TRINITY LAFCO
LOCAL AGENCY FORMATION COMMISSION

REGULAR COMMISSION MEETING AGENDA
OCTOBER 20, 2026 at 4:00 p.m.

Trinity County Library Meeting Room
351 Main Street, Weaverville

This meeting will be conducted in a hybrid format, with in-person and remote participation available. Commissioners will attend in-person in accordance with the Brown Act, unless remote participation is authorized and properly noticed pursuant to Government Code Section 54953. Instructions for remote public participation are provided below.

Join Zoom Meeting:
https://us02web.zoom.us/j/9589361913?pwd=I0DgcMKkR1nTkQs9dB8gTEXzYJC2SD.1&omn=87427898828

Meeting ID: 958 936 1913
Passcode: 740955
Call in: 1 (669) 900-6833

1. CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

A. Roll Call

2. PRESENTATIONS/ANNOUNCEMENTS

A. Release of "Water System Consolidation in California: Lessons learned and key opportunities"

The Commission will receive a copy of the report "Water System Consolidation in California: Lessons learned and key opportunities" released in September 2026, featuring a case study on Lewiston CSD that was previously presented to the Commission. This item is information only; no action is required.

3. CONSENT CALENDAR *(Potential Action)*

A. Approval of Minutes from June 16, 2026 Regular Commission Meeting

4. PUBLIC COMMENT OPPORTUNITY

This portion of the meeting provides an opportunity for members of the public to address the Commission on matters not on the agenda, provided that the subject matter is within the jurisdiction of the Commission. No action may be taken on off-agenda items unless authorized by law. All statements that require a response will be referred to staff for reply in writing.

5. PUBLIC HEARINGS *(Potential Action)* - NONE

6. BUSINESS *(Potential Action)*

A. Preview of Down River Fire Services MSR/SOI Update

The Commission will review the Draft Down River Fire Services Municipal Service Review (MSR) and Sphere of Influence (SOI) Update, including agency profiles for Salyer CSD, Hawkins Bar VFD, and Down River VFC, regional governance alternatives, and preliminary findings and recommendations. The Commission will be asked to authorize release of the draft for public review and comment and direct staff to provide the necessary public notice for consideration of final adoption at its December 15, 2026 meeting.

B. CALAFCO Northern Region Board of Directors Nomination
The Commission will consider supporting Chair Jill Cox's nomination to the CALAFCO Board of Directors. Two Northern Region seats remain without candidates, and additional nominations may be made from the floor during the October 22, 2026, regional caucus. Chair Cox has expressed her willingness to serve, pending Commission support and the outcome of the nomination and election process.

C. FY2025-26 Year-End Financial Report
The Commission will receive and review the year-end financial report for FY 2025-26. This item is information only; no action is required.

7. EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S REPORT/CORRESPONDENCE *(Information Only)* – Verbal report

8. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

9. ADJOURNMENT
The next LAFCo meeting is scheduled for December 15, 2026, at 4:00 p.m. at the Trinity County Library Meeting Room in Weaverville.

The Commission may take action upon any item listed on the agenda. Unless otherwise noted, items may be taken up at any time during the meeting.

All persons are invited to provide public testimony and submit written comments to the Commission. All written materials received by staff before 12:00 p.m. on the day of the meeting will be distributed to the Commission. If you wish to submit written material at the meeting, please supply 10 copies.

Accessibility
The location of this meeting is wheelchair accessible. If other accommodations are required to assist a person with a disability to participate in the meeting, please contact the Executive Officer or Commission Clerk at least 24 hours before the meeting.

Disclosure & Disqualification Requirements
Government Code section 84308 ("Levine Act") establishes campaign contribution conflict of interest rules that apply to public agency proceedings involving certain contracts, licenses, permits and discretionary entitlements for use. LAFCo Commissioners may be disqualified and not able to participate in a proceeding covered by the Levine Act if, within the 12 months preceding the LAFCo decision in the proceeding, the Commissioner received more than $500 in campaign contributions from the applicant, an agent of the applicant, or any financially interested participant who actively supports or opposes the LAFCo decision on the matter. Applicants or agents of applicants in a proceeding covered by the Levine Act who have made campaign contributions totaling more than $500 to any LAFCo Commissioner in the past 12 months are required to disclose that fact for the official record of the proceeding, and financially interested participants or their agents are strongly encouraged to do so. Disclosures must include the amount and date of the contribution and the person or agent making the contribution, and may be made either in writing to the Clerk of the Commission prior to the hearing or by an oral declaration at the time of the hearing.

Late-Distributed Materials. Any material submitted to the Commission after this agenda is posted will be made available for public inspection as soon as possible on the LAFCo website trinitylafco.org.

Contact LAFCo Staff. For additional information please contact amber@trinitylafco.org

Water System Consolidation in California:

Lessons learned and key opportunities

Scan to read the full report

Executive Summary

Over the last fifteen years, state regulators have actively promoted consolidation as a priority solution for struggling water systems. Today, more than 280 consolidation projects have been completed with important benefits for the communities served. Nonetheless, the pace and scale of consolidation is not keeping up with the need for solutions and many promising projects never come to fruition. This report aims to set the stage for the next chapter in California's consolidation efforts by capturing the experiences and recommendations of a diverse array of individuals and organizations involved with consolidation projects from across the state.

Common consolidation challenges

- Project duration — Due to complexity, bureaucracy, miscommunications, and resistance, consolidation projects take a very long time to implement.
- Funding eligibility and process — Limited funding, evolving eligibility and prioritization criteria, and cumbersome requirements can delay or even prevent projects from coming to fruition.
- Capacity — Significant technical, managerial, and financial capacity is required to implement consolidation and sometimes, to manage the consolidated system(s) afterwards as well. Where capacity is limited, it is a frequently cited barrier to consolidation.
- Legal barriers — A wide range of legal barriers surface during consolidation projects ranging from liability and proposition 218 to public water systems without legal standing and housing code violations.



California Consolidation Convening held in Davis, California in April 2026

- Coordination and communication — The complexity of consolidation projects often necessitates many involved partners, creating significant coordination and communication challenges.
- Lack of political will and resistance — Many projects face either some degree of resistance from individuals or groups or stagnation resulting from a lack of political will. Some projects face both.
- Affordability — Whether directly attributable to consolidation or not, most consolidations are associated with rate increases. The burden of rate increases can also be inequitably distributed among households and communities.

Best practices, recommendations, and lessons learned

The report identifies best practices and recommendations to address the identified common challenges spanning participating water systems, funding applicants, technical assistance providers, counties, local and state regulators, and funding agencies. The report also identifies three key lessons learned from California's experience implementing consolidations.

- Consolidation can be highly effective in addressing challenges facing small and even medium sized systems, but it is not a magic bullet. Consolidation also has limits and tradeoffs, necessitating a broader strategy for ensuring the human right to water and resilient services in a changing climate.
- It is important to have both flexibility and consistency in implementing state and local policies related to consolidation as well as distributing funding support.
- Despite significant progress, there remains a need for a stable, consistent funding mechanism that can provide reliable support to potential projects from conception to construction.

Key opportunities for scaling progress

Beyond addressing the common challenges that delay and even prevent consolidations from coming to fruition, scaling consolidation as a solution to reach more and different communities will require new approaches to this work. The following opportunities stand out as promising directions for growing the reach of collaborative solutions statewide.

- Regional consolidation planning
- Promoting managerial consolidation and shared service/staffing models
- Advancing capacity building and information exchange
- Integrating consolidation with climate resiliency and hazard mitigation efforts
- Incentivizing and empowering local action on consolidation

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Consolidation Case Study Library

The following case studies were developed by UC Berkeley and UC Agriculture and Natural Resources to share the experiences of water systems from across the state who have participated in consolidation projects. You can view each write up by selecting English or Spanish beneath the case study name. For questions or to learn more contact Kristin Dobbin at kbdobbin@berkeley.edu.

Case study	Number of systems involved	Type of consolidation	Consolidation structure	Governance of consolidated entity	County	Keywords
The formation of the Ukiah Valley Water Authority (English / Spanish)	5	Managerial	Umbrella Organization	Joint Powers Authority	Mendocino County	Regionalization, Drought, Water supply
Golden State Water Company - Clearlake System Acquisition of Crescent Bay Improvement Company (English / Spanish)	2	Managerial	Acquisition	Investor-Owned Utility	Lake County	Water quality, TMF capacity
Keyes Community Services District Regionalization (English / Spanish)	6	Physical	Master Meter & Acquisition	Independent Special District	Stanislaus County	Regionalization, Water quality, Extraterritorial service, Mobile Home Parks
Sultana Community Services District's Annexation of Monson (English / Spanish)	2	Physical	Acquisition	Independent Special District	Tulare County	Drought, Water quality, Water supply, Domestic wells
Tahoe City Public Utility District acquires the Madden Creek and Tahoe Cedars water systems (English / Spanish)	3	Managerial	Acquisition	Independent Special District	Placer and El Dorado Counties	Regionalization, Fire suppression, Deferred maintenance

Extending Diablo Water District services to Santiago Island Village Mobile Home Park (English / Spanish)	2	Physical	Master meter	Independent Special District	Contra Costa County	Mobile Home Parks, TMF capacity
The City of Perris transfers their drinking water and sewer systems to Eastern Municipal Water District (English / Spanish)	2	Physical	Acquisition	Independent Special District	Riverside County	TMF capacity
Lewiston Community Services District's consolidation of Lewiston Park Mutual Water Company (English / Spanish)	2	Physical	Acquisition	Independent Special District	Trinity County	Water quality, TMF capacity
City of Coachella acquisition of the Mesquite Mutual Water Company (English / Spanish)	2	Physical	Acquisition	City	Riverside County	Water supply, Deferred maintenance
Connecting Saint Anthony Mobile Home Park, Manuela Garcia Water, and Seferino Huerta to Coachella Valley Water District (English / Spanish)	4	Physical	Master meter	Independent Special District	Riverside County	Water quality, Mobile Home Parks, Regionalization
Extending water service from Cal Water Visalia to domestic well households in West Goshen (English / Spanish)	1	Physical	Acquisition	Investor-Owned Utility	Tulare County	Water quality, Water supply, Domestic wells, Drought

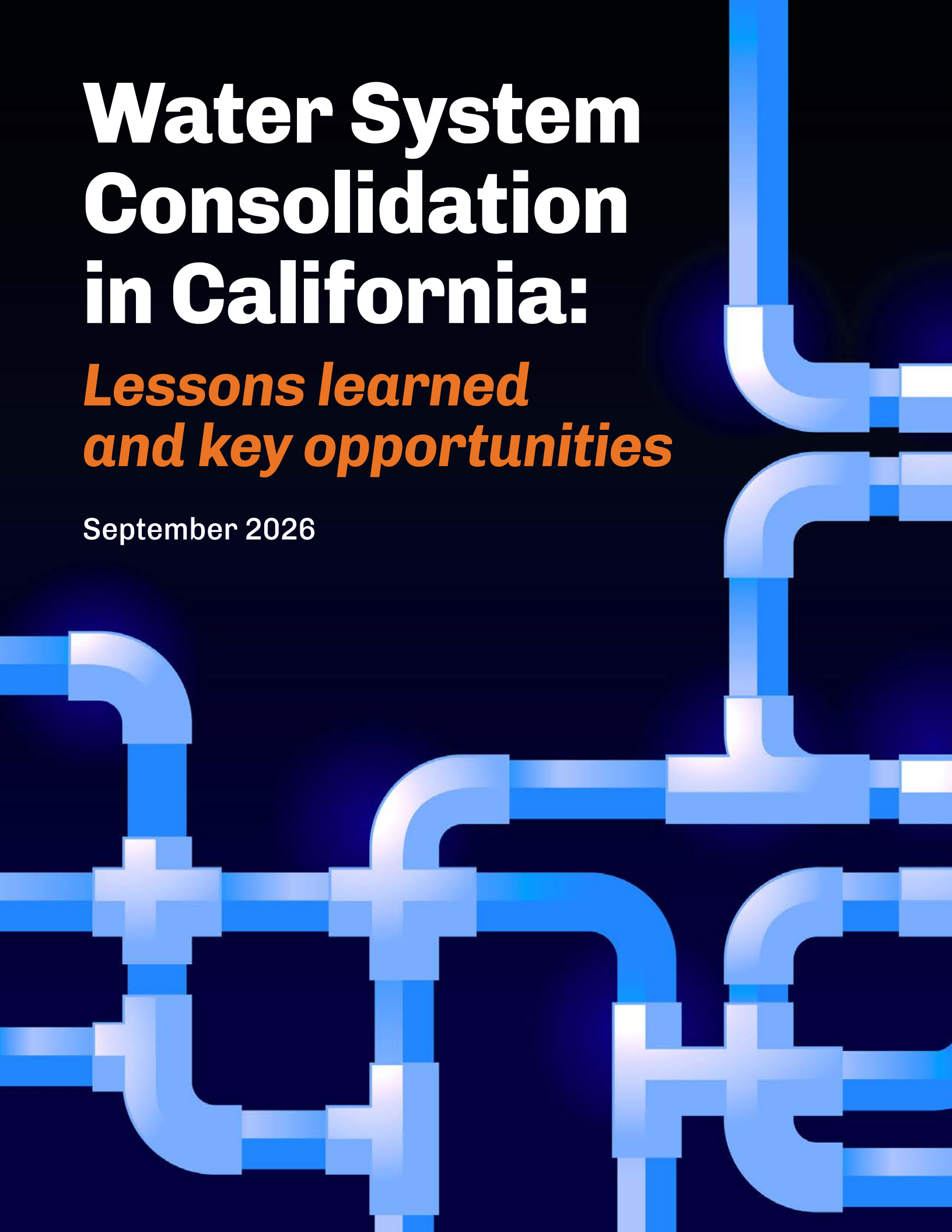
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Water System Consolidation in California:

Lessons learned and key opportunities

September 2026



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Contact: Kristin Dobbin at kbdobbin@berkeley.edu

Introduction

The fragmented nature of drinking water provision in the United States has long been a point of both discussion and concern. Even preceding the passage of the Safe Drinking Water Act in 1974, sector experts advised that significant consolidation would be necessary to support long-term regulatory compliance.[1] Nonetheless, for many years afterwards, system consolidation primarily occurred in an ad-hoc and voluntary manner at the behest of local interest. However, this has begun to shift in recent years. As regulatory burdens mount and infrastructure and treatment costs accelerate, state and federal regulators have turned their attention to leveraging consolidation as a policy solution for addressing the chronic challenges facing small water systems.

In California, targeted efforts to advance water system consolidation can be traced back to the passage of the state's human right to water law, AB 685, in 2012. In the nearly fifteen years since, the state has developed robust funding programs for consolidation, including the Safe and Affordable Funding for Equity and Resilience (SAFER) program and expanded technical assistance support for consolidations including legal and planning assistance. These new resources have been accompanied by legislative and policy changes including allowing for mandatory consolidation under certain circumstances and introducing consolidation incentives, as well as administrative reorganizations resulting in dedicated agency staffing focused on small systems and consolidation.

The outcome of this innovation has been a rapid increase in the number of initiated and completed consolidations across the state. Since 2015, at least 280 consolidations have been completed, and the 2025 Safe Drinking Water Plan identifies another 260 as being planned or in construction.[2] These projects have brought safe drinking water to communities that had gone without it for years or even



Residents and community partners celebrate the groundbreaking of a consolidation project connecting domestic well households in West Goshen to Cal Water's Visalia system in June 2025.
Source: Community Water Center

decades, bolstered climate resilience, facilitated affordable housing development, and have been leveraged to bring in additional state and federal infrastructure funding.[3] But these successes have been hard fought. Some projects take over a decade to complete, many others stall at various phases of the process never to reach completion.

A 2018 workshop hosted at UC Berkeley identified eight challenges impeding progress on consolidations including information gaps, uncertainties caused by changing regulatory standards, affordability, and state preference for full consolidation.[4] Some of these challenges have been resolved or improved in the intervening years. Others remain significant hurdles for projects across the state. New challenges have also emerged. Leveraging expertise from technical assistance providers, regulators, local government representatives, and most importantly, water systems themselves, this report identifies common challenges encountered in recent consolidation projects, lessons learned, recommendations, and key opportunities to inform next steps. The report draws on several data sources including the 2024 California Water System Consolidation Survey (a survey of water system managers with recently completed or in-progress consolidation projects), eleven comparative case studies of consolidations completed since 2018, forty interviews, and a practitioners' convening with more than 40 participants held in Davis, CA in April 2026.

Defining Consolidation

This report defines consolidation as the merging of governance, financial, and management functions of water provision between two or more water systems or between a water system and unregulated water users. This definition is intentionally broad, including both physical and managerial consolidation, as well as extending regulated water service to state small water systems or domestic well users. Consolidation can be accomplished via a variety of pathways including annexations, acquisitions, mergers, and umbrella organizations.[5] While the term consolidation is common in the drinking water sector of California, some actors use different terminology such as municipal service extension, acquisition, or regionalization.

Receiving System: Consistent with California law, we refer to the water system that will persist after a consolidation as the "receiving system."[6] A receiving system in a consolidation may be one of the participating systems that takes over service provision in the service area of the other participating systems, or a receiving system may be an entirely new entity created for the purposes of consolidation. Residents served by the receiving system prior to consolidation are receiving system residents or customers.

Subsumed System: Similarly, we refer to any systems that will cease to exist independently through the implementation of a consolidation as a "subsumed water system" and their served residents as subsumed system residents/customers (including domestic well users).[7]

Common Challenges and Best Practices

While each consolidation is highly locally specific with its own unique set of circumstances, there are also many shared challenges that arise time and time again across projects and contexts. Here, we identify seven common challenges in need of attention as well as the creative strategies that have been or could be used to address them.

Project duration

Consolidation projects are often immensely complex, requiring many carefully timed bureaucratic processes, significant environmental review and engineering studies, and multiple simultaneous legal deliberations. This itself leads to variable project timelines that can take many years. Add

on top of this numerous other sources of delay, and many consolidation projects far exceed even conservative timeline expectations. One interviewee described implementing a consolidation project as "torturous and long." Many others named the length of time these projects take as the hardest part of consolidation.

Some of these sources of delays can occur at the local level. This can be due to limited resources or understanding of the consolidation process (e.g., missed requirements), as well as challenges securing necessary easements/properties. Resistance to consolidation is also a common source of delay, whether through intentional delay tactics or stemming from hesitancy or a lack of urgency among project participants.

Protracted project timelines can also be the result of delays among regulatory or funding agencies. Given the many bureaucratic processes that can be associated with any given project (e.g., Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO), Fish and Wildlife, Division of Financial Assistance, Tribal review), application review, budget approvals, and obtaining permits for each of these processes all add up. Commonly cited delays include cross-cutting requirements between state and federal funds, involvement of multiple regulatory and funding agencies and associated coordination, unclear application and documentation requirements, and requirements that are ill-suited to consolidation projects (versus traditional, single-system capital improvement projects that the State Revolving Fund was designed for). Delays at one level can cascade into other parts of the project. For example, delays in the distribution of funds can halt critical outreach work necessary to secure consolidation agreements. Miscommunications, staff turnover (including the use of different project managers for planning and construction), and procedural redundancies all exacerbate this challenge. For example, in one case a feasibility study funded through technical assistance was conducted without the crucial information that an agreement with a prospective receiving system had been reached. This new information significantly altered the options under consideration in the study.

As consolidation projects go on, the length of time they take can itself become the source of additional problems. Long project timelines can lead to funding gaps as inflation outpaces approved budgets which ironically necessitate funding amendments causing still further delays. Extended timelines can also lead to a loss of faith among the involved communities that the project will be completed. In at least one instance, we heard of a water system dropping out of a proposed project because it was frustrated with how long it was taking.

Relevant best practices

- Conduct meetings at the outset of a project to discuss the project timeline and relevant milestones with residents to set expectations about how long the project will take.
- Host a project kickoff meeting with all involved parties where the anticipated timeline and all applicable steps, approvals, and requirements are clearly discussed.
- Determine funding sources as early as possible in the process and clarify associated requirements to avoid delays and unnecessary costs. Where funding uncertainty exists, prepare application documents assuming the need to comply with federal and state requirements.
- Avoid the potential of parallel long-term projects involving the same receiving system by identifying all public water systems and domestic wells in the project vicinity and conducting targeted outreach. Maintain flexibility to allow for the potential of additional project participants during implementation.

- Where applicable, begin work with Tribes at the outset of the project.
- Start on any necessary land acquisition, easements, and transfers as soon as possible and identify back-up options for contingency purposes.
- For domestic well consolidations, start the process of securing property owner agreements early using trusted organizations and community leaders to build buy-in.
- All project partners (water systems, funding and regulatory agencies, technical assistance providers, etc.) should prioritize consistency in assigning staff (including attorneys) and group projects associated with specific water systems under one staff member or team. When staff turnover occurs, follow a clear handoff procedure to ensure forward momentum.
- Where feasible given availability and cost eligibility, utilize a singular funding source which can help limit bureaucracy in implementation.
- Provide clear guidance, templates, and checklists for all components of the application process including resources for projects that must complete federal crosscutters.
- Among regulators, funders, and technical assistance providers, foster staff expertise on specific project types by developing specialized staffing teams (e.g., domestic well and mobile home park projects, Investor-Owned Utility (IOU) acquisitions, etc.) and/or peer learning groups and cross-training.

Funding eligibility and process

State and federal funding has been essential for advancing consolidation projects across California. As one consequence, challenges associated with obtaining or leveraging funding are common roadblocks for many projects. One such challenge relates to funding eligibility. Some applicants are not eligible to receive common state or federal grants due to income thresholds, lack of an eligible applicant (e.g., domestic well owners) or other restrictions. Funding prioritization criteria can have a similar effect. The state's prioritization of failing and at-risk systems can direct funding away from projects with willing partners towards intractable and conflict-ridden ones, prioritizing need over feasibility. It can also prevent investment in systems where consolidation is under consideration or in the planning stages for fear of loss of construction funding eligibility. And in some cases, systems that are not formally considered as failing but meet the criteria have struggled to document their challenges to access funding that they should qualify for. Further, changing criteria between years and programs causes uncertainty and risk for project proponents and can contribute to loss of momentum on projects when funding that had been anticipated becomes uncertain or inaccessible, even when the planning work has been ongoing for years.

34% of respondents to the 2024 California Consolidation Survey reported difficulty applying for and receiving funding.[8]

Challenges relating to funding eligibility for specific project costs is another issue. Some critical project components, such as community outreach and engagement for domestic well projects or improvements on private property, can be difficult to include in funded scopes of work. There are various reasons for this including liability concerns, limited funding, and varying funder priorities and preferences. Particularly for inexperienced applicants, it is also common for potentially eligible expenses to be left out of the budget due to lack of awareness. For example, only some receiving systems receive reimbursement for staff time or other expenses incurred during a project, which in turn can be essential for the long-term success of the project.

To receive any public funding in the first place, a willing applicant is a prerequisite. However, in many projects it is difficult to find an entity that wants to take on that role. Liability is a principal concern for many, as is a State Water Board funding clause that requires the recipient to complete the project even if the funding is revoked. The above-mentioned funding uncertainty can further compound these concerns. In essence, there is a "chicken and egg" problem in which the state wants a firm commitment to see the project through by the applicant prior to committing funds whereas the applicant wants a firm funding commitment from the state before agreeing to sponsor the project. For smaller entities the need to front costs and then wait for reimbursement can also make serving in this capacity infeasible. The length of time it takes to apply for and receive funding is also a significant constraint that project proponents frequently cite as a source of delays and is often a deterrent from starting or continuing with potential projects.

Relevant best practices

- Wherever possible, route funding through applicants with previous grant and consolidation experience (e.g., county, regional water district).
- Utilize the Water Board's expedited drinking water program whenever possible to minimize requirements and delays.
- Utilize technical assistance funding for planning rather than applying for planning funding to avoid multiple rounds of funding applications and review.
- Leveraging multiple funding sources for different aspects can be a helpful strategy for navigating eligibility restrictions related to specific project components. However, in doing this it is essential to carefully coordinate the various scopes of work to ensure there are no funding or coordination gaps, which are a common challenge for projects relying on multiple funding streams.
- Leverage bridge loans (with fees and interest paid for using grant funding if possible) to expedite projects hamstrung by cashflow challenges.
- To every extent possible, funding agencies should maintain consistent funding eligibility and prioritization criteria and ensure internal consistency with respect to eligible expenses and the funding process.

Technical, managerial, and financial (TMF) capacity

Consolidation projects require a great deal of resources, including time, expertise, and money, to complete. Even with grant funding to cover the costs, these projects can pose technical, managerial, and financial (TMF) capacity challenges for involved systems. Existing TMF limitations for both receiving and subsumed water systems also significantly shape how and if projects proceed by impacting system participation. For under-resourced systems, time and staffing constraints may make active participation in consolidation challenging or even infeasible on top of their existing day-to-day duties, especially when involved systems are heavily or entirely dependent on volunteers. This, in turn, can prevent or limit participation and significantly delay and even impede progress.

Importantly, capacity is not always improved post-consolidation. In fact, in some cases consolidation can place additional TMF demands on the receiving system after the project is complete. For example, significant deferred maintenance or a lack of good record-keeping from a low-TMF subsumed water system can lead to increased staffing demands and maintenance costs post-consolidation for the receiving system and make it challenging to comply with upcoming regulatory deadlines. These challenges and the lack of capacity to maintain previous maintenance or operational standards can diminish staff morale. Newly installed infrastructure can also be a challenge when operations

and maintenance costs exceed the revenue generated by the additional customers. Umbrella organizations, such as Joint Powers Authorities, can create redundancy in monthly meetings, increase administrative costs, and make it challenging to fill board positions. Consolidations of mobile home parks or other small systems completed via master meters have similar issues in that the subsumed water system owner retains responsibility for local maintenance and billing.

Notably, capacity concerns are not limited to the involved water systems. The increasing numbers of consolidation projects have stretched the capacity of existing technical assistance providers who are often assisting with many projects at once. Limited staff capacity across regulators and funding agencies contributes to delays as well. And counties' capacity to participate in consolidation projects is also often far below what would be desirable.

Relevant best practices

- Potential receiving systems should carefully consider the long-term sustainability of operating the subsumed water system and proactively identify post-consolidation operations and maintenance needs. Such considerations should be fully considered in any feasibility analyses.
- Leverage technical assistance to compensate for limited local capacity, particularly in domestic well and mobile home park projects and those involving systems with administrators or in receivership.
- Provide board training and support to build the water system's capacity for post-consolidation success.
- Leverage contract services for engineering and the funding application process to reduce strain on the applicant's capacity as needed.
- Where adequate records on infrastructure are missing, include funding to map the system at the outset of the project.
- Incorporate infrastructure upgrades and automation (e.g., radio read and automated meter reading) into scopes of work to reduce operational needs post-consolidation.
- Include infrastructure improvements that address outstanding challenges as part of the funded scope of work for a given consolidation project.

Legal barriers

A wide range of legal barriers can surface before, during, and after a consolidation. Among these, concern about liability is one of the most common. Many receiving systems are worried about the short- and long-term financial and legal liabilities of taking on a failing system, including concerns about litigation, regulatory compliance, and financial obligations (e.g., payout of subsumed water system's employee pensions). How any given project is implemented can raise additional concerns. Contract provisions in funding agreements and consolidation agreements implicating liability are often highly controversial and can stall projects indefinitely. This can be particularly acute in projects involving Investor-Owned Utilities for which standard processes and contract provisions often diverge from those of government institutions.

Liability is also a common concern when it comes to implementing private property improvements. One way this is often addressed is through the development of a second grant agreement to fund private-side improvements as a parallel project, although this can lead to delays, disjointed projects, and raise concerns among receiving systems about ensuring alignment with their systems' standards. In other cases, private property improvements are left as the responsibility of the small system owner, which can prevent participation.

Other commonly encountered legal barriers include unpermitted or improperly permitted mobile home parks, small water systems without legal standing, concurrent property ownership, unadministered estates, substandard housing with code violations, and undocumented easements. All of these require time, and often legal support, to resolve. Lastly, California's Proposition 218 frequently limits rate setting and financing options for consolidation, which can reduce the prospect for economies of scale benefits. Proposition 218 can also complicate out-of-boundary service arrangements.

Relevant best practices

- Examining potential liabilities and making infrastructure improvements prior to the transfer of systems can reduce costs and liabilities.
- In cases of informal or complex property ownership arrangements, all parties should be prepared to be maximally flexible, leveraging variances and exceptions to keep the project on track.
- In cases where a subsumed water system is completely dissolving because of consolidation, be prepared for costs associated with that dissolution and incorporate them into the approved scope of work.
- Where water quality challenges persist post-consolidation, providing bottled water to customers may help alleviate liability concerns.
- For unionized workforces, it is helpful to include a preliminary agreement on bargaining in the consolidation application submitted to LAFCO. Alternatively, developing such an agreement can be a condition of approval.
- Set up an escrow account to pay for unexpected costs during or after consolidation, thereby limiting the receiving system's liability.
- Coordinate with local government partners and the Department of Housing and Community Development to address permit and code violations and identify pathways to achieve compliance while also advancing the project.
- Identify non-rate revenue to support consolidations as much as possible, including leveraging grant funding wherever possible.
- Provide templates on different types of consolidation agreements.
- Find ways to expedite consolidation where the subsumed water system doesn't have legal standing such as leveraging administrators or receivers.

Coordination and communication

In their most basic form, consolidations require successful coordination between two water systems, which itself can be challenging. As projects grow more complex, they require coordination with a diverse range of state, federal, Tribal, county, and technical assistance representatives. Projects with a high number of involved entities commonly face coordination challenges that cause delays and a loss of momentum, which can be discouraging for the involved systems and impact community buy-in. Domestic well consolidation projects, which functionally are akin to coordinating between dozens of involved water systems with each property owner acting as their own system whose representatives must understand and sign off on the project, are similarly impeded by high coordination costs. The complexity of the consolidation process and variability in how specific projects are implemented only add to these challenges as does the fact that the priorities and requirements of regulators across different scales can conflict with one another.

