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

September 21st, 2026 - 6pm

I. **Pledge of Allegiance**
   A. **Led by chief Blaine Cowan**
II. **Call to Order/Roll Call**
   A. Present: Mike Weigel, Alyssa McLean, Vickie Smith, Shirley Goudzwaard, Herb Ellis, Jeff McLean, Mike Richards, Brian Page, Susan Page, Kevin Clader, Clara Kyrouac, Jon Espenschied, Kristina Hartman. Online Zoom Attendance: Scott Kennedy, viewer Bonnie, and an unidentified viewer "PA".
III. **Correction and/or Approval of Minutes**
   A. Shirley Goudzwaard made a motion to approve *August 18th, 2026* meeting minutes. Vickie Smith seconded the motion. All were in favor, motion passed.
IV. **Public Comments/Correspondence**
   A. No public correspondence in room or online/zoom
   B. Email received from Scott Kennedy, to be attached in minutes
V. **Board Response to Public Correspondence**
   A. No responses at this time
VI. **Financial Report and Approval of Checks and Warrants**
   A. Herb Ellis made a motion to approve *August 2026* expenses report in the amount of: $38,295.16. Shirley Goudzwaard seconded the motion. All were in favor, motion passed.
VII. **Reports**
   A. Call Volume
      1. YTD 2025: 275
      2. YTD 2026: 259
      3. August 2025: 35
      4. August 2026: 48
         a) Stage 2 restrictions can create extra calls with people reporting illegal campfires, etc
   B. Recruitment and Retention
      1. Current Volunteer Count is 21. Three new applicants are in process (a fourth withdrew due to relocating outside of state), including 2 drivers and 1 EMT from Missoula who has begun training.
      2. Assistant Chief Bowman had to resign due to his full time commitment in Missoula
      3. A cadet who recently turned 18 is applying to become a full volunteer.
   C. Grants Update

1. A $10,000 check from Town Pump Foundation for education and training purposes, thanks to Mike Weigel applying for it
2. A tentative award of approximately $123,000 in rural healthcare funds was received, covering a new monitor defibrillator and a new power cot system and gurney for the ambulance. Trade-ins of older equipment were used to reduce costs. Both items come with a 2-year warranty.
3. A preliminary approval from Blackfoot Communications for a community grant was received, covering upgraded internet (quadrupling current speeds from 10 to 40 Mbps) and a new phone package for 2 years, valued at approximately $7,500.
4. Chief reports that he submitted the new grant application for the next round of rural healthcare monies, requesting approximately $585,000 over 3 years to fund the Community Integrated Health Program, including one full-time administrator, two part-time members, a vehicle, equipment, and supplies.
5. Discussions are ongoing with the Community Foundation about potentially taking over the iRide van program (including a wheelchair accessible van) as part of the community integrated health program.

D. Updates/Actions
1. Chief Cowan says Thank you to the Volunteers and Staff for their continued hard work
2. Amb 729 is on a wildland fire assignment which was extended to 3 weeks. It is expected to generate approximately $22,000 in revenue.
3. The missing safety deposit box key was finally located by office Administrator Renee in a hidden place
4. A wildland fire occurred on August 27th between Inez and Alva, the Forest Service and DNRC responded quickly and a helicopter was deployed. The district assisted but did not engage on the fire line.
5. New gear lockers arrived and require assembly, installation work is planned for the coming week.
6. An open house event was hosted for Wildfire Preparedness with the Forest Service, future community education events are planned.
7. 2 volunteers are currently in EMT classes, one is near completion and one is a couple weeks in. A third volunteer is to start in October.
8. August's annual Hazmat Awareness Refresher was completed. Dr. Espenschied taught a stop-the-bleeding and shock portion of EMS training.
9. Using EMS connect platform, has proven invaluable
10. We had one call at the end of month about a possible heart attack. Roger and George responded, they called MESI and Lifeflight, coordinating a successful patient transfer.
11. Four minor vehicle incidents occurred, including the chief backing 710 into another vehicle and receiving minor cosmetic damage. 710 may need minor body repair to prevent any spots vulnerable to rust. Chief Cowan will discuss with the board re: minor body repair. Also an antenna was damaged by a hospital bay door, and a deer strike that caused no damage.
    a) Volunteers received training and a reminder of proper backing up and driving policies.
12. A radio quit working on the water tender while on the DNRC wildland fire call, it has now been fixed.
13. The district owned jeep is underutilized and could be considered for sale in the future.

14. A generous $300 donation was received from Clearwater Realty
15. Unit 719's cot system failed electronically (unable to extend or retract), it is the oldest unit and will be the first to be replaced.

VIII. Old Business

A. SOP "Admin 8" - Terminations for Cause and Grievance Policy
   1. It was explained that the intent of the revisions is to ensure the board is notified during final warnings or dismissals, while preserving the chief's authority to act immediately in egregious situations.
      a) Mike Weigel suggests we consult the county attorney before we dismiss a person for cause
   2. Key changes include adding a sentence requiring board notification at the time of final warning or dismissal, removing redundant language, and clarifying that dismissal decisions involve both the Chief and board, but emphasizes the importance of the chief retaining full operational authority without hesitation in safety-critical situations.
   3. Discussion ensued noting that Montana law requires termination for cause with documented personnel files. Automatic dismissal triggers include: impairment on duty, felony conviction, sexual violence offender status, theft conviction, and refusal of drug/alcohol screening.
   4. Vickie Smith motions to approve SOP Admin 8 with the discussed changes. Shirley Goudzwaard seconded. All were in favor, motion carried.

