

# **Rural Safety**

## **SUMMARY**

Approximately 90,000 Humboldt County residents (2/3 of the population) live in rural areas. Their safety has become a serious issue. Fire and emergency units are the key to rural safety infrastructure and these units are the quickest to respond to any kind of call because they are community-based. The public may consider rural fire and emergency services and law enforcement services as having equivalent status, but California law treats them very differently. The provisions for organization and funding which California law has established for fire and emergency services in unincorporated areas are obsolete. Essential modern and functional gear and equipment are urgently needed.

The legislature's "local/traditional/self-tax" policy for fire and emergency services is no longer tenable as the industries and commercial activities that supported this policy have faded away. The present system is unfair in that rate payers (those who pay taxes for fire and emergency services) also pay for these services for the people who live in "no district" territories. Several California counties have had the foresight to create a regional model with a countywide fire district, a county fire and emergency services officer, and a governing board. The Humboldt County Grand Jury believes this model holds promise for our county. The Humboldt County Grand Jury recommends that Humboldt County Board of Supervisors establishes the position of Humboldt County Director of Fire and Emergency Services.

The Humboldt County Grand Jury believes the county's fire and emergency services units need a budget that brings all units to a baseline that provides sufficient, modern safety gear and equipment. The Humboldt County Grand Jury recommends that for the coming five years, Humboldt County should compensate for decades of dwindling resources by assigning a minimum of 20% of the Measure Z tax revenue to rural fire and emergency service providers, as recommended by the Fire Chiefs' Association of Humboldt County. The Humboldt County Grand Jury also recommends that the county go beyond these temporary measures to permanently fund a regional fire and emergency services district.

## **BACKGROUND**

California fire law for unincorporated areas is permissive, encouraging communities to tax themselves to meet the need for fire and emergency protection. The Government Code of the State of California (Sec.24000, Appendix) mandates that there be a county sheriff and district attorney, providing a strong base for effective countywide law enforcement and justice operations. There is no mandate or expectation for a county to have a Fire Chief, though some do.

Following the law, Humboldt County rural communities have created an unusually large number (42) of local fire and emergency units, although 40% of the county territory is not in a fire service area. (Map, Appendix) The Humboldt County rural fire and emergency services units are almost entirely dependent on volunteers. Many small fire and emergency districts have seen their tax bases eroded with the decline in tax support from commerce and industry. However, we have

received no reports that “out of district” emergencies are ever ignored. Bordering district fire and emergency units respond, with the costs of services falling back on the ratepayers of the responding district. For example, this is a problem between Blue Lake and Willow Creek on State Route 299.

The Humboldt County Board of Supervisors has secured a five-year countywide tax increase, Measure Z, which went into effect on 4/1/2015. (Measure Z, Appendix.) Funds generated by Measure Z are temporarily available for county priorities. Measure Z is projected to generate approximately \$8 million of annual revenue for Humboldt County.

Rural can be defined many ways. “All except Eureka” applies to our county situation, because of the lack of countywide infrastructure and unavailability of services. Abraham Maslow’s description for safety, “having shelter; freedom from injury or danger”, is suitable for this report. The testimony and data gathered during this inquiry reveal widespread concern among the rural residents about adequate shelter and freedom from danger. The protection of lives and property of rural residents is the work of the County Sheriff and 42 local fire and emergency units.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The Rural Safety investigation began with interviews of elected county officials, individuals who serve in law enforcement and fire and emergency services, and others who have expertise in these and other related areas. The Humboldt County Grand Jury sought descriptors for “rural” and “safety” which best fit our Humboldt County geographic profiles. The California legislature’s website was a source for information about the California Government Code as it applies to county law enforcement, city fire services, and County Service Areas. The Humboldt County Grand Jury reviewed the Fire Protection District Law of 1987, also known as the Bergeson Fire District Law, California Health and Safety Code section 13800 et seq. (hereafter referred to as “Bergeson Law”). The Humboldt County Grand Jury also reviewed the detailed annual report on fire and emergency services compiled for the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors by the Fire Chiefs’ Association of Humboldt County and the 2006 and 2013 reports of the Humboldt County Fire Safe Council (FSC), which oversees the Humboldt County Community Wildfire Protection Plan. The Humboldt County Grand Jury also considered newspaper accounts about Proposition 172 distributions in California and other California counties’ websites regarding the organization of their fire and emergency services.