Putting best practices into action

Eastern Municipal Water District and City of Perris define shared goals and procedures using MOUs

In 2021, the City of Perris approached Eastern Municipal Water District (EMWD) about the possibility of consolidating their water and sewer services into the regional district. Soon thereafter, the two entities entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to explore the potential of consolidation. The MOU was expressly designed to support collaboration between EMWD and the City by defining a shared goal: to assess the feasibility of a potential consolidation for the long-term benefit of all involved residents. The MOU also outlined an agreed-upon process for collaboration, committing to equal sharing of all costs, mutual indemnification, and "hold harmless" provisions. The MOU was essential for facilitating the years of meetings that followed, setting the standard for productive collaboration. In early 2024, a new MOU was developed defining a work plan and terms for the consolidation. This revised MOU committed both parties to the complete transfer of ownership of the City of Perris systems and was in effect until the completion of the transfer agreement in October 2025.

Sacramento Suburban and Del Paso Manor Water District leverage joint board meetings and an advisory committee to ensure transparency and clear communication

In 2021, a Sacramento Grand Jury found that the Del Paso Manor Water District (DPMWD), which served approximately 3,000 homes in Sacramento County, had abdicated its mission to provide safe and reliable drinking water at an affordable rate. In 2023, the Sacramento LAFCO initiated the dissolution of DPMWD after finding that it had chronic service deficiencies and was not actively engaged in efforts to remediate those deficiencies. This series of events made reorganization a necessity. DPMWD found a willing partner in their neighbor, Sacramento Suburban Water District (SSWD), which at the time served more than 47,000 connections. From the start of their reorganization discussions, the two boards committed to conduct joint board meetings. This approach made sure that all board members were informed of, and participated in, the process. To keep communication channels open the SSWD Board then established an advisory committee composed of the five former DPMWD board members to help oversee the transition process post-consolidation.

Many projects also struggle with challenges resulting from misunderstandings, both among project partners and among residents. Misinformation, rumors, and disinformation can all shape public perceptions of a project with significant consequences. Technical assistance can be a major help in this regard, but combating this can be challenging when important aspects of the project are in flux as they often are. Rising levels of fear and distrust in public institutions is only compounding the challenge of ensuring clear, direct communication with impacted residents.

Relevant best practices

- Formally document a shared vision for consolidation and a commitment to productive collaboration early in the process such as through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).
- Ensure regular community meetings throughout project planning and implementation to provide updates (project milestones, expected road closures, etc.). Also provide shareable written materials and clear information on the web.
- Make sure public outreach teams and materials are available in all relevant languages.
- Door knocking can be a particularly good way to contact elders and non-English speaking populations.
- Be mindful of potential safety concerns and current political dynamics when conducting outreach, particularly in domestic well communities whose residents may be less

accustomed to interacting with service providers. Ensure outreach workers clearly state who they are and why they are there.

- Facilitate active county and LAFCO participation in all phases of planning and implementation.
- Maintain regular calls with participation of all involved parties including water systems, technical assistance providers, funders, regulators (including LAFCO), and county officials to ensure regular communication and keep everyone informed.
- Facilitate direct communication between counterparts of the involved systems (e.g., those in charge of billing, lawyers) rather than relying on indirect communication through project leads.
- Ensure direct and ongoing communication between regulators and involved system leadership (e.g., board members) rather than relying solely on consultants or technical assistance providers.
- Proactively counter the spread of misinformation through regular communication with customers.
- Ensure alignment of messaging between involved systems/partners.
- Conduct meetings in person whenever possible.
- Where the subsumed water system's employees will not be transferred to the receiving system, short term contracts can help ease the transition and facilitate important information exchange.
- Where feasible, leverage the expertise of the subsumed water system's leadership by creating an advisory committee to support the post-consolidation transition.

Lack of political will and resistance

Many consolidations face overt resistance or at least lack of political will from some participants at some stage of the process. In more challenging cases, the entire consolidation process can be shaped by these forces. The root causes of resistance are diverse and context specific. In many cases, resistance stems from past conflict, which can include previous failed attempts at consolidation or collaboration, decades-old feuds between individuals, or histories of redlining and/or discrimination. Resistance also frequently arises in relation to many of the core issues to consolidation like water affordability, representation, and local control. Notably, local control seems to be of particular concern where there are relative size differences between consolidation partners and can be tied to fear of losing local connections and a direct line of communication with the local water service provider. In cases where consolidation might impact water sources or treatment, consumer trust and preferences regarding their tap water can also ignite controversy.

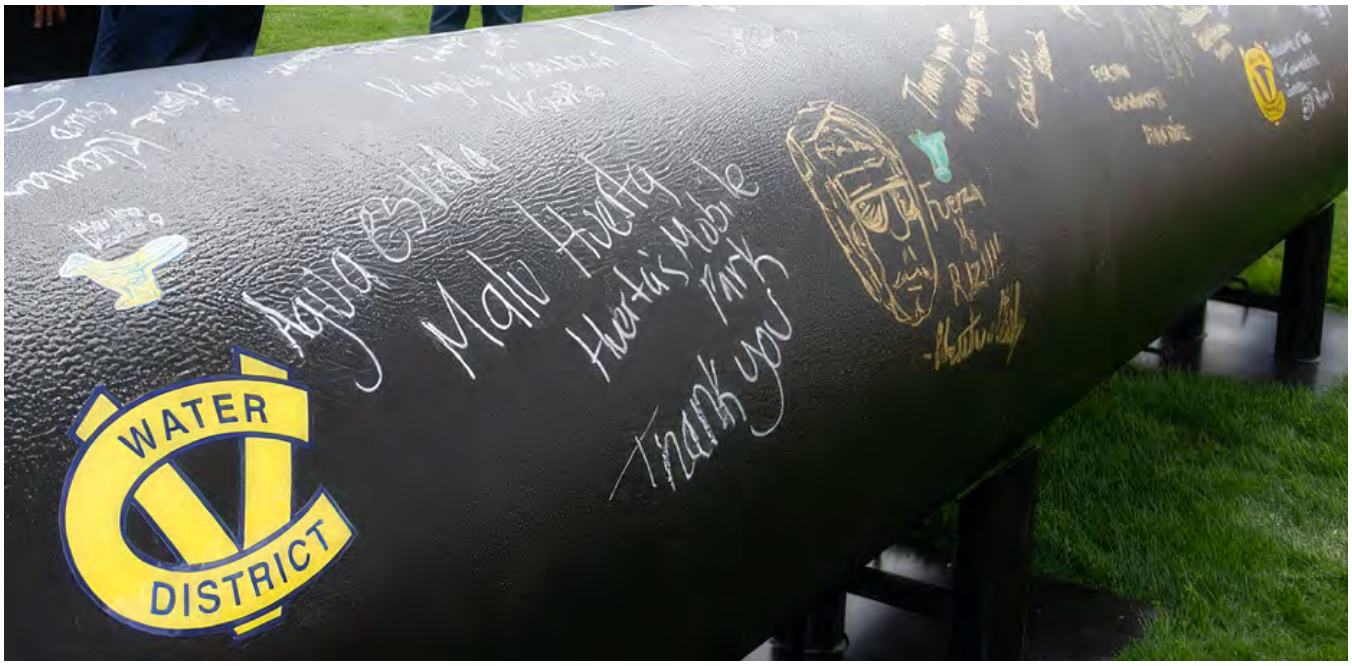
Importantly, it is not uncommon for receiving and subsumed water systems or associated communities to have distinct concerns about consolidation, nor for there to be stark differences in opinions within individual impacted communities. Among subsumed water system residents, varying views on the quality and reliability of their current water supplies can underpin some of these differences. In the case of domestic well users, requirements to destroy their existing wells can also act as a barrier to participation for some households.

Although resistance can come from groups, it's also true that individuals or a few members of local governance can be the source of significant resistance on their own, particularly individuals who have procedural power within the process. Questions of influence and economic well-being can be raised when board members, consultants, or staff perceive a threat to their current positions.

These individuals can take a variety of tacks to slow or stop a consolidation project, including missing deadlines, fomenting resistance among governing board members, or implementing policies to preclude consolidation. In the case of multi-owner properties requiring easements or mobile home parks, a single resistant property owner can halt the process entirely. While resistance can emerge from misunderstandings or legitimate grievances that water providers and project partners can work to address through education and compromise, it's also true that resistance can be the result of prejudice or NIMBYism. Trying to understand the source of resistance can be an important first step to determining how to address it.

Relevant best practices

- Ensure transparency and ongoing communication with system staff to address potential concerns. Create opportunities for staff from involved systems to meet.
- Where rate increases will be necessary, start the customer education process as soon as possible. In some cases, systems have even had success with inaugurating rate increases before consolidation to reduce financial barriers.
- Involve all board members in consolidation discussions rather than utilizing ad-hoc committees. Where infeasible, regular communication with all board members should be a top priority.
- Regularly communicate to customers throughout the planning and implementation of the project, including clearly articulating the rationale for the consolidation.
- Allowing private well communities to keep their wells for non-drinking water use can improve community buy-in but must be accompanied with appropriate safeguards to protect local groundwater supplies.
- Involvement of local elected officials can help move stalled projects forward.



Residents signed water main at a community celebration in Mecca celebrating ten years of efforts by the Coachella Valley Water District's Disadvantaged Communities Infrastructure Task Force.
Source: Coachella Valley Water District

- Conduct outreach not just to the subsumed water system customers, but also to receiving water system customers.
- Community engagement and outreach is key to building buy-in among residents, especially if there are affordability concerns or other points of resistance. Examples include social media posts and hosting community tours.
- Identify and articulate consolidation benefits for all systems/communities (e.g., infrastructure or resiliency benefits). Importantly, different systems/communities can experience and promote different benefits to the same consolidation project.
- Work to air the goals and concerns of all the board members and staff from each water system as early as possible in the planning phase. Consider interviewing board members individually to uncover any unique perspectives.
- Invest in public outreach and education to promote awareness of the benefits of consolidation.
- Incrementalism can help build (or re-build) trust between partners. Starting with mutual aid or other collaborative agreements can support relationship building and reduce resistance. Similarly, umbrella organizations like Joint Powers Authorities can ease transitions and help demonstrate the benefits of collaboration. Allowing consolidations to move at the speed of trust by funding these key milestones can help move projects along.

Affordability

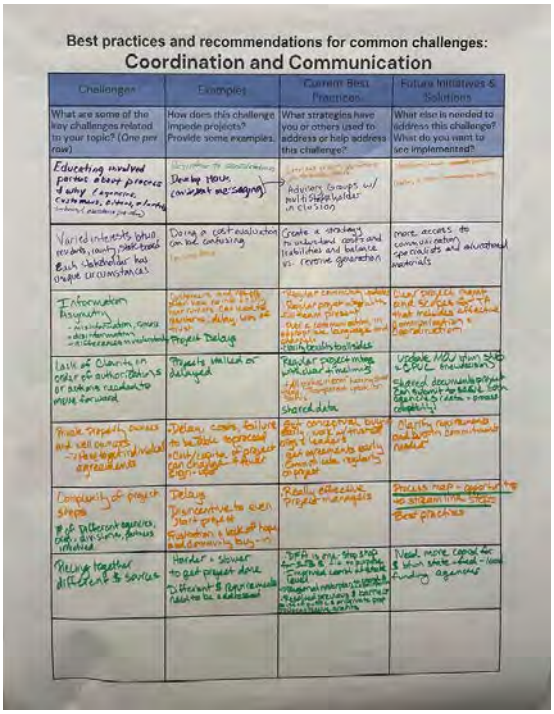
Although consolidation is often considered a way for systems to build economies of scale, concerns about a consolidation's impacts on drinking water affordability are common for receiving and subsumed water systems alike. This concern is often partially driven by the difficulty of determining the full rate impacts of a consolidation prior to its completion for any of the involved systems. However, concerns over reduced affordability are also well-founded in practice. Consolidation is often an expensive prospect, particularly when one or more of the involved systems needs significant investment. Based on findings from the 2024 California Consolidation Survey, 80% of consolidations result in rate increases for subsumed water system customers. In 24% of cases, rates also increase for customers of the receiving system.[9] In many cases rate increases are not a direct result of consolidation but rather infrastructure investments needed to correct artificially low-rates, remedy deferred maintenance, or address an ongoing water supply or quality challenge. Nonetheless, this can create a public relations challenge among residents and can contribute to resistance from a variety of parties. Besides infrastructure investments, the need to remedy pre-existing differences in rate schedules between the involved water systems can also lead to rate increases. Notably, there are also cases where consolidation can support household affordability, particularly when there is significant public investment in upgraded infrastructure and/or where consolidation builds economies of scale (e.g., making water treatment economically feasible by increasing service connections).

Affordability challenges are often most pressing for low-income communities but are not limited to them. Affordability challenges can also be particularly acute for mobile home park residents and other water systems consolidated via master meter agreements. Under these arrangements, the subsumed system retains responsibility for billing customers and maintaining the local distribution system. It is also not uncommon under these arrangements for per-unit water costs to be higher for subsumed system customers compared to receiving system customers. In the case of non-mobile home parks, these extra costs are generally passed on to residents using either a flat or metered rate, resulting in elevated residential rates compared to the receiving system. In the case of mobile

home parks, operators often have discretion in how they allocate these additional costs among residents and may do so through usage charges or raising monthly rents for all residents. The former can help ensure equity by pricing based on consumption but entails additional expenses on the part of the park operator (e.g., meter installation and reading), while the latter can have an outsized impact on low-income, elderly, and disabled residents. In either case, when residents are not direct customers of the receiving system, they are not eligible to participate in the receiving water systems' low-income rate assistance program if applicable.

Relevant best practices

- Where possible, phase in rate changes over time.
- Promote and pursue full consolidations instead of wholesale arrangements that can increase costs. Not only can this improve affordability, but it can also incentivize participation by allowing the subsumed water system to fully relinquish water-related responsibilities.
- Communicate costs and benefits associated with both consolidation and non-consolidation, including rate implications.
- Leverage the planning phase to conduct or update median household income studies and rate studies.
- Use unified rate structures wherever possible.
- Expect that additional participants may want to join in during or after the project is implemented. Plan for expanded capacity in infrastructure design by including T-junctions in areas of potential future service expansion.



Participants at the April 2026 Consolidation Convening brainstormed best practices and solutions for common coordination and communication challenges on a poster.
Source: Kristin Dobbin

- Leverage operations and maintenance funding through the SAFER program to fill fiscal gaps and address affordability concerns for newly consolidated systems.
- Provide templates/best practices for rate setting and dealing with Proposition 218 constraints.

Lessons Learned

Consolidation has not only benefits, but also limits and tradeoffs

Among the most important lessons we can take away from California's experience with consolidations over the last fifteen years is that, while consolidation is highly effective at addressing key challenges facing water systems, it is not a magic bullet. This is true even when it comes to facilitating access to safe drinking water.[10] According to the 2024 California Consolidation Survey, improved water quality was achieved in 75% of cases. Water supply, in turn, was improved in 74% of cases.[11] In other words, water quality and supply improvements are common but not guaranteed. This finding was also supported by subsequent case studies.[12] Key factors influencing consolidation outcomes in this

regard include changing regulatory standards and the degree of capital improvement investments included as part of, or implemented after, consolidation.

Of course, water quality or supply improvements are not the only reasons a system might be interested in consolidation. Many survey respondents reported additional benefits including increased resilience, capacity, customer satisfaction, affordability, representation, and participation. Overall, respondents reported achieving benefits associated with 80% of the motivations for consolidation. Rural water systems and those with pre-existing relationships with the other involved systems were particularly likely to report achieving their goals with consolidation.[13]

As important as acknowledging the potential benefits and limitations of consolidation, it is equally important to acknowledge that consolidation can come with tradeoffs.[14] For example, consolidations can strain a system's capacity both during and after implementation. Consolidation can also increase costs for involved systems and/or increase residential water rates. Identifying potential tradeoffs is an important consideration in planning consolidation projects. Mitigating these tradeoffs — whether with incentives, operations and maintenance funding, staffing support, etc. — can help build support for consolidation and advance successful projects.

The need for both flexibility and consistency

Implementing consolidation projects, regardless of the approach to consolidation, is an exceedingly complicated process and is highly dependent on local context. No two consolidations are the same. As such, the importance of flexibility is one of the most commonly identified lessons learned. Many interviewees emphasized the importance of being flexible and adapting plans as needed, including reworking plans if specific land was not available for purchase or allowing for variances in fire hydrant siting to accommodate uncommon parcel boundaries. Maintaining flexibility can also increase the impact of the project by facilitating the participation of new systems or households during and after construction. Many interviewees and convening attendees also wanted more flexibility in designing, funding, and implementing projects to accommodate unique local needs. This speaks to an important tension between the rigidity of regulatory and funding processes and the fluid nature of consolidation projects. While unlikely to be resolved anytime soon, looking for ways to increase flexibility and build pathways for funding that are less constrained than previous models built for traditional single-entity capital improvement projects will be key to scaling consolidation as a regulatory solution.

At the same time, flexibility must not come at the expense of process clarity and consistency. There is an apparent need for more detailed, accessible information to guide water systems and technical assistance providers through the convoluted consolidation process (e.g., flowcharts, step-by-step check lists). There is also a clear need for more guidance on roles, expectations, and goals related to consolidation. While regulators and policymakers have largely tried to avoid being overly prescriptive, for many, lack of clarity on state goals for consolidation and how to weigh these goals against local priorities has contributed to project delays and frustration. For example, interviewees reported confusion about what constitutes acceptable pathways for consolidation and what benefits need to be achieved to merit state or federal funding. Lastly, many involved with consolidation projects across the state report inconsistencies in the rules and procedures for implementing projects. While some of these inconsistencies undoubtedly arise from variable funding sources and differences among local jurisdictions, others were attributed to unclear policies and variation between project managers. This lack of consistency in implementation not only can cause delays but also limits the ability of water systems, counties, and technical assistance providers who are engaged in many projects to fully leverage their unique advantage of experience towards efficiency.

The perpetually important role of funding

Among the most notable successes in California's recent history of consolidation is the launch of the SAFER program. Established by SB 200 in 2019, SAFER not only prioritized consolidation as a top safe drinking water solution, but also provided a historic influx of funding through the new Safe and Affordable Drinking Water (SADW) Fund with far fewer restrictions than existing sources like the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund. Yet SADW funds have been influenced by shifting political priorities and pressures, creating eligibility uncertainties that can impact projects, which can take years to get to the stage of submitting a funding application. As of 2026, the fund, which was initially funded through 2030, faces the prospect of significant cuts and even zero percent allocations in future years. Over the same period, we have seen a historic influx of federal funding through the 2021 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act followed by an unprecedented funding pause and significant federal retrenchment. Thus, there remains a need for a stable, consistent funding mechanism that can provide reliable support to potential projects from conception to construction.

These changes also raise the uncomfortable question of how California can continue to advance the goals of consolidation in an era of limited funding. The large and growing cost of physical consolidation projects only complicates this matter. While seemingly bleak, the prospect of evolving our funding approach to consolidation does offer new opportunities. While existing funding approaches are primarily reactive in nature and focus heavily on regulatory compliance, new models could more fully address priorities among domestic wells and state small systems and foster proactive approaches such as building capacity or resilience.

Advice from water system leaders on navigating the consolidation process:

"You just have to start and adapt. There will be challenges and imperfections which you have to be prepared for. Some are silly like where are we going to park all these trucks now? But you have to just jump and do it."

"Recognize and use the ways in which consolidation can be a political win for politicians if you get them involved."

"It takes time and leadership to integrate different employee cultures. Be patient and persistent."

"The biggest thing is just because it hasn't worked in the past doesn't mean it can't work now."

"Don't give up. If something isn't working, try something else."

"We need to be okay with being uncomfortable because we want to know all the answers and we don't have all the answers. Sometimes you have to look like you don't know what you're doing."

"Put your own personal interests to the side to look at the overarching benefits to everyone."

Policy Recommendations

While the previously described best practices can go a long way to mitigating common roadblocks encountered across the state, more is needed to fully address common challenges. This section details recommendations suggested by water systems, technical assistance providers, and others involved in consolidation efforts across the state to help expedite successful consolidations.

Funding agencies

- Expand technical assistance, particularly for consolidation agreements, system appraisals, and funding applications. Ensure parity with eligible activities under planning grants for technical assistance work plans to avoid the need for planning grants where possible.
- Build in more flexibility to eligibility criteria for grant funding. For example, consider using affordability as eligibility or scaled funding approaches.
- Reduce duplicative and unnecessary requirements and reviews wherever possible within and between projects and adapt requirements to better fit the needs of a diverse array of applicants. For example, only requiring TMF capacity review for receiving systems once every five years or waiving the requirement for an authorizing resolution for Investor-Owned Utilities in which decision-making processes look different than systems operated by local governments.
- Leverage planning funding to advance property acquisition as much as possible by funding due diligence, appraisals, negotiations, and conditional acquisition agreements.
- Explore opportunities to provide minimum funding guarantees to attract and retain willing project applicants and reduce the perceived risk by potential partners.
- Streamline review to expedite projects using the model of the State Water Board's expedited drinking water program. Expand the expedited program and increase access.
- Move towards a more flexible, design-build approach to funding projects that integrates planning and construction.
- Eliminate contractual barriers for funding applicants such as requirements to complete the project if funding is not available.
- Modify eligibility and prioritization criteria to allow for repairs and capital projects ahead of consolidation which, in turn, can facilitate consolidation and address acute system challenges in a timelier manner.
- Create opportunities within the State Revolving Fund to support post-consolidation construction upgrades.
- Fast track consolidations of failing and at-risk systems through expedited review and streamlined application requirements.
- Where already existing, increase consolidation incentives and provide more flexibility in how they are used. Where incentives are not available, introduce them to facilitate the consolidation, especially of failing and at-risk systems.
- Systematically collect data and feedback from grant recipients to improve the funding process.
- Include funding for the purchase and installation of household water meters as part of consolidation grant agreements. This is particularly important for mobile home parks or other projects where master meter connections are used.

Regulatory agencies

- Increase coordination and alignment between agencies, working towards standardized data collection, shared forms, and process compatibility wherever possible (e.g., aligning the time horizons for required financial projections). This should include formal mechanisms for data sharing and communication between divisions and agencies.
- Develop a mechanism to track consolidations across the state regardless of funding source or type of system involved.
- Provide more guidance on system valuation, including valuation for mutual water systems. Develop pathways for third-party or peer review of water valuation studies.
- Standardize processes for assessing and reporting affordability impacts to customers.
- Provide grace periods for compliance deadlines for recently subsumed systems to give receiving systems time to improve record keeping, get familiar with the system, etc.
- Target consolidation outreach to potential receiving systems who are more likely have the resources to support the project rather than potential subsumed water systems.
- Where available, increase use of mandatory consolidation powers. Where not available, look for ways to promote priority consolidations through conditions and incentives (e.g., approval of desired annexation or acquisition contingent on consolidation).
- Develop tools and resources that help coach small systems through the consolidation process.
- Clarify and communicate roles and responsibilities related to consolidation.
- Clarify the goals of consolidation and associated outcome measures.
- Accelerate public outreach and educational efforts to increase public awareness about consolidation, including both the benefits and the process. This could include public workshops, educational materials, targeted outreach, etc.

Counties and LAFCOs

- Include assessments of consolidation feasibility in Municipal Service Reviews and SB 552 drought resiliency plans.
- Look for opportunities to incentivize priority consolidations in line with local priorities.
- Provide information and checklists for the review, permit, and approval process and requirements.
- Coordinate with state regulators during the development of Municipal Service Reviews and transmit finalized documents to all relevant agencies and offices.
- Prioritize securing services from existing water providers in reviewing and approving new development proposals.

Legislature

- Identify and implement solutions for ongoing liability issues hindering consolidation efforts, including liability associated with private property improvements for mobile home parks and other privately operated small systems and liability for receiving systems consolidating systems with compliance challenges (both known and unknown).

- Move towards mandatory individual metering for water services in mobile home parks as is done for electricity and gas services.
- Streamline the process for addressing tax liability associated with consolidation.
- Explore opportunities for policies and programs that reduce deferred maintenance and artificially low water rates among small systems, both of which can significantly impede consolidation projects in a variety of ways.
- Address constraints imposed by Proposition 218 on extending infrastructure and rate setting.
- Adopt a statewide low-income assistance program that could mitigate resistance to consolidation based on affordability concerns.
- Create opportunities for, and incentivize, regional planning that can identify and prioritize potential consolidation projects.
- Expand the State Water Board's mandatory consolidation powers for intractable cases involving failing water systems. Develop complimentary pathways for mandatory consolidation at the local level.
- Expand opportunities for advance payment in lieu of reimbursement (e.g., eligibility, percent of funds provided in advance, etc.).
- Guarantee a stable funding source capable of supporting long-term projects.

Key Opportunities for Scaling Progress

Beyond addressing the common challenges that delay and even prevent consolidations from coming to fruition, there is a clear need to evolve and expand how this work is approached. Even fully implementing all the best practices and policy solutions described previously, consolidations would remain costly and time intensive (and at times, also controversial and inadequate). Are there opportunities to do more with less, reach more communities or reach new communities? Here we identify five promising opportunities for expanding the reach of consolidation.

Regional consolidation planning

The current ad-hoc and piecemeal approach to consolidation planning limits opportunities for efficiency, coordination, and collaboration. However, it doesn't have to be this way. Across the state, there are examples of regional approaches to consolidation planning that can serve as models for a more comprehensive approach (see below). In these examples, we see how regional planning leverages planning funding to prioritize and expedite local projects. In doing so, regional planning also builds local capacity and expertise, facilitates shared learning, and creates networks of support for projects throughout the planning and implementation pipeline.

Achieving regional planning necessitates a regional champion, but this champion need not be the same everywhere. Counties, water districts, non-profits, and many others can fill this role. There are also a variety of formats and venues that planning can proceed through, from task forces to special projects or initiatives. Regardless of approach, there should be a single, unified funding recipient with the capacity to manage or support simultaneous projects.

Identifying the appropriate scale for regional planning is challenging and context dependent. The scale should match the jurisdiction of the relevant convener(s). Where this implicates a

Examples of regional planning

Coachella Valley Water District's Disadvantaged Communities Infrastructure Task Force

The mission of the Coachella Valley Water District Disadvantaged Communities Infrastructure Task Force is to "secure access to safe affordable drinking water, wastewater, and flood control services in historically disadvantaged Coachella Valley regions through strategic planning, funding procurement, needs assessment, and reporting". First convened in 2017, the primary focus of the Task Force has been the development of a Domestic Water Supply Master Plan and Sanitation Master Plan prioritizing consolidation projects in the Eastern Coachella Valley. To date the effort has received over $100 million in grants for included projects. This historic investment in this underserved region has been made possible by the unique structure of the Task Force which includes community members as well as representatives of community-based organizations, county agencies, mobile home park owners, and state and local elected officials.

Placer County Water Agency's County-Wide Master Plan

The County-Wide Master Plan (CWMP), first developed by Placer County Water Agency in 2010, is a dynamic project database that supports regional collaboration and coordination by identifying, tracking, prioritizing, and funding water and stewardship project needs across Placer County. In 2019, the CWMP and associated Financial Assistance Program started allowing the submission of projects that meet one or more of the eight project elements, including access to safe and reliable drinking water through voluntary consolidations. To date, these efforts have supported 6 water system consolidations with an additional 3 projects that are in progress and several more under consideration. Ongoing updates have been key to this success. Placer County Water Agency provides technical and collaboration resources for updating the CWMP, while providing the grant resources for planning and project development through the Financial Assistance Program. This is particularly important to support the participation of small, geographically dispersed systems across the county. Outreach is conducted through semi-annual small purveyor meetings held for both the mountain and foothill regions of the county. PCWA also collaborates individually with at-risk systems that may have interest in consolidating into a PCWA system. Communication with these local water systems and government stakeholders has been key for establishing and maintaining good working relationships between the districts and systems.

large area, sub-regions based on geography or key infrastructure can be used to make planning more manageable. Proximity matters not just for physical consolidation but also for managerial consolidation. Potential consolidations should be large enough to ensure economies of scale while also ensuring that staff can reasonably cover the whole region.

Financial and community support are both critical to the success of regional planning efforts. In most cases, dedicated funding is needed to develop a regional master plan and prioritized list of projects. Wherever possible, this funding should be used to initiate the engineering and environmental work necessary to secure construction funding for these projects. In this way, funding regional planning is an investment that can be leveraged to bring in additional funding. Importantly, the most effective regional plans will advance a community-driven vision for the future. As such, bottom-up community engagement through outreach, the involvement of community-based organizations, and ongoing participation of impacted community water systems is essential.

Promoting managerial consolidation and shared service/staffing models

While physical consolidation makes up the vast majority of completed consolidations since 2015,[15] there is keen interest around the state in advancing managerial consolidations and other models of shared services and staffing. There are several reasons for this. First, managerial consolidation and shared service/staffing models have the potential to serve geographically isolated community

water systems without reasonable physical consolidation prospects. Second, lack of technical and managerial staff is a key challenge facing many small systems. Even with physical consolidation, due to size, geographic, and other barriers, many systems will still lack the staffing they need for long-term, sustainable operations. Thus, developing opportunities for systems to partner, whether through full administrative consolidation or more narrow collaborative agreements, is an essential, complementary solution to physical consolidation.

Despite limited implementation of managerial consolidation in the state, there is significant precedent. Many drinking water utilities, including not just Investor-Owned Utilities but also cities and special districts, operate more than one regulated system with distinct public water system identification numbers. Many more have contractual arrangements in which a neighboring system supports their operations. These arrangements are not limited only to medium and large systems. Where they have sufficient capacity, small systems make excellent candidates for receiving systems and/or regional system operators. Examples also abound in other states. In 2023, New Mexico created regional utility authorities to consolidate management among rural systems. In Illinois, the EJ Water Cooperative provides a mix of retail and wholesale drinking water service across 19 counties in addition to contract services like billing, reporting, and water quality testing for nearby systems.

