Seeley Lake Rural Fire District
200 Firehouse Dr.
Seeley Lake, MT 59868
Regular Board Meeting Minutes

August 17th, 2026 - 6pm

I. **Pledge of Allegiance**
   A. Led By Chief Blaine Cowan
II. **Call to Order/Roll Call**
   A. Present: Vickie Smith, Alyssa McLean, Shirley Goudzwaard, Herb Ellis, Chief Cowan, Brian Page, Susan Page, Renee Cotton, Mary Ellen Stubb, Lydia and Steve Kelly, Clara Kyrouac, Shawn Ellinghouse, Lu Perez, David Perez
III. **Correction and/or Approval of Minutes**
   A. Shirley Goudzwaard made a motion to approve *July 10th, 2026* meeting minutes with the edit of the labeling mishap from “agenda” to “minutes”. Alyssa McLean seconded the motion. All were in favor, motion passed.
   B. Shirley Goudzwaard made a motion to approve *July 20th, 2026* meeting minutes with the correction of the labeling mishap from “agenda” to “minutes”, and a correction of the statement that brownies were being donated, they are not being donated and we are still working out pricing for desserts. Herb Ellis seconded the motion. All were in favor, motion passed.
   C. Alyssa McLean made a motion to approve *July 29th, 2026* meeting minutes with a correction of the typo under VI., A., that states 30,000 but should say 130,000, also correcting the spelling of Shirley’s name on the first page, and the correction of the labeling mishap from “agenda” to “minutes”. Shirley Goudzwaard seconded the motion. All were in favor, motion passed.
IV. **Public Comments/Correspondence**
   A. Susan Page had a question regarding the July 29th meeting minutes, under section 5, about the planned date of the cookoff. At that time of the July 29th meeting it said September, but the cookoff date got moved to October and has been clarified.
   B. Lu Perez stated that she has enjoyed being here and appreciates the board.
V. **Board Response to Public Correspondence**
   A. No current responses to be made
VI. **Financial Report and Approval of Checks and Warrants**

A. Alyssa McLean made a motion to approve *July 2026* expenses report in the amount of: $52,051.76.
Vickie Smith seconded the motion. All were in favor, motion passed.

VII. Reports

A. Call Volume
   1. YTD 2025: 240 calls
   2. YTD 2026: 210 calls
   3. July 2025: 72 calls
   4. July 2026: 45 calls
      a) In July of 2025 there were 17 wildland fire related calls, lightning strikes, and structure fire calls.

B. Recruitment and Retention
   1. We currently have 20 volunteers, one just finished training for driving, one volunteer who received an inactivity letter said they'd like to talk about re-engaging, meeting with them to be had with Chief Cowan hopefully soon
      a) Chief Cowan has posted facebook posts mentioning the stipend offered, we also did just receive an app for local EMT.
   2. We've been approached by a spouse of new volunteer, a diesel mechanic helping with repairs volunteering his time
      a) Blaine talked to VFIS (our insurance provider) to make sure we are covered regarding mechanic work at the district, and it is best practice to bring him on as a volunteer fire fighter to ensure coverage in case of any issues that could arise.
      b) Chief Cowan suggests creating a fleet maintenance program

C. Grants Update
   1. No new updates on the pending grants, though rumor has it that the MDT grant that we applied for will start making their grant award announcements in September.
   2. Sad piece of news on the RHC grant, our 11 year old ambulance is "too new" to be eligible according to their seemingly new rules.
   3. Federal grants through FEMA: It has taken 6 months to get contracted with SAM.gov (as required to receive grants) because the old administration was listed as the admin of the district's SAM account, so we unfortunately missed the July deadline, but we will try again for next year.

D. Updates/Actions
   1. Stage 2 fire restrictions in effect since August 6th, lolo national forest put their restrictions in place slightly before Missoula county put theirs in place
   2. There was an interesting fire call in the double arrow, they had a propane fire pit table which is legal in stage 2 restrictions. Was an opportunity to meet community members.

3. Chief Cowan states he would like to utilize the stipend for non-traditional volunteers that come along, as we are not filling our calendar because of people's availability. Therefore, in lieu of covering some of our quietest nights, Chief would rather not have a volunteer here on nights where it is slow, but rather 2 volunteers here on a Saturday night when there is increased call activity (according to the data and research Chief Cowan compiled). This would offer us a way to incentivise shift coverage.
    a) Discussion ensued regarding some volunteers not being active, and it was discussed that perhaps we should deactivate their account on the training software if it has not been used after 3 or 4 months, so that we are not paying for training materials that are not being used.
4. The roof repair has been completed, according to the roofer it will buy us 5-6 years before we need a replacement roof. We should budget this into the future budget years.
5. 719, our newest ambulance, continues to have codes coming up on the dash having to do with the DEF system, delete kits could be bought.
6. Training: we purchased the EMS connect platform for training, allowing people the ability to do part of the training on their own time in addition to our training nights. Recently Chief Cowan did a hazmat awareness refresher. Application tracks training progress for each person.
7. Our current policy states that a year of inactivity is what qualifies a volunteer to receive a letter, and that timeline is potentially problematic, and we may want to consider re-examining this policy in the future.
8. Got a new Chief's cell phone to be on during business hours.
9. Lockers are ordered, it takes about 4 weeks to ship, $5700 for them, covered by many generations community donations
10. Shirley Goudzwaard inquires of Chief Cowan if it is feasible to sell station 2 to help with our deficit?
    a) One fire engine there was purchased used from MRFD, it's not quite appropriate for our area. We could use a type 3 engine better made for mountains, we have an old water tender, lime green truck and trailers, so we have various assets that could potentially be auctioned/sold.
    b) Vickie motions to put discussion regarding selling assets in our next agenda, Alyssa McLean seconds the motion. All were in favor, motion passed.