## **DISCUSSION**

A significant cause of declining funding for Humboldt County’s local fire and emergency services is the well-known decline in logging, lumber production, and the commerce associated with those industries, such as trucking, fire monitoring, and mill equipment support. Pacific Lumber’s rapid demise is still fresh knowledge. The Humboldt County Grand Jury also received statements from fire service personnel that their budget decline is due to a countywide diminishing of small district tax bases.

The 1993 Proposition 172 increased state funding for public safety. Statewide, Prop. 172 allocations have favored law enforcement over fire and emergency services. Some members of the local fire and emergency services community expressed concerns that Measure Z distributions will follow the Prop.172 paradigms. The Fire Chiefs' Association has recommended that 20% of the revenue generated by Measure Z be allocated to rural fire and emergency services units in support of the recommendations of the Fire Safe Council. The Fire Safe Council has repeatedly recommended to update the obsolete and unsafe equipment and gear essential for the safety of personnel, and increase the capability to protect rural Humboldt County residents.

For the past decade, reports by the Fire Chiefs' Association and the Fire Safe Council have made it plain that rural fire and emergency services units need adequate and reliable funding. Recently, the County Planning Department and CAL FIRE have helped several communities hold elections establishing two new fire and emergency services districts, consolidate two others, and are working to enlarge district boundaries to provide a larger tax base. Such changes take political will and a great deal of time and money. The Proposition 13 two-thirds majority requirement is a major challenge. (Prop. 13 requires a two-thirds vote majority in local elections for local governments wishing to increase taxes.)

Fire and emergency services departments do not have equal stature with law enforcement in the Humboldt County hierarchy. California law establishes a county Sheriff and District Attorney, leading countywide protection and crime prevention programs. No such requirement exists to establish a countywide fire and emergency services officer. However, there is no legal barrier to having a countywide fire and emergency services officer to address community needs. In fact, some California counties have established a county Fire Chief and universal county fire and emergency services coverage.

Many areas of the county are not in a fire and emergency services district, and some residents (those within a district) pay for their fire and emergency services protection while others (those in the "no district" category) do not.

The Fire Safe Council recommended that there be a plan for "consolidation, expansion, or formation of special districts to ensure adequate and sustainable fire protection for all residents of Humboldt County" (Section II 1.1, 2013 Humboldt County Community Wildfire Protection Plan). These recommendations were put forth by the FSC in 2006 and 2013. No such countywide plan has been approved or implemented by the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors.

Fire and emergency services in unincorporated county territory are governed by the Bergeson Law (Health and Safety Code, Appendix), which focuses on "local provision" as the "traditional" means to provide fire/rescue/emergency/medical/ ambulance and other protective services to California residents. The code provides no county mandate or specific plan for organizing or funding such services. It requires communities to, "meet their own circumstances and responsibilities." It authorizes communities to establish local districts to levy taxes for fire and emergency services, and describes ways to increase taxes when revenue falls short (Sections 2213910-13919). Another provision, Government Code 625210.1 (Appendix, Fact Sheet) allows

a county itself, in lieu of a local fire district, to operate a County Service Area (such as Humboldt CSA No. 4, between Trinidad and Orick) to serve a region where there is no district to do so.

Comprehensive countywide regional consolidation of fire and emergency services units have been established in Amador, Orange, San Mateo, San Bernardino, Sonoma, and Alameda counties. In contrast, Humboldt County now has 42 separate fire and emergency services units. Some of these units are city agencies. Some receive tax revenue via local Fire Districts or Community Services Districts. Some have non-profit status. Some are informal fire companies, self-funded via fundraising. Except for Humboldt Bay Fire District serving in and near Eureka, Humboldt County community firefighters are volunteers. The districts serving Arcata, McKinleyville and Fortuna have full-time paid chiefs.

The Humboldt County fire service map shows that large swaths (white areas) of rural territory are “non-service” areas, which are not in a fire and emergency services district. The residents there do not pay into a fire and emergency services support system. As a “good will” practice, firefighters from bordering districts respond to calls from those places as “out of district” calls even though they are not obligated to, with response expenses falling upon the rate payers and the home fire and emergency services unit. One fire unit reported that fire fighters actually “pass the hat” to collect enough money to pay for fuel.