Such models have the clear potential to expand the number of communities participating in collaborative solutions. Because these models avoid costly capital investments to connect systems, managerial consolidations may also be more affordable for residents and less constrained by state and federal funding availability. Importantly, however, the success of managerial and shared service models depends on workforce availability. Thus, growing the water workforce, both certified operators and management staff, especially in rural areas, is essential to its success. Where water systems are failing or suffering from deferred maintenance, capital investments will also likely continue to play an important role to rightsize staffing with operational needs.

Advancing capacity building and information exchange

Capacity is a key constraint limiting California's progress on consolidation across scales. At the system level, limited TMF capacity is often a key barrier that delays, or even prevents, consolidation. In some instances where consolidation is achieved, consolidation can put strain on receiving systems' staffing, finances, and operational capacity in such a way that deters future consolidations. At the regional level, many technical assistance providers are stretched thin by the growing number of projects that can span decades. At the state level, hundreds of simultaneous consolidation projects limit the efficiency of the funding pipeline. Thus, there is a critical need to build capacity to do this work across all levels.



Participants debrief their breakout group discussions at the California Water System Consolidation Convening held in Davis, California in April 2026. Source: Kristin Dobbin

Information exchange has an important role to play in achieving this. Somewhat ironically, despite the fact that many of California's community water systems have completed a consolidation project or

have one in planning or implementation, many feel alone in this work. This sentiment is also common to technical assistance providers and local government staff involved in promoting and supporting consolidation projects; they are often unaware of similar projects happening in other parts of the state. While local projects are unique in their specifics, any challenge a project might be facing has more than likely been faced in some form by another project. In some cases, that other project might have solved the problem or at least found a work-around. That there is a huge benefit to learning from other projects is also clearly demonstrated by the advantages funding applicants and technical assistance providers gain from experience across projects and time. While this expertise should be intentionally cultivated and leveraged, it can also be emulated through information exchange. There is immense opportunity in facilitating people to share consolidation experiences, troubleshoot problems, and build collective expertise. This is the case not only in the planning and implementation of consolidation projects, but also pre-consolidation when hearing examples of how other communities pursued consolidation and to what ends can be enormously influential.

Integrating consolidation with climate resiliency and hazard mitigation efforts

In many California communities, consolidation has been pursued for natural hazard mitigation benefits, including increasing storage and distribution capacity and developing new water sources. Such climate resiliency benefits are among the most common outcomes of consolidation. In the 2024 California Consolidation Survey, more than 50% of respondents reported increased system resilience as a realized or expected benefit of their consolidation project.[16] At the present time, however, it can be difficult to secure funding for proactive consolidations targeting resiliency benefits. Unless drought, fire, or other disaster impacts have already occurred triggering an acute public safety hazard, these projects typically fall outside of the prioritization criteria for public funding given limited resources.

This lack of intentional integration with climate resiliency and hazard mitigation goals is a significant missed opportunity. First and foremost, this approach has limited much needed adaptation in the drinking water sector. Where consolidations are happening, resiliency benefits should not be incidental, but rather integrated into the design of the project to further adaptation needs. Second, climate resiliency and disaster preparedness benefits are an important incentive that can help drive local support for consolidation among both receiving and subsumed water systems and residents. Leveraging this potential by maximizing and messaging these benefits will help to expand the scale and pace of consolidation and further state climate and resiliency goals at the same time.

Finally, consolidation also has an important role to play in emergency management. Across the state, consolidation has played an important role in disaster recovery, particularly from fire and drought. Yet in almost all cases, consolidation planning has only begun post-disaster, often in a piecemeal manner. Imagine what could be accomplished if pre-disaster data collection, mapping, and other planning activities had already taken place and post-disaster there were funding and technical assistance programs ready to systematically support regional recovery efforts that promote future resilience. Given that natural disasters and extreme weather are increasing in frequency under climate change, ensuring that best practices and resources are available to inform efforts at all stages of emergency management is essential.

Further integrating consolidation into climate mitigation and emergency management will require increased multi-agency coordination as well as funding programs that incentivize climate-ready benefits. Rather than achieving this fully through drinking water funding, consolidation should also

be encouraged through climate focused programs as well. This includes those under the direction of the Department of Water Resources and the Strategic Growth Council as well as with state and local emergency services. This will require outreach and education as many of these potential partners have not previously been intimately involved with drinking water policy and may lack awareness of consolidation and its potential benefits.

Incentivizing and empowering local action on consolidation

Thus far, state regulators have played an outsized role in advancing water system consolidations in California. There have been important successes to this approach, but there are also limitations. State agencies alone do not have the capacity to directly facilitate consolidation to the degree that many, including themselves, would like to see. Moreover, many of the key opportunities to advance consolidation fall outside of the jurisdiction of drinking water regulators. For example, many have noted that consolidation could be leveraged as a transitional strategy for water systems with aging staff and board members seeking retirement. Similarly, opportunities for affordable housing or economic development can serve as powerful motivators to pursue consolidation in communities with water capacity limitations.

This points to a need to incentivize and empower local action on consolidation. Counties and LAFCOs will be key to achieving this. Municipal Service Reviews provide regular opportunity to assess a county's drinking water landscape and identify opportunities to improve the quality, efficiency, and sustainability of service delivery. Leveraging these reviews to do this analysis and then ensuring these recommendations are communicated and acted upon provides one path forward locally. Standing drought task forces, now mandatory under SB 552, provide a similar opportunity to identify vulnerabilities and promote action from a hazard mitigation point of view. And general plans, while they do not mandate specific water elements, do necessitate an integrated analysis of the sufficiency of water resources with respect to housing, safety, and environmental justice. Other potential local champions for consolidation include groundwater sustainability agencies, wholesale water purveyors, and regional water districts. Additionally, community-based organizations and relevant member associations can play an important role in identifying potential consolidations and facilitating conversation. This type of integration will not necessarily emerge organically. Rather, there will be need to be active coordination with diverse partners and decision-makers.

Conclusion

California has come a long way in the last fifteen years with respect to water system consolidation. Hundreds of communities have benefited from completed projects, each of which was only possible thanks to the sustained commitment of many people over many years. Learning from these efforts and the experiences of those involved is essential for making the projects that come next year, and the years after, faster and easier, and identifying the gaps highlights opportunities to serve more communities and needs. Focusing on these dual objectives, this report aims to set the stage for the next chapter in California's consolidation efforts by capturing the experiences and recommendations of a diverse array of individuals and organizations involved with consolidation projects from across the state. Future work should build on this effort by facilitating further information exchange among project proponents at the state and local level. It is abundantly clear from this work that there are dozens, if not hundreds, of Californians ready to collaboratively advance solutions and contribute new ideas in this space.

Notes

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2 State Water Resources Control Board, *California Safe Drinking Water Plan – 2025 Update* (2025), https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/drinking_water/safedrinkingwaterplan/docs/final-2025-sdwp.pdf.

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Lewiston Community Services District's consolidation of Lewiston Park Mutual Water Company

(Trinity County)

Background

Lewiston Community Services District (LCSD) is an independent special district in rural Trinity County. The district was originally formed in 1960 to provide fire services and later expanded its authority to include street lighting and recreation. It wasn't until 2012 that LCSD requested and received authorization to provide water and wastewater services following the district's acquisition of the Lewiston Valley Water Company with 51 service connections. LCSD acquired the company at their request to help address chronic water system deficiencies. Ultimately it was necessary to construct a new water treatment plant and storage facilities, for which LCSD secured grant funding.



The old Lewiston Bridge across the Trinity River.
Source: Angela Feltes, Shutterstock.com

Soon after, State Water Resources Control Board approached LCSD about acquiring the Lewiston Park Mutual Water Company, which provided water to 550 customers through 168 service connections. The LCSD board was initially reluctant to take on such a large (by comparison) system which also had significant infrastructure deficiencies but ultimately agreed as part of an arrangement to receive a $17 million grant to bring their failing wastewater system into compliance.

Construction of an intertie between the two systems began in 2016 and was completed in 2017, funded through Integrated Regional Water Management program. This funding was also used to install two new fire hydrants as well as a flow metering station. Then in July 2018, LCSD formally acquired the Lewiston Park Mutual Water Company system.

Post-consolidation, LCSD once again needed to pursue grant opportunities to replace deteriorating infrastructure in the consolidated system. With funding from the Integrated Regional Water Management program and the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund, the distribution system for the acquired system was fully rebuilt with expanded fire capacity and new fire hydrants. This project was completed in July 2025.

Accomplishments

- Prior to consolidation, Lewiston Park customers regularly received water boil notices when surface water was drawn from the Trinity River. Consolidation with LCSD eliminated this issue, ensuring a consistent supply of safe drinking water.
- System upgrades have also improved reliability and efficiency throughout the service area, while increasing resilience to drought and wildfires.
- LCSD has been highly successful in obtaining grants to make improvements to their water and wastewater systems. In the last fifteen years the district has rebuilt most of its infrastructure including a new water intake, a new treatment plant, new storage facilities, rebuilt distribution lines and a brand-new wastewater treatment plant. Some of these investments were only possible with consolidation given their high costs and LCSD's small number of connections.

Challenges

- LCSD has struggled to find operators qualified to manage their state-of-the-art facilities. Due to their remote location, LCSD has had to contract out for operators at significant expense to the district.
- Even post-consolidation, LCSD is an extremely small system (234 service connections). The community is also a severely disadvantaged community. This combination has made it very difficult for the board to keep up with increasing operations and maintenance costs without imposing hardship to residents. Despite rate increases of 3% in 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2025, LCSD continues to struggle to cover the cost of operating their system.
- LCSD cannot afford a general manager, leaving grant and system management to volunteer board members. This, in turn, has caused board member burnout and raised significant concerns about long-term technical, managerial, and financial (TMF) capacity and sustainability. LCSD has reached out to nearby districts about sharing the costs of a general manager, but they have not found a system willing to do so.

> ***"We have a plant that's first class, no question about that. It just costs so much money to run."***

Key Takeaways

Regional funding programs offer opportunities to fund consolidation projects

LCSD has leveraged state bond funding through their local Integrated Regional Water Management group, the North Coast Resource Partnership, to fund the physical consolidation project and later to partially fund a complete replacement of the consolidated water system's distribution system. Such regional programs, while inconsistently funded, offer technical assistance and grant opportunities with different eligibility and prioritization criteria than statewide grant programs. Often these programs also offer incentives for projects that benefit disadvantaged and severely disadvantaged communities.

Very small consolidated systems may still need operations and maintenance support

Receiving systems can face financial strain trying to balance affordability with sustainability, pointing to the need for proactive planning to cover operation and maintenance costs as part of consolidation agreements and potential, supplemental operations and maintenance funding as part of grant packages. This is particularly true for very small systems acting as receiving systems and systems serving severely disadvantaged communities. In this case, while grants addressed infrastructure deficiencies, LCSD continues to struggle with ongoing costs despite consistently raising their rates.

Capacity investments are as important as infrastructure

Beyond sustainable operations and management funding, to be successful, consolidated water systems need sufficient human capacity to operate effectively. Post-consolidation, LCSD has struggled not just financially but managerially and technically as well. Because they have not been able to afford to hire a general manager, that labor has been done on a volunteer basis by district board members, and the lack of regional operators has caused further challenges. Whether through Technical Assistance programs, investing in regional shared services arrangements, or covering the additional costs of contract labor, there should be plans in place to ensure adequate staffing to sustain the achievements associated with consolidation long-term.

Next Steps

LCSD is continuing to explore options for addressing their staffing needs. The district recently applied for Technical Assistance funds to get additional support in managing the system. PACE Engineering, on behalf of the district, is currently conducting a rate study to potentially further increase rates to cover the district's operating expenses.

Timeline



Case Study Authors: Gardiner Brown and Kristin Dobbin
Contact: kbdobbin@berkeley.edu
For more case studies visit: https://bit.ly/Consolidation_casestudies_library

Highlights

Water systems involved (service connections at the time of consolidation)	1. Lewiston Community Services District (Independent Special District): 51 service connections 2. Lewiston Park Mutual Water Company (Mutual Water Company): 168 connections
Consolidation structure	Acquisition
Consolidation type	Physical
Governance of consolidated entity	Independent Special District
Motivations for consolidation	• Lewiston Park Mutual Water Company's groundwater well production was decreasing leading to increased reliance on the Trinity River. Because the system's treatment plant was not sufficient, this led to regular boil water notices • LCSD was seeking additional grant funding to address challenges with their wastewater system and needed a grant that exceeded the State Water Board's $15 million cap
Concerns about consolidation	• The LCSD board was concerned about the costs and expertise needed to manage a water system that would be 350% larger than their current system
Project Financing	• Integrated Regional Water Management Proposition 84 grant for $558,000 for the water system intertie project • Later LCSD secured another Integrated Regional Water Management Proposition 1 Round 1 grant for just over $1M and a Drinking Water State Revolving Fund grant just over $6M to replace the system's distribution system
Rate impacts for consolidated customers	• Pre-consolidation monthly rate: Unknown. • Current average monthly rate: $51.63 (approximately 1.2% of area MHI). • Future changes: Another rate study is in progress. Additional rate increases are expected.
Infrastructure Improvements	• The original consolidation project included the construction of a 3,585 foot 10-inch system intertie, flow metering, and valve station and two fire hydrants • Subsequently the distribution system of the consolidated water system was rebuilt including approximately 14,170 feet of water main and appurtenances, 7 new fire hydrants, new AMI water meters, and a new well

TRINITY LAFCO
LOCAL AGENCY FORMATION COMMISSION

REGULAR COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES
June 16, 2026

Trinity County Library Meeting Room
351 Main Street, Weaverville
HYBRID In-Person and Virtual Teleconference

These minutes are not intended to be a verbatim transcription of the proceedings and discussion associated with the business on the Commission's agenda; rather, what follows is a summary of the order of business and general nature of testimony, Commission deliberation, and action taken. Votes are shown in abbreviated format when unanimous (Ayes-Noes-Abstain).

1. CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

A. Roll Call

Chair Cox called the meeting to order at 5:40 pm.

Members Present: Commissioners Brownfield, Burke, Cox, Grossman-Crist, and Johnson; Alternate Commissioners Kasper and Nelson*

Members Absent: Commissioners Corbett and Gogan; Alternate Commissioner Carpenter-Harris.

Staff Present: Colette Santsche, Executive Officer (EO), and Krystle Brogna, Acting Clerk/Analyst (virtual attendance)

*Seated as a voting member

2. PRESENTATIONS/ANNOUNCEMENTS - None

3. CONSENT CALENDAR

A. Approval of Minutes from April 21, 2026 Regular Commission Meeting

No Commissioner comments or questions.

Motion to approve the consent calendar by Commissioner Johnson, seconded by Commissioner Burke, and passed by a 6-0-0 voice vote.

4. PUBLIC COMMENT OPPORTUNITY

No public comment was provided.

5. PUBLIC HEARINGS

A. Final Budget for Fiscal Year 2026-2027

EO Santsche introduced the staff report and noted that the proposed budget had been distributed to all member agencies with no comments received. Expenditures have remained relatively consistent over the past several years; however, the Commission has continued to rely on reserves to address an ongoing funding deficit. To address the deficit, the Commission will continue implementing annual 5% increases in member contributions, with the goal of closing the funding gap over approximately five years.

Motion to adopt Resolution 26-02, approving the final budget for FY 2026-27 as described, by Commissioner Burke, seconded by Commissioner Grossman-Crist and passed by a 6-0-0 roll call vote.

6. BUSINESS

A. Governance Options for Down River Fire Services MSR/SOI Update

EO Santsche introduced the staff report and reviewed potential governance options for improving

DRAFT

fire service delivery in the Down River region. Staff noted that Salyer CSD is the only special district in the study area, with the remaining providers operating as volunteer organizations. Three preliminary reorganization options were presented with associated potential revenues for each option based on special tax projections

Commissioners discussed service area boundaries, potential annexation, funding challenges, and the exclusion of Hyampom from the study area. Staff explained that the study boundaries were based on the regional fire service areas identified in the Trinity County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). Commissioners asked clarifying questions regarding possible next steps, special tax proceedings, annexation process, and community outreach. Commissioners also noted a typo on page 15.

No Commission action necessary or taken.

7. EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S REPORT/CORRESPONDENCE *(Information Only)* - None

No EO comments.

A. **COMMISSIONER COMMENTS**

No Commissioner comments.

B. **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business, Chair Cox adjourned the meeting at 6:26 pm.

ATTEST:

_____
Krystle Brogna, Acting Clerk

DATE: _____

AGENDA ITEM 6.A.

MEETING: October 20, 2026
TO: Trinity LAFCo Commissioners
FROM: Colette Santsche, Executive Officer
SUBJECT: Preview of Down River Fire Services MSR/SOI Update

BACKGROUND

Staff is currently preparing the Down River Regional Fire Services Municipal Service Review and Sphere of Influence (MSR/SOI) Update, which will evaluate fire protection and emergency response services in the Down River region of Trinity County. The geographic scope aligns with the Trinity County Wildfire Protection Plan and includes the following primary fire service providers:

- Salyer Community Services District (CSD)
- Down River Volunteer Fire Department (VFD)
- Hawkins Bar Volunteer Fire Department (VFD)

Salyer CSD is the only independent special district within this region. As such, formal Sphere of Influence determinations will apply solely to this agency. However, the MSR will place significant emphasis on mutual aid relationships and opportunities for governance structure and funding opportunities among providers in the region.

The Downriver VFC and Hawkins Bar VFD are non-district volunteer departments and do not have sustainable base funding beyond community donations, grants, and reimbursements. Regional service is further supported through mutual aid by Willow Creek FPD (Humboldt County) and Junction City FPD, as well as other regional, state, and federal partners.

DISCUSSION

The Down River region presents unique challenges for fire protection and emergency response. Over the past several months, LAFCo staff have participated in meetings with regional fire service providers to better understand existing service conditions, operational challenges, and opportunities for improved coordination.

Staff has prepared a complete draft of the Down River Fire Services MSR/SOI Update for Commission review and feedback. The report includes profiles of Salyer CSD, Hawkins Bar VFD, and Down River VFC, with additional consideration given to Salyer CSD as the only special district subject to LAFCo's direct oversight.

The report evaluates regional challenges, including limited volunteer staffing, aging equipment, geographic constraints, and inadequate or unstable funding sources. It also explores opportunities for improved service delivery through shared resources, regional coordination, and potential governance and funding alternatives, while emphasizing the importance of preserving community-based fire services and local representation.

Following Commission review, staff will incorporate comments and circulate the draft to affected agencies for additional review and input. A revised report, including proposed SOI determinations, is anticipated to be presented for Commission consideration and potential approval at its next regular meeting on December 15, 2026.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Commission review the Draft Down River Fire Services MSR/SOI Update, provide feedback as appropriate, authorize its release for public review and comment, and direct staff to provide the required public notice for consideration of final adoption at the December 15, 2026, Commission meeting.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Draft Down River Fire Services MSR/SOI Update

Down River Regional Fire

Municipal Services Review and Sphere of Influence Update



ADMINISTRATIVE DRAFT

OCTOBER 2026

TRINITY LAFCO
LOCAL AGENCY FORMATION COMMISSION

www.trinitylafco.org

TRINITY LOCAL AGENCY FORMATION COMMISSION

Commissioners:

Jill Cox, Chair, District 2 County Supervisor

Julia Brownfield, District 5 County Supervisor

Liam Gogan, District 3 County Supervisor

Andrew Johnson, Trinity Public Utilities District

Todd Corbett, Trinity Life Support Community Services District

Anna C. Burke, Public Member

Jake Grossman-Crist, Public Member

Alternate Members:

Heidi Carpenter-Harris, District 4 County Supervisor

Scott Nelson, Trinity Center Community Services District

Joseph Kasper, Alternate Public Member

Staff:

Colette Santsche, AICP, Executive Officer

Amber Chung, LAFCo Clerk/Analyst

Louis Choy, GIS Analyst

Acknowledgements:

Trinity LAFCo would like to thank the following individuals for their valuable contributions, assistance, and cooperation in the preparation of this Municipal Service Review: Fire Chief David Murphy and Board Chair Garrett Watty of Salyer CSD; Fire Chief Todd Wright and Anita Freemantle of Hawkins Bar VFD; Chief Gloria Reynolds of Downriver VFC; Fire Chief Justin Kerwick and Martha Helber of Junction City FPD; and Fire Chief Samantha Smith and Director Bob Kennedy of Willow Creek FPD.

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1.0 Introduction and Background

The Trinity Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo) is preparing this Municipal Service Review (MSR) and Sphere of Influence (SOI) update to evaluate fire protection and emergency response services in the Down River region of Trinity County. The review considers Salyer Community Services District (CSD), which provides fire protection services through the nonprofit Salyer Volunteer Fire Department (Salyer VFD); Hawkins Bar Volunteer Fire Department (Hawkins Bar VFD); and Down River Volunteer Fire Company (Downriver VFC). It documents existing service conditions, evaluates opportunities for regional coordination and sustainable funding, and informs the SOI review for Salyer CSD, which serves as the only fire-related district in the Down River Region.

The Trinity County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) divides the County into five planning divisions. The Down River planning division encompasses the response areas of the three local fire service providers covered in this MSR/SOI update. Regional distinctions of the County will be referred to according to the divisions set forth by the CWPP throughout this report.

Fire Service Providers in the Down River Region



Fire service providers in rural areas often face unique obstacles in the provision of services including remote terrain, an aging and seasonally variable population, limited volunteer availability, and constrained funding and administrative capacity. This MSR takes a regional approach to assessing the current level of services and identify potential areas of opportunity to increase efficiency and resiliency in the region. This report is organized as follows:

- **Introduction and Background** – LAFCo responsibilities, statutory requirements, study methodology, and data sources.
- **Regional Overview** – County and Down River characteristics, wildfire hazards, evacuation considerations, and regional service challenges.
- **Shared Challenges and Opportunities** - Common challenges affecting Down River fire service providers, as well as opportunities for regional collaboration and shared resources.
- **Agency Profiles** – Individual profiles of Salyer CSD, Hawkins Bar VFD, and Downriver VFC, including governance, staffing, facilities, operations, and finances.
- **Governance and Reorganization Alternatives** – Regional coordination opportunities, organizational alternatives, financial considerations, and potential implementation requirements.
- **Municipal Service Review Determinations** – Statutory MSR determinations for Salyer CSD, informed by the agency profiles and regional analysis.
- **Sphere of Influence Review and Recommendations** – Evaluation of Salyer CSD's SOI and recommendations for any potential changes.

1.1 Role and Responsibility of LAFCo

LAFCos are independent regulatory commissions established by the State legislature in 1963 to encourage the orderly growth and development of local governmental agencies including cities and special districts. There is a LAFCo in each of California's 58 counties. Trinity LAFCo has a public Commission with seven regular Commissioners and three alternate Commissioners. The Commission is composed of three members of the Trinity County Board of Supervisors, two Special District Representatives, and two Public Members-At-Large. The Commission also includes one alternate member for each represented category.

Trinity LAFCo administers the Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Local Government Reorganization Act of 2000 ("CKH Act") (Government Code §56000 et seq.). Its responsibilities include reviewing annexations, formations, consolidations, dissolutions, and certain extensions of service. Through these actions and related studies, LAFCo promotes efficient public services, orderly boundaries, and the conservation of agricultural and open-space lands.

Municipal Service Reviews and Spheres of Influence are complementary planning tools. MSRs assess service capacity, financial and organizational conditions, and opportunities for improvement. SOIs guide the probable future boundaries and service areas of local agencies (Government Code §§56301, 56425, and 56430).

1.2 Purpose of Municipal Service Reviews

An MSR provides the information needed to evaluate existing and future public services and inform SOI decisions. LAFCo may define a regional study area and consider alternatives that improve service reliability, efficiency, accountability, and financial sustainability. Government Code §56430 requires written determinations addressing the following:

(1) Growth and population projections for the affected area.
(2) Location and characteristics of any disadvantaged unincorporated communities within or continuous to the sphere of influence.
(3) Present and planned capacity of public facilities, adequacy of public services, and infrastructure needs or deficiencies.
(4) Financial ability of the agency to provide services.
(5) Status of and opportunities for shared facilities.
(6) Accountability for community service needs, including governmental structure and operational efficiencies.
(7) Any other matter related to effective or efficient service delivery, as required by Commission policy.

These determinations are addressed through the regional analysis and agency-specific reviews in this report.

1.3 Purpose of Spheres of Influence

A SOI is the Commission's plan for the probable physical boundaries and service area of a local agency (Government Code §56076). An SOI guides future boundary decisions but does not itself change jurisdictional boundaries or authorize service delivery.

Trinity LAFCo reviews SOIs periodically, generally in conjunction with an MSR, to consider service needs, capacity, and potential changes in local agency boundaries. LAFCo is required to make five written determinations when establishing, amending, or updating an SOI for any local agency that address the following (G.C. §56425(c)):

(1) The present and planned land uses in the area, including agricultural and open space lands.
(2) The present and probable need for public facilities and services in the area.
(3) The present capacity of public facilities and adequacy of public services that the agency provides or is authorized to provide.
(4) The existence of any social or economic communities of interest in the area if the commission determines that they are relevant to the agency.
(5) For an update of an SOI of a city or special district that provides public facilities or services related to sewers, municipal and industrial water, or structural fire protection, the present and probable need for those public facilities and services of any disadvantaged unincorporated communities within the existing sphere of influence.

MSRs may also identify opportunities for shared services, further study, or future governance changes. Any subsequent boundary proposal would require a separate application and applicable LAFCo proceedings.

1.4 Disadvantaged Unincorporated Communities

SB 244 (Chapter 513, Statutes of 2011) made changes to the CKH Act related to disadvantaged unincorporated communities, including mandating the incorporation of an SOI determination focusing on the topic. A disadvantaged unincorporated community (DUC) is defined as an inhabited territory containing 12 or more registered voters, where the median household income of the area is less than 80 percent of the State of California's median household income.

Pursuant to Government Code §56425(e)(5), LAFCos are required to make written determinations regarding the present and probable need for public facilities and services—including water, wastewater, and structural fire protection—in any disadvantaged unincorporated communities within or contiguous to an SOI. In addition, pursuant to Government Code §56425(c), these communities are recognized as social and economic communities of interest for purposes of SOI determinations.

1.5 Review Methods

The following sources of information and outreach activities were considered in preparing this service review:

- **Agency Information:** Responses to LAFCo Requests for Information and supporting documentation provided by the fire service providers.

- **Demographic Data:** U.S. Census Bureau and California Department of Finance population and socioeconomic data.
- **Financial Information:** Agency budgets, financial statements, audits, and State Controller's Office reports.
- **Agency Interviews and Communications:** Discussions and correspondence with governing board members, fire chiefs, volunteers, and other agency representatives.
- **Regional Plans and Reports:** Trinity County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP), Trinity County 2050 General Plan Background Report, 2024–2029 Housing Element, and other relevant planning documents.

As part of the initial MSR process, LAFCo convened a regional meeting with Down River fire service providers on February 4, 2026, at the Salyer Fire Station. The meeting provided an opportunity to discuss existing service conditions, identify shared challenges and accomplishments, and explore opportunities for improved coordination and service delivery. Particular emphasis was placed on emergency response along State Route 299, volunteer staffing, service coverage, and financial sustainability. This early engagement helped inform the scope and direction of the MSR and provided a foundation for continued coordination with participating agencies.

The information gathered through these sources and outreach efforts was evaluated to support the required MSR and SOI determinations. Supporting documentation is maintained in LAFCo's records for future reference.

1.6 California Environmental Quality Act

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA; Public Resources Code §21000 et seq.) requires public agencies to consider the environmental effects of discretionary actions. Preparation of an MSR is generally treated as an information-gathering or planning activity under applicable CEQA provisions, including Guidelines §§15262 and 15306, as appropriate.

The CEQA determination for any SOI action must reflect the specific action proposed. A later annexation, district formation, or service expansion would be subject to its own environmental review, as applicable. No boundary change or extension of service is approved by this MSR alone.

2.0 Regional Overview

The Down River study area lies along the Trinity River and State Route 299 in western Trinity County. Mountainous terrain, dispersed communities, extensive public lands, and limited transportation access shape both emergency response and the financial capacity of local providers. This chapter summarizes the geographic, demographic, and environmental conditions that influence service needs throughout the region.

2.1 Regional Setting and Service Areas

The Down River region includes the communities of Salyer, Trinity Village, Hawkins Bar, Burnt Ranch, Del Loma, Big Bar, and Big Flat, as well as surrounding rural areas. SR-299 serves as the primary transportation corridor, connecting these communities to Willow Creek and the Humboldt County coast to the west and Weaverville and Redding to the east. Much of the surrounding landscape consists of steep, forested terrain and federal lands, with development concentrated along the Trinity River and its tributaries.

Fire protection and emergency response services within the study area are provided primarily by Salyer VFD, which provides services within Salyer CSD; Hawkins Bar VFD; and Downriver VFC. Additional mutual aid and emergency response support is provided by neighboring agencies, including Willow Creek FPD and Junction City FPD. Salyer CSD is an established special district with defined jurisdictional boundaries, while Hawkins Bar VFD and Downriver VFC operate within locally recognized response areas rather than legally established district boundaries. Figure 2-1 identifies the regional wildfire planning divisions, and Figure 2-2 illustrates the fire service boundaries and response areas.

The region also encompasses ancestral homelands of Indigenous peoples, including the Tsnungwe and Chimariko, with broader historical connections to Wintu peoples. Indigenous communities have longstanding cultural connections to the region's lands and natural resources, including traditional land stewardship and fire management practices. Tribal interests may be relevant to regional wildfire preparedness, fuels management, emergency planning, and future service delivery arrangements.

