

January 9, 2023

To: Lane County Commissioners  
Steve Mokrohisky, Lane County Administrator  
Lane County Public Service Building  
125 E. 8<sup>th</sup> Street  
Eugene, Or 97401

From: State Representative Charlie Conrad - HD12

Re: Row River Fire Response

As you know, a rural community in my district east of Cottage Grove, which includes the unincorporated towns of Dorena, Disston, and Culp Creek, is not part of a legally recognized Fire/EMS service district. The lack of a timely response for Fire/EMS services in this area greatly increases the risk of a catastrophic fire disaster, escalates the possibility of personal injury or morbidity in medical emergencies, and generally makes the community less resilient. This is detrimental to the community and contributes to increased service demands by our current responding agencies.

As their State Representative, and as a member of the Legislature's Emergency Management Committee, I am very concerned that this community lacks basic emergency services. Furthermore, based on my experience working for Lane County Fairgrounds, where I helped coordinate aspects of the Holiday Fire evacuation, I know that recognition and attention to these critical service deficiencies often comes too late, resulting in loss of life, property, and livelihood—which is completely avoidable with proper preparation and systems in place. In addition, as a former Law Enforcement Officer, I recognize how a *quick response* is critical in mitigating the impact of an emergency.

Fortunately, a group of community members in this area is proactively addressing these critical deficiencies. They are in the process of organizing a Fire/EMS department, initially as a 501(c)(3) non-profit, with the ultimate goal of forming a Special Rural Fire Protection District in accordance with ORS Chapter 198 and 478. The organization, Row River Fire Response, is working with the Special District Association of Oregon, as well as multiple county and state agencies, to realize these much-needed services for the public good.

Row River Fire Response's goals are threefold:

1. To create a **Special Rural Fire Protection District** for their community in partnership with Lane County, thus ensuring long term financial and organizational longevity.

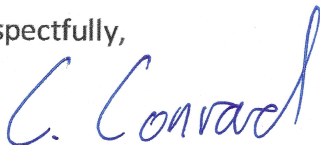
2. To secure emergency stopgap funding for **improved fire services** administered and provided by Row River Fire Response, until the Special Rural Fire Protection District is operational.
3. **To partner with Lane County for grant funding** regarding mutually beneficial activities and services that meet the strategic plans of both organizations.

I met with these community members and believe they are on the right track and deserve support. Given the fact that their community is designated 'high and extreme' wildfire risk, and that the majority of their community is in the urban-wildland interface with similar topography to the Cedar Creek and Holiday fires, I believe there is an urgency to their needs and goals. **As their State Representative and member of the State Emergency, Veterans, and Government Committees, I urge Lane County to support Row River Fire Response to the best of its abilities and resources, including their modest financial needs and partnership requests so that these essential goals of emergency service can be realized.**

In my opinion, Lane County is a stakeholder in the success of Row River Fire Response's goals, not simply because this community is part of Lane County, but also because many Lane County residents visit the parks and recreational facilities in this area. A Fire/EMS district in this community would be strategically located to support Lane County, Cottage Grove and Oakridge in times of fire, disaster, or evacuation. Their vision fits with Lane County's Strategic Plan for a *Safe Healthy County, Vibrant Communities, and Robust Infrastructure*, and also enables self-sufficiency, reducing the burden on *all* emergency services during times of disaster.

As their State Representative, I will do all I can to support Row River Fire Response and Lane County in reaching these goals. I hope you will join me.

Respectfully,



Representative Charlie Conrad