The costs of protective gear and equipment meeting the standards of The National Fire Protection Association are out of reach for many fire and emergency services units. Clothing (“turn-out suits” costing \$1,200) are old, have holes in them and have lost their water-proof capabilities. Air supply packs (Self Contained Breathing Apparatus [SCBA] costing \$5000 to \$6,000) are essential for every person on a fire crew. Many parts are old and key parts such as face masks and air tanks are not interchangeable. Nozzles, masks, flashlights, radios, and other protective items now in use by crews are in many instances obsolete, mismatched, and often without the necessary physical integrity to provide adequate protection. Not every fire station has a modern Jaws of Life unit costing \$28,000. Some Jaws of Life tools are so old that spare parts do not exist. Rural fire and emergency services units lack secure communication systems, compromising the safety and effectiveness of personnel. Vehicles must be maintained according to California emission standards and be ready for a call at any time. A modern fire truck can cost \$250,000 or more and is expensive to insure.

## FINDINGS

- F1. **Equipment:** Emergency response crews lack needed modern gear and equipment. Rural responders are sometimes forced to use obsolete gear and clothing which do not adequately protect them. The lack of modern equipment jeopardizes safety and impairs the response capability of rural emergency response crews.
- F2. **Communication:** A secure and reliable communication system is needed by the fire and emergency services units.
- F3. **Safety is a concern for citizens in rural Humboldt County:** The 90,000 rural residents of Humboldt County have become increasingly apprehensive about their personal safety and the welfare of their property.

- F4. **Tax base:** The industries and commercial activities which supported the legislature’s “local/traditional/self-tax” policy of fire and emergency services in Humboldt County have faded away in the past 50 years. The present system is unfair to ratepayers who live in a district and find themselves paying for their own fire and emergency services and also for nonsubscribers who live in “no district” territory.
- F5. **A county fire and emergency services officer:** Humboldt County has a constellation of fire and emergency services organizations, with dedicated first responders. The lack of a county-level Director of Fire and Emergency Services, comparable to the Sheriff, to oversee and assist the local district personnel and programs, impacts the county-level ability to interact with state government, local, and city fire departments, and with the Sheriff’s Office.
- F6. **Bergeson Law:** The legislation governing fire and emergency services in unincorporated territory was written for another era and is now inadequate for Humboldt County.
- F7. **A different paradigm:** Other counties in California have set aside the localized fire and emergency services model promoted by the Bergeson Law and have moved to a regional model with a countywide district and board. In some cases, the county supervisors are the board.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- R1. The Humboldt County Grand Jury recommends that for the coming five years, Humboldt County should compensate for decades of dwindling resources by assigning a minimum of 20% of the Measure Z tax revenue to rural fire and emergency service providers, to address long-standing equipment deficiencies, as recommended by the Fire Chiefs’ Association of Humboldt County. (F1, F2, F3, F4)
- R2. The Humboldt County Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors set a goal to have all Humboldt County residents covered by a fire and emergency services district within five years. (F3, F4)
- R3. The Humboldt County Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors go beyond the Measure Z temporary funding and move to a permanent funding model for a regional fire and emergency services district. (F4, F6, F7)
- R4. The Humboldt County Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors establish a Humboldt County Director of Fire and Emergency Services position. (F5, F6, F7)
- R5. The Humboldt County Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors lobby the Humboldt County state legislators, requesting that the Bergeson Law be amended to better reflect the funding needs of today’s rural counties. (F6)
- R6. The Humboldt County Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors initiate a study to see how a countywide comprehensive fire and emergency services unification, covering all county residents, has been accomplished in other California counties. The

study should begin as soon as possible and be completed before the five year sunset of Measure Z. (F5, F6, F7)

## REQUEST FOR RESPONSES

Pursuant to Penal Code section 933.05, the grand jury requests responses as follows:

From the following governing bodies:

- The Humboldt County Board of Supervisors (R1 – R6)

## INVITED RESPONSES

- The Citizens Advisory Committee on Measure Z Expenditures (R1)
- The Humboldt County Fire Chiefs' Association (R1 – R6)
- The Humboldt County Fire Safe Council (R1 – R6)
- State Senator Mike McGuire (R5)
- State Assemblyman Jim Wood (R5)

Reports issued by the Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Penal Code section 929 requires that reports of the Grand Jury not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Grand Jury.
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## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Humboldt County Fire Chiefs' Association Annual Report (2013), Humboldt County Fire Chiefs Association, Humboldt County, Ca.