2.2 Population and Socioeconomic Characteristics

Trinity County was established in 1850 as one of California's original 27 counties, with boundaries that were subsequently reduced to form portions of neighboring counties[1]. The County's population has generally increased since the 1920s, reaching 16,112 residents according to the 2020 Decennial Census[2]. The most significant growth occurred between 1940 and 1960, when the population more than doubled from 3,970 to 9,706 residents (Figure 2-3). Additional periods of substantial growth occurred between 1970 and 1980, when the population increased by 4,243 residents, and between 2010 and 2020, when it increased by 2,326 residents. More recently, the population increased by 2,326 residents between 2010 and 2020.

[1] DeBow, J. D. B. (1853). *1850 Census: The Seventh Census of the United States.* Table of Counties, Districts, and Parishes in the United States. Washington: Robert Armstrong, Public Printer. https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1850/1850a/1850a-14.pdf
[2] US Census Bureau. (2020). Table P1.

Figure 2-1: Trinity County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) Divisions

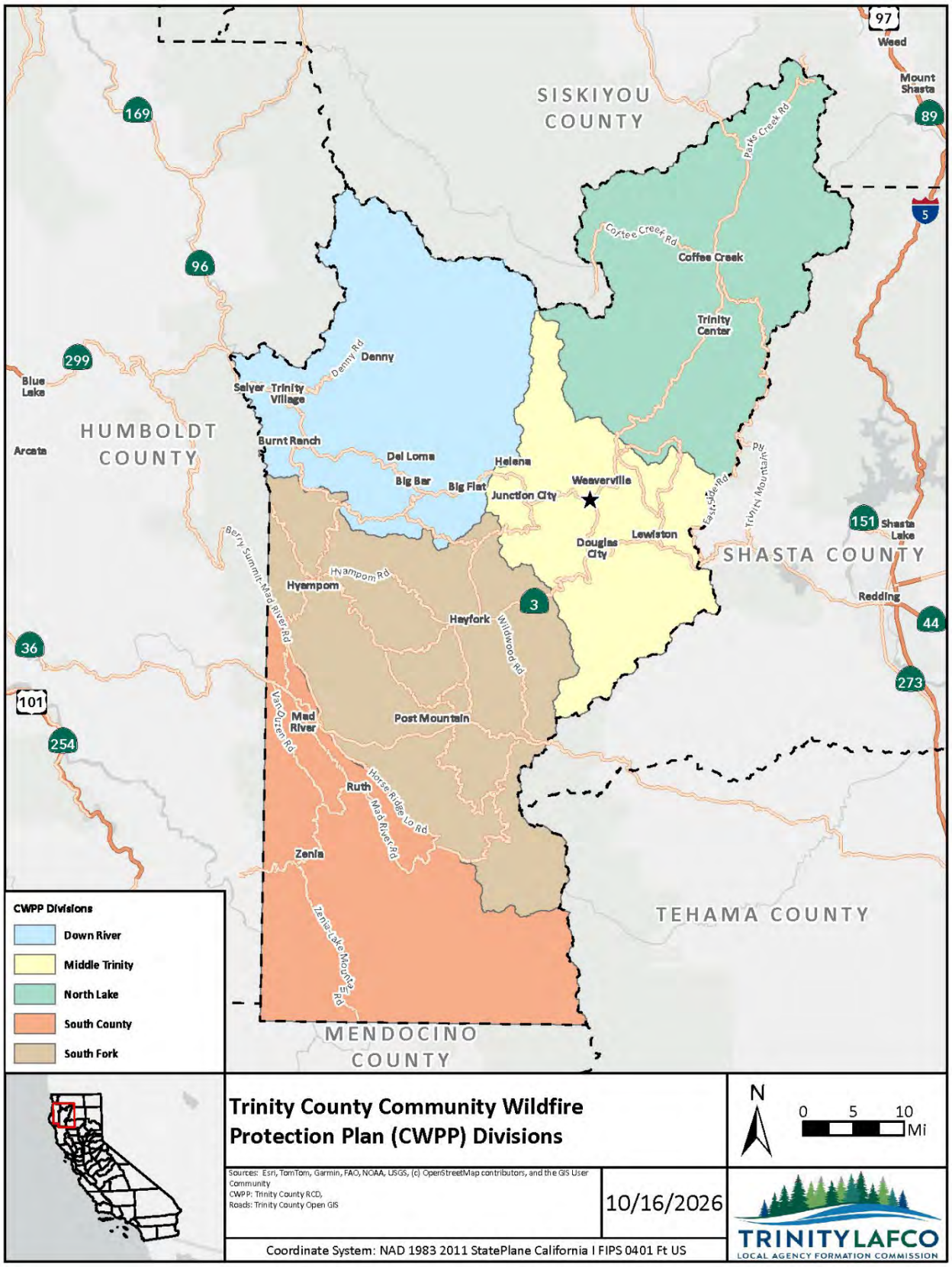
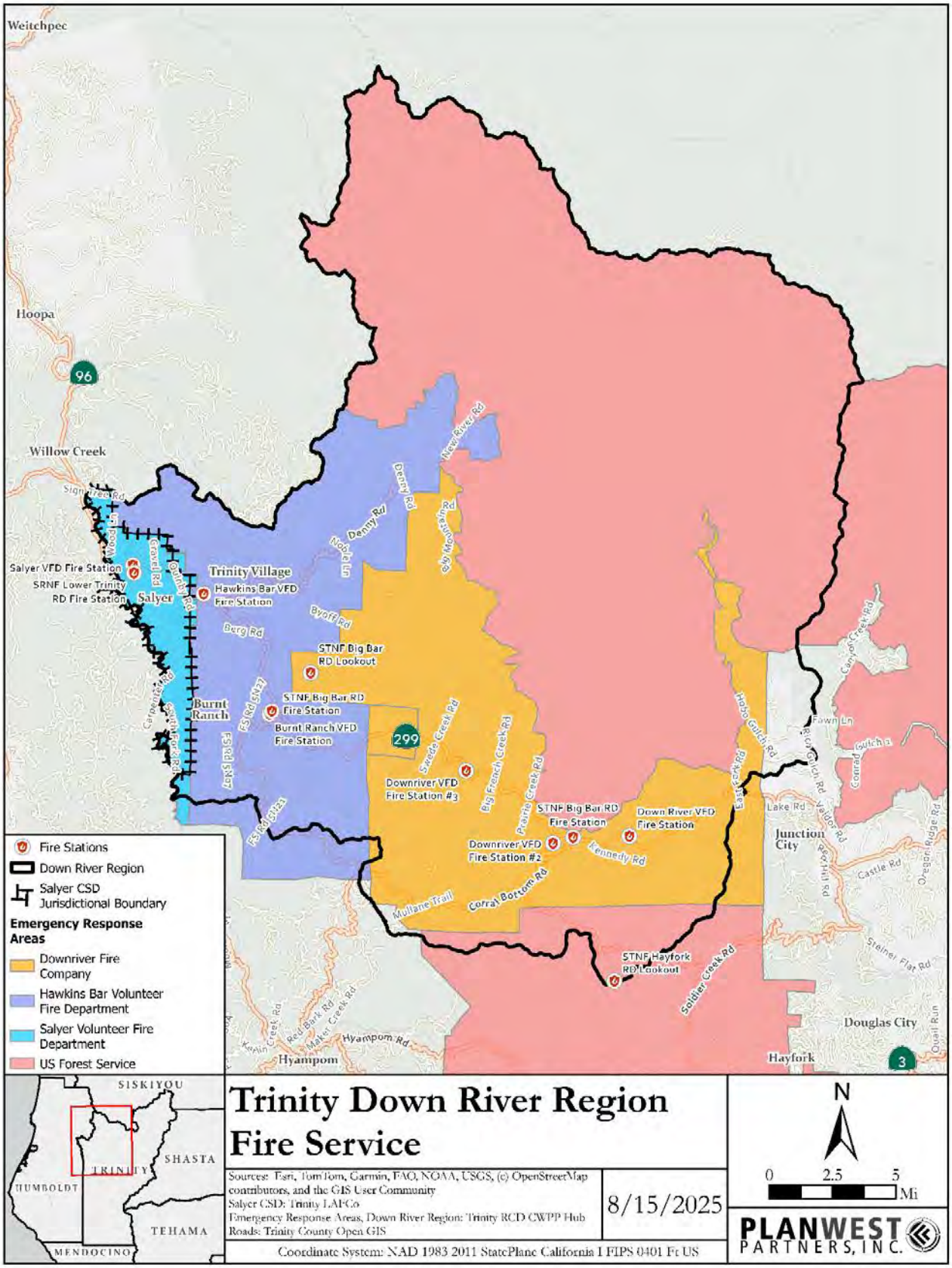
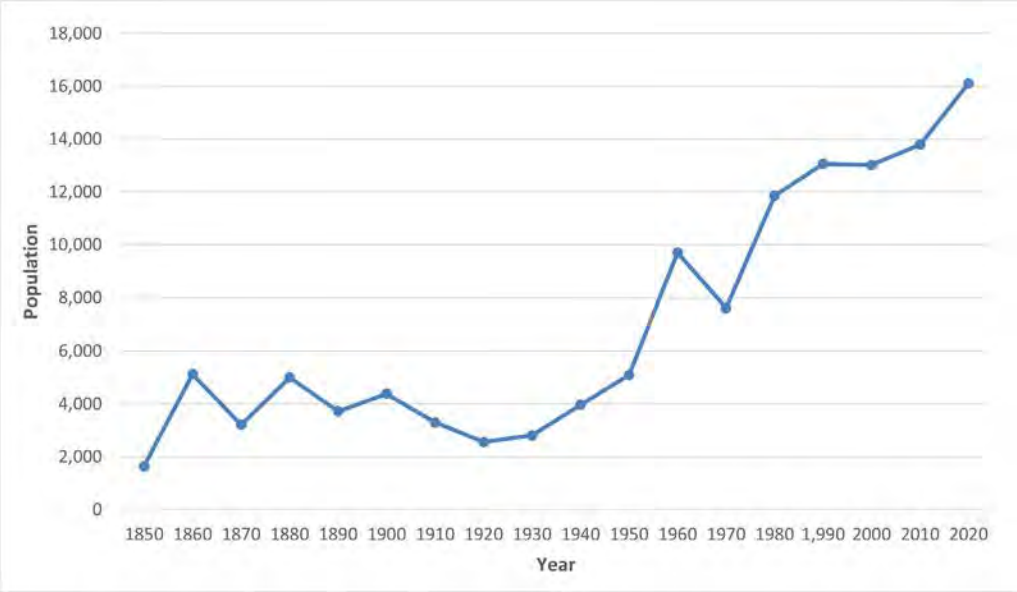


Figure 2-2: Down River Fire-Related District and Department Boundaries



The 2023 Trinity County Economic Forecast, which relies on Department of Finance (DOF) projections, anticipates a gradual population decline to approximately 15,330 residents by 2050[3]. Although the County is projected to experience a modest population decline, the County's 2050 General Plan Background Report anticipates a slight increase in the number of households, reflecting smaller average household sizes. The County's 2024–2029 Housing Element, adopted in 2025, also provides a framework for accommodating future housing needs and development. For purposes of this MSR, an annual population decline of approximately -0.4 percent is assumed as a planning estimate. Given the region's rural character, limited infrastructure, and geographic constraints, substantial permanent population growth is not anticipated during the planning horizon.

Figure 2-3: Decennial Census Population Data for Trinity County



Trinity County's aging population and relatively low household incomes have important implications for public service delivery. According to the County's 2024–2029 Housing Element, approximately 27.7 percent of residents were age 65 or older in 2022, and nearly 47 percent of households were headed by someone age 65 or older. The County's median age increased from 48.5 years in 2010 to 53.2 years in 2022. These characteristics may contribute to increased demand for emergency medical services, additional evacuation assistance needs, and a smaller pool of available volunteer firefighters.

Trinity County also faces significant socioeconomic challenges that affect the ability of residents and local agencies to fund essential public services. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2020–2024 American Community Survey, the County's median household income was approximately $53,000, with an estimated 23 percent of residents living below the poverty level. Many rural communities also experience characteristics associated with disadvantaged unincorporated communities (DUCs), including relatively low household incomes, limited infrastructure, and geographic isolation. Under Government Code Section 56033.5, a DUC is generally defined as inhabited unincorporated territory with a median household income of 80 percent or less of the statewide median household income. These socioeconomic conditions are particularly relevant to fire service planning, as they can constrain

[3] Trinity County Economic Forecast. 2023 County-Level Economic Forecast. DOF-Caltrans.

local revenue generation, limit the affordability of new special taxes, and increase reliance on volunteers, grants, and interagency cooperation to sustain emergency services.

Seasonal occupancy is another important consideration. Vacation homes, part-time residents, and visitors contribute to fluctuations in population and emergency service demand that are not reflected in permanent population estimates. At the same time, seasonal housing may limit the number of year-round residents available to volunteer. Relatively low household incomes and the prevalence of residents on fixed incomes are also important considerations when evaluating the affordability of new or expanded special taxes to support fire protection services.

2.3 Wildfire Risk and Community Preparedness

Wildfire represents one of the most significant hazards facing Trinity County and the Down River region. According to the 2025 Trinity County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP), approximately 40 percent of the County's land area has been affected by wildfire since 1998. Major incidents include the 2020 August Complex and the 2021 Monument Fire and River Complex. The Monument Fire directly threatened Down River communities, prompted evacuations, and resulted in closures of SR-299, illustrating the region's vulnerability to large wildfires and the importance of coordinated emergency response.

The CWPP identifies priority areas for fuels reduction, wildfire mitigation, and community preparedness. The Trinity County Fire Safe Council, Trinity County Resource Conservation District, Watershed Research and Training Center, and Willow Creek Fire Safe Council support these efforts through coordination with local fire departments, land management agencies, and community organizations.

Several Down River communities, including Salyer, Hawkins Bar, Burnt Ranch, and Big Bar/Big Flat, have received recognition through the National Fire Protection Association's Firewise USA® program. These community-led efforts support defensible space, vegetation management, and wildfire preparedness, complementing local fire protection services in areas where emergency response resources and access may be limited.

2.4 Wildfire Hazard Severity and Wildland Fire Responsibilities

In addition to its history of major wildfires, the Down River region contains extensive forestlands and areas of significant wildfire hazard. Much of the region is characterized by High or Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones, reflecting factors such as vegetation, terrain, and potential fire behavior. Wildfire hazard classifications describe the level of wildfire exposure, while federal and state responsibility area designations establish jurisdictional responsibilities for wildland fire protection. These distinctions are important for understanding the availability and capabilities of firefighting resources throughout the region.

Wildland fire protection responsibilities are divided among federal and state agencies. Federal Responsibility Areas (FRA) generally encompass federally administered lands, where wildland fire protection is the responsibility of federal agencies, primarily the U.S. Forest Service. State Responsibility Areas (SRA) generally include privately owned forestlands and other qualifying lands, where CAL FIRE has statutory responsibility for wildland fire protection. Direct Protection Areas (DPAs),

established through cooperative agreements, identify which agency provides primary wildland fire suppression response and may include lands under either federal or state jurisdiction.

This distinction is particularly important in the Down River region. While the Willow Creek area to the west is predominantly within CAL FIRE's direct protection area, much of the Down River region falls within federal direct protection areas served by the Forest Service. CAL FIRE does not maintain a station within the Down River study area, with nearby stations located in Trinidad and Weaverville over 50 miles away. Consequently, the availability and capabilities of state and federal firefighting resources differ across the region.

CAL FIRE maintains wildland firefighting resources and, depending on station assignments and local agreements, may also provide structural firefighting, emergency medical response, and rescue services. In contrast, the Forest Service focuses primarily on wildland fire prevention and suppression, with resources generally staffed seasonally and not routinely equipped or assigned to provide structural firefighting or other emergency services. Although both agencies participate in mutual aid and cooperative response arrangements, their missions, staffing, and operational capabilities are not interchangeable.

In December 2025, CAL FIRE and the Forest Service renewed the California Fire Master Agreement, establishing a five-year framework for cooperative wildfire response and risk reduction. The agreement emphasizes dispatching the closest available firefighting resources to wildfires regardless of jurisdiction and strengthens coordination in training, personnel, equipment, facilities, and hazardous fuels reduction. While this agreement supports more efficient interagency response and resource sharing, it does not eliminate differences in agency missions or establish comprehensive year-round structural fire protection, emergency medical response, or rescue services within the Down River region.

These differences place greater importance on local volunteer fire departments, which often provide the initial response to structure fires, medical emergencies, vehicle collisions, and other incidents. The combination of significant wildfire exposure, limited year-round agency resources, and substantial travel distances reinforces the need for reliable local response capabilities, coordinated mutual aid, and sustainable funding for fire protection services. These challenges are further compounded by the region's limited transportation network and emergency access constraints, as discussed in the following section.

2.5 Emergency Access and Evacuation

The Down River region's mountainous terrain, dispersed development, and limited road network create significant challenges for emergency access and evacuation. SR-299 is the primary east-west transportation corridor and provides access to many of the communities served by the three fire service providers. Narrow roadways, sharp curves, steep grades, and limited alternate routes can affect emergency response times and complicate evacuation during major incidents.

Winter storms, landslides, wildfires, and traffic collisions can result in temporary road closures or restricted access. Many residences are also served by narrow rural roads and private driveways that may present additional challenges for larger emergency vehicles. These conditions can delay

response, limit access to individual properties, and increase the importance of coordinated evacuation planning.

Trinity County addresses wildfire hazards, emergency access, and evacuation through its General Plan Safety Element, Emergency Operations Plan, Hazard Mitigation Plan, and related evacuation planning efforts. The County is also updating its General Plan through the Trinity County 2050 planning process, which includes consideration of wildfire hazards and public safety. These planning efforts provide a framework for identifying evacuation constraints, improving emergency preparedness, and coordinating response among public agencies.

The Trinity County Fire Safe Council, in coordination with the Sheriff's Office and Trinity County Resource Conservation District, has also developed a countywide evacuation zone mapping system identifying 387 evacuation zones. The mapping considers road access, population distribution, topography, and other geographic factors to support emergency notifications and evacuation coordination. Continued evaluation of evacuation routes and public outreach remains important, particularly in rural communities with limited alternate access.

SR-299 also generates emergency response demands associated with vehicle collisions and other incidents involving travelers who may not reside within the local service areas. This creates additional responsibilities for volunteer fire providers beyond the needs of the permanent population. Given the region's geographic isolation and limited transportation network, coordination among local fire departments, the Trinity County Sheriff's Office, County Office of Emergency Services, CAL FIRE, Forest Service, and neighboring agencies remains essential to effective emergency response and evacuation planning.

2.6 Regional Fire Service Coordination

The Trinity County Fire Chiefs Association provides an important forum for coordination among local fire departments and other emergency response agencies throughout the County. The Association supports communication and collaboration among fire service providers and participates in countywide wildfire planning, including review and approval of the Trinity County CWPP.

Regional cooperation is particularly important in Trinity County, where fire protection services are provided by numerous independent districts and volunteer organizations with varying resources and operational capabilities. Coordination among these providers, CAL FIRE, the Forest Service, and neighboring agencies supports mutual aid, training, equipment needs, and emergency response readiness.

These existing partnerships provide a foundation for exploring additional opportunities for shared staffing, administrative support, training, equipment procurement, and other regional service improvements while preserving local fire service organizations and community involvement.

3.0 Shared Challenges and Opportunities

The three Down River fire service providers face many of the same challenges, including limited funding, volunteer recruitment and retention, aging equipment, and increasing administrative demands. Their rural service areas, small populations, and geographic isolation further complicate emergency response and long-term planning. At the same time, the providers have demonstrated considerable resourcefulness through equipment improvements, communications upgrades, and cooperation with neighboring agencies.

This section summarizes shared challenges, recent accomplishments, and opportunities to strengthen fire and emergency services throughout the region..

3.1 Governance, Staffing, and Administrative Capacity

Volunteer recruitment and retention are among the most significant challenges facing the Down River fire service providers. Small and aging populations limit the number of available volunteers, while employment, family obligations, and training requirements can affect participation. Departments often depend on a small group of individuals for emergency response, leadership, and administrative responsibilities, increasing the risk of burnout and limiting opportunities for succession planning.

Administrative capacity is also constrained. Volunteer organizations and small special districts must manage financial records, insurance, reporting, regulatory compliance, and grant administration, often without dedicated administrative personnel. For Salyer CSD, maintaining an active governing board and meeting public agency administrative requirements are additional considerations.

These challenges underscore the potential benefits of shared administrative support, coordinated training, and regional staffing arrangements that reduce demands on individual volunteers while maintaining local service capabilities.

3.2 Financial and Operational Challenges

The three providers operate with limited financial resources and face increasing costs for apparatus, protective equipment, insurance, and facility maintenance. Grant funding has supported important capital improvements but is generally less reliable for ongoing operations, equipment replacement, and administrative expenses.

Insurance costs have become a particular concern for Hawkins Bar VFD and Downriver VFC. The increasing cost of turnout gear and other personal protective equipment also creates financial challenges, especially when equipment must be purchased for individual volunteers who may not remain with the department long term.

Local providers have also identified difficulties obtaining timely reimbursement for certain emergency responses on federal lands. These concerns are particularly relevant to Hawkins Bar VFD and Downriver VFC, which operate in areas with extensive federal landholdings. Reimbursement arrangements and eligibility depend on the circumstances of individual incidents and applicable agreements.

Emergency response along SR-299 represents a significant regional challenge. Local volunteer departments respond to vehicle collisions, medical emergencies, and rescue incidents involving residents and travelers, often beyond their primary service areas and without dedicated funding proportionate to service demands. According to Caltrans District 1 data referenced by the providers, SR-299 near Willow Creek carries approximately 8,000 vehicles per day, compared with approximately 7,000 along portions of U.S. Highway 101 near Garberville. Despite comparable traffic volumes, SR-299 is predominantly a two-lane mountain highway with limited alternate routes and fewer nearby emergency response resources.

The departments also evaluated CAL FIRE station coverage using 50-mile distance buffers, identifying significant gaps along the corridor. CAL FIRE resources based in Trinidad, Weaverville, and Hayfork provide regional support but are geographically distant from portions of the Down River region. Although the Forest Service provides wildland fire protection, its resources are not routinely equipped or assigned to provide structural firefighting, emergency medical, or vehicle rescue services. These conditions highlight a mismatch between regional emergency service demands and locally available resources and funding.

Table 3-1 summarizes the primary challenges identified by the three Down River fire service providers, highlighting both shared concerns and issues specific to individual organizations.

Table 3-1: Shared Challenges Among Down River Fire Service Providers

	Salyer CSD	Hawkins Bar VFD	Downriver VFC
Limited Operating Revenues	X	X	X
Volunteer Recruitment and Retention	X	X	X
Aging Volunteer Workforce	X	X	X
Equipment and Apparatus Costs	X	X	X
Turnout Gear and Protective Equipment	X	X	X
Leadership Succession Planning	X	X	X
Limited Administrative Capacity	X	X	X
Increasing Insurance Costs		X	X
Federal Incident Reimbursement Concerns		X	X
Direct Charge Administration	X		

3.3 Regional Collaboration and Accomplishments

Despite ongoing challenges, the Down River fire service providers have made improvements in communications, equipment, facilities, and regional coordination, supported by grant funding, community contributions, and partnerships with neighboring agencies.

All three providers have installed Starlink satellite internet systems to improve communications in areas with unreliable broadband and cellular service. Hawkins Bar VFD and Downriver VFC have also incorporated mobile Starlink equipment into their response capabilities. These improvements help

address communications limitations that can affect dispatch, incident coordination, and emergency operations.

Grant funding has also supported equipment and operational improvements throughout Trinity County. In 2025, volunteer fire departments countywide benefited from state funding secured with the assistance of Senator Mike McGuire for new and upgraded vehicle extrication equipment. Philanthropic organizations, including the Humboldt Area Foundation and Wild Rivers Community Foundation (HAF+WRCF), have also supported rural fire departments through grants for equipment, disaster preparedness, and related improvements. These investments, together with local fundraising, have helped strengthen emergency response capabilities despite limited operating revenues.

Recent improvements along SR-299, including paving and additional pullouts, have also benefited the region. While traffic collisions remain an ongoing source of emergency calls, improved roadway conditions can support safer travel and emergency access.

Regional collaboration remains another important accomplishment. The three providers maintain working relationships with neighboring fire departments, Trinity County, the Trinity County Fire Chiefs Association, CAL FIRE, and the Forest Service. Mutual aid, joint training, grant coordination, and equipment sharing help extend the capabilities of individual departments. Downriver VFC, located closest to Weaverville among the three providers, has also identified response support from CAL FIRE resources based in the Weaverville area as a benefit of regional coordination.

Table 3-2 summarizes selected improvements and accomplishments identified by the three Down River fire service providers.

Table 3-2: Shared Accomplishments and Improvements

	Salyer CSD	Hawkins Bar VFD	Downriver VFC
Starlink Communications	X	X	X
Mobile Starlink Equipment		X	X
SR-299 Roadway Improvements	X	X	X
Upgraded Extrication Equipment	X	X	X
Collaboration with Neighboring Providers	X	X	X
CAL FIRE Response Support (Weaverville)			X

3.4 Opportunities for Improved Service Delivery

Several opportunities have been identified to address shared operational challenges and improve regional service delivery.

- **Shared Equipment and Administrative Resources.** Regional approaches to equipment purchasing, training, and administrative support could reduce costs and demands on volunteers. One potential initiative is a "turnout closet" or shared inventory of turnout gear and other protective equipment to improve availability and reduce unnecessary purchases. Shared

administrative personnel or services could also assist with financial reporting, grant management, and regulatory compliance.

- **Communications and Emergency Access.** Continued communications improvements remain important along SR-299 and in remote communities. Local providers have identified satellite-enabled emergency call boxes as a potential means of addressing cellular coverage gaps along the highway. Implementation would require coordination with Caltrans, the California Highway Patrol, Trinity County, and other appropriate agencies.
- **Insurance and Financial Sustainability.** Opportunities to address rising insurance costs could include regional purchasing or pooling arrangements, improved risk management, and coordination with statewide organizations. More predictable operating revenues and coordinated capital replacement planning would also improve long-term financial stability.
- **SR-299 Emergency Response Coverage and Funding.** The highway corridor serves a regional traveling population and generates emergency service demands that extend beyond local tax bases. Regional partners, including Willow Creek Fire Protection District, have begun exploring opportunities for dedicated state funding to support emergency response along state highways. Additional coordination with CAL FIRE and other agencies could also help identify options for improving response coverage, including potential supplemental staffing or strategically located resources, such as a satellite CAL FIRE resident program in Willow Creek or additional strategically located paid response personnel. Continued coordination among state, county, and local agencies will be important in evaluating these opportunities.
- **Regional Staffing and Service Coordination.** Shared leadership, training personnel, administrative support, and coordinated staffing arrangements could improve response readiness while reducing the burden on individual departments. These approaches could be pursued through interagency agreements or as part of broader organizational changes, depending on community support, funding availability, and the needs of participating agencies.

Collectively, these opportunities provide a basis for strengthening existing partnerships and evaluating longer-term organizational options to improve the sustainability of fire and emergency services throughout the Down River region.

4.0 Agency Profile: Salyer CSD

The Salyer Community Services District ("Salyer CSD" or "District") is an independent special district providing fire protection, emergency medical response, and related emergency services to the unincorporated community of Salyer in western Trinity County, along State Route 299. Services are delivered through Salyer Volunteer Fire Department, Inc. (Salyer VFD), a separately organized nonprofit volunteer fire department. Salyer VFD provides local emergency response and participates in regional mutual aid and cooperative firefighting arrangements.

Table 4-1: Salyer CSD Contact Information

Primary Contact	Dave Murphy, Fire Chief
E-mail Address	salyervfd@outlook.com
Mailing Address	P.O. Box 503, Salyer, CA 95563
Phone Number	530-629-2778
Website	None

4.1 Organization & Governance

Formation and Authorized Services

Salyer CSD was formed in 1984 to establish a public agency responsible for providing fire and emergency services to the Salyer community. According to District representatives, formation was intended to improve access to funding opportunities and potentially reduce insurance costs through the establishment of a formal fire protection service provider.

The District operates under the Community Services District Law (Government Code §61000 et seq.), which authorizes community services districts to provide a range of public services, subject to their approved powers. Salyer CSD is authorized to provide fire protection and emergency response services, including structural and wildland fire suppression, emergency medical response, rescue, hazardous materials response, and related public assistance activities.

Other services authorized under the Community Services District Law but not activated by the District are considered latent powers and generally require LAFCo approval before they may be exercised (Government Code §56824.10 et seq.). The Salyer community is also served by two independently operated water systems: Salyer Mutual Water Company and Salyer Heights Water Supply, Inc. As a community services district, Salyer CSD could potentially activate water service powers and assume responsibility for one or both systems through negotiated agreements and applicable approval processes. Although outside the scope of this fire services MSR, this represents a potential opportunity for future coordination or integration of community services under a single public agency.

Governing Body & Administration

Salyer CSD is governed by a five-member Board of Directors elected to staggered four-year terms. The Board meets regularly on the first Wednesday of each month at the Salyer fire station. Board meetings are subject to the Ralph M. Brown Act, which establishes public meeting, noticing, and participation requirements.

Table 4-2: Salyer CSD Board of Directors

Board Member	Title	Term Expiration
Wes Otto	Chair	TBD
Rosalin Acuella	Commissioner	TBD
Ivy Peters	Commissioner	TBD
Sue Ayers	Commissioner	TBD
Terri Mierding	Commissioner/ Secretary	TBD

The District has no paid administrative or operational personnel. Day-to-day administration, financial management, and fire department operations are carried out by volunteers, including the Board Secretary, Treasurer/Bookkeeper, and Fire Chief. This volunteer-based structure limits administrative capacity, particularly for financial reporting, grant administration, regulatory compliance, and long-term planning.

Accountability & Transparency

As an independent special district, Salyer CSD is subject to the Ralph M. Brown Act and other state requirements governing public accountability, financial reporting, and transparency. The District reports that Board meeting agendas are posted at the fire station at least 72 hours before regular meetings, with agendas and minutes available upon request.

