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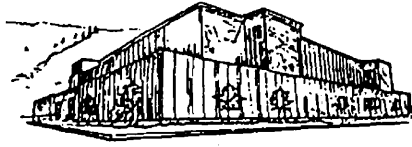
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An Exploratory Study and Assessment of Montana's Volunteer Fire Departments: Trends, Motivations and Priorities

by
Billy R. Preston

B.S. Brigham Young University 1993

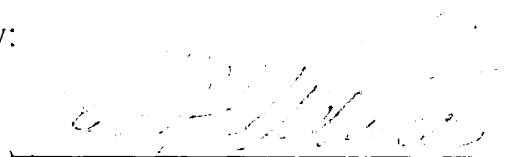
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Master of Science in Forestry

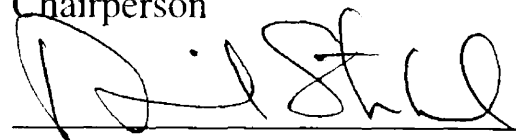
The University of Montana – Missoula
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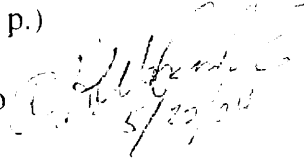
ABSTRACT

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An Exploratory Study and Assessment of Montana's Volunteer Fire Departments: Trends, Motivations and Priorities (174 p.)

Committee Chair: Ronald H. Wakimoto



Volunteer firefighters protect the citizens of small towns and rural communities and save taxpayers hundreds of thousands of dollars annually. They risk their own safety and health while performing a highly demanding and dangerous job and they do so without the benefit of wages and often even without health benefits of any kind. Volunteer fire departments have traditionally been a revered and important part of small communities; but recent national studies have shown that they may be in danger of losing their most important component - the volunteers themselves. Studies have shown that during the past three decades the number of volunteer firefighters in this country have decreased anywhere from 3 to 12.5 percent.

This purpose of this study was to determine very relevant information regarding volunteer fire departments in the State of Montana: 1) if there has been a recent (one year) increase or decrease in the total number of active fire department volunteers in Montana, 2) a characterization of the volunteers within Montana fire departments in terms of their motivations and incentives, and 3) an assessment of the needs and priorities of Montana fire departments with an emphasis on economic compensation and recruitment and retention.

Through the use of a self-administered statewide needs analysis survey, data was gathered from the fire chiefs of volunteer fire departments in an effort to identify the problems, concerns and issues of these departments. It is hoped that through the gathering of this information these fire departments and other government agencies that are affiliated with their mission will be better able to identify and proactively mitigate current and future difficulties.

Results indicate that the numbers of fire department volunteers in Montana are actually increasing, the issues of recruitment and retention are not high priorities when compared to other issues such as training and acquiring equipment, and that volunteer firefighters in Montana are motivated by several factors that are not directly related to economic compensation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I owe thanks, and apologies, to my long-suffering wife Juliet who has always been there for me even in my sourest of moods. I need to acknowledge my children, Cosmo and Kyra (and any future ones that haven’t gotten here yet) for being my source of inspiration and occasional frustration. I always need to be reminded of why I would ever do anything like this in the first place. Love also goes to my parents (both sets, Texas and Utah) for their constant encouragement and occasional economic incentives.

And finally, greatest thanks of all go to the brave men and women of the U.S. Fire Service for their unwavering service and sacrifice. We all owe you the deepest gratitude for the duties you perform every day with little or no recognition.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Much of the forested land of the western United States has been drastically altered through decades of fire suppression, timber harvesting and other various types of management practices. Stand structure, species composition and forest fuel loads have changed and with these differences also come a deviation in the natural and historical role of fire in these forested areas (Harrington 1996). Stands of ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*) and other fire-dependent species that once experienced regular intervals of low-intensity fires in their understory are now in danger of high-intensity stand-replacement fires, capable of extreme destruction to both natural resources and man-made structures. The western United States is also currently experiencing the detrimental effects of a drought (Tolme 2002). This lack of moisture only exacerbates the problem of wildland fire, causing forest fuels to dry out sooner than normal and thus requiring fire service personnel (both paid and unpaid) to be actively engaged in fire suppression duties for several more weeks during the year. In addition to these hazards associated with wildland fire, the problems are further compounded by an ever-increasing population moving out of urban areas and into smaller towns and rural areas. Structures and homes are built very close to forested areas and dense vegetation is often allowed to grow unchecked on properties, creating the potential for structure fires; dangerous to both occupants and those responsible for suppressing fire. Many of these individuals who are expected to provide fire protection in these dense, fire-prone forested areas; stricken with drought and supporting a large population of people with high expectations of the fire service are unpaid fire department volunteers.

