



## Solano Local Agency Formation Commission

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September 20, 2021

Honorable Judge Donna Stashyn,  
Presiding Judge of the Superior Court  
County of Solano  
600 Union Avenue  
Fairfield CA 95433

Honorable Judge Stashyn,

**RE: Response to Grand Jury Report: Wildfires On The Horizon Solano Homes At Risk!**

Solano LAFCO is a state-mandated, independent agency with countywide jurisdiction over changes in organization and boundaries of cities and special districts including annexations, detachments, incorporations, and formations. In meeting its responsibility, LAFCO is required to review and approve or disapprove, with or without amendments, wholly, partially, or conditionally, governmental boundary change proposals. In addition to the regulatory responsibilities, the Commission is empowered to initiate and make studies of existing governmental agencies. Such studies shall include, but not be limited to, inventorying such agencies and determining their maximum service areas and service capabilities. LAFCO may initiate proceedings to consolidate districts. Solano LAFCO is exercising this authority in analyzing the Cordelia, Montezuma, Suisun, and Vacaville Fire Districts.

Solano LAFCO appreciates the Grand Jury's interest and involvement in this study. Pursuant to Penal Code Sections 933(c) and 933.05, the following is LAFCO's response to the three (3) findings and three (3) recommendations contained in the 2020-2021 Grand Jury Report regarding "Wildfires On The Horizon Solano Homes At Risk!".

***Finding #1: Solano County's Fire Protection Districts are critically understaffed, under-equipped, and underfunded to protect rural areas and adjacent cities from this season's wildfires and future wildfires.***

**Commissioners**

Ron Rowlett, Chair • John Vasquez, Vice-Chair • Harry Price • Nancy Shopay • Jim Sperring

**Alternate Commissioners**

Ron Kott • Mitch Mashburn

**Staff**

Rich Seithel, Executive Officer • Jeffrey Lum, Analyst II • P. Scott Browne, Legal Counsel

**Response:**

LAFCO agrees: Although much of the wildland-urban interface area is within the state response area (SRA), individually, the four fire districts are understaffed, under-equipped, and underfunded to protect rural areas from wildfires.

***Recommendation #1: Solano County and the Solano County Local Agency Formation Commission support immediate funding for the four FPDs.***

**Response:**

LAFCO agrees. An infusion of revenue would benefit the wildland-urban interface effort. However, it is essential to note that Immediate funding ("one-time" funding), while helpful, does not address the systemic funding issue. An ongoing increase in revenue is paramount for addressing the understaffed, underequipped, and underfunded districts.

In addition, while LAFCO conceptually supports and believes increased funding is crucial, LAFCOs are not an agency that provides financial support: Each LAFCO is responsible for coordinating logical and timely changes in local governmental boundaries, conducting special studies that review ways to reorganize, simplify, and streamline governmental structure, and prepare a sphere of influence for each city and special district within its County.

***Finding #2: While LAFCO is bringing expert advice to the table to determine the path forward to address the increasing danger from wildfires, the pace at which it is going is too slow to address immediate wildfire concerns.***

**Response:**

LAFCO partially disagrees. Certainly, LAFCO agrees that the funding issue is immediate. However, by its nature, the MSR/Special Study process is not designed to make immediate inroads. The MSR/Special Study provides detailed information to make informed decisions.

LAFCO initiated a special study to address these issues: 1. Standards of Coverage; 2. Needs assessment/deployment assessment; 3. Response mapping; 4. Auto and Mutual aid frequency; 5. Staffing model options; 6. Governance options; 7. NFPA 1720 compliance, and; 8. Revenue enhancements. This study required time due to significant "data-mining" with districts that have little or no administrative staff. Based on the information uncovered and Citygate's fire service expertise, LAFCO evaluated service alternatives, staffing models, and fiscal matters to determine a path forward. This effort included significant time working towards building consensus with four districts, two of which were reluctant.

**Recommendation # 2: LAFCO and Solano County separate the more immediate concerns of Wildfire exposure and address those with urgency.**

**Response:**

LAFCO supports efforts to address concerns of wildfire exposure. However, LAFCO's ability to effect change is not all-encompassing. State Law prescribes four key and distinct roles to LAFCO involving special districts:

1. To conduct studies, including municipal service reviews of existing local government.
2. To assist the public and government agencies concerning changes in local government boundaries and organization.
3. To review and approve or disapprove proposals for changes in the boundaries and organization of special districts, including the formation of new special districts and mergers, consolidations, or dissolutions of existing special districts.
4. To establish spheres of influence which are plans for the probable physical boundaries of each local agency, for cities and special districts within the County, and to review and update those spheres of influence.

LAFCO successfully implemented the following:

- ✓ Conducted the special study.
- ✓ LAFCO provided in-depth, detailed research and recommendations beyond the Citygate special study.
- ✓ Developed recommended changes in the boundaries, staffing, and organization of the districts to improve service, and.
- ✓ Assisting the affected agencies in applying for a district reorganization that will provide a contiguous boundary for the primary wildland-urban interface area in western Solano county and centralized command. In addition, LAFCO identified and included seasonal help in the staffing model being considered.

***Finding #3: Transitional financing is needed to equip the FPDs with new equipment and resilient firefighting techniques to adapt to the environmental changes now presented by the combined challenges of extreme heat, drought, and gale-force winds along with random power outages.***

**Response:**

LAFCO agrees. As identified in the Citygate and the LAFCO studies, the districts are financially hamstrung and cannot afford to purchase costly new equipment with their current revenue streams.

***Recommendation #3: Solano County immediately make resources available to the FPDs to deal with the new wildfire environment.***

**Response:**

Recommendation #3 is recommending an action for which LAFCO has no authority.

Solano LAFCO thanks the Solano County Grand for their time invested in the *Wildfires On The Horizon Solano Homes At Risk!* Report. The Grand Jury's recommendations and comments are appreciated.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Richard J. Seithel". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'R' and 'S'.

Rich Seithel  
Executive Officer