Senate Bill 929 (Government Code §53087.8) generally requires independent special districts to maintain a publicly accessible website containing specified information, including meeting agendas, contact information, and financial disclosures. Salyer CSD does not currently maintain a website. State law allows qualifying districts to claim an annual hardship exemption based on financial, staffing, or other specified constraints. Given its limited financial resources and volunteer-based administration, Salyer CSD should evaluate its eligibility for this exemption and, if applicable, adopt the required resolution annually until a compliant website can be established and maintained.

The District could also consider establishing a basic website or social media presence to improve public communication, share meeting and emergency preparedness information, and support volunteer recruitment. Although social media does not substitute for a legally required website, it could provide an accessible and low-cost means of increasing community engagement and transparency.

4.2 Service Area & Population

Jurisdictional Boundary

Salyer CSD encompasses approximately 12,301 acres (19.22 square miles) in western Trinity County (Figure 4-1). The District includes the unincorporated community of Salyer and surrounding rural residential, agricultural, and forested lands.

SR-299 serves as the primary transportation corridor through the District, connecting Salyer with Willow Creek to the west and other Down River communities to the east. State Route 96 intersects SR-299 near Willow Creek, approximately 5.5 miles northwest of Salyer. Local access is provided primarily

by narrow rural roads, many of which are unpaved, with limited alternate routes. These conditions can affect emergency response times and evacuation during major incidents.

Sphere of Influence

Salyer CSD's existing sphere of influence (SOI) is coterminous with its jurisdictional boundary. As part of this MSR, potential regional fire service reorganization alternatives were evaluated, including annexation of surrounding areas to Salyer CSD, consolidation with neighboring service providers, and formation of a new district. These alternatives could result in future changes to the District's boundaries, service responsibilities, or SOI.

While expansion of Salyer CSD's SOI eastward has been identified as a potential option, further coordination among affected fire service providers, governing bodies, and communities is needed to evaluate organizational feasibility, financial sustainability, service delivery arrangements, and local support. Accordingly, this MSR recommends retaining the District's existing coterminous SOI at this time, while recognizing that future SOI amendments may be appropriate as regional governance and service delivery alternatives are further developed.

Land Use & Zoning

Land use within Salyer CSD is governed by the Trinity County General Plan and Zoning Regulations (Trinity County Code Title 17). The County is undertaking a comprehensive General Plan update, which may result in changes to applicable land use policies and designations.

The developed portion of Salyer consists primarily of rural residential, agricultural, and village-oriented uses, with surrounding areas designated predominantly for resource lands (Figure 4-2).

Development is dispersed throughout the District, reflecting the area's mountainous terrain, forested landscape, and limited infrastructure. These characteristics constrain opportunities for substantial new development and contribute to the challenges of providing emergency services across a geographically extensive, low-density service area.

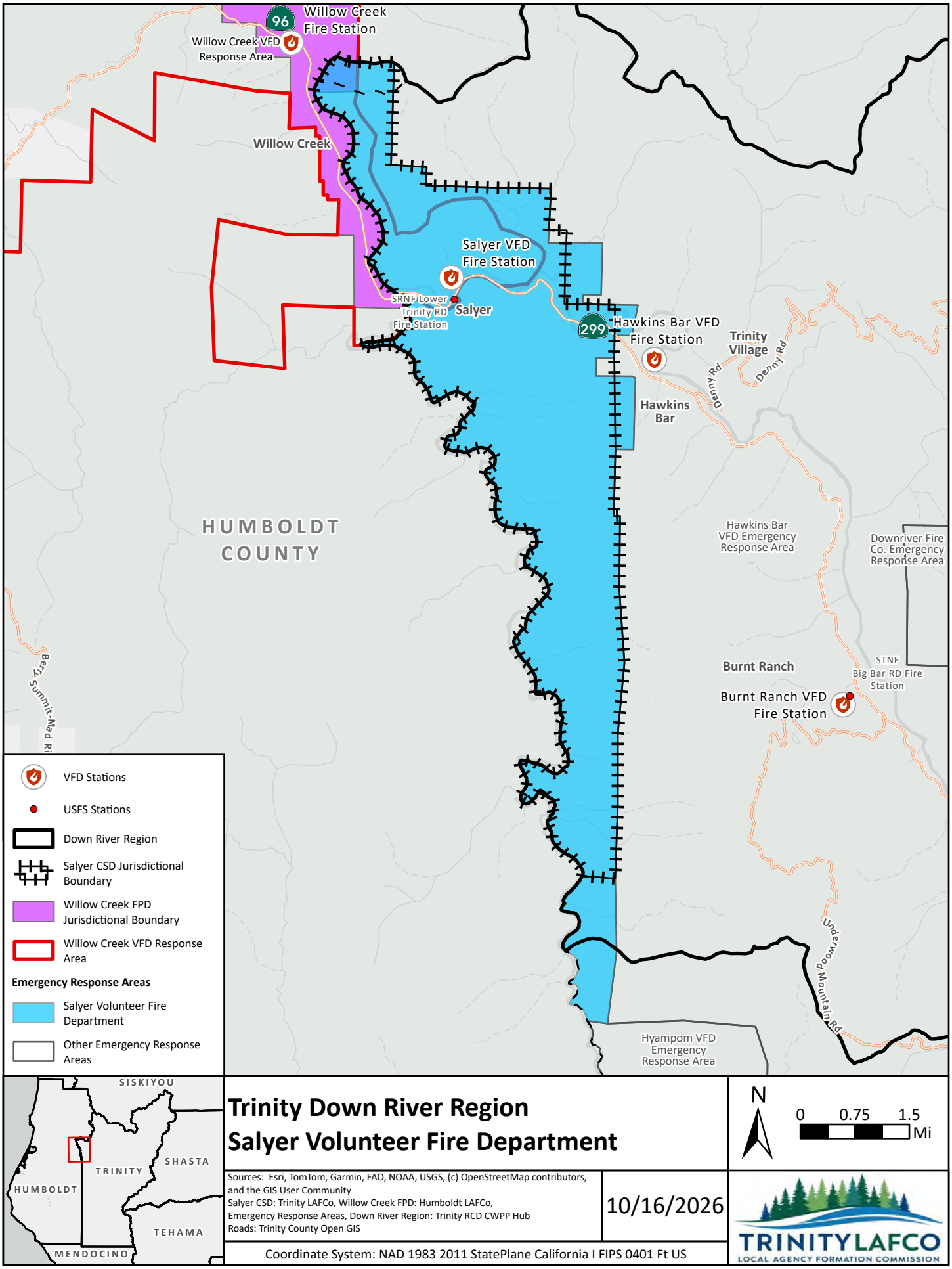
Population & Growth Projections

According to the 2020 Decennial Census, the Salyer Census Designated Place (CDP) had a population of 389 residents[4]. However, the CDP encompasses a smaller geographic area than Salyer CSD and therefore does not represent the District's entire population.

American Community Survey (ACS) estimates indicate a population of approximately 433 residents in 2020 and 487 in 2023[5]. These estimates have substantial margins of error, particularly given the community's small population, and should be interpreted cautiously rather than as evidence of significant population growth.

District representatives estimate that approximately 750 year-round residents live within the District's service area, with an additional 100 seasonal residents or visitors. Approximately five percent of housing units are reportedly used as seasonal or vacation homes. Although this estimate is higher than published Census figures, it encompasses the District's larger geographic service area.

[4] U.S. Census Bureau. Table P1 Race. 2020 Decennial Census.
[5] U.S. Census Bureau. Table DP05 ACS Demographic and Housing Estimates. 2020 & 2023.



Trinity Down River Region
Salyer Volunteer Fire Department

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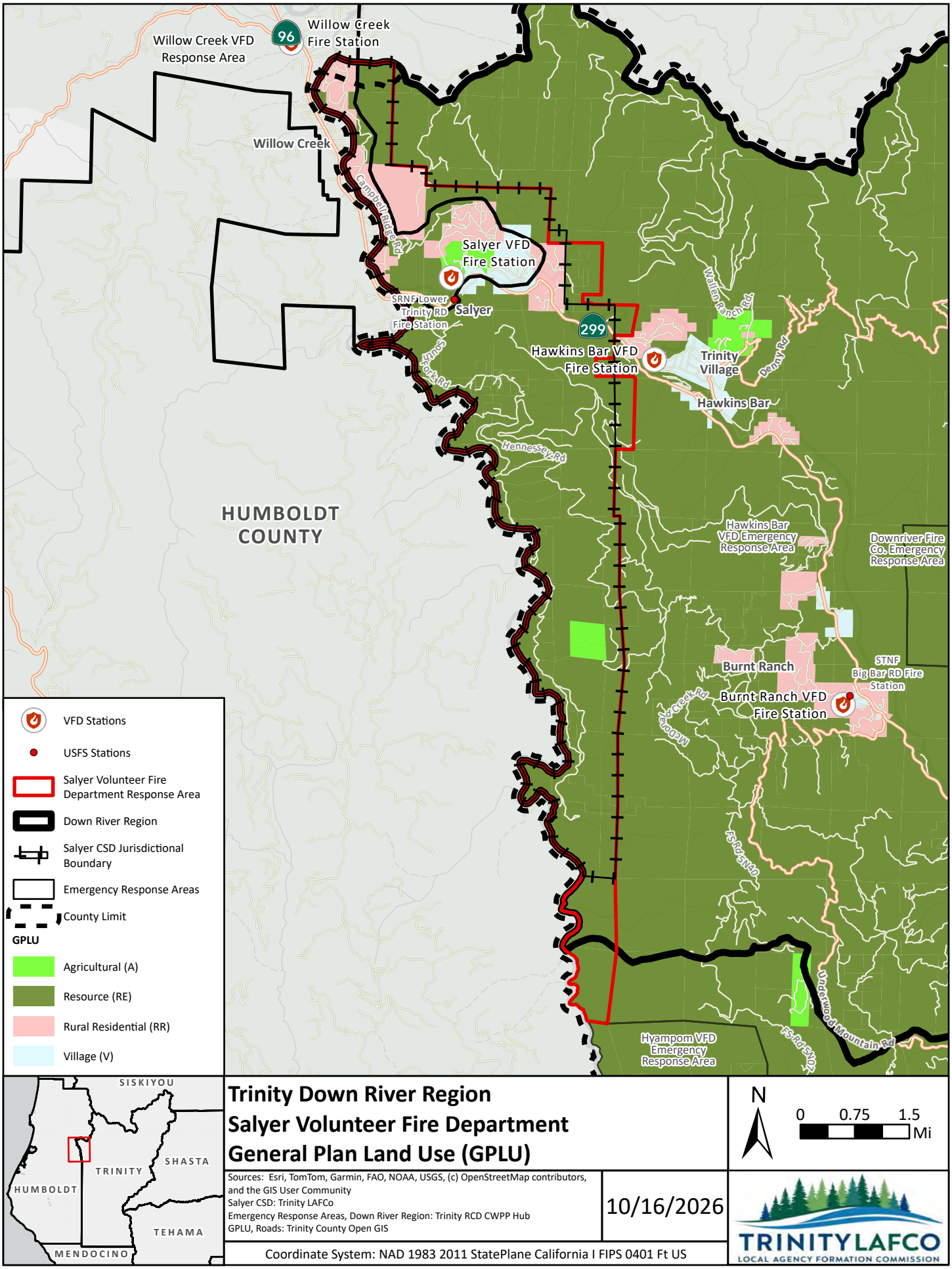
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Sources: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, (c) OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community
Salyer CSD: Trinity LAFCo, Willow Creek FPD: Humboldt LAFCo,
Emergency Response Areas, Down River Region: Trinity RCD CWPP Hub
Roads: Trinity County Open GIS

10/16/2026

Coordinate System: NAD 1983 2011 StatePlane California I FIPS 0401 Ft US

TRINITY LAFCO
LOCAL AGENCY FORMATION COMMISSION



Trinity Down River Region
Salyer Volunteer Fire Department
General Plan Land Use (GPLU)

Sources: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, (c) OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community
Salyer CSD: Trinity LAFCo
Emergency Response Areas, Down River Region: Trinity RCD CWPP Hub
GPLU, Roads: Trinity County Open GIS

10/16/2026

Coordinate System: NAD 1983 2011 StatePlane California I FIPS 0401 Ft US

TRINITY LAFCO
LOCAL AGENCY FORMATION COMMISSION

For purposes of this MSR, the District-reported estimate of approximately 750 year-round residents is used, recognizing that a parcel-based population estimate has not been independently verified.

Trinity County had a population of 16,112 residents in 2020. The California Department of Transportation's 2023 economic forecast projects a decline to approximately 15,330 residents by 2050, representing a decrease of approximately 4.9 percent. This projection reflects the County's long-term demographic challenges, including an aging population and limited population growth.

Given the District's rural character, limited development potential, and broader countywide population trends, substantial population growth is not anticipated within Salyer CSD over the next five to ten years. Future service demands are more likely to be influenced by seasonal population fluctuations, emergency incidents along SR-299, wildfire risk, and changes in regional service responsibilities than by significant residential development.

Disadvantaged Unincorporated Communities

Government Code §56430 requires LAFCos to consider the location and characteristics of disadvantaged unincorporated communities (DUCs) as part of municipal service reviews. A DUC is generally defined as an inhabited unincorporated area with a median household income (MHI) less than 80 percent of the statewide MHI.

Based on the 2024 American Community Survey five-year estimates provided for this review, the Salyer CDP has an estimated MHI of $55,000, approximately 55 percent of the statewide MHI of $100,149. Trinity County's estimated MHI is $53,002, or approximately 53 percent of the statewide figure. These figures indicate that Salyer meets the income criterion for designation as a disadvantaged unincorporated community, although the CDP boundary does not encompass the entire District.

Several communities within and near the Down River region have MHI substantially below the statewide median, as summarized in Table 4-3. Of the four communities evaluated, Salyer, Burnt Ranch, and Willow Creek fall below the 80% statewide MHI threshold commonly used to identify disadvantaged communities, while Trinity Village exceeds this threshold.

Table 4-3: Median Household Income and Disadvantaged Community Status

Community	Estimated MHI	Percent of State MHI	Below 80% Threshold
Salyer	$55,000	55%	Yes
Burnt Ranch	$49,226	49%	Yes
Trinity Village	$87,361	87%	No
Willow Creek	$47,137	47%	Yes
Trinity County	$53,002	53%	Yes

Burnt Ranch and Trinity Village are located east of the District, while Willow Creek is located approximately 5.5 miles northwest of Salyer in Humboldt County. Although Trinity Village does not meet the income threshold based on available estimates, the broader Down River region includes several economically disadvantaged communities with limited access to public services and infrastructure.

The presence of disadvantaged communities is an important consideration in evaluating future service boundaries, fire protection funding, and regional governance alternatives. Any proposed SOI expansion or annexation should consider the service needs and financial capacity of affected communities, including the potential effects of extending existing or establishing new special taxes to support fire and emergency services.

4.3 Services & Operations

Salyer VFD responds to approximately 120 calls for service annually, averaging roughly 10 calls per month. The Department provides structural and wildland fire suppression, emergency medical response, motor vehicle accident response, rescue services, hazardous materials response, and other public assistance activities within the Salyer community and surrounding areas.

Available incident data indicate that emergency medical services represent a substantial portion of the Department's workload. Third-party records attributed to the National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS) identify 102 incidents during 2024, including 51 emergency medical incidents (50 percent), eight fire-related incidents (8 percent), and 43 other incidents (42 percent).

SR-299 is a major source of emergency response demand, particularly for motor vehicle accidents and associated medical and rescue incidents. The highway serves as the primary east-west transportation corridor through the Down River region, with winding roadways, steep terrain, and limited alternate access routes presenting challenges for emergency response. Incidents along the highway may require extended response times, technical rescue capabilities, traffic control, and coordination among multiple emergency service providers.

Salyer VFD also participates in regional mutual aid, providing assistance to neighboring fire departments and receiving additional resources when necessary. Available third-party incident data report 45 mutual aid responses given and 11 received during 2024. This regional interdependence is particularly important given the limited staffing and resources available to individual volunteer fire departments throughout the Down River corridor.

4.4 Facilities & Equipment

Salyer VFD operates from a fire station located at 275 Salyer Loop Road in Salyer. The station is reportedly in generally good condition, although a recent inspection associated with a change in insurance providers identified electrical deficiencies that the Department is working to address. Recent facility improvements include the installation of a Ready Rack turnout gear washer and Smart-Dry 6 drying cabinet, supporting proper cleaning, drying, and maintenance of firefighter protective equipment.

The Department maintains four operational apparatus, consisting of two fire engines, one rescue vehicle, and one water tender. An additional fire engine is no longer in service due to its age and condition. Several of the Department's operational vehicles date to the 1980s, presenting long-term replacement and maintenance considerations.

Salyer VFD has demonstrated success in obtaining competitive federal grant funding to support equipment purchases and emergency response capabilities. Publicly available grant records identify

four FEMA Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) awards between 2014 and 2024, totaling approximately $724,000 in reported federal funding. These include awards of approximately $42,400 in 2014, $545,922 in 2022, $88,700 in 2023, and $47,100 in 2024. The substantial 2022 award was identified as supporting the acquisition of fire and rescue apparatus, protective equipment, and other emergency response resources. Specific expenditures and the status of grant-funded purchases remain subject to District confirmation.

According to District representatives, Salyer VFD has secured sufficient grant funding toward the purchase of a new fire engine, although procurement has not yet begun. Beyond the planned engine replacement, the Department has not identified other immediate apparatus needs but recognizes the importance of developing a long-term replacement schedule for its aging fleet.

Table 4-4: Salyer VFD Apparatus Information

Apparatus	Year	Type	Pump (GPM)	Tank (Gal)
Water Tender	2005			3,000
Fire Engine		6		400
Fire Engine	1984	2		
Rescue Rig	1985		N/A	N/A

ISO Rating

The Insurance Services Office (ISO) Public Protection Classification (PPC) program evaluates community fire protection capabilities, including emergency communications, fire department resources, and water supply. Classifications range from 1 (highest level of recognized protection) to 10 (not meeting minimum criteria). These classifications are among the factors insurers may consider when establishing property insurance premiums.

As of 2026, Salyer CSD's reported ISO classification is [confirm current rating]. The District has a classification of [X] for properties located within five road miles of a fire station and within 1,000 feet of a recognized fire hydrant, and [X] for properties located within five road miles of a fire station but beyond 1,000 feet of a hydrant.

According to District representatives, Salyer VFD previously held an ISO Class 10 rating before improvements to the community's water supply infrastructure. Improvements undertaken by Salyer Mutual Water Company, including replacement of water distribution lines and installation of fire hydrants, enhanced the availability of water for fire suppression and reportedly contributed to an improved ISO classification.

District representatives have also reported reductions in fire insurance costs following these improvements. However, individual insurance premiums depend on multiple factors, including property characteristics, wildfire exposure, insurer underwriting practices, and market conditions. The Department's improved fire protection infrastructure and the community's Firewise USA recognition represent positive developments in local fire preparedness, although neither guarantees reduced insurance premiums.

4.5 Staffing & Service Capacity

Volunteer Staffing

Salyer VFD currently maintains approximately 11 volunteer firefighters on its roster, with approximately five that are considered active and regularly available to respond to emergencies. This represents a substantial decline from the approximately 25 volunteers historically maintained before the COVID-19 pandemic. District representatives attribute this decline to an aging population, relocation of existing volunteers, and limited recruitment of new residents. These challenges are common among rural volunteer fire departments and can affect staffing availability, response capacity, and the long-term sustainability of services.

The Department relies primarily on word of mouth to recruit new volunteers and does not currently maintain a formal recruitment program. Expanded community outreach, including social media and coordinated regional recruitment efforts, could help attract additional members. With sufficient financial resources, volunteer stipends, pay-per-call programs, or other incentives could also be considered to support recruitment and retention.

Fire Chief Dave Murphy has served in his position since the District's formation in 1984 and has expressed interest in transitioning out of the Chief role while remaining involved as a volunteer firefighter. The District is currently seeking to identify a suitable successor to serve as Fire Chief. Establishing a formal succession plan, including leadership development and transition of administrative responsibilities, will be important to maintaining continuity of operations.

Training & Certifications

Salyer VFD has reported ongoing challenges in obtaining and maintaining firefighter training and certifications, primarily due to the limited availability of local training opportunities and the travel and time commitments required of volunteers.

Historically, Department personnel participated in training offered through College of the Redwoods and the Humboldt Fire Chiefs Association at the Willow Creek Fire Protection District station. According to District representatives, these opportunities are no longer regularly available. More comprehensive training programs are offered through Shasta College in Redding; however, the travel distance and substantial time commitments associated with these courses present significant barriers for volunteers balancing employment and other responsibilities.

Some training opportunities, including Public Safety First Aid (PSFA/Title 22), are periodically offered through Trinity County Life Support CSD in Weaverville. Although these programs are more accessible than training in Redding, travel requirements remain a challenge. Expanded regional training partnerships, shared instructors, and locally hosted certification courses could improve access and help maintain volunteer qualifications.

The Department has identified volunteer recruitment and expanded training and certification opportunities as priorities for the coming years. All nine reported volunteers have completed Public Safety First Aid training, including two certified Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs). Four volunteers hold Fire Fighter I or higher certifications, while three have swiftwater rescue training and three hold driver/operator qualifications. Table 4-5 summarizes reported training qualifications.

Table 4-5: Training Qualifications

Training Qualification	# of Members
CPR/AED	9
Public Safety First Aid (PSFA / Title 22)	TBD
Fire Fighter I or above	4
Wildland Fire Qualifications (CICCS)	TBD
Emergency Medical Responder (EMR)	2
Emergency Medical Technician (EMT)	2
Paramedic	0
HazMat First Responder Operations	TBD
Rope Rescue	TBD
Swiftwater Rescue	3
Driver/Operator	3

Limited access to training, combined with a declining volunteer workforce, presents ongoing challenges for maintaining operational readiness and developing future Department leadership. Improved training coordination and shared resources among neighboring fire service providers could strengthen regional emergency response capabilities and support long-term volunteer retention.

4.6 Mutual Aid & Regional Coordination

Mutual aid is fundamental to fire and emergency response in the Down River region, where small volunteer fire departments serve geographically dispersed communities with limited staffing and equipment. Salyer VFD participates in a regional response network involving neighboring fire service providers, including Hawkins Bar VFD, Downriver VFC, and Willow Creek FPD, as well as state and federal wildland fire agencies.

Available incident data demonstrate Salyer VFD's active role in providing mutual aid throughout the region. Third-party records derived from the National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS) identify 45 mutual aid responses given and 11 received during 2024, out of 102 reported incidents. These figures suggest that the Department provides assistance to neighboring agencies more frequently than it receives assistance, underscoring its importance within the regional emergency response network. The figures should be verified against the Department's official incident records, including the locations and types of mutual aid responses.

The Forest Service and CAL FIRE provide additional wildland fire suppression resources within the region, subject to resource availability. CAL FIRE may also provide assistance with structure fires and other emergencies through mutual aid arrangements. Trinity County Office of Emergency Services (OES) supports broader emergency preparedness, disaster response coordination, evacuation planning, public notifications, and requests for additional resources during significant emergencies. These state, federal, and county partnerships are particularly important during major wildfires, winter storms, and other incidents that exceed local response capabilities.

Salyer VFD's substantial mutual aid activity highlights the interconnected nature of emergency services throughout the Down River region. However, the Department's limited active volunteer staffing and aging apparatus may constrain its ability to respond simultaneously to incidents within its District and requests for assistance elsewhere. Continued interagency coordination, joint training, shared resources, and effective dispatch arrangements will be important to maintaining regional response capacity.

4.7 Financial Overview

Salyer CSD is responsible for funding fire protection and emergency services within its jurisdiction. The District operates with a relatively limited annual budget supported primarily by property tax revenues and its existing parcel-based special tax. Fire protection services are provided through Salyer Volunteer Fire Department, Inc., a nonprofit organization that contracts with the District and independently pursues grant funding for equipment and other capital needs.

As an independent community services district, Salyer CSD is governed by the Community Services District Law (Government Code Section 61000 et seq.). Government Code Section 61110 establishes the annual budget process, including adoption of a preliminary budget by June 30 and a final budget by September 1, subject to applicable statutory requirements.

Revenues & Expenditures

The District's principal recurring revenue source is its voter-approved special tax, currently levied at $50 per unimproved parcel and $100 per improved parcel. Additional revenues may include interest earnings, incident-related reimbursements, and other miscellaneous income. The special tax is administered through the Trinity County property tax system and collected annually on property tax bills as a direct charge. The District is responsible for submitting its annual special tax levy information to the County Auditor-Controller by August 10 for inclusion on the upcoming fiscal year's secured property tax roll. Tax revenues are subsequently collected and distributed to the District through the County's property tax administration process.

Salyer CSD has submitted annual financial transaction reports to the California State Controller's Office since at least 2003. As shown in Table 4-6, reported annual revenues ranged from approximately $37,000 to $66,000 between FY 2020–21 and FY 2023–24, while expenditures ranged from approximately $35,000 to $55,000. The District reported operating deficits in FY 2020–21 and FY 2021–22, followed by surpluses of approximately $12,700 in FY 2022–23 and $9,100 in FY 2023–24.

The District's adopted FY 2023–24 budget anticipated $40,000 in revenues and expenditures. Major budgeted expenses included materials and supplies ($8,030), insurance ($7,100), workers' compensation ($6,000), audit services ($5,000), and equipment maintenance ($4,000). Together, these categories represented approximately 75 percent of the annual budget. The District also budgeted $2,831 for annual debt service associated with a U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) loan for its fire station, along with expenses for fuel, utilities, communications, bookkeeping, and other administrative functions. With no paid personnel, expenditures are primarily associated with maintaining facilities, equipment, insurance coverage, and essential administrative functions.

Table 4-6: State Controller's Office Financial Summary

Fiscal Year	Revenues	Expenditures	Net Gain/(Loss)
FY 2020-21	$37,241.00	$40,971.00	**($3,730.00)**
FY 2021-22	$54,470.00	$54,798.00	**($328.00)**
FY 2022-23	$65,705.00	$53,024.00	**$12,681.00**
FY 2023-24	$44,659.00	$35,553.00	**$9,106.00**

Source: California State Controller's Office, Special Districts Financial Transactions Reports

Financial Audits & Fiscal Condition

The District provided audited financial statements for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2021, prepared by Horton McNulty & Saeteurn, LLP. The independent auditors issued an unmodified opinion, finding that the financial statements fairly presented the District's financial position in accordance with applicable accounting principles.

As of June 30, 2021, the District reported total assets of $184,917, liabilities of $50,494, and net position of $134,423. Assets included $19,003 in cash and cash equivalents, $15,586 in special tax receivables, and approximately $148,596 in net capital assets. The District's unrestricted net position totaled $31,120.

The District reported a $23,927 decrease in net position during FY 2020–21, with total expenses of $61,168 exceeding revenues of $37,241. Total expenses included $15,514 in noncash depreciation and $1,909 in interest expenses. Excluding depreciation, expenses totaled $45,654, resulting in a shortfall of $8,413. The audited financial statements also identify a USDA loan originally obtained in FY 2007–08 for $55,000 to acquire a new fire station. The outstanding principal balance was $45,293 as of June 30, 2021, with annual debt service of approximately $2,831 and scheduled payments extending through 2048.

Table 4-7: Salyer CSD FY 2020-21 Audited Financial Summary

	FY 2020-2021
Special Tax Revenue	$37,231
Interest Income	$10
Total Revenues	**$37,241**
Fire Department Operations	$26,418
Insurance	$9,223
Legal and Professional Services	$4,500
Utilities	$3,604
Depreciation	$15,514
Interest Expense	$1,909
Total Expenditures	**$61,168**
Net Gain/(Loss)	**(23,927)**
Cash and Cash Equivalents	$19,003

Net Capital Assets	$148,596
Total Liabilities	$50,494
Total Net Position	**$134,423**

Source: Salyer CSD FY 2020–21 Audited Financial Statements

The FY 2020–21 audit identified a significant deficiency in internal controls related to bank reconciliations. Specifically, reconciliations were not consistently completed in a timely manner, and an independent review process was not in place. The finding had also been identified in the prior-year audit. The auditors recommended monthly bank reconciliations and independent review by a Board member or officer not involved in cash disbursements. District management indicated its intent to implement corrective procedures. The audit did not identify any material weaknesses in internal control or reportable instances of noncompliance. However, the recurring deficiency underscores the administrative challenges associated with maintaining adequate financial oversight in a small, volunteer-operated district.

Financing Constraints & Opportunities

Salyer CSD's limited recurring revenues, reliance on volunteer personnel, aging apparatus, and ongoing facility and equipment costs present challenges for long-term financial sustainability. District representatives have expressed interest in increasing the existing special tax from $50 to $100 per unimproved parcel and from $100 to $150 per improved parcel, subject to community support, Board action, and voter approval.

Based on preliminary parcel estimates developed for this MSR using County Assessor use codes, the existing special tax would generate approximately $33,100 annually. However, District representatives indicated that this estimate understates actual revenues because Assessor use codes do not always reflect improvements or changes in property development. The District tries to maintain and update its annual special tax charge list to account for any changes or improvements and ensure parcels are assessed at the appropriate rate. Based on the same preliminary parcel data, increasing the tax by $50 per parcel category could generate approximately $51,570 annually, an increase of $18,470. These estimates should be refined using the District's current special tax charge list and reconciled with County assessment records.

The District and Salyer VFD have also obtained outside financial assistance, including competitive grants for fire equipment and emergency response resources. The FY 2020–21 audit documents that the nonprofit fire department obtains equipment grants and transfers title to acquired capital assets to the District. This arrangement provides an important mechanism for financing capital improvements, although competitive grants are generally restricted to specific purposes and cannot be relied upon to fund recurring operational expenses.

Preliminary revenue modeling also indicates that broader service area and reorganization alternatives could provide additional funding opportunities. However, expanded boundaries would introduce corresponding service obligations, potentially requiring additional staffing, apparatus, facilities, and administrative capacity. Any future annexation or consolidation should therefore be supported by a comprehensive financial and operational analysis.