Volunteer firefighters in rural communities are regarded as highly valuable resources who provide protection to citizens and save taxpayers hundreds of thousands of dollars annually. The services these men and women provide to their communities are often done at great risk to their own health and safety but are crucial for saving lives, property and valuable natural resources. Additionally, few towns in rural areas have neither the population nor the tax base to support a fully-paid fire department. In fact, most of these firefighters must be willing and able to perform highly demanding and dangerous tasks often in exchange for nothing more than purely the satisfaction of helping others in their community. In order for volunteer fire departments to remain viable to the people they serve and continue to function in a highly efficient manner, they must be able to maintain an adequate staff of highly motivated, well-trained individuals. However, a recent study conducted in 2002 by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) of U.S. fire departments has shown the total number of active volunteer firefighters in this country has decreased by approximately three percent since 1986 (Shannon 2003). A report published by the National Volunteer Fire Council showed a decline of 7.8 percent in volunteers from 1983 to 1996 (NVFC, USFA, and FEMA 1998). A third report, given at the National Volunteer Fire Summit in December 2000, estimates the actual decline may even be as high as 12.5 percent since 1980 (NVFC, USFA, and FEMA 2001). The 2002 study conducted by FEMA and the NFPA of over 8,400 fire departments showed that not only are there less volunteer firefighters in the United States now than there were 17 years ago but the average age of these firefighters has also increased. In 1986, 36 percent of U.S. firefighters were at least 40 years of age. The percentage of firefighters at age 40

or higher has now increased to 44 percent (FEMA, USFA and NFPA 2003). This increase in average age could be indicative of problems with many departments' abilities to recruit younger individuals to replace outgoing ones, or some retirements have been temporarily delayed due to personnel shortages among departments. With this increase in the average age of volunteer firefighters the most common cause of death among volunteers while on duty is no longer due to injury by fire or falling objects but is now due to cardiac arrest (Shannon 2003).

In addition to the declining numbers of volunteers and aging firefighters, the demands placed on these individuals have become increasingly greater and much more complex. During the last few decades, fire, rescue and emergency services departments have increasingly been required to deal with much more difficult tasks such as handling hazardous materials, search and rescue operations in rugged and remote terrain, and EMS calls that require extensive knowledge and training. Additional challenges to firefighters includes the growth of an urban population into the wildland-urban interface, bringing more people and their property closer to the high-risk and very flammable zone where forest meets backyard; the western United States' continued and prolonged drought, and volunteer emergency personnel being highly encouraged (often even required) to train for the possibility of terrorist situations since the tragic events that happened to our nation on September 11, 2001. All of these added duties represent not only an increase in the demand for a volunteer's valuable time but also represents an added degree of danger and greater risk to the individual. Keith Bone, fire chief in Charity, Missouri, summed up the current situation:

The struggle to recruit, train and motivate volunteer firefighters is a problem that many volunteer fire departments like ours have faced. How do you find people willing to train monthly, carry out daily maintenance tasks, respond to emergency incidents – all for free – and still come back for more? (Bone 2000, pg.1).

As volunteer fire departments face increasing, more complex, and more risky duties in a post 9/11 world, and with more and more people with high expectations of fire protection choosing to move into the wildland-urban interface, their ability to maintain an adequate staff becomes absolutely vital. This holds true for *all* volunteer fire departments whether they are located in Charity, Missouri, or Lookout, Montana.

Currently there are approximately 1.09 million total firefighters in this country and roughly 76 percent of them perform their duties strictly as volunteers. About 42 percent of the current population of the United States is protected by local volunteer fire departments and nearly one-half of all volunteer firefighters in this country serve in communities with less than 2,500 people. Virtually all (99.5%) of these very small communities are protected wholly by volunteers (FEMA, USFA, and NFPA 2002). These statistics reflect the fact that not only is a substantial amount of the U.S. population very dependent on our force of non-paid fire personnel during times of emergency but that the smallest of rural communities are almost 100 percent *exclusively* dependent on them. These very small rural communities lack the tax revenue and population to support a paid staff of firefighters and it is often these same communities who seem to be fighting a “losing battle” when it comes to finding and retaining an adequate number of volunteers in their fire departments (The Register Guard, Eugene, Oregon 2003). In the words of James M. Shannon, President and CEO of the National Fire Protection Association, addressing the United States House of Representatives on June 4, 2003:

Something must also be done to help our volunteer fire departments with recruitment and retention. Volunteer fire departments struggle to keep their members and to recruit new members to replace retiring firefighters. We cannot continue to ask our fire departments to protect our communities without adequate resources. We would not expect our armed services to defend our nation without adequate staffing and we should expect no less from our first responders here at home (Shannon 2003, pg.3-4).

