

## YELLOWSTONE COUNTY FIRE COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES - SEPT 12, 2023

1. Meeting held at the Fuego Fire Station. Introductions made.
2. Meeting minutes approved from July 11.
3. Treasurer's Report: As authorized, \$10,597.69 from the calendar sales was distributed evenly to the Molt, Broadview, Fuego, Haley Bench, and Custer volunteer fire departments. The Fire Council now has \$319.42 in its checking account.
4. Fire Warden/DES Report: The next round of the Rural Fire Capacity grants from the US Forest Service will see an increase to \$16,000 available in Yellowstone County. Applications from our county will be due in Feb in order to meet the national deadline in March. As usual there will be a 10% match from each fire department. Eligibility requirements consist of submitting fire reports to NIFRS and having basic NIMS certifications. The IamResponding bill has been paid by the county. Grass fire contracts: The county has increased the amount paid for grass fire contracts by 1.6% again, and another \$5000.00 is being given to each rural fire department to help with cost increases for fuel and equipment. The grass fire contract is currently being reworked. It has been discovered some information used to determine payouts is obsolete. The current contracts are based on grass fire equipment costs incurred for 6 months each year (when wildland fire seasons used to be a matter of a few months). Phil Ehlers believes with much longer wildland fire seasons (nearly year round), contracts need to be based on a full year of expenses. Phil will continue to compile actual costs to maintain wildland fire equipment for the county commissioners to consider in revamping grass fire contracts. In order to be eligible to have a grass fire contract, there must be a roster of current firefighters, certification of basic wildland fire training, certification of NIMS (ICS) training, and proof of vehicle insurance. In lieu of certifications, a letter from the fire chief testifying to meeting requirements will suffice. The county DES is now using a program called Salamander which will allow emergency management information to be organized and stored. KC Williams has offered to store fire dept. training records in it and also county fire equipment resources. New identification badges for all county fire firefighters and trucks are being introduced. Some pertinent fire fighter or fire truck information plus photo can be "stored" on the badge and is scannable. This will help track fire fighters and equipment arriving at and departing large fires. This will eliminate hand written notes. The scanned information can be used to help obtain reimbursements for fire depts. on large incidents.

OLD BUSINESS: (See Fire Warden/DES report on grass fire contracts.) Travis Jones says the Resource Book for 2023 has never been completed because only 6 out of 12 fire departments provided updates. Originally it was intended that updates were to be due by Dec. 1 of each year in order to be "published" in January of the following year. KC Williams offered the new Salamander program to replace the Resource Book. Though it will not store all the various information as is contained in our current book, it can be more easily updated throughout the year.

NEW BUSINESS: Derek Yeager has once again requested that the rural fire departments not flood the dispatch frequencies with individual truck numbers especially during a large or multiple concurrent incidents. Other radio traffic can be impeded. The Dispatch Center also struggles with understaffing, and at times do not have the dispatchers available to handle surges in radio traffic. Derek says they do not track rural fire truck numbers so all that is really needed is for a fire dept. to use its name only to acknowledge a page, responding to a scene, on scene, clearing a scene, and back in quarters. Another problem is dispatchers are getting

more than one person claiming to be the IC, and with multiple "IC's" they often get conflicting orders about which resources to order and/or cancel. This is exacerbated when the Sheriff and/or Highway Patrol get on scene first and assume IC. KC Williams responded that the fire depts. are not following our county SOP's when it comes to Incident Command. It was decided to have a fire chief's meeting and invite Derek Yeager, law enforcement, and medical to discuss the problems further.

5. Agency Reports: Billings - Montana Fire Service Convention will be held Oct. 11-14 at the downtown Double Tree/Hilton. Laurel - Getting a new truck. Fuego - Having communication issues along Highway 3 between MM #9 - #15. There have been several horrific accidents there this summer. One area near MM #14 has an optical illusion which portrays a straight stretch as a clear view with easy passing, however a dip in the road has vehicles "popping up" suddenly and seemingly out of now where. Broadview - Working on a Type 4 engine. Blue Creek - Hosting their annual fall breakfast on Oct. 8 from 8 am till noon. Lockwood - Are obtaining new radios capable of handling the 800 Mz to better communicate with Billings Fire and law enforcement. They will donate their old radios to the rural fire depts. at the Nov. Fire Council meeting. A new automatic mutual aid agreement between Lockwood and Billings will commence in June, 2024. At a later time, Lockwood hopes to enact one with Shepherd. Plans are proceeding in developing what will become a regional fire training center on 4 acres of land adjacent to the fire station. Chief Staley is retiring Dec 29, and 16 people applied for his job. That number has been reduced to 5 people. Have 2 firefighters training in Belgrade. Lockwood will also donate used wildland and structure gear at the Nov. Fire Council meeting. Shepherd - Plans are proceeding for Republic's recycling center on the Shepherd Acton Road. Plans include installing a 30,000 gallon dry hydrant. Thank you's extended to AMR, DNRC, MHP, and YCSO for their help on various calls this summer. Custer - Quiet. Hope to have the new Hysham Hills fire repeater running in Nov. AMR - Nothing new to report. DNRC - The Billings Interagency Dispatch Center is cutting back hours to just 5 days a week. Air support will be pulled soon. Thanked everyone who responded to the Pryor Creek Road Fire. Though awkward at times working with BIA Fire, suppression was successful. Time to put in training requests for fall. Can do NIMS 300 and 400 classes. Keep submitting grass fire reports to DNRC. Very important to get funding directed to the Southern Land Office. Sheriff's Office - Thanks to all who responded to the fire near Pryor. MHP - Eric Gilbert is the new liaison officer to the Fire Council. FSTS - Hired 3 new full time instructors. (Sigh of relief)! County Fire Chief - John Ostlund thanked everyone who responded to the fire near Pryor.

6. At the end of the meeting there was brief mention of county fire departments banding together in a cooperative manner to purchase fire equipment. There is a potential save money.

Larry Carpenter, Sec/Treas.  
YCFC

NEXT FIRE COUNCIL MEETING IS AT LOCKWOOD ON NOV. 14 AT 7:00 PM. CHILI AND CINNAMON ROLLS TO BE SERVED.