Regional collaboration with neighboring fire service providers may also create opportunities to share administrative responsibilities, coordinate training, pursue joint grants, improve equipment utilization, and strengthen volunteer recruitment and retention. These opportunities are evaluated further in the regional governance and service delivery alternatives discussed later in this MSR.

4.8 Wildfire Risk and Community Preparedness

The Salyer community faces significant wildfire exposure due to its location within the wildland-urban interface, surrounding forested terrain, and dispersed residential development. Steep slopes, heavy vegetation, and limited access routes increase the potential for rapid wildfire spread and complicate emergency response and evacuation. SR-299 serves as the primary transportation corridor, while local roads, including South Fork Road, provide access to residential areas with limited alternate routes.

Salyer is recognized as a Firewise USA community, with local preparedness efforts supported by the Willow Creek Fire Safe Council and regional partners. These initiatives emphasize defensible space, vegetation management, home hardening, and community education to reduce wildfire risk. The Trinity County Fire Safe Council and Trinity County Resource Conservation District (TCRCD) also support community wildfire preparedness and fuel reduction activities throughout the Down River region.

The 2025 Trinity County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) identifies several priority fuel reduction projects in the Salyer area, including roadside treatments along South Fork Road, defensible space improvements near Oden Flat Road, and a proposed community fuel break. TCRCD has also advanced fuel reduction work in the Salyer area through the Greater Willow Creek Wildfire Resilience Project. These efforts support improved community protection and emergency access, although continued maintenance, interagency coordination, and reliable local emergency response capacity remain important to long-term wildfire resilience.

4.9 Service Challenges & Opportunities

Salyer VFD faces ongoing challenges related to volunteer recruitment and leadership succession. Like many rural fire service providers, the Department relies on a small group of dedicated volunteers to maintain emergency response capabilities. Despite ongoing recruitment efforts, the Department reports a substantial decline in community interest in volunteering, making it increasingly difficult to maintain a consistent roster. Limited staffing places additional demands on existing members, increasing the potential for volunteer fatigue and burnout and affecting the Department's ability to sustain long-term operations.

Leadership succession represents another significant concern. Fire Chief Murphy has served in this capacity since the District's formation and has expressed an interest in retiring. Identifying and preparing a successor will be important to maintaining continuity of operations, institutional knowledge, and organizational leadership. Expanded training opportunities and leadership development could help facilitate this transition and strengthen the Department's long-term stability.

Limited personnel availability, travel distances, and competing work and family commitments also present challenges for maintaining training and certifications. Greater coordination with neighboring

fire service providers could expand access to training, improve operational readiness, and reduce the administrative burden on individual departments.

Despite these challenges, Salyer CSD and Salyer VFD have made improvements to their facilities, apparatus, and emergency response capabilities. The Department has successfully pursued equipment upgrades and outside grant funding to support capital improvements despite limited local revenues. Continued investment in equipment, facilities, and volunteer training will be important to sustaining reliable emergency services.

Salyer CSD representatives have expressed openness to exploring regional fire service reorganization and a willingness to serve as an annexing agency if supported by neighboring providers and communities in the future. As an established public special district with an existing special tax, Salyer CSD could provide an organizational and funding framework for broader regional fire service coordination without requiring the formation of a new public agency. Such an approach would build upon existing governance infrastructure while allowing participating communities and fire service providers to collaboratively determine an appropriate operational structure.

Any proposed reorganization would require careful consideration of governance, local representation, staffing, service responsibilities, financial capacity, and operational needs across the participating service areas. Potential arrangements could preserve existing volunteer fire organizations while providing opportunities for shared leadership, administrative support, training, equipment, and coordinated emergency response. The objective would be to develop a sustainable regional service model that strengthens emergency response capabilities, supports local volunteer participation, and addresses the needs of each community. These considerations are evaluated further in the regional governance and service delivery alternatives discussed later in this MSR.

Opportunities for shared leadership, administrative support, training, equipment, and volunteer recruitment could help address challenges common to neighboring Down River fire service providers. These considerations are evaluated further in the regional governance and service delivery alternatives discussed later in this MSR.

5.0 Agency Profile: Hawkins Bar VFD

The Hawkins Bar Volunteer Fire Department ("Hawkins Bar VFD" or "Department") provides fire protection, emergency medical, vehicle extrication, technical rescue, and other emergency services to the Hawkins Bar area and surrounding communities. The Department's primary response area is concentrated around the Trinity Village and extends north along Denny Road and east/south along SR-299 corridor toward Burnt Ranch and Underwood Mountain Road. As a nonprofit volunteer fire department rather than a public agency with defined jurisdictional boundaries, Hawkins Bar VFD does not have a legally established service boundary comparable to a fire-related district. Its operational response area overlaps with the broader mutual aid network serving the Down River region.

Table 5-1: Hawkins Bar VFD Contact Information

Primary Contact	Todd Wright, Fire Chief
E-mail Address	Tdawg23232@hotmail.com
Physical Address	71 Trinity Court, Hawkins Bar, CA 95563
Mailing Address	PO Box 485, Salyer, CA 95563
Phone Number	530-739-2493
Website	N/A; Facebook: www.facebook.com/HBVFD/

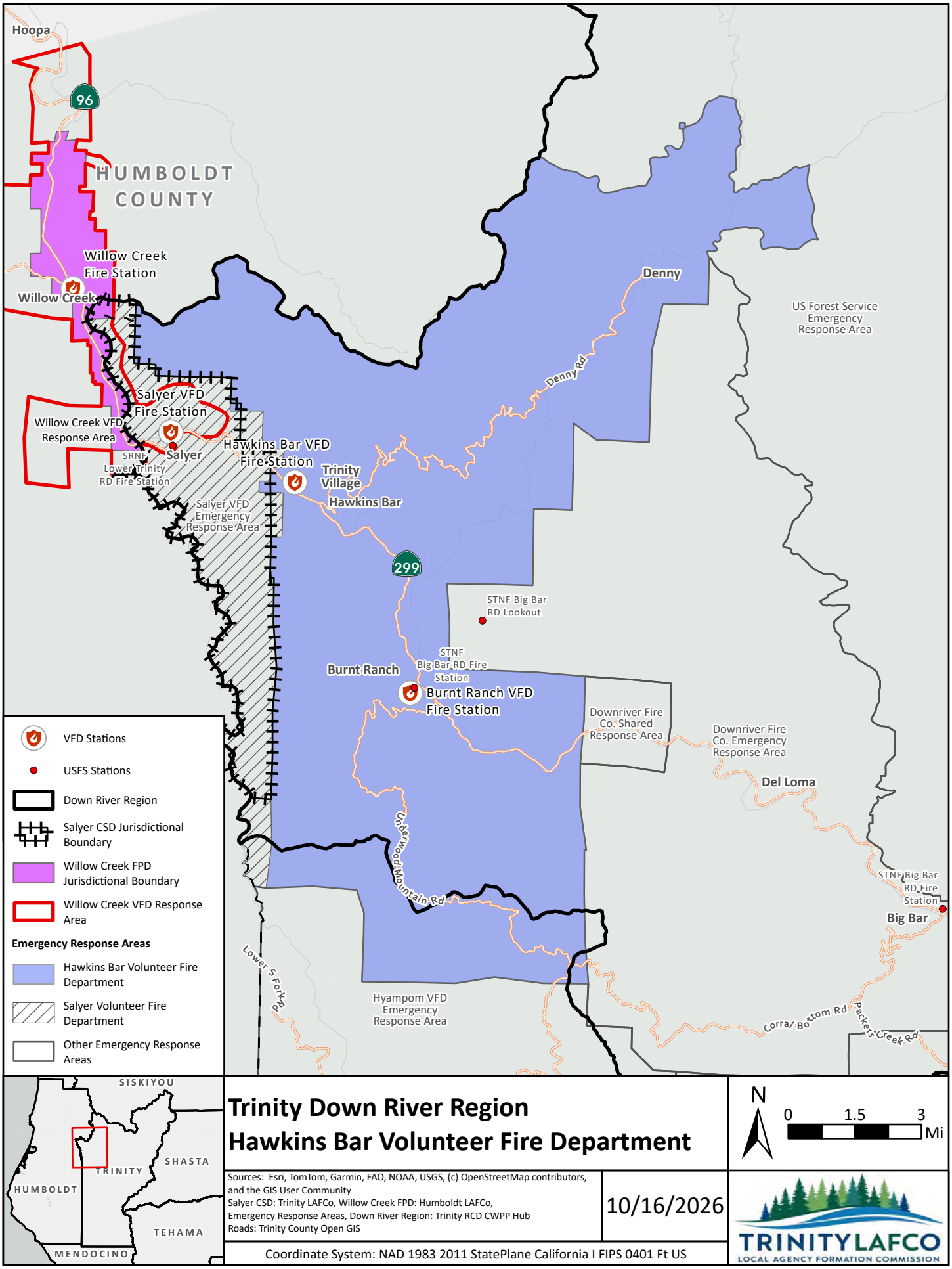
5.1 Organization & Governance

Hawkins Bar VFD is a non-district volunteer fire department organized as a nonprofit corporation. Available historical information indicates that the Department was established by community volunteers in approximately 1984. The organization received federal tax-exempt status in November 1988 and is currently recognized as a 501(c)(4) nonprofit organization. Its stated purpose is to provide fire protection and emergency services to the Hawkins Bar community and surrounding area. Federal tax filings report no paid employees, consistent with the Department's all-volunteer operating model.

Unlike neighboring Salyer CSD, which operates Salyer VFD, Hawkins Bar VFD is not an independent special district or other unit of local government and does not have taxing authority or a defined jurisdictional boundary. Instead, the Department operates as a volunteer fire organization, relying on community contributions, fundraising, grants, and other outside funding sources to support emergency response services.

5.2 Service Area & Population

The Hawkins Bar VFD response area includes the Census-designated communities of Trinity Village and Burnt Ranch, as well as surrounding rural areas. The 2020 Census reported 278 residents and 245 housing units in Trinity Village and 250 residents and 135 housing units in Burnt Ranch, for a combined population of 528 within the two CDPs. These Census geographies do not correspond precisely with the Department's response area and therefore should not be interpreted as a service-area population estimate. The Department also serves dispersed development outside these communities, including areas along Denny Road and Underwood Mountain Road.



Trinity Down River Region
Hawkins Bar Volunteer Fire Department

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Sources: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, (c) OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community
Salyer CSD: Trinity LAFCo, Willow Creek FPD: Humboldt LAFCo,
Emergency Response Areas, Down River Region: Trinity RCD CWPP Hub
Roads: Trinity County Open GIS

10/16/2026

Coordinate System: NAD 1983 2011 StatePlane California I FIPS 0401 Ft US

TRINITY LAFCO
LOCAL AGENCY FORMATION COMMISSION

The area's population fluctuates considerably due to seasonal residency. Hawkins Bar VFD estimates that approximately 60 to 65 percent of homes within its service area are vacation or seasonal residences. Consequently, the permanent population understates the number of properties requiring fire protection and may also understate peak seasonal population and emergency service demand. At the same time, the relatively small year-round population limits the pool of residents available to serve as volunteer firefighters.

5.3 Services & Operations

Hawkins Bar VFD reports responding to approximately 90 to 100 calls for service annually. Calls include structure and wildland fires, vehicle accidents, emergency medical incidents, technical rescues, and other emergencies. Vehicle accidents and fire-related incidents represent a significant share of the Department's responses.

The geography of the response area creates unique operational challenges. SR-299 follows the Trinity River through steep, mountainous terrain, and vehicle accidents can require over-the-bank and technical rescue operations. Hawkins Bar volunteers are trained to perform these rescues and reported responding to them regularly. The complexity of these incidents underscores the importance of maintaining trained personnel, specialized rescue equipment, and reliable mutual aid relationships.

The Department's technical rescue capability has also supported larger interagency incidents. During the 2021 Monument Fire, Hawkins Bar personnel assisted with a complex technical operation after smoke prevented a federal rappel crew from extracting equipment by helicopter. Working with other responders, Hawkins Bar personnel helped establish a highline across the Trinity River to move equipment from the remote location. The incident illustrates both the specialized rescue capabilities maintained by the Department and the importance of those capabilities within the rugged Down River service area.

5.4 Facilities & Equipment

Hawkins Bar VFD operates two fire stations. The Department's primary station is located at 71 Trinity Court in Trinity Village and serves as the principal location for emergency response operations. The facility was substantially renovated and completed in 2025 using funding associated with the 2021 Monument Fire. Improvements included three apparatus bays, expanded training and meeting space, a kitchen, two bathrooms, backup generator, and internet connectivity. In addition to supporting fire department operations, the station serves as an important community resource and is used for activities such as community food distribution.

The Department's secondary station is located in the Burnt Ranch area and consists of a basic apparatus garage housing an engine and an older water tender. The facility has electrical service but lacks internet connectivity and backup power. Although relatively few emergency responses currently originate from this location, the station provides important apparatus storage and a geographic presence along the State Route 299 corridor, helping support emergency response coverage across the dispersed Down River communities.

The Department's current apparatus consists of two fire engines (one stationed at each station), one water tender, and one emergency response vehicle. The primary engine is equipped with hydraulic vehicle extrication equipment (Jaws of Life) and rope rescue equipment, supporting the Department's

response to traffic collisions and other rescue incidents. The Department also reported receiving self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) through a regional equipment funding initiative coordinated through the Trinity County Fire Chiefs Association. The initiative was supported by a $1 million state legislative appropriation for fire, rescue, and emergency medical services equipment benefiting Trinity County fire agencies. Despite these investments, apparatus and vehicle replacement remain significant long-term capital needs.

5.5 Staffing & Service Capacity

Like many volunteer fire departments throughout Trinity County and rural California, Hawkins Bar VFD faces ongoing recruitment and retention challenges. The traditional model of community-based volunteer firefighting has evolved as employment patterns, family responsibilities, training requirements, and emergency response demands increasingly compete for volunteers' time. These broader changes have made it more difficult for rural departments to recruit and retain personnel and maintain consistent response availability.

As of 2026, Hawkins Bar VFD reported eight volunteers, approximately five of whom are regularly available. Daytime staffing is particularly challenging because many members work outside the service area. The Department previously maintained as many as 16 volunteers, but participation has declined over time due to an aging workforce, volunteer burnout, changing personal commitments, and other factors.

All eight volunteers hold CPR/AED certifications, six have Firefighter I certification or higher, one is certified as an Emergency Medical Responder (EMR), one as an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT), and six as driver-operators. Members have also received training in swiftwater and rope rescue, although maintaining specialized certifications remains challenging given limited personnel and resources. The Department's Fire Chief also serves as a wildland fire Engine Boss, bringing additional experience in wildland fire operations, engine crew supervision, and incident response.

The Department noted that relatively few younger residents are available to replace longtime volunteers as they retire or leave the area, creating challenges for succession planning and maintaining an adequate number of trained responders. The Department's medical officer retired in April 2026 after approximately 26 years on the department, and other recent turnover has resulted from volunteers moving out of the area or retiring. Hawkins Bar VFD continues to actively recruit new volunteers.

Hawkins Bar VFD is recognized by the Northern California EMS Agency (Nor-Cal EMS), the Local EMS Agency serving Trinity County, as a Basic Life Support (BLS) non-transport provider. As such, Department personnel provide initial emergency medical response but the Department does not operate an ambulance transport service. Nor-Cal EMS does not currently have up to date training or certification information on Hawkins Bar VFC volunteers. They will be implementing a new system in the coming months to improve their ability to maintain training/certification records and coordination with rural fire service providers in the Downriver region, including Hawkins Bar VFC.

5.6 Mutual Aid & Regional Coordination

Mutual aid is fundamental to fire and emergency response within the Down River region. Hawkins Bar VFD regularly provides and receives assistance from neighboring fire service providers, including Salyer VFD, Downriver VFD, Willow Creek FPD, and federal wildland fire agencies.

According to the Department, Hawkins Bar responds into the Salyer area relatively frequently, averaging approximately 12 to 20 mutual aid responses annually. Hawkins Bar also responds east into Downriver VFD's service area several times each year, although its typical eastern response limit is Del Loma. This regional coordination is particularly important for motor vehicle accidents, technical rescues, vegetation fires, and other incidents requiring multiple responders or specialized equipment.

The Forest Service provides additional resources when personnel and equipment are available, primarily for fire-related incidents. The Forest Service is not typically dispatched automatically to medical emergencies, motor vehicle accidents, or other non-fire calls but may assist when requested. Hawkins Bar VFD reports that mutual aid assistance from CAL FIRE is much less frequent, given the distance to the nearest stations in Weaverville (approximately 50 miles) and Trinidad (approximately 60 miles).

The importance of this interagency response system is particularly evident during wildland and structure fires that have the potential to spread into surrounding wildland areas. No individual volunteer department in the Down River region has sufficient staffing or equipment to independently address every major incident. Consequently, Hawkins Bar VFD's operational capacity is closely tied to the availability and response capabilities of neighboring departments, underscoring the importance of maintaining strong mutual aid relationships and regional coordination.

5.7 Financial Overview

Securing adequate and sustainable financial resources remains one of Hawkins Bar VFD's primary challenges. Unlike a fire protection district or community services district, Hawkins Bar VFD does not receive a dedicated share of property tax or levy a special tax or assessment. The Department instead relies on community donations, fundraising activities, grants, and reimbursements associated with eligible emergency response activities.

Community fundraising provides an important recurring source of revenue. The Department reports receiving approximately $32,000 annually from community breakfasts held around Memorial Day, the Fourth of July, and Labor Day. These events are organized with significant support from the Trinity Village Improvement Association (TVIA). TVIA also supports other community needs, including road and pothole maintenance, vegetation management, and other local improvement activities.

Federal tax filings illustrate both the Department's reliance on contributions and the variability of its annual revenues. In 2024, Hawkins Bar VFD reported approximately $57,461 in total revenue and $98,168 in expenses. Contributions totaled approximately $47,024, or 82 percent of annual revenue. At year end, the organization reported approximately $444,700 in assets and minimal liabilities.

Annual revenues and expenditures can vary substantially due to grants, emergency response reimbursements, apparatus and equipment purchases, facility improvements, and other nonrecurring activities. Accordingly, individual fiscal years should be interpreted cautiously when evaluating the

Department's ongoing operating capacity. The Department's underlying financial structure remains heavily dependent on community support and outside funding rather than a stable tax-supported revenue source.

The Department regularly pursues grants and participates in regional funding opportunities. Hawkins Bar VFD has received turnouts and other equipment through countywide grant applications coordinated through the Trinity County Fire Chiefs Association. A separately documented grant of $14,500 from the Humboldt Area Foundation funded 13 regional emergency fire shelters and a mobile water pump. The Department also partners with the Forest Service and can receive reimbursement when its water tender and personnel are assigned to eligible incidents. Grant funding and interagency reimbursements provide important supplemental resources but are not necessarily predictable from year to year.

5.8 Wildfire Risk & Community Preparedness

Hawkins Bar VFD operates within a heavily forested, mountainous area characterized by significant wildland-urban interface fire exposure. The SR-299 corridor, Trinity River canyon, steep slopes, limited transportation routes, and dispersed rural development create challenges for wildfire suppression, evacuation, and emergency access. These conditions increase the importance of coordinated wildfire preparedness, vegetation management, and regional emergency response capabilities.

Wildfire preparedness in the Hawkins Bar area extends beyond the fire department itself. Hawkins Bar and Burnt Ranch are both recognized as a Firewise USA community, along with neighboring Salyer and Big Bar/Big Flat. The Firewise USA program encourages residents to collaboratively reduce wildfire risks through defensible space, home hardening, vegetation management, and community preparedness activities. Maintaining recognition requires ongoing community participation and documented investment in wildfire risk reduction.

The 2025 Trinity County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) identifies wildfire hazards and mitigation priorities throughout the County, including the Hawkins Bar and Burnt Ranch areas. Community engagement conducted for the CWPP included a June 2024 meeting in Hawkins Bar, where residents identified priorities such as fuel breaks, defensible space, roadside vegetation management, evacuation-route improvements, and other wildfire resilience projects.

The Trinity County Fire Safe Council has also developed a wildfire simulation for Hawkins Bar modeling a fire originating along State Route 299 and comparing potential fire behavior before and after implementation of fuel-treatment projects identified through the CWPP process. The simulation highlights the community's exposure to roadside wildfire ignition and the role of landscape-scale fuel reduction in supporting community and firefighter safety. The Trinity County Resource Conservation District (TCRCD) has also reported selection of a nearly $8 million Community Wildfire Defense Grant to support fuel reduction on private lands in the Burnt Ranch, Big Bar, and Big Flat areas. This investment represents an important opportunity to reduce wildfire exposure and improve community resilience, although the funding does not directly support Downriver VFC's ongoing operating expenses.

The Trinity County Fire Safe Council has also developed a wildfire simulation for Hawkins Bar, modeling a hypothetical wildfire originating along SR-299 and comparing potential fire behavior before and

after implementation of fuel-treatment projects. The simulation highlights the community's exposure to roadside wildfire ignition and the role of landscape-scale fuel reduction in supporting community and firefighter safety. Collectively, these initiatives demonstrate ongoing community engagement and regional investment in wildfire risk reduction.

5.9 Service Challenges & Opportunities

Hawkins Bar VFD is an important component of the regional fire and emergency response system, operating from two stations with fire apparatus, BLS medical response capabilities, specialized rescue skills, and mutual aid support to neighboring departments. However, declining volunteer availability, recruitment and retention challenges, and limited financial resources threaten long-term service sustainability. Without a dedicated tax-supported revenue source, the Department relies on fundraising, donations, grants, and reimbursements, limiting its ability to fund staffing improvements and major equipment replacement.

These challenges are shared throughout the Down River region, where Salyer VFD, Hawkins Bar VFD, and Down River VFC operate as an interdependent network of volunteer providers despite separate organizational and funding structures.

This MSR evaluates several governance and funding alternatives, including formation of a new fire protection district or community services district, or annexation to an existing district. A regional structure could improve administrative capacity, staffing, training, and emergency response coordination while preserving local fire stations, volunteer companies, and community identity. A battalion-based model could provide shared leadership and operational coordination while maintaining community-based response capabilities. Equitable governing board representation, local participation, and clearly defined operational responsibilities would be essential considerations.

Regional reorganization could also provide a foundation for a longer-term countywide approach. Under this model, established regional public agencies could participate in a countywide joint powers authority (JPA) to coordinate shared services and resources while retaining local governance, community representation, and operational identity. The Down River region could help establish a model for similar community-based regional arrangements elsewhere in Trinity County.

Dedicated recurring revenues, potentially through a voter-approved special tax, could support volunteer recruitment and retention, stipend or pay-per-call programs, training, administrative staffing, and equipment replacement. Any proposed reorganization would require further financial analysis, agency coordination, and community engagement to ensure sustainable services while preserving local participation and decision-making

6.0 Agency Profile: Downriver VFC

The Downriver Volunteer Fire Company ("Downriver VFC" or "Company") provides fire protection, emergency medical, vehicle extrication, technical rescue, and other emergency services to a large area between the communities of Helena to Cedar Flat. The Company's primary response area is concentrated around SR-299 and extends north into Forest Service lands and surrounding areas such as Corral Bottom and Big French Creek. As a nonprofit volunteer fire company rather than a public agency with defined jurisdictional boundaries, Downriver VFC does not have a legally established service boundary comparable to a fire-related district. Its operational response area overlaps with the broader mutual aid network serving the Down River region.

Table 6-1: Downriver VFC Contact Information

Primary Contact	Gloria Reynolds, Fire Chief
E-mail Address	gloriaraelene@gmail.com
Physical Address	70 Fire House Road, Big Bar, CA 96010
Mailing Address	P.O. Box 608, Big Bar, CA 96010
Phone Number	530-806-8750
Website	N/A; Facebook: www.facebook.com/DownriverVFC/

6.1 Organization & Governance

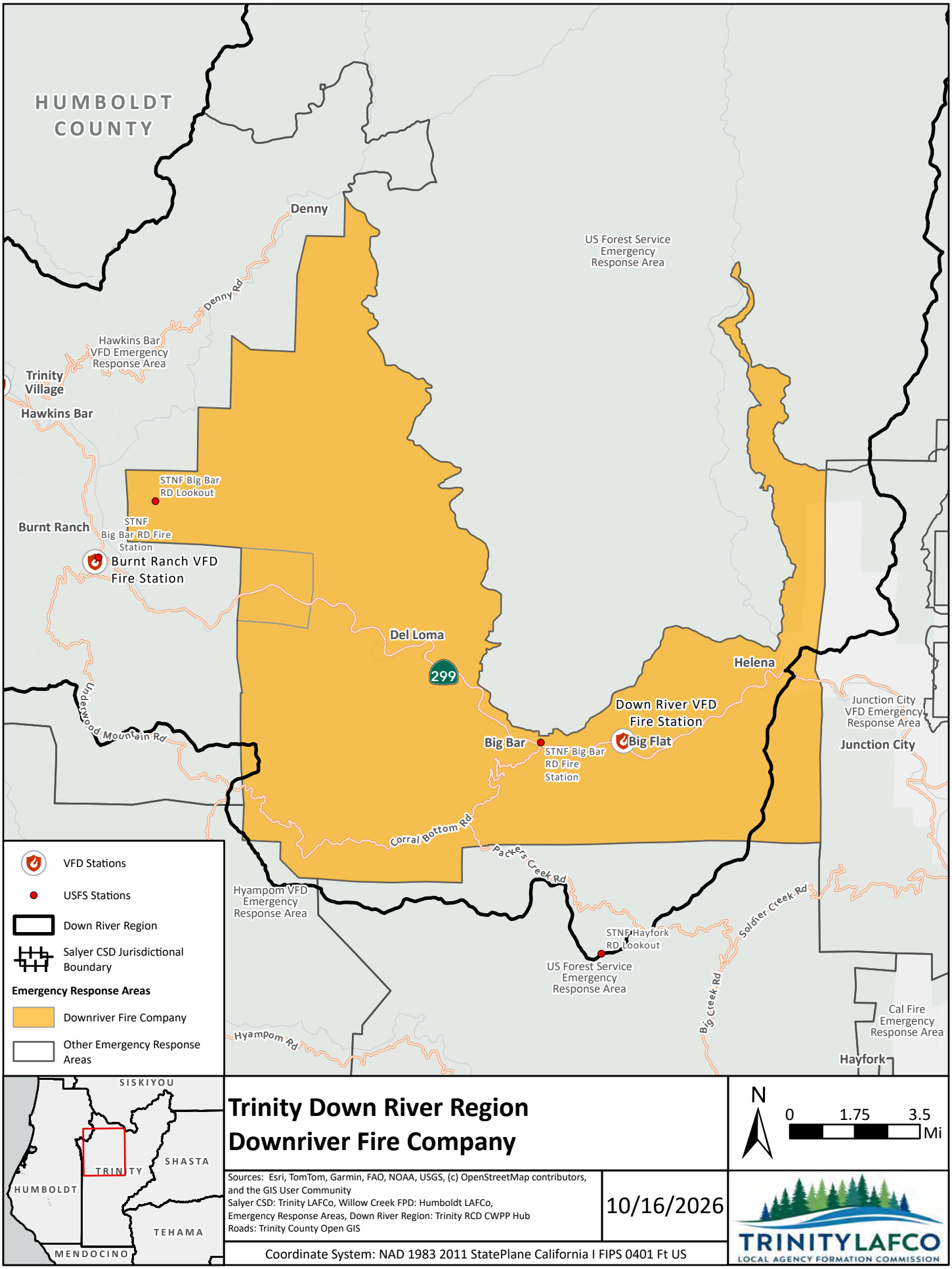
Downriver VFC is a non-district volunteer fire department organized as a nonprofit corporation. The Company was established by the community in approximately 1989. The organization received federal tax-exempt status in 1993 and is currently working to reinstate recognition as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization (EIN: 68-0257965). Its stated purpose is to provide firefighting, emergency medical service, and rescue to anyone in need within their response area.

In 2023, the Company's federal tax exempt status was automatically revoked for not filing a Form 990-N for three consecutive years. Downriver VFC has been working with its volunteer that handles its taxes and the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) to reinstate its federal tax exempt status. The Company has not been able to advertise donations as tax-deductible in its annual donation letter since 2023. As such, the Company has not sent out a donation request letter in recent years.

Unlike its neighbor Junction City FPD, Downriver VFC is not an independent special district or other unit of local government and does not have taxing authority or a defined jurisdictional boundary. Consequently, the Company relies on volunteer personnel and community and outside financial support to maintain emergency response services. However, the Company is overseen by a non-profit Board of Directors. Downriver VFC currently has a full Board with three new members.

6.2 Service Area and Population

The Downriver VFC response area does not include any Census-designated communities. The 2020 Census reported Junction City CDP to have a population of 658 residents and 388 housing units. However, the Junction City area is significantly more populated than the rural areas of Big Bar, Big Flat,



Trinity Down River Region
Downriver Fire Company

Sources: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, (c) OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community
Salyer CSD: Trinity LAFCo, Willow Creek FPD: Humboldt LAFCo,
Emergency Response Areas, Down River Region: Trinity RCD CWPP Hub
Roads: Trinity County Open GIS

10/16/2026

Coordinate System: NAD 1983 2011 StatePlane California I FIPS 0401 Ft US

TRINITY LAFCO
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Del Loma, and Cedar Flat that the Company responds to. The Company estimates a population of approximately 150 and approximately 200 housing units within its response area. The community of Big Bar is the most densely populated area within the response area and there are approximately 10 seniors living in the area that regularly call for medical aid. The Downriver VFC also serves dispersed development outside these communities, but there is not significant residential population in these areas.

The area's population fluctuates considerably due to seasonal residency. Downriver VFC's response area offers multiple outdoor recreational opportunities including camping and river rafting. In the summer months, the Company estimates a population of approximately 300, considerably higher than its year-round residency. As such, the estimated permanent population understates peak seasonal population and emergency service demand, particularly for calls for service associated with vehicle accidents along SR-299. Additionally, low year-round population limits the pool of residents available to serve as volunteer firefighters.

