

## MINUTES

Exhibit C

### RURAL FIRE DEPARTMENTS STUDY COMMITTEE

September 30, 2015

The Rural Fire Departments Study Committee met at 1:30 p.m., Wednesday, September 30, 2015, in Room A-MAC, Little Rock, Arkansas.

Committee members present: Senator Greg Standridge, Co-Chair; Representatives James Ratliff, Co-Chair; Charlene Fite, Justin Gonzales, Ron McNair, and Jeff Wardlaw; and Senator Larry Teague; Non-legislative members: Brad Bain, Steve Beck, Joe Fox, Dwayne Franklin, Charles Gangluff, Alex Johnston, Steve Jones, Bill Lacy, Kevin McMasters, Kendall Snyder, and Lindsey Williams.

Other legislators present: Senators Ronald Caldwell and Alan Clark; Representatives Scott Baltz, Nate Bell, R. Trevor Drown, Kim Hammer, Grant Hodges, Mike Holcomb, Sheilla Lampkin, Kelley Linck, and Betty Overbey.

Senator Standridge called the meeting to order.

#### **Welcoming Remarks by Co-Chairs**

Senator Standridge and Representative Ratliff welcomed committee members and guests to the meeting.

#### **Consideration to Approve Minutes from the May 19, 2015, Meeting (Exhibit C)**

Without objection, the Minutes of the May 19, 2015, meeting were approved.

#### **Consideration of a Motion to Authorize Chairs to Approve Special Expenses Incurred by the Committees**

Without objection, a motion was made authorizing the Co-Chairs to approve special expenses incurred by the committee.

#### **Update on Status of Rural Services Grant (Handout 1)**

Alex Johnston, Division Director, Rural Services-Arkansas Economic Development Commission (AEDC), provided an update on grants distributed by AEDC:

- **General Improvement Fund Fire Protection:** applicants are eligible to apply for up to \$50,000; Communities in the past have received funding for new fire stations, additional bays for existing stations, turn-out gear, communications equipment, and fire trucks;
- Senate GIF - \$790,000. Fire protection deadline is September 30, 2015; includes 2 cycles of funding; settlement monies from the Attorney General's office was also received, with a combined total of \$1.3 million;
- House GIF: \$1 million. Fire protection deadline is December 18, 2015; all applications will be rolled over to the December 18 deadline--will not have to resubmit application. Funds are for volunteer fire departments only.
- **Rural Community Grant Program:** applicants from incorporated towns of less than 3,000 in population and unincorporated rural areas are eligible for up to \$15,000 in matching funds under this program. Communities wishing to apply for projects under the program must provide one half of the cost of the project as match. Deadlines for FY 2016 are December 4, 2015, and March 11, 2016;
- **Rural Services Block Grant Program:** funds new construction or renovation of community centers, fire stations, or multi-purpose buildings, and the purchase of fire trucks. Applicants are eligible for up to \$75,000--match grant is 10%; community population must be at least 51% Low to Moderate Income (LMI). Deadline for FY 2016 is December 4, 2015.

**Representative Ratliff requested Ms. Johnston provide staff with a list of towns that have qualified for LMI funding. Staff will forward information to committee members.**

In response to a question by Representative Hammer, Ms. Johnston stated that applications are mailed to all 75 county judges, ADEM coordinators, House and Senate staff for distribution to members, and an application packet is available on the AEDC website. Information is also included in their newsletter. The application has been revised to include ISO information that will help ensure the money is used as intended.

Representative Hammer questioned how AFC notifies fire departments on the request list of the 44 trucks that are available at Greenbrier. Mr. Fox said it is his understanding that the departments are notified by telephone. **Representative Hammer asked Mr. Fox to send staff a list of the above fire departments. Staff will forward information to committee members.**

#### **Status of Prison Fire Tanker Refurbishments**

Joe Fox, State Forester, Arkansas Forestry Commission (AFC) stated that in calendar 2015, AFC picked up 29 tanker-style trucks from the Department of Defense (\$3.5 million value); delivered and/or distributed 40 trucks to fire departments and the prison (\$4.6 million value). Five trucks are at the prison, one at Hilbuilt in Benton; 44 trucks at Greenbrier waiting to be picked up or going to the prison; and 45 fire departments are on the request list. AFC has provided 12 no-interest loans totaling \$143,000; and distributed approximately 3,900 smaller items such as axes, boots, flashlights, etc., valued at \$462,000.

