

## WRRRA Fire Protection Contracts from Pierce County Fire Department #26

Inputs are included from Chief Sowers, the administrator for the contracts, the fire commissioner, county assessor's office, and more.

### 1. Contract and Fee Structure –

PCFD 24 offers WRRRA members a standard service contract used across the state. They likely got their template from either the State Fire Commissioners Association or the State Fire District Association.

The Fire Protection Contract and fee is set up just like the county tax assessment, where it is based on the assessed value of your cabin. This is a very standard approach for these fees, whether charged by the county, or privately. The mechanism is easy to understand, easy to manage, and makes sense when you consider that additional resources are required for protection or firefighting at a larger cabin for example – more suppressant, equipment, and resources.

Years ago, WRRRA paid a lump sum for fire protection on behalf of all cabin owners. We soon realized that a lot of the cabin owners felt they did not need to join the Association since the Association paid for fire protection, snow removal and road maintenance anyway! It was at that time that the board asked the Fire District to bill cabin owners individually. The commissioners offered WRRRA members the easiest deal to administer; that's important to them because they have no paid staff, which is one reason why their service rates are so reasonable; also they don't want to spend money on legal work.

In short, there is no interest on the part of GWFD to move to a flat fee structure for all cabin owners. Pushing them to buy legal time to set up something more complicated that no one else uses in this state, would likely require WRRRA to find a different option or approach on our own. Therefore it is not something that the WRRRA Board is interested in pursuing at this time either.

### 3. Fee Rate –

The GWFD Fire Protection Contract fee rate is quite favorable, and the current fee structure is also the best value for members. In fact, the fee rate is the lowest rate we have found, and, is lower than what Greenwater residents pay. Here is data from the Pierce County Assessors Office:

Fire Service Recipients	Rate in dollars per \$1,000 assessment
WRRRA cabins	\$1.00
GW (within the boundaries of PCFD 26)	\$1.30
Ashford	\$1.89
Anderson Island	\$2.33
Graham	\$2.65
West Pierce	\$3.30
Bainbridge Island (included for reference)	\$1.35

## **2. Duplication of Fees –**

Many members ask why they need to pay a Fire Protection Contract if they are already paying for the fire department in their county taxes.

If you look at the details noted on the county tax bill, you will see confirmation that Forest Service cabin owners do NOT pay Fire/EMS fees in the taxes we pay to Pierce County; those lines are listed \$0 on all our tax bills. So payment of your Fire Protection Contract is not a duplication of payment, it is the only payment you make for Fire and EMS support for your cabin.

## **4. Non-Mandatory Fee –**

The Fire Protection Contracts are not mandatory, you can choose to pay or not. If there is a fire at or near your cabin and you haven't paid, GWFD will still fight to protect your cabin. If there is a medical emergency, they will send EMS. However if choices need to be made based on resources or time, in terms of which cabins get priority protection from a fire for example, those that have paid their Fire Protection Contract are higher priority of course.

***It is in all our best interest to ensure we have resources when needed, and a strong fire and EMS system and department, so while payment of the Fire Protection Contract fee is not mandatory, it is highly encouraged for all WRRRA members.***

## **5. Additional Protection Notes –**

There is no mandate to provide fire service in Washington State. It is optional. The commissioners are free to offer us a contract as long as it is in the interests of the people who elected them. They are free to refuse to make offers when it no longer suits them or their constituents. We are lucky to be able to work with such a generous chief and fire commission; many are far less flexible and inclusive.

There is no protection offered by the Crystal Mountain Fire Department. That is not a stand-alone fire department; it is an auxiliary of the GWFD and is staffed limited days and hours.

Additional protection against wildfire may be offered by many insurance companies; for the Norse Peak fire they were first on the scene in our cabin tracts before the Forest Service firefighters arrived. You can check with your insurance company to see if they offer that service. But its only for wildfire protection, not for structure fires or medical emergencies of course.