6.3 Services and Operations

Historically, Downriver VFC has responded to approximately 50 calls for service annually. However, the Company reports that call volumes have declined in recent years, which it attributes in part to roadway repaving and safety improvements along SR-299.

In 2025, Downriver VFD responded to 26 total calls for service, including 11 vehicle accidents, 11 medical assistance calls, one fire, one smoke check, one propane leak, and one incident involving a fallen tree that brought down power lines. Motor vehicle accidents and medical emergencies accounted for approximately 85 percent of total calls, reflecting the Company's primary role in providing emergency response along the SR-299 corridor.

The geography of the response area creates unique operational challenges. SR-299 follows the Trinity River through steep, mountainous terrain, and vehicle accidents can require over-the-bank and technical rescue operations, often involving coordination and mutual aid assistance from neighboring fire service providers. Despite relatively low annual call volumes, the complexity of these incidents underscores the importance of maintaining trained personnel, specialized rescue equipment, and reliable mutual aid relationships.

6.4 Facilities & Equipment

Downriver VFC operates one fire station, located at 70 Fire House Road, Big Bar, CA, 96010. This is the principal location from which emergency responses originate. The station was finished in 2024 and funded through a grant from the McConnell Foundation, acting as the Company's first formal fire station. Originally, volunteers provided service out of the schoolhouse and Forest Service office. Eventually, they graduated to storing apparatus and conducting operations out of a metal building with minimal plumbing, located at 70 Fire House Road on land donated by the Rose Family. Now, the station has a commercial kitchen, ADA compliant bathroom with a shower, an office, a conference room, an engine bay with capacity for two engines, and a storage loft. There are no laundry facilities at the station; volunteers are responsible for laundering their turnouts at their residences.

The station has two main outstanding needs: an auto generator and permanent heating installed in the engine bay. The rest of the station has permanent heating, but the engine bay only has temporary

heating. The insurance company has indicated that this is a requirement due to the potential for apparatus hosing and equipment freezing. Until permanent heating is installed in the engine bay, the station does not technically qualify as a "firehouse". The Downriver VFC Board is not actively looking into installing a generator, but plans to look into this in the coming months.

A portion of the station property was previously leased to the Trinity Public Utilities District (TPUD) for storage under a formal agreement, generating approximately $1,000 per month in rental revenue for roughly three years. The agreement ended in 2024 after an updated property survey revealed that much of the leased area was owned by the neighboring Strawhouse Café. Downriver VFC has since established a designated helispot on the property, which could potentially support future use by TPUD or other emergency service providers.

In previous years, Downriver VFC had two other fire stations on parcels not owned by the Company that acted as satellite stations. One station was located in Del Loma at the Del Loma RV Park and the other, located in Big Bar, was based out of a volunteer's home. These satellite stations were temporary canopy garages, rather than formal, fully-functional fire stations.

The Company's current apparatus consists of a Type 2 pickup truck that seats three people with 250-gallon capacity; a Type 3 structure engine that seats three people with 750-gallon capacity; a Model 62 engine that seats five people with 500-gallon capacity; and a rescue rig that seats two people. The pickup truck has been in and out of the mechanic shop recently due to a high-speed wobble issue, but when in commission, acts as the Chief's rig and is equipped with ropes, stabilization equipment, and medical gear. The engines are in good shape besides needing minor maintenance and repairs. The Model 62 engine is a surplus engine that the Company does not own. The rescue rig is an older ambulance that was converted and is equipped with rescue ropes, Jaws of Life, cutting tools, stabilization equipment, and other equipment to assist with rescues or retrieval of people from over the Trinity riverbank that follows SR-299. Of the apparatus, the rescue rig is used most often and is the highest priority to replace, should funding allow.

The Downriver VFC Board is interested in the Company acquiring a water tender. The Company has been informed by its insurance company that having a water tender would likely lower their insurance rate. However, there is currently no place to store a water tender and no available funding to support this acquisition. On calls that require a water tender, Junction City FPD is often dispatched or called in to support.

6.5 Staffing & Service Capacity

Like many volunteer fire departments throughout Trinity County and rural California, Downriver VFC is experiencing challenges associated with an aging population and declining volunteerism. As of 2026, the Company reported eight active volunteers. Of the eight active volunteers, two are trained firefighters, three have basic first-aid training, one is a certified Emergency Medical Responder (EMR) (recently expired, but in the process of renewing), and none are Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs).

In March 2026, the Company published a call to serve on its Facebook page to solicit additional volunteers. Four new volunteers have been added to the Company's roster, and they are currently being trained and working on gaining certifications. In late October, these volunteers will be attending

a training hosted by Chief Corbett with the Trinity County Life Support Community Services District (TCLS CSD) to be trained on basic first aid, CPR, and Title 22 (also often referred to as Public Safety-First Aid). One of the new recruits is interested in continuing education and training to become a certified EMT for the Company and others have expressed interest in attending trainings over at Shasta College in Redding.

Downriver VFC typically struggles to replace longtime volunteers as they retire or relocate due to the low number of younger residents in the region. This creates a challenge for maintaining an adequate number of responders to meet demand and for succession planning and overall long-term sustainability of the Company. The Company has noticed a considerable decline in volunteers since the Monument Fire in 2021 – many people relocated out of the area in the years following. The current Downriver VFC Fire Chief is planning to retire in January 2027; a volunteer has been identified as a potential replacement and is currently being cross trained on the position by Chief Reynolds. If funding for insurance allows, Chief Reynolds is interested in staying on the roster as a volunteer responder.

Downriver VFC is recognized by the Northern California EMS Agency (Nor-Cal EMS), the Local EMS Agency serving Trinity County, as a Basic Life Support (BLS) non-transport provider. As such, Company personnel provide initial emergency medical response but the Company does not operate an ambulance transport service. Salyer VFD and Hawkins Bar VFD are similarly identified as BLS non-transport providers within the Nor-Cal EMS system. Nor-Cal EMS does not currently have up to date training or certification information on Downriver VFC volunteers. They will be implementing a new system in the coming months to improve their ability to maintain training/certification records and coordination with rural fire service providers in the Downriver region, including Downriver VFC.

6.6 Mutual Aid & Regional Coordination

Mutual aid is fundamental to fire and emergency response within the Down River region. Due to its limited operational capacity, Downriver VFC primarily receives mutual aid rather than providing assistance to other agencies. The Company reports that it has not maintained a full response crew since 2021. Most often, Downriver VFC receives mutual aid from Junction City FPD, reportedly responding to approximately 75 percent of the Company's calls for service. Hawkins Bar VFD also provides mutual aid within the region, although its typical eastern response limit is Del Loma. This regional coordination is particularly important for motor vehicle accidents, technical rescues, vegetation fires, and other incidents requiring multiple responders or specialized equipment.

State and federal agencies also play important roles in emergency response. CAL FIRE, responding from Weaverville, has maintained an active presence in the area in recent years and is frequently dispatched automatically to motor vehicle accidents, although its response is occasionally canceled when additional assistance is determined to be unnecessary. The Forest Service regularly assists with fire-related incidents but is not typically dispatched automatically to medical emergencies, vehicle accidents, or other non-fire calls. Forest Service personnel may provide additional assistance when requested and available, although the Company indicates that such responses are relatively infrequent.

No individual volunteer department in the Down River region has sufficient staffing or equipment to independently address every major incident. Consequently, the operational capacity of Downriver

VFC is closely connected to the staffing and availability of neighboring departments, particularly Junction City FPD.

6.7 Financial Overview

Securing adequate and sustainable financial resources remains one of Downriver VFC's primary challenges. Unlike a fire protection district or community services district, the Company does not receive a dedicated share of property tax or levy a special tax or assessment. Instead, operations are supported through community donations, fundraising activities, grants, and reimbursements associated with eligible emergency response activities.

Community contributions have historically provided an important source of financial support. Although Downriver VFC has not circulated its annual donation letter since 2023, the Company continues to receive modest contributions from local property owners. The Strawhouse Café also supports the Company by donating $3 from each one-pound bag of coffee sold. While the Café has previously indicated that it may discontinue contributions during periods when the Company lacks a full response crew, Downriver VFC reports that donations have continued. The Company indicates that community support for local fire protection remains strong, with residents expressing interest in establishing a paid Fire Chief position and restoring a fully staffed response crew.

Grant funding provides another important, although unpredictable, source of financial support. Like many small volunteer fire departments, Downriver VFC lacks the administrative capacity to consistently identify, pursue, and administer grant opportunities. Nevertheless, the Company has successfully secured funding for major capital improvements, including a grant from the McConnell Foundation that supported construction of its fire station. More recently, Downriver VFC received new vehicle extrication equipment through a countywide grant initiative. The Company has identified the acquisition of a replacement rescue apparatus or Fire Chief vehicle as a future funding priority.

In recent years, Downriver VFC has relied on financial reserves accumulated through a former storage lease agreement with the TPUD. The agreement generated approximately $1,000 per month over a three-year period before ending in 2024. These reserves have helped sustain operations despite limited ongoing revenues; however, the Company anticipates that the remaining funds will soon be depleted, creating an increasingly urgent need to identify alternative funding sources.

The Company's reliance on voluntary contributions, competitive grants, and diminishing reserves presents significant challenges to long-term financial sustainability. Without a stable, recurring revenue source, Downriver VFC faces limited ability to fund routine operating expenses, maintain and replace apparatus and equipment, or invest in the staffing and administrative capacity necessary to sustain reliable emergency response. These financial constraints highlight the importance of evaluating potential organizational and funding alternatives, including opportunities for regional service consolidation and the establishment of a voter-approved special tax to support ongoing operations.

6.8 Wildfire Risk & Community Preparedness

Downriver VFC operates within a heavily forested, mountainous area characterized by significant wildland-urban interface fire exposure. The SR-299 corridor, Trinity River canyon, steep slopes, limited transportation routes, and dispersed rural development create challenges for wildfire suppression,

evacuation, and emergency access. These conditions increase the importance of coordinated wildfire preparedness, vegetation management, and regional emergency response capabilities.

Wildfire preparedness in the Big Bar, Big Flat, and Del Loma areas extends beyond the fire department itself. Big Bar/Big Flat is recognized as a Firewise USA community, along with neighboring Junction City, Burnt Ranch, and Hawkins Bar. The Firewise USA program encourages residents to collaboratively reduce wildfire risks through defensible space, home hardening, vegetation management, and community preparedness activities. Maintaining recognition requires ongoing community participation and documented investment in wildfire risk reduction.

The 2025 Trinity County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) identifies wildfire hazards and mitigation priorities throughout the County, including the Big Bar and Big Flat areas. Community engagement conducted during preparation of the CWPP included a May 2024 meeting in Big Bar, where residents identified priorities such as fuel breaks, defensible space, roadside vegetation management, evacuation route improvements, and other wildfire resilience projects. The Trinity County Resource Conservation District (TCRCD) has also reported selection of a nearly $8 million Community Wildfire Defense Grant to support fuel reduction on private lands in the Burnt Ranch, Big Bar, and Big Flat areas. This investment represents an important opportunity to reduce wildfire exposure and improve community resilience, although the funding does not directly support Downriver VFC's ongoing operating expenses.

The Trinity County Fire Safe Council has also developed a wildfire simulation for Big Bar, modeling a hypothetical wildfire originating along SR-299 and comparing potential fire behavior before and after implementation of fuel-treatment projects. The simulation highlights the community's exposure to roadside wildfire ignition and the role of landscape-scale fuel reduction in supporting community and firefighter safety.

Collectively, these initiatives demonstrate ongoing community engagement and regional investment in wildfire risk reduction. However, wildfire mitigation efforts do not eliminate the need for reliable local emergency response capabilities. Given Downriver VFC's limited volunteer staffing and dependence on mutual aid, continued coordination among local fire service providers, CAL FIRE, the Forest Service, TCRCD, and community preparedness organizations remains essential to protecting residents and improving wildfire resilience throughout the Down River region.

6.9 Service Challenges & Opportunities

Downriver VFC provides an important component of the regional fire and emergency response system, maintaining a fire station, emergency response apparatus, and basic life support (BLS) medical response capabilities. However, the Company faces significant challenges related to volunteer staffing, financial sustainability, and long-term service capacity.

The Company's limited volunteer workforce creates uncertainty regarding response availability and succession planning as longtime volunteers retire, although recent recruitment efforts may help address these concerns. Without a dedicated tax-supported revenue source, Downriver VFC relies on donations, grants, occasional reimbursements, and diminishing financial reserves. This funding structure limits its ability to support ongoing operations, replace aging apparatus, and invest in staffing and training.

These challenges extend throughout the Down River region. Salyer VFD and Hawkins Bar VFD similarly rely on limited volunteer personnel, and all three providers depend on neighboring agencies for assistance during major incidents. Consequently, the existing system functions as an interdependent network of volunteer fire providers, despite their separate organizational and funding structures.

As part of this MSR, LAFCo is evaluating several potential governance and funding alternatives to improve the long-term sustainability of fire and emergency services throughout the Down River region. Options relevant to Downriver VFC include formation of a new fire protection district (FPD) or community services district (CSD), or annexation to a neighboring fire-related district. Formation of a new district could provide a dedicated governance structure and an opportunity to establish a voter-approved special tax. Annexation to Salyer CSD could build upon its existing fire protection responsibilities and special tax structure, potentially incorporating Hawkins Bar VFD and Downriver VFC into a broader regional organization. Alternatively, annexation to Junction City FPD could formalize an existing operational relationship, as Junction City reportedly responds to approximately 75 percent of Downriver VFC's calls, although a new special tax funding mechanism established by Junction City FPD would likely be necessary.

Under any regional governance alternative, consideration should be given to preserving the identity and volunteer base of the individual fire companies while improving shared administration, training, staffing, and emergency response. A potential battalion-based structure could maintain existing stations and local volunteer companies under a common administrative and command framework. Governance considerations would include equitable geographic representation, potential expansion of an existing governing board, changes to agency or department names to reflect the expanded service area, and other terms and conditions addressing service area boundaries, local representation, accountability, and transparency.

A dedicated source of special tax revenue could also support improvements to volunteer recruitment and retention, including pay-per-call or stipend programs, scheduled duty coverage, dedicated training coordination, and part- or full-time administrative or operational personnel. These investments could strengthen response reliability while preserving the volunteer-based service model.

These alternatives would require additional financial analysis, community engagement, and coordination among Downriver VFC, Hawkins Bar VFD, Salyer CSD, Junction City FPD, neighboring fire providers, and affected residents. The objective would be to identify a governance and funding structure that preserves local volunteer participation and community identity while improving administrative capacity, staffing reliability, training, capital planning, and the long-term sustainability of fire and emergency services throughout the Down River region.

7.0 Governance & Reorganization Alternatives

Discussions with local fire service providers in the Down River region indicate a shared recognition that the current service delivery model may not be sustainable over the long term. While the region faces many of the same challenges as rural volunteer fire departments throughout California—including declining volunteerism, increasing training and regulatory requirements, aging infrastructure, and limited access to stable funding sources—these challenges are exacerbated by geographic isolation, extensive SR-299 corridor responsibilities, a limited and aging population, and substantial public land ownership that constrains the local property tax base. High poverty rates, lower household incomes, and the presence of disadvantaged communities further limit the ability of residents to support additional taxes or assessments for fire protection services.

These conditions underscore the importance of exploring alternative governance structures that could improve financial stability, strengthen operational capacity, and preserve essential fire protection and emergency services. Potential approaches range from expanding an existing district's boundaries to establishing a new district or pursuing a broader regional reorganization.

Salyer CSD provides an existing governmental structure through which regional fire services could potentially be expanded. Unlike the non-district volunteer fire organizations serving Hawkins Bar and Downriver, Salyer CSD has an elected governing board and an existing voter-approved special tax. Salyer CSD's existing special tax provides a useful model for evaluating potential revenue generation under the restructuring alternatives. The District currently levies $50 per unimproved parcel and $100 per improved parcel. A second scenario evaluates rates of $100 per unimproved parcel and $150 per improved parcel.

The following five alternatives are presented for further consideration. They are conceptual and do not represent a preferred reorganization or a commitment by affected agencies to pursue boundary changes.

- **Option A – Salyer CSD Annexation (Hawkins Bar to Del Loma)**
- **Option B – Hawkins Bar Special District Formation**
- **Option C – Junction City FPD Annexation (Downriver to Del Loma)**
- **Option D – Regional Fire Services Reorganization (Salyer to Junction City)**
- **Option E – Countywide Fire Services Reorganization**

These alternatives range from targeted boundary expansions and formation of a new special district to a more comprehensive regional or even countywide reorganization. They are intended to provide a framework for evaluating potential improvements in governance, financial sustainability, and service delivery rather than establish a preferred organizational structure at this time.

Option A - Salyer CSD Annexation (Hawkins Bar to Del Loma)

This alternative would expand Salyer CSD's jurisdiction eastward to encompass the entire Hawkins Bar VFD response area and a portion of the Downriver VFC response area extending to Del Loma, which

generally represents the eastern limit of Hawkins Bar VFD's response activities. The annexation would establish a unified special district structure responsible for fire protection and emergency response services across a larger portion of the Downriver region.

The expanded District could maintain locally based volunteer fire companies and stations while providing centralized governance, financial administration, and coordination of staffing, training, equipment, and operational resources. This structure could preserve local response capabilities while creating opportunities for shared leadership, improved operational coordination, and more consistent administrative support.

Based on the preliminary special tax analysis, the annexation area could generate approximately $58,800 in additional annual revenue under Salyer CSD's existing special tax model, increasing total District special tax revenues from approximately $33,100 to $91,900 annually. Under the increased tax model, the annexation area could generate approximately $91,800, resulting in total annual District special tax revenues of approximately $143,370. Actual revenues would depend on final boundaries, applicable tax provisions, and required approvals.

Implementation would involve consolidation of the Salyer and Hawkins Bar volunteer fire departments under a unified organizational structure. A detailed plan for services and combined operating budget would be needed to establish the proposed staffing and leadership structure, address the transfer or continued use of existing facilities, apparatus, and other assets, and identify ongoing operational and capital funding needs. Consideration should also be given to the expanded District's governing board composition and representation of the newly annexed communities.

Option B - Hawkins Bar Special District Formation

This alternative would establish a new independent fire protection district (FPD) or community services district (CSD) encompassing the Hawkins Bar VFD response area and extending eastward to include Del Loma and surrounding portions of the Downriver VFC response area.

Formation would establish a locally elected governing board responsible for fire protection services, budgeting, financial management, and long-term service planning. It would also provide a governmental structure capable of pursuing voter-approved special taxes and certain public funding opportunities that may not be available to nonprofit volunteer fire organizations.

Using the Salyer CSD special tax model for comparison, the proposed district could generate approximately $58,800 annually under the existing tax rate model or $91,800 under the increased tax model. Establishment of a new special tax would require two-thirds voter approval and would likely be a condition of LAFCo approval to demonstrate the financial sustainability of the proposed district.

Formation of a new district would provide independent local governance and dedicated funding for fire protection services. However, unlike annexation to an existing district, this alternative would establish an additional public agency with its own governing board, administrative responsibilities, financial reporting, annual audit requirements, and other compliance obligations. These functions would require dedicated staffing and financial resources. By comparison, annexation under Option A could provide opportunities for economies of scale through shared administration, staffing, and operational resources. A detailed plan for services and financial analysis would be necessary to

evaluate the long-term sustainability of an independent district relative to the other restructuring alternatives.

Establishment of a formal fire protection district may also provide benefits related to recognition of organized fire protection services and coordination with insurance providers. However, property insurance availability and premiums would continue to depend on wildfire exposure, demonstrated response capabilities, and insurer underwriting practices.

Option C - Junction City FPD Annexation (Downriver to Del Loma)

This alternative would expand Junction City FPD's jurisdiction westward to Del Loma, encompassing the eastern portion of the existing Downriver VFC response area, including the rural areas of Big Bar, Big Flat, and Helena. The annexation would consolidate Junction City FPD and Downriver VFC operations under a unified special district structure while maintaining locally based fire response capabilities.

The expanded District could integrate Downriver VFC's existing station, apparatus, and volunteer personnel into its organizational structure, providing opportunities for shared leadership, coordinated staffing and training, equipment management, and administrative support. The Big Bar station would remain an important local response facility given the geographic distances and limited transportation routes throughout the region.

As identified in the Mid-Trinity MSR, Junction City FPD relies primarily on property tax revenues and does not currently levy a special tax. To support the additional service responsibilities associated with annexation, this alternative would likely require establishment of a voter-approved special tax within Junction City FPD's existing boundaries prior to pursuing annexation. Subject to applicable statutory requirements, the special tax could then be extended to the annexation territory, providing a more consistent funding mechanism across the expanded District.

Implementation would require coordination between Junction City FPD and Downriver VFC to develop a comprehensive plan for services and combined operating budget, including the proposed organizational and staffing structure, transfer or continued use of the Big Bar station and other assets, and ongoing operational and capital funding needs. Consideration should also be given to governing board representation, emergency response coverage, and the adequacy of projected revenues to support services across the expanded jurisdiction.

Option D - Regional Fire Services Reorganization (Salyer to Junction City)

This alternative would establish a unified regional fire service organization extending from Salyer to Junction City through expansion of Salyer CSD, dissolution of Junction City FPD, and consolidation of the existing Salyer, Hawkins Bar, Downriver, and Junction City fire departments under a single governing agency. Salyer CSD is identified as the proposed successor agency for two primary reasons. First, the District has an existing voter-approved special tax that could provide an established funding mechanism for the expanded service area, subject to applicable statutory requirements. Second, unlike fire protection districts, community services districts are not subject to the restrictions under Health and Safety Code Section 13811 concerning the inclusion of certain commercial timberlands within State Responsibility Areas (SRA). This distinction provides greater flexibility in establishing a contiguous regional service boundary encompassing the geographically diverse Downriver region.

The expanded District could operate under a battalion-based structure encompassing four geographic service areas: Salyer, Hawkins Bar, Downriver, and Junction City. Each area would retain locally based fire stations, volunteer personnel, and response capabilities, while benefiting from centralized governance, administration, operational leadership, and coordinated training and equipment management. This approach could preserve local response capabilities while providing opportunities for economies of scale and more efficient use of limited resources.

A regional organizational structure could also strengthen volunteer recruitment and retention while improving staffing and operational capacity through shared resources across the four service areas. Depending on available funding, potential enhancements could include a shared or full-time Fire Chief, designated battalion leadership or Assistant Chiefs, shared administrative and training personnel, paid-on-call programs, and coordinated staffing arrangements to improve response readiness and reduce the administrative burden on volunteers.

Financial considerations would be central to the feasibility of this alternative. Salyer CSD currently benefits from an established special tax, while Junction City FPD relies primarily on property tax revenues and does not have a special tax. The reorganization would require evaluation of existing property tax allocations, the potential extension or modification of Salyer CSD's special tax, and opportunities for establishing a consistent and equitable funding structure across the expanded jurisdiction. Additional special tax revenues could support regional staffing and operational improvements, subject to applicable statutory requirements and voter approval where necessary.

Implementation would require a comprehensive plan for services and consolidated operating budget addressing the proposed organizational structure, governing board composition and local representation, transfer of assets and liabilities, staffing and leadership arrangements, and long-term capital and operational needs. Consideration could also be given to expanding the CSD governing board from five to seven members, renaming the District to reflect its broader regional responsibilities, and establishing formal operational divisions to maintain community identity and local participation.

Although this alternative would involve the most extensive governance restructuring, it could provide opportunities to strengthen long-term financial sustainability, improve service capacity, and support more consistent staffing and operational capabilities across the Downriver region.

Option E – Countywide Fire Services Reorganization

This alternative would consider a countywide approach to reorganizing and coordinating fire protection and emergency services throughout Trinity County, building upon the regional consolidation concept described in Option D. Several governance approaches could be considered, including expansion of an existing district, formation of a new countywide district, or consolidation of fire service providers into several regional districts operating under a countywide Joint Powers Authority (JPA).

Formation of a new countywide district would provide an opportunity to establish a unified governance, service delivery, and funding structure from the outset. This approach could involve extensive community engagement to develop a shared vision for fire protection services, establish equitable geographic representation, identify service priorities, and develop a new special tax proposal for voter consideration.

Alternatively, regional district consolidations combined with a countywide JPA could provide a more decentralized governance model. Under this approach, fire service providers could consolidate into several geographically based districts (such as Down River, Middle Trinity, South Fork, Southern Trinity, Northern Trinity), each retaining its own elected regional-based governing board, local revenues, and service responsibilities. The regional districts could then establish a countywide JPA, governed by representatives of the participating agencies, to coordinate shared functions such as fire leadership, training, recruitment, administrative support, equipment purchasing, and capital planning. This approach could achieve many of the benefits of countywide coordination while preserving greater regional autonomy and local accountability.

Under either approach, preserving local identity, community participation, and volunteer engagement would be essential. Geographically based battalions or service areas could allow existing fire stations and volunteer companies to retain their local identities and operational leadership within a coordinated regional structure. Existing nonprofit fire associations could potentially remain independent to support fundraising, volunteer recruitment, community outreach, and equipment needs. Local advisory committees and geographic representation on governing boards could further support community involvement and address concerns regarding the loss of local control.

A countywide framework could provide opportunities to consolidate administrative functions, coordinate recruitment and training, establish shared staffing and leadership positions, and improve equipment purchasing and long-term capital planning. A community services district structure may offer additional flexibility because it is not subject to the same statutory restrictions on including commercial timberlands within State Responsibility Areas that apply to fire protection districts under Health and Safety Code Section 13811.

Although this alternative would represent a significant organizational change, both countywide district formation and a regional district/JPA model could provide pathways toward more sustainable fire protection services while preserving community-based volunteer organizations. Implementation would require a comprehensive feasibility study, extensive interagency and community coordination, and evaluation of governance, financing, service delivery, existing district obligations, and long-term operational needs.

Preliminary Special Tax Revenue Analysis

To illustrate the potential financial implications of restructuring, Salyer CSD's existing special tax framework of $50 per unimproved parcel and $100 per improved parcel was used as a baseline for estimating revenues under alternative service area configurations. A second scenario assumes an increase to $100 per unimproved parcel and $150 per improved parcel.

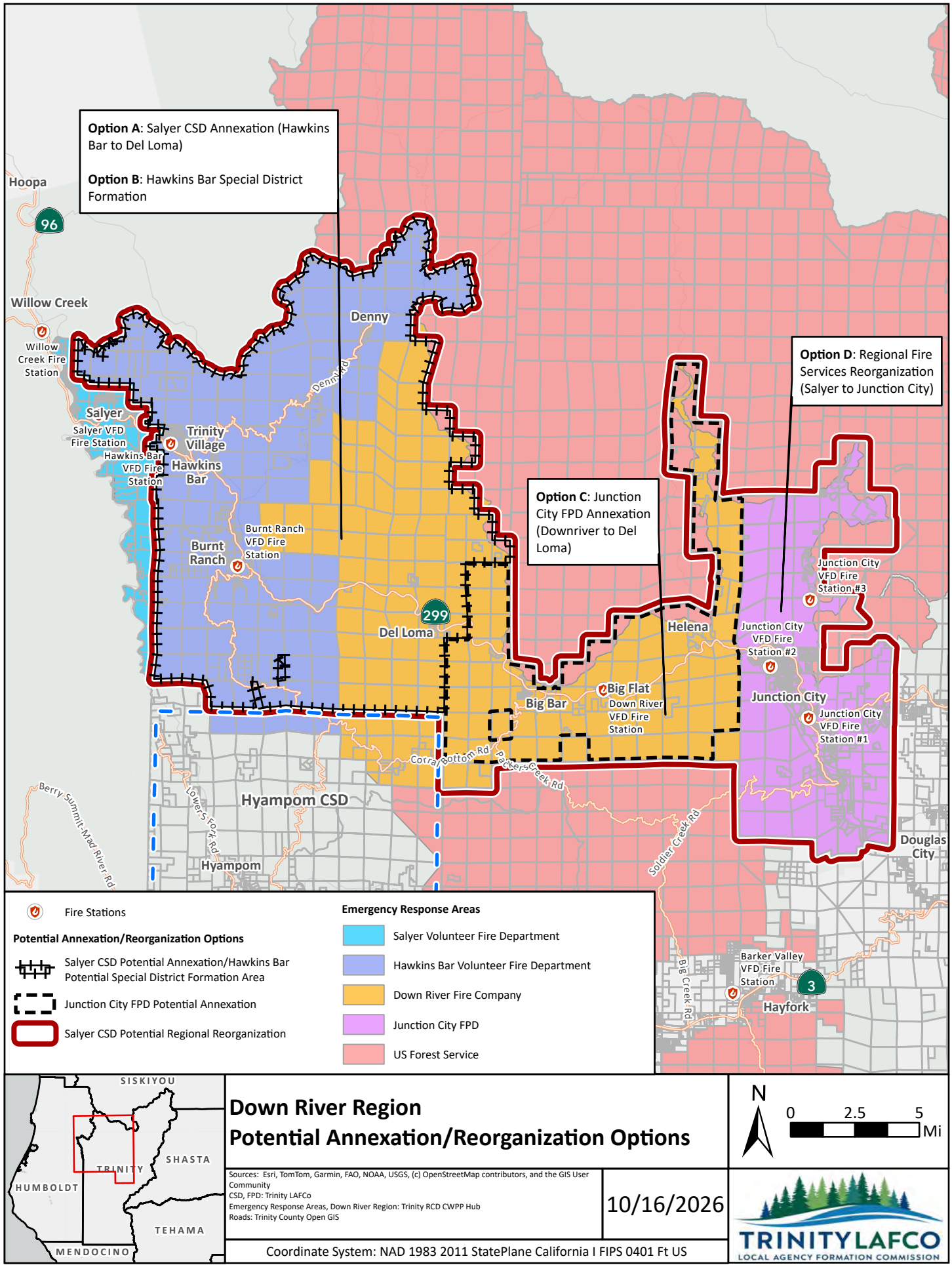
Table 7-1: Special Tax Analysis on Restructuring Options

	Existing Tax Model ($50/$100)	Increased Tax Model ($100/$150)
Salyer CSD Existing Boundary	$33,100.00	$51,570.00
Option A: Salyer CSD Annexation (Hawkins Bar to Del Loma)	$91,900.00	$143,370.00

	Existing Tax Model ($50/$100)	Increased Tax Model ($100/$150)
Option B: Hawkins Bar Special District Formation	$58,800.00	$91,800.00
Option C: Junction City FPD Annexation (Downriver to Del Loma)	$63,150.00	$99,800.00
Option D: Regional Fire Services Reorganization (Salyer to Junction City)	$149,600.00	$235,100.00
Option E: Countywide Fire Services Reorganization	$1,035,050.00	$1,665,450.00

Note: Revenue estimates are preliminary and based on assumed parcel use classifications and tax rates. They are provided for comparative planning purposes only and do not represent existing revenues or an approved funding mechanism for the proposed alternatives. Actual revenues would depend on final jurisdictional boundaries, applicable exemptions, parcel classifications, and voter-approved tax provisions. Implementation of a new or increased special tax would require the applicable statutory procedures and voter approval.

