ELECTORAL AREA DIRECTORS REPORT

TO:	Chair and Directors
SUBJECT:	Road Rescue Feasibility Study
DESCRIPTION:	Report from Derek Sutherland, General Manager, Community and Protective Services, dated April 29, 2024
RECOMMENDATION #1:	THAT: the Electoral Area Directors' Committee receive the road rescue feasibility study report for information.
RECOMMENDATION #2:	THAT: the Electoral Area Directors' Committee provides a recommendation to the Board of Directors on one of the four options in the staff report.

BACKGROUND:

Overview and Provincial Context

In 2014, the CSRD Board authorized staff to engage in a road rescue feasibility study. Since that time, the CSRD has utilized a number of consultants to help develop an understanding of road rescue services in BC as well as the CSRD, and to identify what opportunities exist for the CSRD to support road rescue services within the region to address service gaps.

The consultants have concluded there is currently no legislative requirement for any governing body to provide road rescue service in the province; however, the legislative void has not eliminated the social need for road rescue as a matter of public safety. The result is the application of an inconsistent approach to service provision in BC. In many areas of the province, road rescue service is delivered by fire departments, while other areas are serviced by road rescue societies and search and rescue organizations that are staffed with (unpaid) volunteers. At one time, as many as twenty three road rescue societies were in operation provincially; currently there are approximately seven. There are several reasons for the decline, including an unsustainable provincial funding model, volunteer recruitment and retention issues, and the absorption of the function by the local tax base through service establishment by local fire departments. When fire departments take on a road rescue service, it is often because of a society's dissolution due to funding and volunteer concerns that affect its ability to sustain operations on its own. This was the case in Sicamous recently with the fire department absorbing the road rescue responsibilities of the Eagle Valley Rescue Society.

Local governments throughout BC have long been critical of the provincial government for not taking full responsibility for road rescue. The province does provide some financial support to fire departments delivering road rescue service, but only to calls that occur outside of the specified service area. This funding mechanism is administered by Emergency Management BC (EMBC), which currently pays $346 per hour for a road rescue apparatus to respond to a road rescue call. The payment only covers road rescue apparatus and does not cover fire suppression apparatus, or support vehicles such as traffic control/protection units, command units, or the training or stress supports needed of personnel.

The Fire Chiefs Association of BC and EMBC retained consultants to develop a report on the guidelines for provincial oversight, compensation arrangements, and minimum standards for road rescue providers. The report was released and makes much needed recommendations for changes to the governance and reimbursement models.

CSRD Context and Gaps

Within the CSRD boundaries, there is one road rescue society and two fire departments (Revelstoke and Golden) that provide road rescue services. The CSRD also has two fire departments outside the CSRD boundaries (Vernon and Chase) that provide road rescue services to areas within the CSRD. Portions of Electoral Area D are serviced by Vernon Fire and Electoral areas F and G are primarily serviced by Chase Fire. These areas are identified as gaps because of larger than adequate response times. The areas serviced by Revelstoke and Golden that are outside of their fire suppression areas are largely remote and few alternatives for service delivery exist in these areas. The fire department at the Townsite of Field has very recently discontinued road rescue services within the park boundary due to liability and staffing concerns and the Golden Fire Department has partnered with Lake Louise FD to provide road rescue service in the Yoho National Park Boundary.

Considerations of a CSRD Service Delivery

Staff consulted with current service providers to gain a better understanding of their strengths, challenges and needs, as well as their ability and desire to continue offering the service within the CSRD. All road rescue providers in the CSRD have reported that the amounts paid by EMBC do not cover their full cost of operations. Road rescue societies have a strong desire to continue operations and serve their respective communities. The societies expressed concern for their future due to funding and volunteer recruitment and retention challenges. Fire departments in Vernon and Chase have indicated there is significant subsidization given to provide road rescue service to areas outside of their fire suppression boundaries. Vernon Fire has indicated that their interest in servicing CSRD areas is on a temporary basis until a more permanent solution is found.