It would only be logical to assume that Montana, with so many small communities and sparsely populated counties, is also part of this national downward trend of dwindling numbers of volunteer firefighters. This question, along with many others, can only be sufficiently answered by the undertaking of an in-depth study of all fire departments in the state and the current status of the force of volunteer personnel working in these departments. If it is determined there has been a recent loss of volunteers then this situation brings up even more questions that need to be answered, such as: Is this loss in volunteers happening evenly throughout the state or is it more concentrated in a certain region? Is it time to take the idea of economic compensation for volunteers in this highly demanding line of work more seriously? How do the volunteers themselves in Montana feel about the idea of receiving economic incentives? What *really* motivates these volunteers, if it is not related to economic incentives? In order to determine if recruitment and retention of fire department volunteers will truly be significantly enhanced by offering economic incentives to them then it will also be important to find out which types of incentives are considered most valuable, or if they are even considered necessary at all. Answers to these questions will further the understanding of the motivations of volunteer firefighters and solidify the reasons why economic incentives do or do not enhance recruitment and retention efforts. In Montana, the percentage of all firefighters who are volunteers is approximately 93 percent. When

compared to the national average of 76 percent it shows just how dependent the state is on its unpaid fire service. The more we are able to understand about these volunteers and their motivations the more prepared we will be, as Shannon (2003) suggests, to help our volunteer fire departments with recruitment and retention.

Purpose of the Study

In light of the previously mentioned research, statistics, and other information regarding the shrinking national force of fire department volunteers the purpose of this study was to assess the current status of Montana's fire department volunteer numbers, the retention of these volunteers, and department priorities and needs. This study was necessary in order to calculate any recent (one year) trend in gains or losses of volunteer personnel, and to aid in the description and characterization of fire department volunteers in Montana by identifying their motivations and incentives. In order to obtain the quantitative data to be used during the study, a self-administered survey instrument was mailed to all fire departments in Montana. The study contained a qualitative aspect as well which was accomplished by interviewing several chiefs of volunteer and combination fire departments in Montana and in two other western states, Utah and Texas. The purpose of these interviews was to bring out issues involving recruitment, retention and motivation in greater detail. Through both the survey process and the interviews, we will be able to understand more about the underlying motivations of volunteers involved with fire departments in Montana, how they compare to other fire department volunteers in the United States and how their motivations compare with findings in the literature related to the topic of volunteerism.

It is hoped the results of this study will serve the purposes of better educating managers of volunteers, help them in their endeavors of finding more volunteers when needed and keeping the ones they currently have motivated and active within their respective organizations. Having access to this information will assist decision-makers at the local, regional and state level in deciding on an appropriate course of action for improving recruitment and retention rates among fire department volunteers.

In summary, the purpose of this study was to:

- 1) Determine if there has been a recent (one year) increase or decrease in the total number of active fire department volunteers in the state of Montana;
- 2) Characterize these volunteers within fire departments in terms of their motivations and incentives; and
- 3) Assess the needs and priorities of Montana fire departments with an emphasis on economic compensation for volunteers, and volunteer recruitment and retention.

Research Questions

1. Does Montana reflect the national trend in a declining number of active fire department volunteers?
2. What are the motivations behind volunteering for a fire department?
3. Does economic compensation, in its various forms, increase a fire department's ability to recruit and retain volunteers and should it be considered a necessity?
4. Where does the recruitment and retention of volunteers fit into the overall needs and priorities of fire departments in Montana?

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Wildland Fires, Volunteer Fire Departments and Volunteerism

The broad goal of this study was to assess the current status of Montana's volunteer fire departments, motivations for volunteering, and priorities and needs within the departments. As such, this literature review will provide a background into the increase in unnaturally severe fires in our western forests, the hazards associated with these fires, national trends associated with volunteer departments, and finally, a review and analysis of the concept of volunteerism. This chapter will be subdivided into nine sections with the first two giving a general overview of the theories and research involved with wildland fire, current drought conditions in the western United States, hazards and risks associated with the wildland-urban interface and how all of these affect volunteer fire departments. The next three sections will be a brief discussion on the definitions of volunteerism and volunteers, some of the psychological factors that affect the motivations to become and remain a volunteer, and then challenges of the recruitment and retention of volunteers in general. The sixth and seventh sections of this chapter will deal more specifically with research and theories regarding those volunteers who are actively involved with fire departments. In these two sections, studies that have previously examined the very specific motivations of volunteer firefighters and various efforts to recruit and retain them will be examined. Section eight will discuss the importance of gaining an understanding of the needs and issues currently affecting volunteer fire departments, and finally, a short summary of the entire literature review on these topics will be presented.

