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November 5, 2008

Board of Supervisors  
County of Santa Cruz  
701 Ocean Street, Room 500  
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

Subject: Fire Protection and Initial Medical Response in Bonny Doon and the  
Rest of County Service Area 48

Members of the Board:

Upon receiving a petition from Bonny Doon voters, the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) conducted a study concerning a proposal to form a fire protection district in Bonny Doon. During the evening of September 22, 2008, LAFCO held a public hearing and received substantial public testimony on the proposal. Some of the testimony came from Bonny Doon residents who wanted better fire protection services, and were willing to pay more for improved services. Some of the testimony came from residents of the other rural communities served by County Service Area 48 (County Fire). They were concerned that the proposed fire district would divert revenues away from the existing CAL FIRE stations funded by County Service Area 48, and that service levels would decline in one or more the areas served by these stations.

The LAFCO study identified several cost-effective operating and financing steps that could significantly improve fire protection and initial emergency response in Bonny Doon as well as assisting County Fire to ameliorate its budget problems.

1. The CAL FIRE company that is stationed in Felton during the fire season could be moved to one of the Bonny Doon stations. Note that the fire season costs for this company are paid by the State. There are virtually no County Fire or Bonny Doon resident costs for this re-deployment. The Felton Fire Protection District station is located on Kirby Street two blocks away from CAL FIRE's Felton Station. The San Lorenzo Valley has a number of able departments that can send several companies to an incident near Felton (Felton FPD, Zayante FPD, Ben Lomond FPD, Boulder Creek FPD, and Scotts Valley FPD). The re-deployed CAL FIRE company would continue to respond via several routes into the San Lorenzo Valley by traveling down Felton-Empire Grade, Alba Road,

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and Jamison Creek Road. A strong Bonny Doon volunteer company would still be needed to get sufficient forces to major Bonny Doon incidents, and to cover the community when the CAL FIRE company is deployed in a strike team to another community.

2. The County could consider dividing County Service Area 48 into zones that represent the service areas of the various stations. Different volunteer companies could then advocate for area-specific enhancements (such as a sleeper program, a paid station manager, a vegetation management program, or keeping a seasonal station open all year). These enhancements could be funded by area-specific levies that are voted upon in accordance with Proposition 218. The taxpayers in the various communities may be more likely to vote for the levy if they knew the money would be segregated in a zone fund and only spent in their community.
3. The County could prepare another ballot proposal that proposes an across-the-board assessment or tax in all of County Service Area 48 to fund the basic services of County Fire, as well as any area levies that the volunteer companies want to propose for enhancements in their individual areas.

Please consider whether the Board of Supervisors should pursue any or all of these steps in your duty to administer County Service Area 48.

Very truly yours,

James W. Rapoza  
LAFCO Chairperson

cc: Susan A. Mauriello, County Administrative Officer