South Arkansas Fire Protection District

MEETING MINUTES

Date: February 23, 2026

Time: 0900 Hours

Location: 611 Oak Street, Salida, CO 81201

Board Members Present

- Harold Starbuck
- Art Hutchinson
- Sheldon Morgan
- Phillip Gamache
- Rich Edgington

Board Members Excused

None reported.

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by President Harold Starbuck at 0902 hours.

2. Approval of the Agenda

- Motion to accept the agenda as presented.
  - **Motion by:** Sheldon Morgan
  - **Second by:** Rich Edgington
  - **Vote:** Passed unanimously

3. Approval of January Board Meeting Minutes

- Motion to accept the January Board Meeting Minutes.
  - **Motion by:** Art Hutchinson
  - **Second by:** Sheldon Morgan
  - **Vote:** Passed unanimously

4. Open Session

No public was present.

5. Reports

Sarah Marques of Walke and Associates provided an update on deposits and current balances, with nothing unusual to report.

Laurie Todesco of South Arkansas Fire Protection District detailed received and outstanding amounts for the current billing cycle. She also reported on personnel on resource orders.

Financial Report

- Motion to accept January financials.
  - **Motion by:** Sheldon Morgan
  - **Second by:** Rich Edgington

- **Vote:** Passed unanimously

Fire Chief's Report

Chief Aaron Jonke discussed the following items:

- Mitigation Efforts
  - Mitigation has garnered positive attention from community members and other fire departments and districts.
- DFPC Audit
  - The audit is ongoing. Chief Jonke will provide an update when available. The pace is being dictated by the state.
- Administrative Position
  - Researching a new administrative position to assist with billing, payroll, accounting, and systems assessment.
- Personnel Benefits Package
  - Researching a benefits package for staff. An update will be provided when options have been selected.
  - Medical benefits for wildland firefighters are not likely with the current structure of offerings and inconsistent pay. The lack of these benefits is covered by higher pay levels.
  - Retirement benefit options are being researched.
- SCC Crew Hires
  - Six additional crew members have begun with SCC.
  - These crew members are fire-trained and will be available to assist with local fire events when needed. They have been onboarded and will work for the District in the event of a wildland fire.
- District Severity Planning
  - Chief Jonke aims to have a plan by the March board meeting regarding staffing and apparatus deployment when extreme fire danger arises in the District.
- Fire Service Study
  - Board members discussed a comprehensive approach to assessing future fire service needs and the need for a study.
  - As the population and threat of wildfire grow, the Board felt it is critical to plan properly for a sustainable fire service.
  - The Board will work with the City of Salida and wants a process that engages all local stakeholders because fire service decisions affect the community as a whole.
  - Previous assessments were conducted in 2005 and 2012.
- Potential Purchase of 124 E Street Station
  - A property valuation of the old firehouse will be completed for a potential purchase.
  - The old firehouse would be used for mitigation, employee housing, and fire equipment storage.
- Accessibility Supplies Program
  - The Chief will research medical hard-good supplies provided to the community through a no-cost rental program.
  - Liability is being researched.

- Heavy Equipment on CRFF
    - The Chief is investigating adding heavy equipment to the CRFF through a contracted agreement.
    - The concept could benefit the District but needs to be thoroughly vetted.

Assistant Fire Chief's Report

Chief Rohrich reported on the following administrative items:

- Personnel Benefits Package
    - Researching a benefits package for SAFPD personnel.
- Red Bag Grant
    - Received the Red Bag Grant, which provides “Stop the Bleed Bags” for all locked doors at schools during active shooter events.
- Lieutenant Testing
    - SFD held Lieutenant testing on 2/18/2026. Andy Majeski and Brian Jefferson were selected as the two new lieutenants.

Division Chief of Wildfire

Division Chief Bainbridge reported the following:

- Grants
    - FRWRM grant was awarded for $250,000 in equipment to assist with mitigation.
    - COSWAP grant was awarded for $700,000 in mitigation work in the District. SWIFT crews were anticipated to start at the beginning of March 2026.
    - The Common Ground grant resulted in 95 acres of mitigation in six months.
- Community Initiatives
    - The District treated 96 acres since August, distributed 40 cords of firewood, burned several piles to remove fuel from the landscape, and planned additional burning and thinning.
    - The District held community education meetings and continued to promote Firewise communities.
    - The District was working with the county to ensure the BLM agreement for roadside thinning projects was in place, supporting access and compliance across private and public lands.
- Annual Refresher Training
    - Scheduled for March 4.
- Fire Conditions
    - Warm, dry, and windy weather persisted. Stage I fire restrictions were active in unincorporated Fremont County, and Chaffee County had several Red Flag days.
- Deployments
    - E311 and E112 were in Texas on severity assignment, with 13 personnel deployed.

6. New Business

- Motion to engage Lyons Gaddis as the District's legal counsel and approve the firm's engagement letter.
    - **Motion by:** Rich Edgington
    - **Second by:** Sheldon Morgan
    - **Vote:** Unanimous

- Resolution No. 2026-01 authorizing a Regional Fire Protection Feasibility and Sustainability Study and inviting regional stakeholder participation.
    - **Motion by:** Sheldon Morgan
    - **Second by:** Rich Edgington
    - **Vote:** Unanimous

7. Adjournment

- Motion to adjourn the meeting at 0949 hours.
    - **Motion by:** Rich Edgington
    - **Second by:** Sheldon Morgan
    - **Vote:** Passed unanimously

Submitted by: Art Hutchinson, Secretary Treasurer. Scanned signature removed.