

Fire District Unification



Information

As North Fork Fire, Inter-Canyon Fire, and Elk Creek Fire move toward unification, we know you may have questions. We are trying to anticipate what those may be and have collected several here. We will continue to do our best to answer any questions you have and look forward to further conversations.

How is this different from consolidation, or is it the same?



The way it is the same is that it gets all three districts working together and operating as one agency. As we have presented in previous talks, write-ups, and videos, this is the best way to continue with successful emergency response and wildland fire risk management for the entire community. It gives us the best structure and the best opportunities from which to move forward operationally and administratively.



The biggest difference is that in November of 2023, consolidation was tied to a mill levy increase. Unification is not.

- Had consolidation not been tied to an increase, it could have simply been voted on by the boards much like they have now done for unification. It would not have needed to be on the ballot nor put to a public vote.

Quick Facts

WHAT?

- The three Fire Chiefs have made a recommendation to all three boards for an amendment to our current consolidation IGA to create unification among the three fire districts.
- The boards have voted the recommendation forward in all three fire districts.
- This amended IGA proposes unification without a mill levy increase.
- The districts would be unified into one district, and then rebranded into Conifer Fire.
- The entire unified district will be at the North Fork base mill levy (12).
- If the boards approve the final unification process, the intent is that the districts will be unified by January 2025.
- There will be public hearings in November so that the community can share input.



- The reason it was tied to a mill levy raise (and therefore a vote) was because the desired goal was to build out infrastructure in order to house 18 new-hire firefighters. A lot was in flux at the time (including home valuations, multiple potential tax and assessment-altering legislative measures, and the possibility of Elk Creek Fire’s mill sunset) and we weren’t sure what was going to happen with mill levy revenue; an increase would have helped us accomplish our planned goals and improvements.
- Because of these factors, in November of 2023, it was difficult to predict whether the districts could operate on existing mill levies, particularly if a portion of the Elk Creek mill had sunset and the mill went down to 10.
- Now, with more finalized information, with an increased budget due to valuation increases, and with the lowest base mill levy of all three Districts remaining at 12, the Districts can successfully operate together into the near future. As the area grows and changes, we will continuously evaluate future needs.



A consolidated district with a mill levy could have provided more infrastructure and more staffing. With unification, we will need to scale back on those plans. We will hire less staff than we would have in consolidation, and we will only improve some existing infrastructure (such as some minor remodels at Inter-Canyon Station 1 so it can house firefighters and EMS staff) as opposed to being able to build new facilities and staff even more stations.

Quick Facts

WHY?

- The needs and concerns of our districts and communities have been growing, and the three districts have been in discussions over the past several years regarding the best way to meet them in a sustainable way.
- It has become clear that we cannot work in a silo, and the best way forward is to work together.
- The Conifer Wildland Division has shown us that these partnerships and IGAs are highly successful.
- The challenges we face continue impacting our ability to provide a high level of service and we are trying to get ahead of a crisis that could happen in any of our districts.
- Every day, we are truly one call away from disaster. We often depend on one another for mutual aid, leaving districts unstaffed, especially during larger scale or high acuity calls.
- We have seen very recent examples of these concerns in our districts:
 - **Quarry Fire:** Threatened multiple neighborhoods, caused the evacuation of 575 homes, and more pre-evacuations in both Inter-Canyon and Elk Creek districts, burning 579 acres. (July 2024)



Isn't this what some voters turned down in November 2023? What is different now and why are we moving forward?