B. Discuss the potential sale of Station 2 and other assets
   1. Chief Cowan informs us that we have equipment stored in Station 2. We have a type 1 engine there that we must keep sheltered. It was built and purchased from the Bonner mill site, which is on all flat ground. It has a 1000 gallon tank due to the fact it was meant for an industrial site. We acquired it in 2022 for about $25,000 (it is now 20 years old), which is about the going rate for a used apparatus. It is poor in the winter on flat ground in snow and ice, as the back end fishtails. It would not be good for use up the double arrow in winter conditions. We do however need to keep it until we get a replacement, possible replacement could come next year with the AFG grant.
   2. The water tender outside station 1 (considered a type 3) has a logging truck chassis, it's not a usable piece that any firefighter hop in the truck and go, as driving it takes specialized training. It is a 2800 gallon tank, but it's cumbersome and hard to drive. We recently had to take it out of service because a PTO shaft broke apart. The district's other truck is a green 1983.
   3. The office building at Station 2 is leased to Missoula County for $24,820 a year on a 5 year lease. It is used by county deputies and Fish Wildlife and Parks. The district pays insurance, taxes, and maintenance, but utilities are reimbursed by the county. Concern has been raised that we may not be profiting from the lease after accounting for insurance, taxes, and maintenance.
   4. The property is approximately 3 acres, zoned commercial, served by Seeley Lake Water District, and is on its own septic system. It is not advantageous location wise, but is essential for storing equipment.
   5. A future station near Placid Lake is a strategic priority to improve ISO ratings and reduce fire insurance premiums for residents more than 5 miles from a station or hydrant.

6. Discussion ensued regarding doing more research into the property's value, and potentially consulting an attorney to explore land acquisition opportunities around the Placid Lake area.
7. Shirley Goudzwaard motions to investigate the value of station 2 and do information gathering to present to the board. Alyssa McLean seconds the motion. Discussion Ensued:
    i. Vickie Smith suggests that we should gather as much information as possible and due diligent research as we consider this.
    ii. Herb suggests we make a long-term future goal to build a better station south of town, since we do not own the land that station 1 currently sits on, we lease it from the county.
    iii. Shirley Goudzwaard and Herb Ellis agree to form a committee to investigate the value of the station 2 property.
    b. Motion to pursue further investigation including property appraisal was voted on. All were in favor, motion carried.

C. Budget Revision Proposal
1. The board reviewed the budget vs. actual expenditure report compiled and presented to us by Chief Cowan.
    a) Some categories were highlighted showing over 100% of budget utilization, providing context for each.
        (1) Software/Quickbooks was overspent at 124% due to running two systems simultaneously during the transition to our new quickbooks. Office Administrator Renee was able to negotiate a $1,200 credit from Quickbooks for poor service during that transition.
        (2) Station 2 utilities are overspent in the budget, but get fully reimbursed by the county at the year's end.
        (3) An anomalous Collections payment of approximately $1,600 was made that was not anticipated in the budget.
        (4) Station 1 building maintenance is overspent due to unbudgeted locker purchases, but is then covered by donations
    b) Chief Cowan emphasizes transparency and his commitment to providing explanations for budget variances at each meeting. The new chart and explanation he provided makes the budget easy to analyze and track.

IX. New Business

A. New Computer for Boardroom/Classroom
1. In light of the Town Pump grant we have the ability to get a new computer in the conference room.
    a) Current computer is needed for medical reports and other staff clerical needs, but is corrupted with a virus
2. Alyssa motions to spend $1000 dollars on updated computer and desk area for the conference room. Vickie Smith seconded. All were in favor, motion carried.

B. Starlink Internet
1. In light of the Blackfoot communications grant, this is currently a non-issue as we will have adequate internet speeds and phone service for 2 years for free through Blackfoot.
2. Moving to starlink internet to be deferred for 2 years
3. No motion to be made at this time

C. DEF Delete 719
    1. DEF system causes a lot of breakdowns and causes the vehicle to go into limp mode which could pose a serious safety risk if it happened on call.
    2. Two options were researched: a DIY kit for approximately $1,900 to be completed by our volunteer mechanic, or a professional deletion by EQ Diesel in Missoula for $2,700 which includes a 2 year warranty. This option is further appealing because EQ Diesel has the proper equipment to recode the ambulance computer correctly once the DEF is deleted.
    3. Mechanic Dawson has offered to help us create a comprehensive preventative vehicle maintenance program. A maintenance and tracking program is in development.
    4. Mike Weigel motions that we have the DEF deleted at EQ in Missoula. Vickie Smith seconded. All were in favor, motion carried.

X. Chief's Positivity Report

A. We are seeing great success with grants after many months of grueling application processes, it is a significant morale boost after waiting and uncertainty
B. New volunteers continue to filter in and begin training
C. The wildland fire assignment bringing in added revenue

XI. Adjournment/Next Meeting

A. Alyssa McLean motions to adjourn, Herb Ellis seconded. All were in favor, the meeting adjourned.

October 19th, 2026 at 6pm