

CITY OF RIO DELL POLICE DEPARTMENT

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Subject: Fire District Boundary

I am writing to express my concerns about the inappropriate southern district boundary of the Fortuna Fire District. The current southern boundary is at the north end of the US 101 Eel River Bridge, at the Rio Dell City Limits. This boundary is approximately 6.18 miles from the Fortuna Fire Department. The Rio Dell Fire Department is 1.15 miles from the southern Fortuna Fire District Boundary and 4.5 miles from the US 101 Van Duzen bridge. The response route for the Fortuna Fire Department is US 101 south-bound past State Route 36. The intersection of US 101 and State Route 36 is a notoriously dangerous intersection with traffic crossing both the north and south bound lanes of US 101.

The Rio Dell Fire Department is closer and therefore would have a shorter response time to medical and fire calls within the area between the US 101 bridge located at the northern city limits of Rio Dell and the US 101 bridge at the Van Duzen River. The Rio Dell Fire Department has an excellent response record and is equipped with the necessary equipment for fire, vehicle extrication, as well as medical calls for service.

There are numerous instances where the Fortuna Fire Department has responded to these areas that could have been reached more quickly by the Rio Dell Fire Department based on the simple reason that the Rio Dell Fire Department is geographically closer. This is of particular concern to me as my department often responds to this area of US 101 to assist the California Highway Patrol as well as the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office. The Rio Dell Police Department also routinely makes traffic stops after following vehicles from the north end of Wildwood Avenue after observing vehicle code violations. The area north of the US 101 bridge at the north side of Rio Dell is the first safe place to make a vehicle stop after observing a violation on Wildwood

Avenue. Police Officers working for this department put themselves at risk performing tasks on US 101 for the purpose of public safety and should one of them become injured or otherwise require the assistance of the fire service, I would not want them to wait unnecessarily long because of the current district boundary.

The current southern Fortuna Fire District boundary also conflicts with the current practice of emergency services currently operating in the area. Both the California Highway Patrol and the Humboldt County Sheriff's Department request assistance when needed in this area from the Rio Dell Police Department, not the Fortuna Police Department. This is because the Rio Dell Police Department is closer than the Fortuna Police Department. Having the Fortuna Fire Department respond to emergencies in this area would be like having the Rio Dell Fire Department respond to emergencies on US 101 at Drake Hill Road. That would not make any sense.

I have personally driven the response routes from each fire department and under no circumstances would it ever be a faster or a more efficient response time for the Fortuna Fire Department in comparison to the Rio Dell Fire Department to respond to this area of what is currently the Fortuna Fire District. In the interest of the safety of Humboldt County citizens, visitors to our county, and our emergency service workers it is imperative that these district boundaries be examined and moved appropriately. I believe these comments are directly related to policies IS-P29, IS-P30, and implementation measures IS-IM16, and IS-IM17.

In no way do these comments reflect a negative opinion of the Fortuna Fire Department. I have a great deal of respect for the Fortuna Fire Department and all of their volunteers. These comments are for public safety concerns only, particularly the safety of the residents of the City of Rio Dell whom I have sworn to protect, who use this area of US 101 frequently.

I have compiled several examples listed below. Also attached are calls for service to the area between the US 101 Van Duzen Bridge and the southern boundary for the Fortuna Fire District. These calls demonstrate the frequency of emergency events in the area with which I am concerned. A vast majority of these events could have been reached more quickly by the Rio Dell Fire Department. Also attached is an ariel image of the area with which I am concerned. It can clearly be seen in the image that emergency units from the Rio Dell area would have a much quicker response time.

Example 1:

On a recent medical call in 2008 at Moore Fuel on US 101 at the north end of Eel River Saw Mill the Fortuna Fire Department response time was in excess of twenty minutes. Police Personnel from the Rio Dell Police Department and Ambulance personnel arrived on scene ahead of the fire department. The initial units from the Fortuna Fire Department were pick-up trucks without any medical supplies, specifically a defibrillator. The victim had suffered an apparent heart attack and was shocked three times on scene by ambulance personnel in an attempt to resuscitate the victim. The victim was loaded onto an ambulance and transported to Redwood Memorial Hospital with assistance from a Rio Dell Police Officer who rode in the ambulance and assisted in performing

CPR. The Fortuna rescue vehicle with the necessary equipment arrived on scene as the ambulance left with the victim. Could a quicker response time have offered a better chance of survival for the victim? I do not know the answer to that question and do not wish to speculate, however the question cannot be ignored.

Example 2:

On another recent call for service in late 2007 a vehicle with three occupants collided with a loose cow on US 101 near Metropolitan Road. The vehicle caught on fire. I heard the call on a police scanner while at a residence in Rio Dell near the fire department on Wildwood Avenue. I was in the company of one of the Rio Dell Fire Department Assistant Chiefs. I heard radio traffic indicating a Rio Dell Police Unit was already on scene. We waited several minutes while I finished my dinner and then drove at the speed limit to the accident scene so I could assist my Officer. We arrived on scene and the Fortuna Fire Department arrived after we did. I know from experience that the Rio Dell Fire Department would have been able to achieve a quicker response time. I was confronted by one of the vehicle occupants who questioned why it took so long for the Rio Dell Fire Department to respond. I clarified it was the Fortuna Fire District and suggested she pose that question to that agency.

Example 3:

A Rio Dell Officer responded to a vehicle fire near the north end of Metropolitan Road. Due to an extended response time from the Fortuna Fire Department the owner of the vehicle attempted urinating on the fire in a effort to extinguish it. While his attempt to put out the fire was obviously futile, I believe it demonstrates the citizen's frustration.

These are just several examples of many to illustrate that the Rio Dell Fire Department can provide more efficient service to this area of Humboldt County, due to their proximity to the service area. While the Fortuna Fire Department performs admirably once they arrive on scene the fact remains that the Rio Dell Fire Department is closer. Based on my conversations with Rio Dell Fire Department Administration, their current staffing levels and equipment could easily handle the increased call volume that would be caused by moving the northern boundary of the Rio Dell Fire District to the area of the Van Duzen Bridge at US 101. My research into this matter has not revealed a logical argument for maintaining the boundaries as they currently exist.

Respectfully,

Graham Hill
Chief of Police
Rio Dell Police Department