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Fire Safe Council 2013 Humboldt County Community Wildfire Protection Plan, FSC (CWPP), 1105 6<sup>th</sup> St. Eureka, Ca. 95501

<http://humboldt.gov/689/Fire-Safe-Council>

The Fire Protection District Law of 1987/ the Bergeson Fire District Law (§13800), California State Governance and Finance Committee-Senate Local Government Committee, Sacramento, Ca. <http://sgf.senate.ca.gov/thefireprotectiondistrictlawof1987>

The Citizens Advisory Committee on Measure Z Expenditures, 825 5<sup>th</sup> St. Eureka, Ca. 95501

<http://www.humboldt.gov/1968/Measure-Z-Advisory-Committee><http://www.humboldt.gov.org/1803/Measure-Z-Information>

**APPENDIX**

## Geographic Distribution of Local Fire Services Throughout Humboldt County

The map on the next page provides a geographic illustration of where and what type of local fire protection is provided throughout Humboldt County. The majority of local fire service providers in the county are associated with a special district. The special districts that provide fire services, including fire protection districts, community services districts, a county service area, and a resort improvement district are identified in the map legend as “District.” These districts were formed to provide services within a specific jurisdictional boundary and are supported by revenue from a combination of taxes, fees, and fundraising. Many of these jurisdictional boundaries were created as far back as the 1930’s. Since that time, neighborhoods, scattered subdivisions, and rural residential development have emerged outside of district boundaries. This newer development requires year-round fire protection and emergency services, which it receives in a variety of ways.

Some areas outside the boundaries of an established district receive fire protection from district resources responding outside of their jurisdictional areas. This type of service is identified in the map legend as “Out of District” and is often referred to as “goodwill service.”

District fire departments provide service to these areas even though they are under no obligation to do so and receive no compensation for their service, other than donations. This practice can put a strain on already limited resources. Furthermore, property owners within the district may question why the services funded through their taxes are benefiting out of district residents, particularly if they pay a special tax or benefit assessment specifically for fire protection.

Many areas outside the boundaries of an established district receive fire protection from a fire company that is not affiliated with a district. These fire companies receive no tax revenue and for that reason are identified on the map legend as “Non-Tax”. The survival of these fire companies depends on revenue generated from community donations, fundraisers, and grants. Some communities are more supportive of their local fire companies than others and support can fluctuate dramatically depending on local economic conditions.

# Humboldt County

## Local Fire Protection



### Legend

- Humboldt County Fire Departments  
Local Fire Organization**
- District
  - Out of District
  - Non-Tax

