

PINE/STRAWBERRY FUEL REDUCTION, INC.
BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING
MINUTES
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 29, 2014

CALL TO ORDER:

President Mel Palmer called the meeting to order at 6:03 P.M.
The meeting was held at the Pine Senior Center Dining Room
Mel led the Pledge of Allegiance

Members Present: Mel Palmer, Janet Brandt, Jack Malloy, Katie Calderon, Ron Calderon

Members Absent: None

APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS MEETING MINUTES:

Katie moved to approve the minutes of the November 19, 2013 meeting as presented. Ron seconded.
Motion Passed.

TREASURER'S REPORT:

Janet presented the Treasurer's Report.
Checking Account: \$17,070.42
Savings Account: \$10,853.37
Fire On The Rim Account \$41,694.84
Total: \$69,618.63

Ron moved to accept Treasurer's Report as presented. Katie seconded.
Motion Passed.

BILLS/CORRESPONDENCE:

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Grant Update: Janet reported that our State Forest Thinning Grant is over as of December 31, 2013. With the grant, P/SFR was able to have 303 acres thinned. Adding the Lo Mia thinning project of 197 acres, P/SFR has been responsible for thinning 500 acres, most of which is up against the fuel break. This enlarges the fuel break and makes it more affective by bringing it closer in to the towns.

Between the time P/SFR was awarded the RTP grant from State Parks for the Bearfoot Trail to the time the money was available, P/SFR used volunteer labor to complete the project and only spent half of the grant money. The other half of the grant money cannot be used to pay for reroutes on the Pine Canyon Trail. So the Bearfoot grant had to be closed out and Janet will now apply for a new Pine Canyon grant. However, this will mean the Forest Service will have to do more archeological and cultural studies because of the signs that will explain that the Bearfoot trail is in the fuel break, the purpose of the fuel break, what hikers are looking at and pictures, are considered a structure. Janet commended Chelsea, at the Forest Service, who is doing wonderful work on this study.

Janet noted that of the \$20,000 Forest Foundation Grant for work on the Pine Canyon Trail \$10,000 must be used by September which is matched by P/SFR. The grant will then reimburse P/SFR for the \$10,000 we matched. State Parks will also reimburse the \$10,000 P/SFR matched. She said it's like getting \$2 for every 1\$ PSFR matches.

Brush Pick-Up Fundraising Update: Jack reported we have collected about \$2,500 from our website Pay Pal donation buttons. Janet reported we have collected \$11,155 in checks. She mentioned there were many notes included in the checks thanking P/SFR for what we are doing and how important this effort is.

P/SFR Hotline Phone Update: Katie reported that P/SFR has a new hotline phone number, 928-970-0713. The phone and answering machine are located at her residence. She has received 50 calls so far, many stating the importance of a brush pick-up service. Katie discussed other questions she has fielded on the Hotline. It was noted that Chief Staub recommended (at the November 19, 2013 meeting) a separate phone number with an answering capability so that P/SFR could field brush pick-up questions instead of PSFD staff. That led to P/SFR signing a two-year contract for this Hotline phone service.

In response to a question, Mike Brandt reminded everyone present that because of the time it takes for the brush truck to do all of Pine and Strawberry that the plan is for only one pick-up.

In response to questions regarding citizens reporting properties that are in need of thinning, Chief Staub responded that there is an ordinance in place that can be used for this and that if the FD reports it jumps three steps ahead than if a citizen reports and that the FD will be working on that this spring.

Brush Pick-Up Partnership with Fire Department: Mel shared his thoughts on the current situation.

At the time P/SFR was working on starting a brush pick-up program they did not have non-profit status to be able to receive grant money. So, Janet wrote a grant for PSFD to purchase the equipment needed for the brush pick-up. This equipment is the property of PSFD. Mel stated he does not think PSFR wants anything to do with the equipment as we do not have the funds to pay for the licensing, insurance, storage, etc. and are happy with where the equipment is now. The grants previously used to fund the brush pick-up have dried up. For over a year, PSFR has been trying to come up with ways to raise the money needed for the program. Many ideas have come up but none have been able to work out.

