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Nebraska Forest Service: Responsibilities of the Rural Fire Protection District Board of Directors

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Operating under a **proactive** management style, a board takes the needs and desires of its district's residents very seriously. A proactive board develops long-range plans that consider the implications of their actions. It chooses priorities and makes decisions very carefully. Proactive management is the most successful and cost-effective form of management.

Master Planning

Fire district budgets must be approved by the county board, so it is imperative that the board has a long-range plan in place for future district needs. This is accomplished by developing a Fire Protection Master Plan.

The preparation of a Fire Protection Master Plan is a proactive step that allows a board to determine what course(s) of action will provide its district the best long-term fire protection. Additional information about master planning is available the Nebraska Forest Service publication *Community Fire Protection Master Planning*.

Fire Prevention

The best type of fire protection is fire prevention. An effective fire prevention program can accomplish this. An effective fire prevention program can decrease annual fire losses, so these types of programs are a wise investment.

Fire Suppression

Fire prevention will only eliminate a portion of fires, so each district must have the necessary fire suppression equipment. A fire department, regardless of the amount of training, cannot perform at 100 percent without adequate equipment. It is the responsibility of the board to see that the firefighters have the equipment necessary to do their job. This equipment benefits everyone who lives in and passes through the district, not just the firefighters.

This pamphlet only begins to cover the responsibilities of a Rural Fire Protection District Board of Directors. For more information contact:

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Responsibilities of the Rural Fire Protection District Board of Directors

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln does not discriminate based on gender, age, disability, race, color, religion, marital status, veteran's status, national or ethnic origin or sexual orientation.

As a member of the Rural Fire Protection District Board of Directors, you are one of five people responsible for providing district residents with the best fire protection the district can afford. It is the board's responsibility to see that members of your volunteer fire department(s) have the proper equipment and training necessary to serve district residents.

Powers and Responsibilities of the Rural Fire Protection District Board of Directors

The Rural Fire Protection District Board of Directors was created by Nebraska State Statutes 35-501 through 35-536 RRS 1943. Statute 35-506 states that the district will be governed by a board of five members, all residents of the district. The board will consist of a president, vice-president, secretary/treasurer and two directors. These offices are re-organized annually. Board members serve four-year terms.

Nebraska Statute 35-508 specifically details the powers and responsibilities of the Rural Fire Protection District Board of Directors. Briefly this statute states that each board will have the following general powers:

- (1)To determine a general fire protection and rescue program for the district;
- (2)To make an annual estimate of the... expense for carrying out such program;
- (3)To annually certify such estimate to the county clerk . . . ;

(4)To manage and conduct the business affairs of the district;

(5)To make and execute contracts in the name of and on behalf of the district;

(6)To buy . . . and to sell real estate on behalf of the district . . . ;

(7)To purchase or lease such firefighting and rescue equipment, supplies, and other real or personal property as necessary . . . to carry out the general fire protection and rescue program of the district;

(8)To incur indebtedness . . . ;

(9)To authorize the issuance of evidences of the indebtedness permitted ... and to pledge any real or personal property owned . . . by the district as security for the same;

(10)To organize, establish, equip, maintain, and supervise a paid, volunteer, or combination paid and volunteer fire department . . . to serve the district;

(11)To employ . . . such personnel as necessary to carry out the general fire protection and rescue program of the district;

(12)To authorize . . . a contract with the Game and Parks Commission or a public power district for fire protection of property . . . located in or adjacent to the rural or suburban fire protection district;

(13)To levy a tax not to exceed 10½ cents on each \$100 in any one year upon the taxable value of all taxable property within the district..., in addition to the amount of tax which may be annually levied to defray the general and incidental expenses of such district, for the purpose of establishing a sinking fund for the construction, purchase, improvement, extension, original equipment, or repair, not including maintenance, of district buildings to house equipment or personal belongings of a fire department, for the purchase of firefighting and rescue equipment or apparatus, for the acquisition of any land incidental to such purposes, or for payment of principal and interest on any evidence of indebtedness issued . . . ;

(14)To adopt and enforce fire codes and establish penalties at annual meetings . . . ; and

(15)Generally to perform all acts necessary to fully carry out the purposes of sections 35-501 to 35-517.”

Effective Management

To perform their duties effectively, board members should understand the two forms of management practiced by many boards.

Under a **reactive** management style, a board acts impulsively and does not consider the long-term consequences of its actions. Reactive boards usually fail to make the best use of its resources and meet the desires of the taxpayers.