VIII. Old Business

A. SOP "Admin 8" - Terminations for Cause and Grievance Policy - Alyssa McLean motions to table this item to next meeting, Vickie Smith seconds the motion. All were in favor, motion passed.

B. Budget Past and Present concerns
    1. We have worked with Missoula county to determine where our finances were at, Vickie Smith created a chart, and recently we were able to get

into “Workday” which is what Missoula County uses for their record keeping. Vickie Smith was able to analyze the numbers, and compare our chart vs. the county records. The data was very similar.

C. Board Bylaws approval
    1. The Board Bylaws were finished and signed by all but Mr Chairman who wasn’t able to be at this meeting, but will be at the next.

D. Committees
    1. Apparatus Replacement/Facility Needs Committee head appointment, headed by Chief Cowan
    2. Make a list of of Committees, their head of committee, and their members
    3. Susan Page is joining the events committee with Shirley Gourdzwaard
    4. Committees Reports
        a) ShirleyGoudzwaard reports that her and Susan Page are organizing the chili contest and chili feed with an entry fee of $20 for Chili cooks.
            (1) Cups and silverware are already purchased for tastings
            (2) 2 gift baskets for prizes, fire prevention items, and a kitchen items basket
            (3) Board will participate by making a crock pot of chili to feed everyone dinner, about 6 crock pots
            (4) Route 83 bars are above our budget, so will shop for other desserts
            (5) Pop’s Restaurant is donating cornbread
            (6) October 10th is the official set date of the event
            (7) Location here in the bay at the SLRFD Firehouse
            (8) Alyssa McLean will be making a flier for the chili cookoff to be posted online and around town
            (9) The Griz game is at 3pm in AZ that day, and we could potentially stream it

IX. New Business

A. Confirmation of Letter to Volunteers
    1. We sent out a letter to all the volunteers regarding the beginning of fire season, showing appreciation for their volunteerism and encouraging volunteers to respond while we have some Volunteers away from the district working on wildlands fires.

B. Welcome New Board Member Herb Ellis!
    1. Herb was given the new board member welcome binder that was compiled by Chief Cowan and Vice Chairman Vickie Smith.

C. Board Response to concerns re: scheduling/coverage
    1. Chief Cowan discussed challenges with volunteer scheduling and coverage during fire season, explaining that the Chief is having difficulty meeting the restrictions of his contract hours, and that working that many hours is not sustainable for any person working in the position. The department is now using mutual aid agreements to help address staffing

shortages, though this means some calls may not be answered by SLRFD, but potentially MESI or other companies in the county like Lifeflight.

2. Discussion ensued regarding the need for continued recruitment, seeking out skilled/experienced help, and educating the public regarding our current schedule and staffing struggles. A call will never go unanswered, it just may not always be answered by our fire district.
3. Chief Cowan commends volunteer David Perez who responded to 27 calls his first month back, and hopes to inspire more rostered volunteers to respond more often.
4. The district agrees to remain optimistic, and to reach out to volunteers to see how we can further support them and encourage them.

D. FY26/27 Budget Revision Proposal

1. Discussion ensued regarding the meal and snack budget for volunteers. It is in policy that if Volunteers go on a 3hr transport, they are allowed to get lunch for that shift.
2. Expert testimony from bookkeeper Mary Ellen Stubb who assisted with balancing our books reiterated that the large swinging deficit is likely due to negligent overspending. She recommends we analyze end-of-year financials vs. month to month financials, as the nature of our finances monthly often takes large swings due to when we are paid by the county and other factors. She also recommends we create a separate fund and ledger for donations we receive to keep in organized clear compliance.
3. **Vickie Smith motions to table the budget revision proposal until next meeting, Alyssa McLean seconded. All were in favor, motion passed.**

X. Chief's Positivity Report

A. Roof project finally completed!
B. Brakes fixed on water tender, everything running great for now
C. The upstairs bathroom/shower room had mold, Captain Steve helped Chief Cowan rip out the old carpet and put vinyl flooring in.

XI. Adjournment/Next Meeting

A. Herb Ellis motions that we adjourn the meeting, Vickie Smith seconds, all were in favor, motion passed.
B. Next Meeting: September 21st, 2026 at 6pm