

# LFRA Looking to expand service area westward



Loveland Fire Rescue Authority Firefighter Justin Burks makes checks out a chain saw Monday at Fire Station 7 west of Loveland. Firefighters use the chainsaw and other tools for wildfires and mitigation. JENNY SPARKS — LOVELAND REPORTER-HERALD



Image



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The Loveland Fire Rescue Authority is looking to expand its official service area westward, reaching further into the more rural communities west of Loveland.

The planned expansion would bring the Pinewood Reservoir area, Storm Mountain and Buckhorn Heights communities officially under the umbrella of the fire

department, according to Fire Chief Tim Sendelbach.

Currently, the department does not offer expanded service in these areas aside from responding to emergency calls, something crews do despite the fact that the homes in question are not in the official service area.

“First and foremost, firefighters are not given any instructions other than you go,” he said. “When it comes to an emergency we don’t screen that, we make sure the emergency is addressed.”

Sendelbach described the three areas as one that could benefit from the inclusion into the service area, describing them as high risk and even a sort of “no man’s land” outside of the jurisdiction of any local fire department. He said by being incorporated into the official service area, residents would become eligible for further non-emergency resources.

This would include things like assistance with wildfire mitigation to cut down on the risk of damage due to wildfires. Sendelbach said the inclusion could potentially provide a hand for homeowners struggling with insurance; if added, the department would be able to come out to homes and conduct an assessment, prescribe a mitigation plan and then offer a letter signed by the chief that could then be sent to insurance companies.

While the inclusion would not cost the LFRA any additional funds — or pull resources away from Loveland itself — it would put a tax increase on homeowners in those areas. Based on the mill levy for the department, a \$500,000 home would end up paying an additional \$374.73 annually on their taxes if it was to be included.

Sendelbach said the LFRA has held talks in all three communities and has received positive feedback so far, including from residents he described as emotional when discussing their difficulties in receiving insurance on their homes due to the risk they face from wildfires.

Pete and Angie Robbins, who live in the Pinewood community, said their neighborhood does not receive many public services currently, putting the burden

on residents to prepare themselves to save their homes and evacuate safely if a fire hits the area, something they experienced in 2020 during the historic Cameron Peak Fire.

“We think the LFRA needs the resources to be able to support our area,” Pete Robbins said. “We are really trying to be good stewards of our area and support the emergency efforts and communication efforts for the whole community.”

Justin Wilson, who lives in the Buckskin Heights community part time depending on the season, said the community is on its own for fire mitigation and preparing for any potential event without any help from a fire department, something Wilson was all too familiar with, having lost his home in the Cameron Peak Fire, which he later rebuilt.

“Prior to the Cameron Peak Fire and prior to meeting with LFRA, I thought if a wildfire comes through our community, there’s no chance anyway, so why even care, why do mitigation because there’s no chance our house will survive?” he said. “I have since learned that perspective is wrong, that there are things we can do that have proven to increase the chances of your house surviving a fire. “Having been through the process of losing a home to a fire and having to go through a rebuild ... I am willing to put in a huge amount of effort to prevent that from happening again in the future, and I think this is the way we can do that.”

The Robbinses, however, noted that they have seen a mixed reaction from some in their community, with some in favor of the idea and others opposed. Pete Robbins said some question if the inclusion will be worth it for the extra taxes that they will be paying, wondering if they will get anything for the additional money they are spending.

Angie Robbins added that others have been favorable to the idea when considering its potential impact on insurance.

Wilson said that “overwhelmingly” the neighbors he has spoken to are excited about the prospective inclusion, but noted that could be because those in favor have been more vocal.

“Ultimately it will come down to a vote anyway, and if the majority does not want it then we will find out when we have that vote,” he said.

Sendelbach said right now the department would need 20% of residents in those communities to petition the Loveland Rural Fire Protection District Board to hold a special inclusion election. He added to get the communities added for the 2026 tax rolls, the election would need to be completed by the summer.

And though it is just a plan currently, he said the desire to expand the LFRA service area is one meant to better take care of the local community.

“I want to basically do what we do (in) the fire service: leave nobody behind,” he said. “They’re within our reach, let’s offer the service to them, and if they ... petition to be in, we’ll bring them in.”