



BLACK FOREST FIRE/RESCUE PROTECTION DISTRICT

Your fire department needs your help!

Black Forest Fire/Rescue needs your help this November. We are a growing district, with new developments going up in the northwest part of the district, as well as even larger developments going up in the southeast part of the district. Despite the damage done in the 2013 fire, the remainder of the forest still has a very significant portion that is prime to burn some day in the future.

To meet these needs, your Fire District Board of Directors has taken on a number of initiatives to provide an adequate level of service throughout our district. The Board developed a strategic plan for the district covering many items such as staff training and retention, and establishing a fire apparatus capital replacement plan to replace aging fire vehicles without having to pay costly financing fees. The Board paid off the financing for Station Two as well as our newest fire apparatus that were on a lease purchase agreement, both of which saved thousands of dollars. The Board has also recognized the urgent need to get Station Two at Hodgen and Black Forest Road staffed 24 hours per day as opposed to only part time.



To accomplish these things, the District will need a small increase in the budget. However, there is another issue on the horizon that has struck fear in rural fire districts all over Colorado, and that is the Gallagher Amendment. Gallagher is a Colorado Constitutional amendment, voter approved in 1982, that established how residential tax assessments were done. It limited the portion of the state property tax collection for residential properties so that residential taxes did not make up more than 45% of budgets. When the value of homes goes up as it has done along the front range, the residential assessment rate is adjusted down, and commercial property taxes make up the difference.

In rural districts like Black Forest, where we have very few commercial properties, there is nothing to make up that difference. Historically, fire district Boards would raise the mill levy rate in the district to keep the tax income level at the same amount. Then came the Taxpayers Bill of Rights (TABOR) which blocked the ability of a Board to adjust the mill level up without voter approval.

The State of Colorado has already forecast that the Gallagher Amendment is going to cause the residential assessment rate to be adjusted downward in 2019 significantly, which is estimated to decrease the operating revenue of your fire district by around 15%, which would result in cuts to staffing and services. Added to the 9% cut we felt after the residential assessment rate was adjusted last year, that would mean a 25% cut overall. At a time when growth requires that we increase our level of service, the financial situation is primed to cut the level of service we are providing instead.

To prepare for our future and be ready for this adjustment, the Black Forest Fire/Rescue Board of Directors has chosen to place a measure on the ballot this November asking you to allow us to increase our budget with an increase in our 9.215 mill levy of up to 14.5 mills. In comparison to other local fire districts that are similar to Black Forest, we have found that the average mill levy is 14 mills. Falcon has a mill levy of 10.002, but is also requesting an increase to around 14.5 mills. Cimarron Hills has a mill levy of 15.3, Tri-Lakes is at 18.5 and the Wescott District is at 21.9.

Currently, there is a bond being paid for that was drawn to build our Station One. That bond will be paid off in 2021. With that tax payment gone, and with an adjustment of the mill levy to 14.5 mills, a residence in Black Forest valued at \$250,000.00 will see their property tax bill increase by only \$79.00 per year, a small price to pay to ensure the continued availability of well trained firefighters and up-to-date equipment, at both of our stations, to protect both our homes as well has to handle vehicle accidents and medical emergencies throughout Black Forest.

When seconds count, we want to be prepared to serve you!