Last November, the Fire Board moved to put the brush pick-up equipment, valued around \$70,000, up for sale. The motion was tabled to give PSFR time to come up with a plan because once the equipment is sold there are not grants to get them back. For the last six months or so, PSFR has been meeting, along with Chief Staub, to come up with a plan to keep a brush pick-up program. In those meetings there was an understanding by PSFR that the best way to operate the program would be for PSFR to reimburse the FD for the cost of the brush pick-up employees salaries and the FD would deal with their taxes, unemployment, etc. and manage the equipment. After that understanding, PSFR put together the fundraiser project. At the last Fire Board meeting, the Fire Board heard from the FD accountant who recommended, because of the liabilities involved, the FD not take on what was understood by PSFR. And this is where we stand today.

Mel continued that he has contacted a company that will take on the payroll responsibilities of the brush pick-up employees, pay their taxes, workman's comp, Federal and State unemployment insurance, W-2's, all reports that are needed, etc. at a cost of about 25% of the payroll. For two employees at \$15 and \$10 per hour for 10 weeks, PSFR could pay the salaries and cost of the company to do the payroll.

Mel then opened the meeting to discussion.

Dave Prechtel, who introduced himself as a member of the PS Fire Board, took offense at the implication of the wording in the email PSFR sent announcing this meeting that the decision of the Fire Board "could stop this program before it gets started". He then added, "technically, yes you are correct", but he would have preferred wording he considered less harsh. He then went on to say that while we are all in this together, the major concern of the Fire Board were the ramifications the Fire Boards advisor cautioned regarding the law, labor, etc. He further stated he felt there were no Fire Board members opposed to cooperative effort with PSFR and that the Fire Board would be willing to lease the equipment to PSFR at \$1/year or whatever would make it legal. He then went on to state that he requested the sale of the brush pick-up equipment be put on a future Fire Board agenda. He said his motivation was that he was told by "one prominent member of this committee (PSFR)" that money for the program was not going to be available.

Janet asked Mr. Prechtel if the liability is a new issue. He responded yes. Janet then asked that since the FD has been running the brush pick-up for many years and liability was not an issue why is it now? Mr. Prechtel replied, "I don't know."

Chief Staub indicated the program was run as best they could under the grants. Now the concerns are the unemployment liability it creates for the FD. Also, workman's comp for the two brush pick-up employees would cost the FD the same as they pay for a fire fighters which is more than if they were not employed by some other entity than the FD.

Dave Burkhart, who introduced himself as a member of the Fire Board, said that what he was going to say was not representative of the Fire Board but his personal opinions. Mr. Burkhart went on to say he supported brush pick-up. He continued indicating PSFR has been saying for years that they want a community based brush pick-up program. The problem he sees is that the plan being presented now places all the responsibilities on the FD, "the work, the duty, the responsibilities, the liability, the problems and also the complaints we (the FD) would get from people when we stop it again just like when we did last time." He had further concerns regarding new laws including worker's comp, unemployment, required health insurance and maintaining the employee records as required by law, all additional expenses for the FD. Mr. Burkhart also said the FD would be required to post for the brush pick-up positions and hold interviews, all additional responsibilities. He then outlined how PSFR could use an outside company to handle the employee responsibilities. He said he was hoping PSFR would have included in their plan taking on the responsibility of the employees.

Janet responded that PSFR had never been informed of all of these specific FD liabilities until last week. Over the last few months, working with Chief Staub, these issues had never been brought up. She stated that it would have been good to know about the options of PSFR contracting with a company for the employee responsibilities before the flyer went out. Since becoming aware of these issues, Janet said PSFR has been working really hard to address them. She said Mel, as stated earlier, had found a company that for 25% of the payroll would do the payroll and PSFR is "perfectly willing to do that." She said she went back through the records of the fuel cost and said that for 10 weeks PSFR can also do that. She further stated she understands that the FD should not have to take on the whole load and if she had been aware of the issues, PSFR would have addressed them beforehand. She also said that PSFR couldn't have the whole load either. If we partner in a true partnership and PSFR takes on the responsibilities of the payroll and fuel costs then hopefully the FD can take on the responsibilities of the insurance and maintenance on the trucks. Another issue, dealing with dumping the brush and burning it, will also have to be resolved.