There are significant social, moral, economic, and political considerations when evaluating the advancement of road rescue service in the CSRD. A legal review conducted in 2019 determined that for the CSRD to advance a road rescue service, the creation of specified service area bylaws requiring the associated public assent to fund related road rescue call outs, capital acquisition, training, critical incident stress management and rehabilitation would be necessary. The service area(s) would require a large enough tax base to provide adequate and acceptable funding support, however the trade-off is that provincial funding would only be available for calls dispatched outside of the service area. Additionally, the boundaries for existing fire suppression service areas would not necessarily mimic the boundaries for a road rescue service.

CSRD Policy A-52, Volunteer Fire Department Involvement in Non-Fire Suppression Activities, 1996 stipulates that fire departments will not deliver non-fire suppression services such as medical first responder, search and rescue service, hazardous waste spill response and road rescue extrication service. The policy preamble indicates these services provide a great risk of liability and that emphasis is best placed on ensuring a uniform level of proficiency and training with respect to fire suppression activities. This policy would need to be rescinded or amended upon CSRD advancing this service.

Potential Solution

Given the social need for the service and the political and economic complications associated with offering the service through the fire departments, staff has explored the interest of fire fighters in Electoral Areas F, the Falkland area of Electoral Area D, and Electoral Area G. These fire department

members have expressed a willingness to establish a road rescue service in their fire suppression areas. However, there are administrative and political considerations to providing this service.

NEXT STEPS:

Policy A-52 (attached) precludes the CSRD Fire Services from road rescue activities. Furthermore, the Service establishment bylaws for the CSRD fire services do not allow for activities other than structural firefighting.

These documents would have to be changed by the Board prior to authorizing the fire departments to undertake road rescue.

The provincial government has not increased rates for road rescue services in the recent policy updates. This was an expected and necessary change to adequately cover costs associated with road rescue services on provincial road networks. Therefore, any road rescue services performed by a CSRD fire service would have to be subsidized by the local taxpayer, including out of jurisdiction response.

The road rescue feasibility study report by Tim Pley and Associates (attached) outlines a process that involves the creation of a new service area that would allow fire departments to undertake road rescue services.

If the Board wishes to pursue road rescue in the gap areas through the local fire department a service area establishment process would have to be completed to provide the service.

Options for Service Delivery

Option 1

An option for all areas that does not require an assent process is to encourage and allow certain fire departments to create a Road Rescue Society that utilizes CSRD Fire Services equipment, facilities, and apparatus. This model would require the Fire Departments to fund raise for equipment specific to Road Rescue and operate out of the fire halls.

Option 2

An assent process for service delivery could be undertaken to provide service within the fire suppression boundaries of Shuswap Fire Department in Area G, Falkland, and Area F sub-regional fire service boundaries.

Option 3 – Specific to Area F

An assent process could be undertaken within the Celista fire suppression boundaries only. This would allow for provincial reimbursement for responses in Scotch Creek and Anglemont with an approved task number. There is some risk that CFD would respond to those areas without a task number and not be eligible for re-payment.

Option 4

Maintain the current service delivery model and lobby the province to make changes to allow local fire departments to bill the province at an adequate rate to sustain operations.

Financial

Staff are using a preliminary estimate for the cost of service delivery in each new service area at $60,000 for the first year and $30,000 per year thereafter.

Report Approval Details

Document Title:	2024_05_07_EAD_CPS_Road_Rescue_Feasibility_Study_Update.docx
Attachments:	- A-52 Volunteer Fire Department Involvement in Non-Fire Suppression Activities (1).pdf - CSRD Road Rescue Feasibility Study - TPA Final.pdf
Final Approval Date:	May 1, 2024

This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:

Jodi Pierce

No Signature - Task assigned to Jennifer Sham was completed by assistant Crystal Robichaud

Jennifer Sham

No Signature - Task assigned to John MacLean was completed by workflow administrator Crystal Robichaud

John MacLean