Wildland Fire in the Western United States

In western Montana and other parts of the region, dense, fir-dominated stands have largely replaced what were once more open ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*), western larch (*Larix occidentalis*), and whitebark pine (*Pinus albicaulis*) forests at both upper and lower elevations. Historically, these forests were dominated by these longer-living and fire-dependent trees but are now rapidly being replaced by shorter-living species more vulnerable to insects, disease and severe wildfires (Hill 1998, Monnig and Byler 1992, Mutch et al. 1993, O'Laughlin et al. 1993). According to Arno (1988), Harrington (1996), Fiedler and others (1996), fire history records from lower elevation ponderosa pine/Douglas-fir (*Pinus ponderosa/Pseudotsuga menziesii*) forests clearly show that the natural and historical occurrence of fire has played an extremely important ecological role in these forested areas for centuries. Low-intensity/high frequency fires functioned as a thinning agent, stimulated herbaceous vegetation, prepared seedbeds, recycled nutrients, and reduced excessive forest fuels. Decades of well-organized fire suppression have changed these same stands and their normal/historical fire regimes, leaving them overstocked, unhealthy, and severely fire-prone with a heavier accumulation of surface and ground fuels. In the absence of this natural disturbance of fire, shade tolerant/highly flammable conifers are allowed to regenerate much more prolifically and thus begin to function as ladder-fuels beneath the larger, seral overstory trees, propelling flames into the upper canopy and creating a link between surface fires and the crowns of the overstory.

The western portion of the United States, and more specifically, California, Arizona, Wyoming, Idaho, and Montana, are currently in a period of prolonged drought

and has been so for more than six years (Economist 2003, CNN 2004a). These changes in the normal hydrological cycle over the contiguous United States have been well-documented for over 50 years and these most recent drought conditions in the west have made forests in the region even more vulnerable to destructive stand-replacing crown fires (Sampson 1992, Groisman, Knight, Karl, Easterling, Sun and Lawrimore 2004).

Geographically, the most significant century-long increase in surface air temperature occurred in the northern and western parts of the country... Over the conterminous United States, a substantial increase in minimum temperatures has been documented in winter and spring with the biggest changes confined to the northwestern quadrant of the country and to the past 50 years... Nationwide, precipitation was below normal during 1999-2002... A strong spring warming and thus an earlier spring onset (by 2-3 weeks) in the western United States has been documented in temperature, snow cover, and phenological records (Groisman et al. 2004, pp. 68-74).

The most recent drought in the west began in 1998 with a string of *La Nina* seasons where cooler temperatures over the Pacific Ocean cause less moisture to be carried over the western states (Tolme 2002). The effects of drought on the natural environment include diminished snow cover that recedes earlier in the spring, lower than normal flow in creeks and rivers, shrinking reservoirs, drier soils and drier vegetation (Tolme 2002, Groisman et al. 2004). These years of chronic drought have killed millions of trees and made millions more vulnerable to insect infestations, resulting in tinder-dry forest fuels ready to burn (CNN 2004a). Already, record high temperatures in March of 2004 for parts of the Rocky Mountain West have prematurely melted away much of the mountain snowpack and three early spring fires this year in Colorado and Arizona have already burned over 19,000 acres. The El Cerrito Fire in Riverside County, California, had burned over 10,500 acres by May 5, 2004 and caused the evacuation of over 4,000 homes. This fire was allegedly caused by an individual dragging a steel plate behind his

vehicle, throwing sparks that ignited a fire (CNN 2004c). According to fire service officials in California: “The start of the fire season was declared three weeks earlier than it was last year because of scant rainfall, high temperatures and a bark beetle infestation that has killed thousands of trees” (CNN 2004b). Weather forecasts for 2004 already predict a summer warmer and drier than normal for much of the western United States (USA Today 2004). This early start to the fire season puts a strain on firefighting agencies to deploy crews and resources much sooner in the year and drier conditions prolong the fire season into the fall (CNN 2004a). Normally, fire crews in western Montana are not required to be at full-strength until early June just before what would normally be the peak of fire season in non-drought conditions. Currently, parts of Montana are considered Federal drought-disaster areas and the parts of the state experiencing the highest population growth rates also seem to be experiencing the worst effects of the drought (Tolme 2002).

