

Yellowstone County Fire Council

P.O. Box 35004 . Billings . Montana . 59107 . 406-256-2775



YELLOWSTONE COUNTY FIRE COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES – MAY 12, 2026

Meeting was held at Huntley VFD.

1. Introductions made.
2. Minutes of the Mar. 10, 2026, meeting were approved.
3. Treasurers Report: The checking account is \$600.18.

OLD BUSINESS:

1. None presented.

NEW BUSINESS:

1. Proposals for new structuring of rural fire departments and the county grass fire contracts: Derek Yeager spent considerable time researching the history of rural fire protection in the county, fire laws applicable to the county and rural fire departments, and possible changes that could be made in rural fire protection in the county. Derek had his work reviewed for accuracy by a lawyer who specializes in fire law. Derek went on to define the difference between Fire Districts that own and operate their own fire department and Fire Companies which rely on donations or firefighting contracts with other entities such as a Fire Service Area or county government. In a Fire District, because funding comes from property taxes, those fire districts are ineligible for any additional county funding for wildland fires within the district. Fire Districts are required to respond to all fire incidents. Currently there are 3 fire districts in Yellowstone County: Lockwood, Broadview, and Laurel.

Fire Companies are considered “public benefit corporations” which are non-profit corporations which provide a benefit, in this case fire protection, to the public. Fire Companies may have a contract with the county for wildland fire response, but they may not receive workers compensation insurance from the county because members of Fire Companies are not considered county employees. Officers of Fire Companies have a lot of exposure to liability lawsuits. It is therefore important that Fire Companies have a good set of written S.O.P’s and follow them.

Derek presented a total of 6 options for consideration. One would be to do nothing and have things remain as they are. The 5 new options are:

OPTION A: Create a county wide fire department out of all the Volunteer Fire Companies. The 3 Fire Districts would have the option to join this new agency if they wish. It would respond to all types of calls currently handled by the existing fire departments.

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OPTION B: Create a county fire department that would include only those Fire Companies who voluntarily wish to join. You would possibly end up with a combination of some Volunteer Fire Companies and a County Fire Department.

OPTION C: Create a county fire department that would take responsibility for responding to wildland fires only. It would be the 13th fire department within Yellowstone County. The Volunteer Fire Companies would continue to separately exist and respond to emergencies.

OPTION D1: County contract with the Volunteer Fire Companies for wildland fire response. Financial compensation would be based on Standard Operating Procedures and a Memorandum of Understanding.

OPTION D2: County contract with Volunteer Fire Companies would be negotiated and bid on.

After much discussion, the fire departments decided to consider option A. and option D. 1. Fire chiefs will consider these two options before the next Fire Council meeting. Haley Bench VFD did mention that for them, the responsibilities of providing wildland fire protection for their assigned area seemed too time consuming at times. There was a short discussion about disbanding Haley Bench VFD and divide their area up between neighboring fire departments. Their officers were going to discuss this matter in more detail within their department.

Agency Reports:

No agency reports given.

Next Council Meeting: July 14th Blue Creek Fire Station at 7:00PM