South Arkansas Fire Protection District

MEETING MINUTES

Date: 4/28/2025

Time: 0900 Hours

Location: 611 Oak Street, Salida, CO 81201

Board Members Present

- Harold Starbuck
- Rich Edgington
- Art Hutchinson
- Fred Jackson
- Jeff Graf

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by President Harold Starbuck at 0900 hours.

2. Approval of the Agenda

- Motion to accept the agenda as presented:
  - **Motion by:** Rich Edgington
  - **Second by:** Fred Jackson
  - **Vote:** Passed unanimously

3. Approval of March Board Meeting Minutes

- Motion to accept the March Board Meeting Minutes as presented:
  - **Motion By:** Jeff Graf
  - **Second By:** Fred Jackson
  - **Vote:** Passed unanimously

4. Open Session

Current board members welcomed new board members Phillip Gamache and Sheldon Morgan who will be officially seated in May, 2025.

5. Reports

Financial Report

Sarah Marques of Walke and Associates reported that $1.3 million was transferred back into the Colorado Trust, bringing the total balance to approximately $2.6 million. She also noted that payroll tax overpayments had occurred, resulting in no reduction to crew members' taxable income. Consequently, she arranged repayment of Social Security, FICA, and Medicare taxes that were not originally deducted. The IRS and Colorado Unemployment are expected to reimburse South Ark FPD for the overpaid amounts.

Chief Aaron Jonke updated the board on wildland fire billing and revenue. In the past 30 days, South Arkansas FPD received over $1.2 million in wildland-related payments, with about $600,000 currently in the billing system and an additional $200,000 in progress. Total revenue from wildland

responses exceeds $4 million, including $593,000 received in 2025 from California fire deployments. In 2024, apparatus deployments generated a profit of over $422,000, with year-to-date truck profit for 2025 currently over $175,000.

Motion to accept the monthly financials as presented:

- **Motion:** Fred Jackson
- **Second:** Rich Edgington
- **Vote:** Passed unanimously

Fire Chief's Report

Chief Aaron Jonke discussed several critical issues:

- Elections: It was announced that new board members, Phillip Gamache and Sheldon Morgan, will be sworn in in May 2025. Chief Jonke reported that he is in the process of developing onboard handbooks for incoming board members. These handbooks will provide guidance on board bylaws, Special District Association (SDA) policies, and general board responsibilities and practices.
- Grants: Chief Jonke reported that he is developing partnerships with Colorado Firecamp and the Southwest Conservation Corps (SCC) to support community mitigation efforts and provide additional fire response capability. It is anticipated that eight (8) to nine (9) SCC crew members will be housed at the 124 E Street station throughout the summer, with South Arkansas FPD covering utility costs. This arrangement will effectively triple the number of personnel available for fire response. Chief Jonke also noted that the National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC) has been nationally defunded by the current administration and will no longer be available to assist with mitigation. He will continue to monitor and pursue funding opportunities through active grant portals.
- Apparatus: It was noted that the department's apparatus had not been adequately maintained in recent years, resulting in significant costs to restore them to operational status. Chief Jonke reported that he is now working with the City of Salida's fleet maintenance services, which has proven to be more efficient and cost-effective for the district. He affirmed his commitment to maintaining all apparatus regularly to extend their service life and minimize potential legal liabilities.
- Operational Planning:
    - The annual Wildland Refresher will be held on Friday, May 2nd in the training room of the Station 11. Captain Chris Bainbridge has organized a panel of speakers for the morning session, as well as hands-on training, including pack testing, for the afternoon session. Chief Jonke encouraged board members to attend in the morning to briefly introduce themselves and meet the wildland team.
    - Chief Jonke introduced two new policies: the Overtime Policy and the Volunteer Policy. To help manage payroll costs, the Overtime Policy stipulates that overtime pay will be issued when crew members are deployed on an apparatus. This approach is intended to incentivize qualified personnel to participate in responses, promote knowledge-sharing among crew members, and support continued revenue generation through active apparatus deployments. The Volunteer Policy will require crew members to volunteer twenty-four (24) hours annually back to the community through either training, mitigation, or other departmental needs.
    - Chief Jonke informed the board of his efforts to review South Ark's policies and procedures as they have not previously been addressed. His goal is to align them with those currently being implemented by the City of Salida to ensure consistency and operational efficiency.
    - Board Appreciation Dinner honoring Jeff Graf and Fred Jackson for their dedicated years of service to the South Ark board took place on the evening of

Monday, April 28th. Chief Jonke thanked both Jeff and Fred for their dedication to serving the board.