#### **Act 1032 Presentation (Exhibit G)**

David Steele, Fire Supply and Consulting, said the workgroup, created by Act 961 of 2015 met for two years to find ways to reassess the ISO fire ratings for the state. Act 1032 of 2015 created additional memberships in the Rural Fire Study Committee and was amended to include fire department consultants and establish guidelines and qualifications for fire department consulting services. Mr. Steele also referenced Acts 691 (sales & tax exemption), 693 (collection of dues by volunteer fire departments), and 697 (contract with public/private sources for repairs, etc.).

#### **Fire Consultant Qualifications (Exhibit H)**

Dwayne Franklin, Fire Supply and Consulting, presented a list of qualifications for a fire department consultant. He stressed the importance of using hauled water in the event of a break in water lines during an emergency and said that consultants are experienced in the grading of hauled water, including dump times, distance, water sources, volume calculations, etc. Listed below are the proposed fire consultant qualifications submitted by Mr. Franklin:

- Map boundaries of fire district and location of stations and neighboring stations; inventory fire apparatus and equipment in each station; inventory buildings in area to compute needed fire flows for each fire departments graded area; survey water system and ponds in area of each station; certification of water source and volume calculations accepted by ISO and its graders; has a hauled water predictive model that matches within 15% accuracy of models used by ISO; must have fire service background in hauled water systems; ability to gather incident reports and advise of needed changes to response techniques; ability to gather training records and advise of needed changes to curriculum and aid in training; review hose test records; review pump test records; review and assist with proper building pre-plans; review fire departments SOG's; review Auto Aide Agreements with neighboring departments; inventory Engines and Tankers from Auto Aide Departments; prepare books to turn into ISO to start review process; gather changed information to upgrade ISO books when grader comes for inspection; attend ISO grading session to handle any questions for the ISO grader;
- Consultants are organized as an Arkansas Corporation with the Secretary of State; and have a demonstrated track record of using alternate hauled water grading to move ISO class 9 departments to a rating of a 3, 4 or 5

**Representative Hammer asked committee members to consider who will act as the "keeper" of the qualifications and suggested the Department of Rural Services serve in that capacity.**

**Representative Wardlaw, Brad Bain, and Lindsey Williams requested more time to review the qualifications.**

**Representative Hammer suggested that staff contact the state fire marshal in Texas for a list of qualifications to serve as a fire consultant and the possibility of the fire marshal testifying before the committee.**

### **Insurance Services Office and Fire Departments Workgroup Recommendations (Exhibit I)**

Ken Brown, Chair, Fire Departments Workgroup, presented a list of recommendations by the fire department work group. He said that the committee has a large task before them as they are charged by Act 1032 with developing a comprehensive plan to bring all fire departments to an ISO rating of class 6 or better for all residents in their fire districts by January 1, 2024. He expressed the need to take action as soon as possible considering there are 800 fire departments to be reviewed.

### **Other Business**

Joe Fox, State Forester, AFC, provided the following information on the 2015 fire season:

- 830-850 fires in 2015; 11,500 acres burned; 18 fires past weekend; expect more fires during hunting season
- Collections increased by \$700,000 annually due to 20 cent increase on forest land fire protection tax

Mr. Fox stated that AFC bought 5 new dozers and ordered 3 more that were delivered in July 2015, which placed them under the FY 2016 appropriation. He is requesting an increase in AFC's capital appropriation for 2016 in order to pay for the equipment.

Kevin McMasters presented members with a list of the NFIRS State Reporting Status Audit provided by Ms. Rachel Nix, Director, Arkansas Fire Training Academy. **(Handout 2)**

Senator Standridge and Representative Ratliff advised the committee will meet regularly to make sure the tasks before them are completed to the best of their abilities.

With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 3:00 p.m.