

November 09, 2011 | Posted by [Mike Bush](#)

South County fire fee passes in Tuesday's election

Measure F, which calls for an \$85 tax increase on each developed parcel in the Pioneer Fire Protection District to fund fighting fires and medical responses in south El Dorado County, passed with flying colors election night on Tuesday.

According to the election summary on the county's Website, with all three precincts reporting, the measure had 76 percent (1,306 votes) in favor to 23 percent (401) against. There were 1,702 residents who voted on the measure.

"It was just an amazing evening for us," said Mike Lawless, one of the co-chairmen of the Save the Pioneer Fire District Committee. "We were all very optimistic (about the outcome); it was the best thing to happen for our fire district."

Lawless said a team of volunteers called more than 950 South County residents within the past two months to vote in favor of the increase.

"I'm so proud of the team of people we put together," Lawless said.

The tax increase goes into place December 2012 when the county mails tax bills to property owners.

According to a 2010 study by Citygate Associates commissioned by the county and released earlier this year, the average assessment received by fire districts on the typical single-family dwelling unit is about \$180 a year. But unlike most fire districts in the county, Pioneer does not levy any assessments.

The tax increase will replace Aid To Fire, which is a supplemental funding program from the county to support the community based independent fire districts on the Western Slope of the county. The funding from the county's General Fund will end June 30, 2012, when the 2011-12 fiscal year ends.

The El Dorado County Board of Supervisors voted in 2008 to eliminate the program that began in 1998.

The district protects 296 square miles — or 187,000 acres — of land containing a mixture of homes, ranches, businesses, vineyards and forest land. There is one manned fire station plus five other fire stations. On the payroll are Chief Bob Gill, six full-time firefighters, a part-time administrative assistant and eight qualified volunteer firefighters.

According to the League of California Cities, El Dorado County collected \$7.6 million in sales tax revenue from Proposition 172, which passed in 1992, for the 2009-10 fiscal year. The district also provides medical responses. Proposition 172 is the one-half cent sales tax to fund police, fire and other public safety programs.

"The other rural fire districts get somewhat similar (funds) percentage of their taxes," Lawless said in an interview with the Mountain Democrat two months ago. "In our particular case, it's a 9 percent share because we are so sparsely populated."

Public safety organizations are required to have adequate and stable funding sources to enable them to ensure reliable delivery of emergency services to the public.

Had the measure not passed, the district would've been forced to make dramatic cuts that could have ranged from reducing staff as much as 75 percent, plus longer response times to fires, medical emergencies and motor vehicle accidents.

Chief Gill cut his own salary voluntarily by 25 percent over the summer. There was discussion of eliminating some paid staff members, reducing fire station staffing hours, dropping the Emergency Medical Technician/Paramedic program and deferring fleet and facility maintenance.

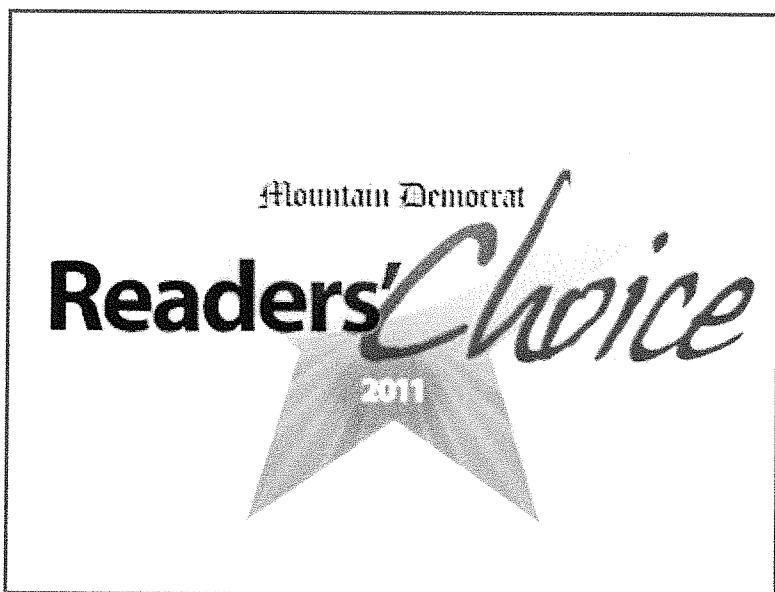
In 2010 there were 670 emergency calls in the Pioneer area. Of those calls, approximately 47 percent were for fire related incidents, while 53 percent were for medical aid and automobile accidents.

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