The preliminary analysis illustrates the potential to establish a more predictable source of locally controlled revenue in areas currently dependent on volunteer fundraising and grants. While expanded special district boundaries could provide additional financial resources, they would also increase service responsibilities and associated costs. Accordingly, the financial feasibility of each alternative should be evaluated based on anticipated revenues, existing financial obligations, administrative and staffing requirements, and the full cost of providing fire protection and emergency response services throughout the proposed jurisdiction. Given the region's disadvantaged socioeconomic conditions, community affordability and the feasibility of obtaining voter approval for new or increased taxes would be important considerations.



Down River Region
Potential Annexation/Reorganization Options

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Sources: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, (c) OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community
CSD, FPD: Trinity LAFCo
Emergency Response Areas, Down River Region: Trinity RCD CWPP Hub
Roads: Trinity County Open GIS

10/16/2026

Coordinate System: NAD 1983 2011 StatePlane California I FIPS 0401 Ft US

TRINITY LAFCO
LOCAL AGENCY FORMATION COMMISSION

8.0 Implementation Considerations & Statutory Process

Changes to the governance and organization of fire services may involve annexation, district formation, consolidation, dissolution, or a combination of these actions. Such changes are generally subject to the Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Local Government Reorganization Act of 2000 (Government Code Section 56000 et seq.), applicable district principal acts, and other relevant state laws.

The following discussion summarizes the principal statutory processes and implementation considerations. Specific requirements depend on the type of organizational change, affected territory, method of initiation, and proposed financing arrangements..

8.1 Annexation & Reorganization Process

Annexation involves adding territory to an existing district, while reorganization may involve multiple boundary or organizational changes, such as annexation, consolidation, or dissolution. These processes can provide opportunities to expand service responsibilities, coordinate operations, and establish more sustainable governance and funding structures.

- **Initiation and LAFCo Application.** Annexation or reorganization proceedings may be initiated by a resolution of application from an affected agency or by a qualifying petition. A formal application would include proposed boundaries, a Plan for Services, fiscal analysis, and supporting materials. The application should identify how fire protection services would be provided throughout the expanded district, including potential changes to governance, staffing, facilities, operational responsibilities, and funding.
- **LAFCo Review and Public Hearing.** LAFCo reviews the proposal, coordinates with affected agencies, provides public notice, and conducts a public hearing to evaluate the annexation and receive comments from residents, landowners, agencies, and other interested parties. The Commission may approve the proposal with terms and conditions addressing service delivery, financial arrangements, governance, and other implementation requirements.
- **Protest Hearing.** Following LAFCo approval, subsequent protest proceedings are conducted unless waived pursuant to applicable law. Affected registered voters and landowners may submit written protests. Depending on the type of change, whether the territory is inhabited or uninhabited, and applicable statutory thresholds, the proposal may proceed without an election, require voter confirmation, or be terminated. Government Code Sections 57075 through 57091 establish various protest and election requirements..
- **Extension of Existing Special Taxes.** Government Code Section 57330 provides that territory annexed to a district may become subject to previously authorized district taxes, assessments, fees, and charges, subject to applicable statutory requirements. This can provide an opportunity to extend an established funding mechanism into newly annexed territory without necessarily requiring a separate special tax election.
- **Completion and Boundary Filing.** Following satisfaction of applicable protest and election requirements, LAFCo completes the proceedings and issues a Certificate of Completion. Required documentation is recorded with the County Recorder and submitted to the State

Board of Equalization (BOE), as applicable. Timely completion and filing are important for implementing boundary changes and associated property tax administration.

8.2 District Formation Process

Formation of a new community services district (CSD) or fire protection district (FPD) provides an opportunity to establish a new governmental structure for delivering fire protection and emergency services. A newly formed district would establish its own governing board, authorized services, administrative responsibilities, and funding framework.

- **Initiation by Petition or Resolution.** Formation proceedings may be initiated by a qualifying petition or, where authorized, a resolution of application. For both community services districts and fire protection districts, a formation petition must be signed by at least 25 percent of registered voters residing within the proposed district boundaries (Government Code Section 61011(c) and Health and Safety Code Section 13818). The petition must also satisfy applicable statutory requirements regarding proposed boundaries, services, financing, and governance.
- **Plan for Services and LAFCo Application.** A formation proposal requires identification of proposed boundaries, governance arrangements, authorized services, and a financially feasible Plan for Services. The plan should address staffing, facilities, apparatus, operational responsibilities, and anticipated revenues and expenditures. LAFCo evaluates the proposal and conducts a public hearing before determining whether to approve formation.
- **Special Tax Approval.** A newly formed district may require a dedicated funding mechanism to support ongoing operations. A special tax could be proposed in conjunction with formation, allowing voters to consider the organizational structure and its financing as part of a coordinated process. A special tax generally requires approval by two-thirds of voters voting on the measure.
- **Formation Election and Confirmation.** Depending on the applicable principal act, initiation method, and statutory requirements, formation generally requires majority voter approval. Where an election is required, voters may consider formation, the initial governing board, and any proposed special tax. Following completion of all required proceedings, LAFCo issues the Certificate of Completion.
- **Completion and Boundary Filing.** Following satisfaction of applicable election requirements, LAFCo completes the proceedings and issues a Certificate of Completion. Required documentation is recorded with the County Recorder and submitted to the State Board of Equalization (BOE), as applicable. Timely completion and filing are important for implementing boundary changes and associated property tax administration.

8.3 Implementation Considerations

Regardless of the organizational approach, successful implementation would require coordinated planning among affected agencies, local officials, volunteers, and communities. The following considerations would be important in evaluating the feasibility and long-term sustainability of any proposed restructuring.

- **Governance and Community Representation.** Organizational changes may require establishing or modifying governing boards, administrative responsibilities, and

representation across expanded service areas. Potential approaches could include expanding board membership, establishing geographic representation or community advisory committees, and changing the district name to better reflect the communities served. LAFCo may also establish terms and conditions addressing governance, representation, transfer of assets and liabilities, financial arrangements, and other transitional responsibilities. These provisions could help formalize agreements among participating agencies, establish expectations and commitments prior to reorganization, and preserve local participation and community identity within a unified governance structure.

- **Service Delivery and Organizational Structure.** A comprehensive Plan for Services should identify how fire protection and emergency response would be coordinated across the proposed service area. Regional or battalion-based structures could preserve local fire stations, volunteer companies, and community identities while establishing shared leadership, training, administrative support, and operational standards. Existing nonprofit fire associations could potentially continue supporting local fundraising, volunteer recruitment, and community activities.
- **Financial Sustainability.** A detailed financial analysis should evaluate existing and potential property tax revenues, special taxes, grants, and other funding sources against projected operating costs, administrative expenses, and capital replacement needs. Consideration should also be given to community affordability, particularly in disadvantaged rural areas where the ability to support additional taxes or assessments may be limited. Special tax ordinances could incorporate provisions such as hardship exemptions for qualifying low-income property owners, exemptions or reduced rates for contiguous parcels under common ownership, differentiated rates based on property use or development status, and annual adjustments tied to the Consumer Price Index (CPI), subject to applicable legal requirements. These provisions could help balance equitable cost distribution, community affordability, and long-term revenue stability while improving the feasibility and public acceptance of a proposed funding measure..
- **Staffing and Volunteer Recruitment and Retention.** Additional funding and regional coordination could support paid-on-call programs, duty shifts, expanded training opportunities, and reimbursement of volunteer expenses. Depending on available resources, organizational improvements could also include shared or full-time fire leadership, battalion officers, administrative personnel, and dedicated training staff to reduce the administrative burden on volunteers.
- **Facilities, Apparatus, and Equipment.** Implementation planning should include an inventory and assessment of existing fire stations, apparatus, equipment, and other assets. Participating agencies would need to address ownership, maintenance responsibilities, outstanding indebtedness and liabilities, and potential asset transfers or shared-use agreements. A coordinated capital improvement and replacement plan could help prioritize investments and identify opportunities for grant funding and shared procurement.
- **Phased Implementation and Community Engagement.** A phased approach may be appropriate given the geographic extent of rural service areas, limited volunteer capacity, and varying financial conditions among participating agencies. Initial efforts could focus on shared leadership, training, and administrative coordination, followed by formal organizational changes as funding and capacity allow. Continued engagement with residents, property

owners, volunteers, and other interested parties would be essential to addressing concerns regarding governance, taxation, service levels, and preservation of local identity.

Ultimately, any proposed organizational change should be evaluated based on its ability to improve financial sustainability, strengthen operational capacity, preserve community representation and volunteer participation, and provide reliable fire protection and emergency services over the long term.

9.0 Municipal Service Review Determinations

Pursuant to Government Code Section 56430, the Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Local Government Reorganization Act of 2000 (CKH Act) requires LAFCo to conduct a municipal service review (MSR) before or in conjunction with updating an agency's sphere of influence (SOI). The purpose of the MSR is to evaluate the adequacy, efficiency, and sustainability of public services and identify opportunities to improve service delivery.

This MSR evaluates fire protection and emergency services throughout the Down River region, including services provided by Salyer Community Services District (CSD), Hawkins Bar Volunteer Fire Department (VFD), and Down River Volunteer Fire Company (VFC). Although the statutory determinations apply specifically to Salyer CSD as the public agency subject to the SOI update, the regional analysis considers the interconnected nature of fire protection services, shared challenges, and potential governance and service delivery alternatives.

Government Code Section 56430(a) requires the Commission to adopt written determinations addressing seven statutory factors. The following determinations are based on the findings presented in the Regional Overview, Shared Challenges and Opportunities, Agency Profiles, and Governance and Reorganization Alternatives chapters of this report.

(1) Growth and population projections for the affected area

a) The Down River region is characterized by small, geographically dispersed rural communities, low population density, and substantial areas of forestland and mountainous terrain. Development is concentrated along SR-299 and adjoining local roads, with limited opportunities for substantial residential or commercial expansion.

b) Trinity County's population is projected to remain relatively stable or decline modestly over the long term. Available demographic forecasts indicate a decrease from approximately 16,112 residents in 2020 to 15,330 by 2050. Although these projections apply countywide, they suggest that substantial population growth is unlikely to be a primary driver of increased fire service demand in the Down River region.

c) Seasonal residences, recreational visitation, and through traffic along SR-299 contribute to fluctuations in the population and emergency service demand that are not fully reflected in permanent population estimates. These factors are particularly relevant to rural fire service providers with limited staffing and broad geographic response areas.

d) Future fire service demands are expected to be driven less by population growth and more by wildfire exposure, transportation incidents, aging infrastructure, escalating equipment and operational costs, and an aging population with a shrinking pool of available volunteers. Fire service costs, particularly apparatus and equipment replacement, may continue to increase faster than general inflation, placing additional pressure on limited local revenues. Accordingly, long-term planning should emphasize sustainable staffing, capital replacement, and regional collaboration to achieve economies of scale, share resources, and improve service efficiency.

(2) Location and characteristics of any disadvantaged unincorporated communities within or contiguous to the sphere of influence

a) The Down River region includes several rural communities with median household incomes substantially below the statewide median. Available income estimates identify Salyer, Burnt

Ranch, and nearby Willow Creek as falling below 80 percent of the statewide median household income (MHI), while Trinity Village exceeds this threshold.

b) These income characteristics indicate potential financial constraints on the ability of residents to support increased special taxes or other local funding mechanisms. The limited population and property tax base further restrict opportunities to generate sufficient revenues for fire protection services through existing local funding sources.

c) The adequacy of structural fire protection services is an important consideration for disadvantaged communities, particularly where limited local revenues, volunteer staffing constraints, and aging apparatus may affect emergency response capabilities. Opportunities for improved coordination, shared resources, and regional funding mechanisms could help address these challenges.

d) Any future SOI amendment, annexation, or reorganization involving surrounding communities should include further evaluation of disadvantaged community characteristics, existing service deficiencies, financial impacts, and opportunities to improve equitable access to emergency services.

(3) Present and planned capacity of public facilities and adequacy of public services, including infrastructure needs or deficiencies

a) Salyer VFD, Hawkins Bar VFD, and Down River VFC provide essential fire protection and emergency response services throughout the Down River region. However, limited volunteer staffing, recruitment and retention challenges, and leadership succession concerns affect long-term service capacity and reliability.

b) Existing fire stations, apparatus, and equipment support local response capabilities, but aging infrastructure, equipment replacement costs, and limited financial resources present ongoing challenges. The region's mountainous terrain, dispersed development, and limited road access further complicate emergency response.

c) Regional coordination and shared resources could improve staffing, training, equipment utilization, and emergency response readiness. Opportunities include shared leadership and staffing arrangements, such as a regional fire chief or joint training officer, as well as strengthened mutual and automatic aid agreements. These collaborative measures could provide near-term service improvements and serve as incremental steps toward potential regional reorganization. Any future reorganization should be supported by a detailed plan for services that establishes clear operational responsibilities and ensures adequate service capacity throughout the affected area.

(4) Financing ability of agencies to provide services

a) Down River fire service providers operate with limited and varied funding sources, including special taxes, donations, grants, and reimbursements. Existing revenues are generally insufficient to support substantial staffing enhancements, major capital improvements, and long-term equipment replacement without additional funding.

b) Reliance on volunteer personnel and outside grants helps sustain existing operations but presents challenges for long-term financial stability. Reliable recurring revenues and coordinated capital planning are needed to maintain and improve services.

c) Regional collaboration or reorganization could create opportunities to share costs, improve financial efficiency, and establish more sustainable funding mechanisms. However, organizational changes alone will not resolve existing funding limitations. Any proposed alternative should be supported by a comprehensive financial analysis that aligns service responsibilities with available resources.

(5) Status of and, opportunities for, shared facilities

a) Salyer VFD, Hawkins Bar VFD, and Down River VFC maintain separate fire stations, apparatus, equipment, and volunteer personnel. These locally based resources are important for maintaining emergency response coverage across the region's geographically dispersed communities.

b) Opportunities exist to improve resource utilization through shared equipment, coordinated purchasing and capital planning, and joint use of facilities. Greater regional coordination could help reduce duplication, achieve economies of scale, and make more efficient use of limited financial and operational resources.

c) Shared staffing arrangements and strengthened mutual and automatic aid agreements could improve operational coordination while maintaining local response capabilities. Such arrangements could be implemented incrementally and evaluated before pursuing more formal organizational changes.

(6) Accountability for community service needs, including governmental structure and operational efficiencies

a) Salyer CSD is an independent special district governed by a five-member Board of Directors and provides a public governance and funding structure for fire protection services. Fire and emergency response services are provided through Salyer VFD, a separate nonprofit organization. The respective roles and responsibilities of the District and VFD, including operational oversight, financial arrangements, and accountability, should be clearly documented and maintained.

b) Salyer CSD does not currently maintain a public website as generally required by Government Code Section 53087.8. The District qualifies for a statutory hardship exemption and should adopt the required resolution annually until it can establish and maintain a compliant website. Continued compliance with public meeting, financial reporting, and other transparency requirements is important to maintaining public accountability.

c) The Down River region’s fire service providers operate under differing organizational and governance structures, reflecting their respective community histories and needs. Greater coordination in leadership, administration, training, and financial planning could improve operational efficiency while maintaining local participation and representation.

d) Salyer CSD's existing public agency structure provides a potential framework for regional fire service governance if supported by affected agencies and communities. Any future reorganization should clearly establish governing board representation, operational responsibilities, financial accountability, and mechanisms for continued community involvement.

(7) Any other matter related to effective or efficient service delivery

a) The long-term sustainability of fire protection services throughout the Down River region is challenged by declining volunteer availability, leadership succession needs, increasing operational costs, and limited local funding. These conditions warrant continued evaluation of collaborative service delivery approaches that strengthen regional capabilities while preserving community-based emergency response.

b) Near-term priorities should include strengthening mutual and automatic aid agreements, coordinating volunteer recruitment and training, exploring shared leadership and administrative staffing, and developing joint equipment and capital replacement strategies. These measures could provide immediate operational benefits and establish a foundation for evaluating longer-term governance alternatives.

c) Regional reorganization alternatives, including annexation to an existing public district or new district formation, could strengthen local governance and establish a foundation for broader countywide fire service coordination. A countywide approach could involve regional districts participating in a joint powers authority (JPA) to coordinate leadership, staffing, training, administration, and capital planning while retaining local governance and service responsibilities. This approach would allow participating regions to retain a meaningful voice in decisions affecting their communities while benefiting from shared resources and economies of scale. Establishing such a framework would require broader coordination among Trinity County and fire protection agencies throughout the county, with the Down River region potentially serving as an early model for community-based regional organization.

d) LAFCo should continue to encourage regional coordination and consider the findings of this MSR when evaluating future SOI amendments, annexations, and other organizational changes affecting fire protection services in the Down River region.

10.0 Sphere of Influence Determinations

The Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Local Government Reorganization Act of 2000 requires LAFCo to establish and periodically review the sphere of influence (SOI) of each city and special district within its jurisdiction. An SOI represents LAFCo's determination of the probable physical boundaries and service area of a local agency.

Government Code Section 56425 requires LAFCo to consider specified factors when establishing, amending, or updating an SOI. These determinations are informed by the findings of the Municipal Service Review, existing service arrangements, anticipated community needs, and potential opportunities for improved service delivery.

10.1 Sphere of Influence Review

This Draft MSR/SOI Update evaluates existing fire protection services and potential governance and reorganization alternatives within the Down River region. The findings will inform the Commission's consideration of appropriate SOI designation for Salyer CSD.

SOI determinations are intentionally deferred in this Draft Report to allow for review and discussion of the MSR findings, regional reorganization alternatives, and input from affected agencies and communities. Proposed SOI determinations and any recommended SOI changes will be developed following this review and incorporated into the final version of the report for Commission consideration.

10.2 Sphere of Influence Determinations

Reserved for subsequent report revisions following agency and community review of the Draft MSR/SOI Update.

(1) Present and planned land uses in the area, including agricultural and open-space lands

(2) Present and probable need for public facilities and services in the area

(3) Present capacity of public facilities and adequacy of public services that the agency provides or is authorized to provide

(4) Existence of any social or economic communities of interest in the area if the commission determines that they are relevant to the agency

(5) For an update of a sphere of influence of a city or special district that provides public facilities or services related to sewers, municipal and industrial water, or structural fire protection, the present and probable need for those public facilities and services of any disadvantaged unincorporated communities within the existing sphere

AGENDA ITEM 6.B.

MEETING: October 20, 2026
TO: Trinity LAFCo Commissioners
FROM: Colette Santsche, Executive Officer
SUBJECT: CALAFCO Northern Region Board of Directors Nomination

BACKGROUND

The California Association of Local Agency Formation Commissions (CALAFCO) will hold its 2026 Annual Conference on October 21–23, 2026, at the Sheraton Grand in Sacramento. The conference includes regional caucuses to elect representatives to the CALAFCO Board of Directors.

The Northern Region has four Board seats up for election this year, including two one-year terms and two two-year terms. CALAFCO initially received three official nominations for the four available seats. However, one of the candidates for a one-year term has withdrawn due to relocation. As a result, there is currently one candidate for each term category, leaving one one-year seat and one two-year seat without a candidate.

DISCUSSION

CALAFCO has been encouraging participation from Northern Region LAFCos to ensure representation on its Board of Directors, particularly from smaller and rural jurisdictions. With two seats currently lacking candidates, additional nominations are needed during the Northern Region Caucus.

Chair Jill Cox has expressed her willingness to serve on the CALAFCO Board and represent the Northern Region. Her participation would help fill one of the available seats while providing Trinity LAFCo with a greater voice in statewide policy discussions, legislative matters, and issues affecting rural and smaller LAFCos.

Although Trinity LAFCo has not budgeted for conference registration or associated travel expenses, Trinity County has agreed to support Chair Cox's travel expenses for the 2026 Annual Conference. CALAFCO has also provided discounted conference registration and coverage for one night of lodging. Additionally, CALAFCO has identified $1,000 in its adopted FY 2026–27 budget to help offset travel costs associated with Trinity's participation on the Board. While similar financial support may be available in future years, these arrangements have not been confirmed beyond the current fiscal year.

CALAFCO Board service involves a relatively modest travel commitment, as most regular Board meetings are conducted in a hybrid format with remote participation available. Based on the adopted 2026–2027 Board calendar (attached), the primary in-person commitments include a one-day strategic planning workshop in Sacramento on February 25, 2027, and the Annual Conference scheduled for September 8–10, 2027, in Pasadena. An additional in-person Board meeting is tentatively scheduled for October 2027, although that date is expected to change. The availability of remote participation for regular meetings helps minimize travel demands and associated expenses.

Staff will continue coordinating with Trinity County and CALAFCO regarding potential financial assistance for future in-person meetings and conference attendance.

The Northern Region Caucus is scheduled at the conference for Thursday, October 22, 2026, at 8:00 AM. Under CALAFCO's election procedures, nominations may be made from the floor during the caucus. While formal Commission approval is not required for a floor nomination, staff is requesting the Commission's support for Chair Cox's candidacy and potential service on the CALAFCO Board of Directors.

If the number of candidates equals the number of available seats following floor nominations, the election will be conducted by voice vote. If additional nominations result in more candidates than available seats, a written ballot election will be required. Any regional seats remaining vacant following the caucus will be filled through the statewide at-large election process during the Annual Business Meeting.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Commission express its support for Chair Jill Cox's nomination from the floor and potential service on the CALAFCO Board of Directors as a Northern Region representative.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: CALAFCO Board and Conference Calendar FY 2026-27

California Association of Local Agency Formation Commissions
CALAFCO
SUPPORTING SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY GROWTH

BOARD AND CONFERENCE CALENDAR

Updated September 10, 2026

Agenda Item 6.B
Attachment A



DATES TO HOLD

The following calendar includes CALAFCO Board meetings and annual conference dates through the end of 2027. All times are Pacific. Board meeting dates remain subject to change by Board action.

2026

OCTOBER 21-23, 2026

CALAFCO Annual Conference

IN PERSON

Sheraton Grand Sacramento Hotel
1230 J Street, Sacramento, CA 95814
Regional caucus elections: October 22 at 8:00 a.m. | Annual Business Meeting: 9:00 a.m.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2026 | 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Regular Board Meeting

HYBRID

CALAFCO Office
1000 G Street, Suite 380, Sacramento, CA 95814
Contact CALAFCO staff at info@calafco.org for Zoom information.

2027

FRIDAY, JANUARY 22, 2027 | 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Regular Board Meeting

HYBRID

CALAFCO Office
1000 G Street, Suite 380, Sacramento, CA 95814
Contact CALAFCO staff at info@calafco.org for Zoom information.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2027 | 9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Board Strategic Planning Workshop

IN PERSON

CALAFCO Office
1000 G Street, Suite 380, Sacramento, CA 95814

California Association of Local Agency Formation Commissions
CALAFCO
SUPPORTING SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY GROWTH

BOARD AND CONFERENCE CALENDAR

Updated September 10, 2026

2027 CONTINUED

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2027 | 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Regular Board Meeting

HYBRID

CALAFCO Office
1000 G Street, Suite 380, Sacramento, CA 95814
Contact CALAFCO staff at info@calafco.org for Zoom information.

FRIDAY, MAY 14, 2027 | 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Regular Board Meeting

HYBRID

CALAFCO Office
1000 G Street, Suite 380, Sacramento, CA 95814
Contact CALAFCO staff at info@calafco.org for Zoom information.

FRIDAY, AUGUST 27, 2027 | 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Regular Board Meeting

HYBRID

CALAFCO Office
1000 G Street, Suite 380, Sacramento, CA 95814
This meeting may be rescheduled by Board action because it falls close to the Annual Conference. Continue to hold the current date until an updated schedule is approved. Contact CALAFCO staff at info@calafco.org for Zoom information.

SEPTEMBER 8-10, 2027

CALAFCO Annual Conference

IN PERSON

Pasadena, California
Additional conference and venue information will be provided as it becomes available.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2027 | 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Regular Board Meeting

IN PERSON

Location to be determined
This meeting remains on the Board-approved calendar but is expected to be rescheduled. Updated information will be distributed following Board action.

Regular Board meetings may adjourn earlier if Board business is completed.

AGENDA ITEM 6.C.

MEETING: October 20, 2026
TO: Trinity LAFCo Commissioners
FROM: Colette Santsche, Executive Officer
SUBJECT: Fiscal Year 2025-26 Year-End Financial Report

BACKGROUND

On June 17, 2025, the Commission adopted its final budget for Fiscal Year (FY) 2025-26 through Resolution No. 2025-05, in accordance with California Government Code Section 56381. Following the close of each fiscal year, staff prepares a year-end financial report summarizing actual revenues and expenditures compared to the adopted budget for the Commission's review.

DISCUSSION

This report summarizes the Commission's financial activity for FY 2025-26, including a comparison of budgeted and actual revenues and expenditures. A detailed account-by-account breakdown is provided in Attachment A. The table below summarizes the year-end financial activity.

Budget Item	Adopted FY 2025-26	Year-End Actual	Difference
Total Revenues	$37,800.00	$34,894.66	($2,905.34)
Total Expenditures	$49,900.00	$44,653.64	($5,246.36)
Operating Difference*	**($12,100.00)**	**($9,758.98)**	**+$2,341.02**

**Negative Balance indicates use of Reserves*

Revenues & Expenditures

Actual revenues totaled $34,894.66, approximately $2,905 below the adopted budget. The difference was primarily attributable to the absence of application fee revenues, which were budgeted at $5,000. This shortfall was partially offset by $2,075 in interest earnings that were not included in the adopted budget.

Actual expenditures totaled $44,653.37, approximately $5,247 below the adopted budget. The primary expenditure savings occurred in the following accounts:

- Professional & Specialized Services – Applications: $5,000 below budget, with no application-related expenditures incurred.
- Publications & Legal Notices: $341.53 below budget, with actual expenditures of $158.47.
- Transportation & Travel: $639 below budget, with actual expenditures of $861.

These savings were partially offset by expenditures exceeding budgeted amounts in certain professional services categories, including staffing and MSR/SOI services.

Fund Balance and Reserves

The Commission's adopted budget anticipated the use of $12,100 in reserves to offset the projected operating deficit. Actual expenditures exceeded revenues by $9,758.71, resulting in approximately $2,341 less reserve usage than anticipated.

The Commission ended FY 2025-26 with a fund balance of $52,538, compared to a beginning balance of $62,297.

Overall, the Commission concluded the fiscal year with expenditures below budget and a smaller operating deficit than originally anticipated. No budget amendments are proposed.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends the Commission receive and file the FY 2025-26 Year-End Financial Report. The Commission is invited to discuss the item and provide direction to staff as needed.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: FY 2025-26 Year-End Financial Summary

Trinity LAFCo Budget

Agenda Item 6.C
Attachment A

Categories	Acct #	FY 2024/25 Amended Budget	FY 2024/25 Year End Actual	FY 2025/26 Adopted Budget	FY 2025/26 Year End Actual	FY 2026/27 Adopted Budget
REVENUES:						
Interest	6601	-	3,294.83	-	2,075.47	-
LAFCo Fees (Applications)	8404	12,000	11,557.50	5,000	-	5,250.00
Cont From Other Agencies:						
County	9282	15,500	15,500.00	16,400	16,400.00	17,200
Indep Spec Districts	9285	15,500	16,226.42	16,400	16,419.19	17,200
TOTAL Revenues		$ 43,000	46,578.75	$ 37,800	$ 34,894.66	$ 39,650
EXPENDITURES:						
Memberships	2240	1,400	1,378.00	1,500	1,423.00	1,500
Office	2260	500	395.70	600	137.71	600
Professional & Specialized:	2300	52,800	51,557.50	45,800	42,073.19	45,800
- Staffing services		*25,000*	*24,650.00*	*25,000*	*25,686.25*	*25,000*
- MSR/SOI		*15,000*	*15,350.00*	*15,000*	*16,366.95*	*15,000*
- Applications		*12,000*	*11,557.50*	*5,000*	*-*	*5,000*
- Legal Counsel		*500*	*-*	*500*	*-*	*500*
- Web Service		*300*	*-*	*300*	*19.99*	*300*
Publications & Legal Notices	2500	550.00	514.91	500	158.47	500
Transportation & Travel	2750	1,650.00	1,608.02	1,500	861.00	1,500
Training	2756	-	-	-	-	-
Contrib to Non LAF Agency	3200	-	-	-	-	-
Transfer Out		-	-	-	-	-
TOTAL Expenditures		$ 56,900	$ 55,454.13	$ 49,900	$ 44,653.37	$ 49,900
Operating Difference		$ (13,900)	$ (8,875.38)	$ (12,100)	$ (9,759)	$ (10,250)

(Negative Balance Indicates Use of Reserves)

FUND BALANCE/RESERVES						
Beginning Year Fund Balance		$ 71,172		$ 62,297		$ 52,538
Ending Year Fund Balance			$ 62,297		$ 52,538	