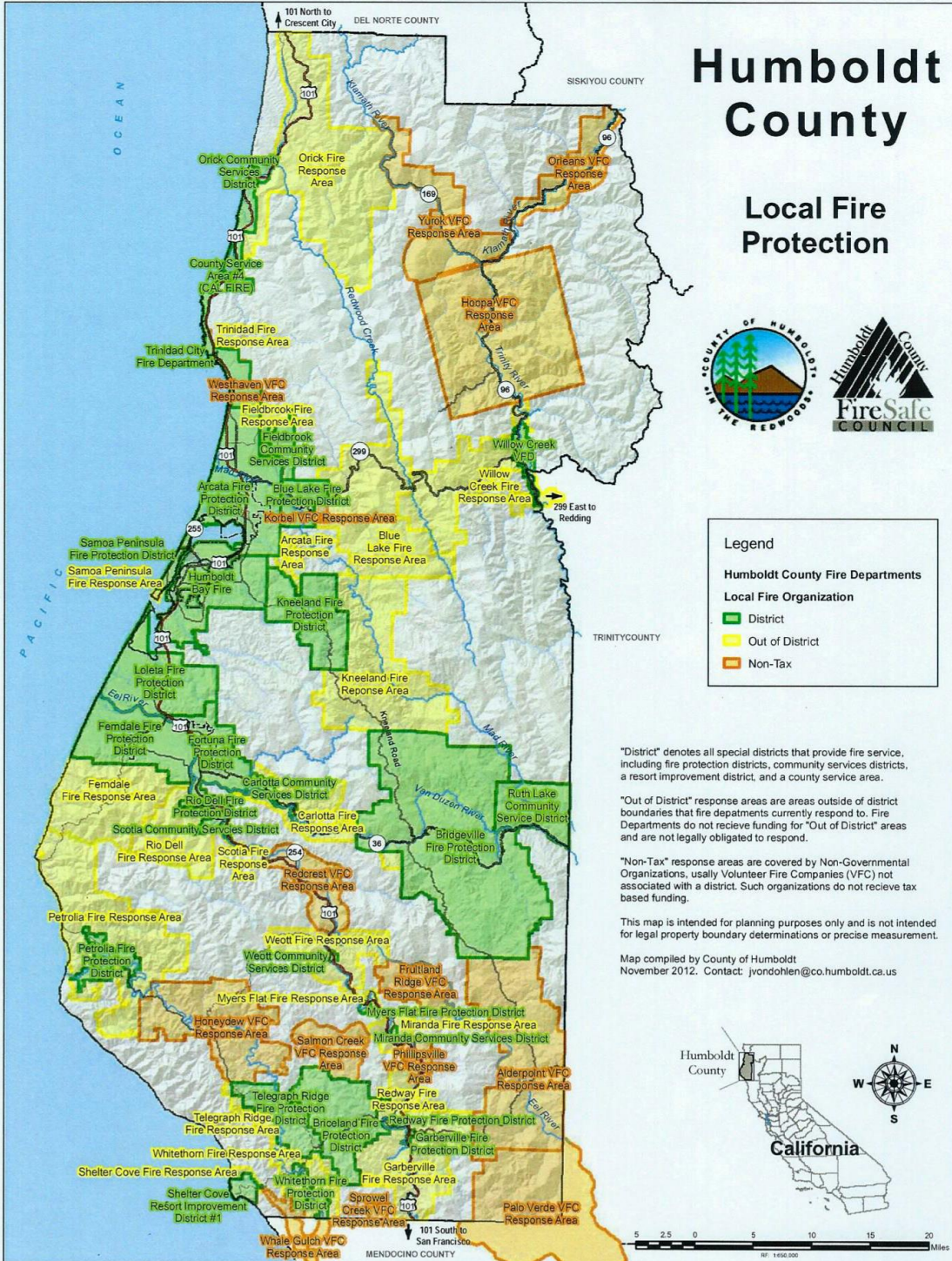
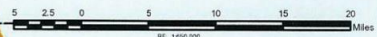
"District" denotes all special districts that provide fire service, including fire protection districts, community services districts, a resort improvement district, and a county service area.

"Out of District" response areas are areas outside of district boundaries that fire departments currently respond to. Fire Departments do not receive funding for "Out of District" areas and are not legally obligated to respond.

"Non-Tax" response areas are covered by Non-Governmental Organizations, usually Volunteer Fire Companies (VFC) not associated with a district. Such organizations do not receive tax based funding.

This map is intended for planning purposes only and is not intended for legal property boundary determinations or precise measurement.

Map compiled by County of Humboldt  
November 2012. Contact: [jvondohlen@co.humboldt.ca.us](mailto:jvondohlen@co.humboldt.ca.us)



## California Government Code\*

24000. The officers of a county are:

- (a) A district attorney.
- (b) A sheriff.
- (c) A county clerk.
- (d) A controller.
- (e) An auditor, who shall be ex officio controller.
- (f) A treasurer.
- (g) A recorder.
- (h) A license collector.
- (i) A tax collector, who shall be ex officio license collector.
- (j) An assessor.
- (k) A superintendent of schools.
- (l) A public administrator.
- (m) A coroner.
- (n) A surveyor.
- (o) Members of the board of supervisors.
- (p) A county veterinarian.
- (q) A fish and game warden.
- (r) A county librarian.
- (s) A county health officer.
- (t) An administrative officer.
- (u) A director of finance.
- (v) A road commissioner.
- (w) A public guardian.
- (x) Such other officers as are provided by law.

\*Complete verbiage can be found at:

<http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/cgi-bin/displaycode?section=gov&group=23001-24000&file=24000-24012>

## Measure Z FAQ's 1. [What is Measure Z?](#)

On July 22, the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to place Measure Z on the November 4, 2014, ballot to maintain and improve essential Humboldt County services, including public safety. If adopted by voters, Measure Z will, by law, expire in five years.

### 2. [Why was Measure Z placed on the ballot?](#)

With \$286 million in State takeaways over the past 22 years, Sacramento has taken significant revenue from Humboldt County's budget, decreasing public safety and other essential services. If Measure Z passes, it will provide a guaranteed source of local funding that cannot be taken by the State on a temporary basis, for 5 years. The Board action to place Measure Z before the voters followed input from a countywide community survey that asked residents about their priorities for local county services. Measure Z will give the community the opportunity to address local services needs among these cuts.