- District Unification: Chief Jonke reported positive reception from various elected officials regarding the unification of fire districts with the City of Salida and neighboring cities. He remains committed to researching this initiative further.
- DFPC: Chief Jonke reported that $1.2 million was received from state bill processing in the last 30 days. He is actively monitoring the process and taking necessary actions.
- Legislation: Chief Jonke is monitoring a few bills and informed the board of the following:
    - Vegetative Fuel Mitigation (HB25-1009): House Bill 25-1009 is a Vegetative Fuels Mitigation bill that, if passed, gives South Ark the power to establish programs dedicated to removing dead or dry plant materials and have landowners mitigate their properties to reduce the risk of wildfire.
    - “Single Staircase” Legislation (HB25-1273): House Bill 25-1273 creates potential challenges for fire response through the implementation of a single exit (or staircase) in multifamily buildings (up to five stories). The passing of this bill makes it harder for fire departments to effectively manage emergencies in these buildings due to a single dedicated exit.
    - Modifications to the Colorado Open Records Act (CORA) (SB 25-077): Senate Bill 25-077 amends the Colorado Open Records Act (CORA) by implementing new guidelines for information requests. The bill introduces regulations intended to streamline requests, ensuring they are focused and do not place time-consuming tasks on staff. The bill was passed by both houses with bipartisan support and was vetoed by the governor. Chief Jonke will continue to monitor this issue.
- SFD Open House: Official opening of the Salida Fire Department will be on Friday, May 23rd from 11am to 2pm and South Ark board members are encouraged to attend.

Assistant Fire Chief Report

Chief Rohrich reported on a few administrative items:

- Insurance: Assistant Chief Rohrich reported that the exploration of insurance providers is ongoing, and she is currently awaiting quotes from multiple companies. She anticipates having updated quotes available by the next board meeting. Both insurance providers under consideration work in partnership with the Special District Association (SDA) and may offer potential cost savings for the district.
- Grants: Firehouse Sub grant was submitted on April 4th for the acquisition of a new rescue boat - notification of award (either accepted or denied) will be received within three (3) months of submission.

Wild Land Coordinator

Captain Bainbridge reported the following:

- Apparatus: The department's trucks remain deployed in Texas and are expected to stay there until weather conditions improve. The apparatus are currently operating on twelve (12) hour shifts, with rotating crews focusing on severity response and training in coordination with the Texas Forest Service. Additionally, Tender 11 is scheduled to deploy with a staffed crew to southern states on May 1st.
- Annual Refresher Training: The Annual Refresher Training will take place on

Friday, May 2nd from 8am to 5pm, Captain Chris Bainbridge encouraged board members to attend in the morning to introduce themselves to the staff.

- Fire Conditions: Captain Chris Bainbridge reported that snowpack is at 54% for

the whole valley as of Monday, April 28th with higher snowpack in the upper mountains. Drought conditions are expected to get worse and persist throughout Southern parts of the Country. An active fire season is expected this summer.

- Community Initiatives: Ranch Hand Mitigation Program has been inconsistent

due to weather conditions and high winds, although crews conducted numerous burns last week. Properties are beginning to green up and controlled burns are expected to slow down.

6. New Business

A. Resolution No. 2025-06 Resolution to Authorize the Purchase of Two (2) Type-6 Fire

Engines.

- **Motion By:** Rich Edgington
- **Second:** Art Hutchinson
- **Vote:** Unanimous

B. Motion: By the South Arkansas Fire Protection District to Authorize the Purchase of

Beverages for the Salida Fire Department Open House on May 23rd, in an amount not to exceed $200.00.

- **Motion By:** Fred Jackson
- **Second:** Rich Edgington
- **Votes:** Unanimous

7. Adjournment

- Motion to adjourn the meeting at 0943
  - Motion to Adjourn: Rich Edgington
  - **Second:** Art Hutchinson
  - **Vote:** Passed Unanimously

Submitted by:

Jeff Graf, Secretary Treasurer