There was much other discussion from those in attendance all relating to the importance of the brush pick-up and the hope that PSFR and the FD would be able to find a solution to bring back this program.

The discussion then turned to how PSFR and the Fire Board would be able to meet to work out a plan. After much discussion it was determined that PSFR needs to request that the Fire Board call a special public meeting with an agenda item discussing how to partner with PSFR. The Fire Board can then put that on their agenda however they want.

OLD BUSINESS:

Trails Update: Mike Brandt reported that they are working to bring the Bearfoot Trail around and directly across from the Pine/Strawberry trailhead. He is now working with ADOT about an underpass or bridge across the 87 but until that is developed paths on either side of the 87 leading to Strawberry would be possible. Those hiking would be able to use the Strawberry Creek culvert to cross under the 87.

Mike discussed a fiberglass bridge and Janet said she just received an email from the company they are dealing with that a fiberglass bridge would also be able to be used by horses. Mike liked the fiberglass, as it has no maintenance.

He is also working with Chelsea at the Forest Service to acquire the SWECO trail building machine that the Tonto District has and nobody is using.

In March there will be a trail restoration class held in Tucson. There will be four or five people going. Mike asked if at the next PSFR meeting there could be an agenda item for PSFR to pay for the rooms for two nights of those attending.

Al Christianer asked as to how long it would be before the bridge would be up? Mike replied, as soon as the forest service approves. Janet noted we need \$47,000 for the bridge and we currently have \$34,000. Al said he had just been on the trail from Strawberry to Camp Lo Mia and complimented on what a wonderful trail it was and the great job Mike and Janet have done. Much applause!

Mike then mentioned that over the weekend he had taken former President/founder of PSFR Walt Smith to the new portion of the trail to see what it is like being built. To Mike's surprise Walt walked a good half mile and back and has committed himself to exercise so he can walk the whole trail.

NEW BUSINESS:

Katie made a motion that PSFR request a meeting with the Fire Board to discuss a partnership regarding the brush pick-up project. Jack seconded.

Motion Passed

Saturday PSFR Meeting: Mel said there have been requests for PSFR to meet on Saturdays so those who live in the valley would be able to attend.

Ron made a motion to have a special informational meeting on Saturday, February 15 at 2 PM in the Cultural Hall. Katie seconded.

Motion Passed

ITEMS NOT ON AGENDA FOR DISCUSSION, POSSIBLE ACTION:

Chief Staub presented information regarding the RPAP (Regional Payson Area Project) Pit. Although funding for the pits had been discontinued, Chief Staub said he just received an email from Supervisor Tommie Martin stating that she has committed that they will fund that project and get the pits open at the end of the month.

Dave Brukhart asked if PSFR had looked into doing a hotdog/hamburger type fundraiser in the afternoon at the Memorial Day, 4th of July and Labor Day weekends and teaming with the group that does the pancake breakfast in the morning.

Mel replied that it had not been looked into yet.

Dave Prechtel said he would be able to give PSFR background on the pancake breakfast and possibly piggybacking on to it.

Ron recommended sending out another flyer regarding the brush pick-up fundraiser.

SET DATE, TIME, PLACE OF NEXT P/SFR, INC. MEETING:

Wednesday, February 26, 2014; 6 PM; Pine Senior Center Dining Room

ADJOURNMENT:

Katie moved to adjourn. Janet seconded.

Motion Passed.

Meeting adjourned at 7:30 P.M.

Respectfully submitted by Jack Malloy, P/SFR Secretary