### 3. [What does Measure Z cost?](#)

Measure Z is a one-half cent sales tax that will, by law, expire in five years. Sales tax is not applied to prescription medicine or food purchased as groceries and visitors to our region also pay the cost. Measure Z is subject to strict community and fiscal accountability, including annual independent audits and community input via a citizens' advisory committee to ensure funds are spent efficiently.

### 4. [How will Measure Z address my public safety needs?](#)

Due to budget constraints, Sheriff's patrols have been greatly reduced across Humboldt County, meaning it can sometimes take several hours for a Sheriff's deputy to respond to a call. If enacted Measure Z can provide the funds necessary for expanding patrols, maintaining emergency 9-1-1 response times, and making sure calls about violent or property crimes are responded to promptly.

Also, volunteer fire departments and firefighters play critical roles in protecting life and property here in Humboldt County. Additional resources will help maintain rural fire and ambulance protection services, allowing our first responders to better – and more safely – protect County residents.

### 5. [I'm concerned about the illegal drug industry and increased narcotics use in our region.](#)

Clearly, hard drugs and narcotics like meth are growing problems in Humboldt County. Measure Z can provide the additional funds the County needs to fight drug-related crimes, eliminate meth labs, and provide drug prevention and rehabilitation services.

Illegal, large-scale, marijuana farms are diverting and drying up sensitive creeks and streams and using toxic pesticides that destroy Humboldt County's natural environment. The additional funds generated by Measure Z can protect our natural resources from these illegal industrial operations.

### 6. [How will Measure Z enhance County services?](#)

If adopted by voters, Measure Z will provide funds to maintain and improve public safety and essential services, including:

- Investigating violent crimes, such as rape and domestic violence

- Maintaining 911 emergency response times
- Ensuring there are Sheriff's deputies on-duty
- Providing services for the victims of child abuse
- Maintaining rural fire protection and ambulance services
- Cleaning up environmentally damaging marijuana farms

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. [When is the election?](#)

Tuesday, November 4, 2014. [You can register to vote on-line.](#)

8. [Where can I get more information about Measure Z?](#)

The County will continue to keep the community informed about Humboldt County's essential service needs and fiscal condition. [For more information, visit our Measure Z page.](#)

## HEALTH AND SAFETY CODE

### SECTION 13800-13806

13800. This part shall be known and may be cited as the Fire Protection District Law of 1987 or as the Bergeson Fire District Law.

13801. The Legislature finds and declares that the local provision of fire protection services, rescue services, emergency medical services, hazardous material emergency response services, ambulance services, and other services relating to the protection of lives and property is critical to the public peace, health, and safety of the state. Among the ways that local communities have provided for those services has been the creation of fire protection districts. Local control over the types, levels, and availability of these services is a long-standing tradition in California which the Legislature intends to retain. Recognizing that the state's communities have diverse needs and resources, it is the intent of the Legislature in enacting this part to provide a broad statutory authority for local officials. The Legislature encourages local communities and their officials to adapt the powers and procedures in this part to meet their own circumstances and responsibilities.

13802. As used in this part:

(a) "City" means any city whether general law or charter, including a city and county, and including any city the name of which includes the word "town."

(b) "Day" means a calendar day.

(c) "District" means a fire protection district created pursuant to this part or created pursuant to any law which this part supersedes.

(d) "District board," means the board of directors of a district.

(e) "Employee" means any personnel of a district, including any regular or call firefighter hired and paid on a full-time or part-time basis, or any volunteer firefighter. "Employee" also includes any person who assists in the provision of any authorized emergency duty or service at the request of a person who has been authorized by the district board to request this assistance from other persons.

(f) "Principal county" means the county having all or the greater portion of the entire assessed value, as shown on the last equalized assessment roll of the county or counties, of all taxable property within a district.

(g) "Zone" means a service zone formed pursuant to Chapter 10 (commencing with Section 13950).

