board issues
- Discontinue grant funds
- Failure to be accountable

5. What are the top three issues that the Department needs to address in the next 3-5 years?

- Internal and external communication
- Staffing-paid and volunteer
- Consolidation/merger
- Funding infrastructure needs & improvements
- Community engagement & public education
- Contingencies for mutual aid needs
- Wellness
- Pay & benefits (competitive)
- Wildfire mitigation
- Recruitment/Retention
- Equipment replacement plan/schedule

APPENDIX **B**

Community Survey Summary - 194 responses

1. Which of the following zip codes do you live or work in?

ZIP CODE	PERCENTAGE	RESPONDENTS
80421	4.12%	8
80433	53.09%	103
80439	7.73%	15
80465	3.61%	7
80470	31.44%	61
TOTAL	100%	194

2. How would you rate the performance of the Elk Creek Fire Protection District?

RATING	PERCENTAGE	RESPONDENTS
Very Dissatisfied	4.15%	8
Dissatisfied	2.07%	4
Neutral	8.81%	17
Satisfied	34.20%	66
Very Satisfied	50.78%	98
TOTAL	100%	193

**Weighted
Average Rating
4.25**

3. What are the strengths?

- Professionalism
- Community communication
- Responsive to our needs
- EMS response
- Emergency response
- Home assessment
- Wildfire preparedness
- Chipping program
- Community education events
- Fire mitigation efforts

4. What threats exist that could negatively impact the Department?

- Communication
- Transparency
- Emergency notifications
- Recruitment/Retention
- Board issues
- Website
- Pay and benefits
- Evacuation routes & preparedness
- Better mitigation efforts
- Accident response
- Staffing
- Budgeting
- Under funded
- Transparency
- Reliance on volunteers
- More vocal opposition to high density projects
- Staffing for large emergencies/ events
- Out of area fire fighting
- Not enough full-time staff
- Slash & chipping sign ups full
- Location of fire houses
- Facilities

5. Rank order the following issues that the department needs to address in the next three to five years:

- Wildfire suppression and mitigation (chipping program and home assessments included)
- Timely response to calls for service
- Recruitment and Retention
- Increased staffing and resources
- Community education and prevention (targeted education for prevention such as CPR programs and fire extinguisher training)
- Communication with the community

1. What are the strengths of the Department?

- Fire academy
- Staff quality
- Slash mitigation program
- Collaboration with neighboring districts
- Emergency response
- Volunteer commitment
- Ability to secure grants
- Community engagement
- Conifer wildland division
- Ambassador program
- Fiscal responsibility
- Community training

2. What are the weaknesses of the department?

- Transparency
- Volunteer resources
- Reliance on grants
- Chipping program parameters
- Infrastructure
- Retention of paid and volunteer staff
- Staffing
- Reliance on mutual aid
- Geographical alerting
- Too many information sources
- Improve ambassador program

3. What opportunities exist that could benefit the department?

- Grants
- Standard community alerting
- Reshape district boundaries
- Co-house agencies
- Volunteer opportunity levels
- Expanded coverage increases funding
- Consolidation
- Better working agreements with 3 fire districts
- Public education
- Use volunteers for slash program

4. What threats could negatively impact the department?

- Changing demographics
- Extreme wildfire risk
- Lack of volunteerism
- Higher pay of other departments
- Climate change
- Home insurance issues
- Increased EMS call volume
- Supply chain challenges

5. What issues should the department work on over the next five years?

Ranked Order:

1. Increased staffing resources
2. Wildfire suppression and mitigation
3. Timely response to calls
4. Communication with the community
5. Community education and prevention
6. Improve and formalize agency cooperation
7. Continuous quality improvement
8. Water management plan
9. Volunteer hand crew

EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES (EMS)

- Standardize training and improve consistency of approvals
- Need standalone EMS manager to coordinate training and standardize operations
- Equipment and apparatus needs
- IT connectivity issues
- Need general EMS meeting
- Staffing needs to expand to all stations

FIREFIGHTERS

- Training with Inter-Canyon is important
- Challenges with training fulltime and volunteers
- Staffing issues
- Need to build organizational capacity
- Need a training building
- Improve internal communication
- Need community risk reduction plan, succession planning and professional development

WILDLAND

- Staffing-need engine bosses
- Opportunity to educate public on mutual aid and district coverage
- Housing stipend for seasonal staff isn't enough
- Hand crew station has one bathroom and is cramped and falling apart
- Ready reviews for staff to start soon

ADMINISTRATION

- Create a risk reduction program
- Need to better educate the public on capacity and risks
- Staffing
- On-boarding for board members
- Facility issues-space, equipment, records room needed
- Need a fleet development and management program
- Staffing analysis needed to look at roles and workload, HR compliance and IT support

VOLUNTEERS

- Internal Communication
- Too many different communication systems
- Recruitment-volunteering is down
- Retention-need to look at incentives and accountability
- Career development for volunteers to include mentoring
- Facilities
- Have a cookout with community to recruit

APPENDIX **E** Weaknesses and Service Gaps

INTERNAL SURVEY	COMMUNITY SURVEY	COMMUNITY FORUM	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expectations over-extending capacity and resources • Lack of competitive pay and benefits • Career and volunteer relationship distant • Workload analysis needed • Need mentoring • Accountability • Underutilization of volunteers • Recruitment/Retention • Upward mobility • Answer office phone • Accountability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need more volunteers • Funding/Underfunded • Not enough full-time staff • Mental health Services for staff • Staffing limits on overlapping calls • Recruitment and Retention • Strain on fire resources with growth • Not having all firehouses staffed 24/7 • Not being able to consolidate • Too small • Need more staff • Not enough resources to handle residents, motorists, and visitors • Limited staff on growing population • Inability to offer competitive salaries to entice quality candidates • Need to visit neighborhoods • No experience in running a business 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited resources for large-scale event • Decline in volunteerism • Non-competitive wages and benefits • Staffing capacity • Volunteer resources • Reliance on mutual aid • Lack of administration volunteers • Burnout/PTSD • Lack of volunteer benefits 	WORKFORCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor internal communication • Lack of common operating picture • Too many different email lists • Unclear expectations • Need feedback/evaluations • Need to embrace new training scenarios and equipment • Need to educate public better 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Firefighter discord 		INTERNAL COMMUNICATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External Communication • Need to better educate public 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not enough emphasis on mitigation and defensible space • Need more communication • Communicate better about consolidation and strategy moving forward • Distance from fire station • Mediocre communication about programs • Educating about effective wildfire mitigation • Emergency notifications/use of website • Chipping program can't meet demand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of financial transparency • Current parameters of chipping program • Website/social media/emergency apps • Public meeting transparency • Transparent communication • Need to improve ambassador program • Geographic alerting • Reliance on grants • Reliance on mutual aid 	EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Antiquated infrastructure • Radios • Storage/breakers/WiFi 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilities • Distance from fire station • Need money for outdated equipment • Outdate/too small facilities • Insufficient budget to fund equipment and training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not enough emphasis on mitigation and defensible space • Emergency planning 	INFRASTRUCTURE