Of the combined votes of all concerned districts, the majority voted yes to consolidation (54%, or 4,261 out of 7889 voters). Elk Creek district alone voted no at 50.8%. In listening to the concerns of the community, these are what we heard, and the ways we have addressed it:

- Concerns for the mill raise with already climbing assessment rates. This concern has been abated, as unification will have no tax increase.
- Concerns for moving some staff out of Elk Creek Station 1, and into what is currently Inter-Canyon Station 3. With unification, the current fire and EMS staffing will remain at Elk Creek 1. Only administrative staff will move to Inter-Canyon Station 3.
- Some of the public wanted a strategic plan prior to approving consolidation. This plan was produced and was published in August 2024.
- We had many people come to us and report that they were confused about information that was circulating in the public and what of that information was fact versus opinions or assumptions. Upon further conversation, many who voted “no” expressed they were adamantly supportive of the district’s perspective once they understood facts versus opinions. *cont. on page 3*

Quick Facts

WHY, cont.

- **Twin Forks Fire:** Included evacuations and closed Hwy 285. (July 2024)
- **Hwy 285 vehicle fire turned wildfire:** Threatened homes, stripped district resources. (July 2024)
- **Trumbull Fire:** Required response from multiple districts, stripping resources. (July 2024)
- **Styve Fire (house fire turned wildfire):** Required response from multiple districts, stripping resources. (July 2024)
- **Multiple high acuity motor vehicle accidents:** Included fatalities, shut down Hwy 285, and stripped multiple districts of resources while simultaneous medical calls also needed staffing.
- We are understaffed, and to meet the above needs and concerns, we must address this. Requirements for FFs today are not what they were in the past and recruitment and retention of quality fire and EMS staff has become a challenge not just locally, but across the nation.
- Volunteerism is rapidly dwindling across the whole country, and it is becoming harder and harder to obtain and retain a core group of quality volunteers. While volunteers will ALWAYS be a critical and necessary part of our ranks, we must also increase our 24/7 paid, on-call staff in order to meet our community’s growing needs.

Fire District Unification

Information, continued



- *cont.* We understand the confusion that some of our residents dealt with during this time, as well as some of the confusing ballot language, and we are grateful that so many have expressed their support.
- An election is not necessary to unify. Were we to do that regardless, it would cost a significant amount of taxpayer money to run that election.

The above is a lot of numbers and logistics and detailed explanations. Ultimately, what we really need our community to understand is that the **BOTTOM LINE FOR ALL THREE DISTRICTS is this:**



- We **CANNOT** keep serving the emergency needs of these districts with the current model. It will fail. We are one call away from disaster.



- Regardless of what happened at the ballot boxes in November, we still have the same issues and the same problems.



- We still live in one the most dangerous wildland urban interface districts in the entire country.



- Elk Creek is still calling for significantly more mutual aid than it gives, stripping Inter-Canyon and North Fork of their resources.

Quick Facts

WHAT'S NEXT?

**Nov 13, 6pm:
Inter-Canyon Public
Hearing and Board
Meeting**

**Nov 20, 1pm:
REGULAR North Fork Board
Meeting
(Special meeting late Nov if
needed)**

**Nov 21, 6pm:
Elk Creek Public Hearing
and Board Meeting**

Fire District Unification

Information, continued



- Regardless of this, Inter-Canyon and North Fork continue to subsidize Elk Creek through not only mutual aid, but also by contributing to the cost of the Fuels Crew, Fleet Maintenance, and Fire Marshal services. If they choose to only take care of their own and stop this subsidization, Elk Creek will have immediate increased costs to cover those services or need to reduce or eliminate those services.



- Instead, the three districts have determined that unification will increase overall service while still lowering taxes. *This is the best we can possibly get of both worlds for the time being.*



- All of these decisions are being made by leadership that lives in and cares for these amazing communities. All of these decisions are made in order to keep providing the absolute best emergency services we can to those communities.



- The intention of every choice, recommendation, and suggestion taking place right now is so that we can continue to show up for every emergency, and that no one ever has to worry there are no resources to help them in their greatest time of need.

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THANK YOU for taking the time to read through this information. Should you have further questions, please reach out on our social accounts or on email:

- **North Fork Fire**
 - nffpd@aol.com
- **Inter-Canyon Fire:**
 - tmcmanus@icfpd.net
- **Elk Creek Fire:**
 - info@elkcreekfire.org