13803. (a) This part provides the authority for the organization and powers of fire protection districts. This part succeeds the Fire Protection District Law of 1961 and all of its statutory

predecessors. Any fire protection district organized or reorganized pursuant to the Fire Protection District Law of 1961 or any of its statutory predecessors which was in existence on January 1, 1988, shall remain in existence as if it had been organized pursuant to this part, except that when the district board is a county board of supervisors the number and method of selection of its board of directors shall continue to be governed by the provisions of Chapter 4 (commencing with Section 13831) of the Fire Protection District Law of 1961 in effect on December 31, 1987, as if that chapter had not been repealed. Any special fire protection zone formed pursuant to Chapter 12 (commencing with Section 13991) of the Fire Protection District Law of 1961 or any of its statutory predecessors which was in existence on January 1, 1988, shall remain in existence as a service zone as if it has been formed pursuant to Chapter 10 (commencing with Section 13950).

(b) This part does not apply to any reorganization which was filed pursuant to the Fire Protection District Law of 1961 and which is pending on January 1, 1988. Those pending reorganizations may be continued and completed under, and in accordance with, the Fire Protection District Law of 1961. The repeals, amendments, and additions made by the act enacting this part shall not apply to any of those pending reorganizations, and the laws existing prior to January 1, 1988, shall continue in full force and effect as applied to those pending reorganizations.

13804. This part is necessary for the public health, safety, and welfare, and shall be liberally construed to effectuate its purposes.

13805. If any provision of this part or the application of any provision of this part in any circumstance or to any person, city, county, district, the state, or any agency or subdivision of the state is held invalid, that invalidity shall not affect other provisions or applications of this part which can be given effect without the invalid provision or application of the invalid provision, and to this end the provisions of this part are severable.

13806. Any action to determine the validity of the organization or of any action of a district shall be brought pursuant to Chapter 9 (commencing with Section 860) of Title 10 of Part 2 of the Code of Civil Procedure.

# What is a County Service Area?

## **The County Service Area Law (Government Code §25210.1 *et seq.*)**

In unincorporated areas, basic services like water, sewer, police and fire protection are provided by the county. Because counties often consist of large and diverse geographical areas, providing a consistent and adequate service level across all areas can be difficult. Residents of urban communities may want more services than those residing in rural areas. The County Service Area Law (Government Code §25210.1 *et seq.*) was created in the 1950's to provide a means of providing expanded service levels in areas where residents are willing to pay for the extra service.

### **The County Service Area Law**

The law allows residents or county supervisors to initiate the formation of a County Service Area (or "CSA"). A CSA is authorized to provide a wide variety of services, including extended police protection, fire protection, park and recreation facilities, libraries, low power television and translation facilities and services.

CSAs also may provide other basic services such as water and garbage collection if they are not already performed on a countywide basis.

A CSA may span all unincorporated areas of a county or only selected portions. A CSA may issue General Obligation or Revenue Bonds, or form improvement areas for the purpose of issuing bonds that specifically benefit, and will be charged to, only part of the CSA. Any bond issuance or other long-term debt will require approval of voters residing within the CSA.

### **Why is a County Service Area Needed?**

CSAs allow small communities in unincorporated areas to pay for and receive specific services from the county. If residents are willing to pay, they can receive the types of services and improvements not available in other areas of the county. There is no cost to residents of other areas of the county who do not wish to receive the additional services.

### **How is a County Service Area Formed?**

A CSA is initiated by a petition of registered voters or by adoption of a resolution at the county level. Once proposed, the formation of the CSA will be subject to public notice and a public hearing. If more than 50% of registered voters or landowners protest, the CSA may need to be subject to voter approval at a special

election. Once approved, the CSA is normally granted limited powers and the county board of supervisors act as the CSA board.

### **How is the Annual Charge Determined?**

When a CSA exists, the property owner will pay taxes and fees to the CSA instead of the county for the services provided. These will be billed as line items on the county property tax bill. The taxes may take a variety of forms:

- General property taxes may be levied depending upon Prop. 13 constraints. These taxes, referred to as “ad valorem taxes”, are based on assessed value.
- Special taxes may be levied for specific purposes. These taxes must be approved by a 2/3rds vote of CSA residents.
- Benefit assessments may be levied for specific purposes and are based on the direct benefit each parcel receives from the improvements or services financed. These charges are subject to annual approval at a public hearing.
- Water or sewer standby charges may be levied to ensure future availability of service, subject to certain limitations.

Additionally, the CSA may charge these fees and taxes according to zones to more accurately bill residents for the particular services provided to their individual property.

### **How Long Will the Charge Continue?**

CSA charges will continue as long as the CSA is providing services to the community.