Because of these well-documented phenomena of changes in forest stand structure and natural ecological processes, coupled with prolonged drought, the occurrences of wildland fire in the west have become much more destructive and much more dangerous to those living near the wildland-urban interface (WUI). Along with the added hazards and risks, many individuals (especially newer residents to these WUI areas and those who are unfamiliar with the dangers of wildland fire) have come to expect that all fire *should* and *must* be suppressed by any means necessary, thus putting an added strain on firefighting resources. In many rural communities adjacent to forested areas prone to frequent fire there are limited amounts of money, time, equipment, and properly trained fire department personnel. Federal wildland firefighters are often called in to assist these

communities in times of need but in some cases, when Federal resources are spread too thin, the local volunteer fire department is left alone with all fire suppression duties. These volunteers are quite often placed in situations for which they may not be adequately trained or properly equipped (USFS 1995).

In the past, rural communities were often associated solely with agricultural activities. Today, these same communities are also associated with high-value residential properties and dwellings. Historically, rural residents often practiced their own form of fire protection by reducing forest fuels around their homes and properties (University of Arkansas 1996). As newer residents move into these smaller towns from urbanized areas, their ideas of fire protection often seem to focus more on the activities and services of fire suppression organizations rather than on their own preemptive homeowner actions. According to Beebe and Omi (1993):

Public reaction to wildfire suggests that many Americans want competent professionals to manage fire flawlessly, reducing the risks to life, property, and public lands to nil. Clearly, such a reduction is unattainable... the public need to realize that an unmanipulated forest will likely become more flammable over time (p. 24).

Ideas about forest fuel loads have reversed in many cases with forested areas often left undisturbed due to a perception based solely on aesthetics or scenery. In these areas of dense residential settlements, nestled in among thick, overgrown forests, the fuel load available to a wildland fire is even more complex and can increase the magnitude and size of a fire immensely, increasing danger to firefighters and overall cost to the fire department (Bailey 2001).

When an individual lives most or all of their entire adult life in a metropolitan or suburban area it may be quite common for them to be unaware that most rural

communities rely mainly on volunteer labor for their fire or emergency services. If this same individual retires or becomes financially able to afford property and/or a second residence, then decides to become a permanent or part-time resident in a rural area, it may be difficult for that individual to fully appreciate the volunteer fire department protecting their newly adopted home. It is easy to see why many long-time residents of these rural areas (that have suddenly become so popular with urbanites), and especially those that serve as volunteers in the local fire departments, can develop a negative attitude toward newcomers. It is also very common for many rural homeowners (newer *and* long-time residents) to be uneducated and unaware about the hazards or potential risks associated with wildland fires to their property and their lives, as was the case for many residents in the Cerro Grande Fire that destroyed much of Los Alamos, New Mexico in May of 2000 (MacDonald 2001, Hamer 2001). Because they are able to obtain homeowner fire insurance, or because of a lack of any recent or serious fire events, many believe that they are somehow not at risk from wildland fire (Smalley 2001). Slovic (1986) believes that the general public often underestimates risk from wildland fire and are often influenced only by the memory of recent past events or through erroneous reports by various media outlets. It is precisely this apathetic behavior and/or lack of education that can contribute to the already added danger and stress to a volunteer fire department and its members.

A study of the literature shows that in general, the public does not perceive a risk from fire in the wildland-urban interface. In some cases, many residents are uncooperative with local fire agencies or are unwilling to invest time or money into fire-hazard reduction activities on their own property (Burton, Kates and White 1978, Beebe

and Omi 1993). Further, property owners believe that insurance companies or disaster assistance will always be there to cover losses. Jackson (1981) believes that many residents, when faced with the risk of low-frequency natural disasters, actually prefer to wait until the event occurs and *then* respond rather than take precautions to minimize risk. To be protected from the risk of wildland fire, people have the choice to either take action themselves or to rely solely on governmental intervention.

Given a choice, people would rather not have to confront the gambles inherent in life's dangerous activities. They would prefer being told that risks are managed by competent professionals and are thus so small that one need not worry about them (Slovic 1986, p. 405).

When people are under the impression the government will protect them from natural hazards, the potential for a catastrophic event increases (Burton et al. 1978). Fire prevention efforts, official pronouncements, and media depictions of imminent risk have been shown to have little effect on those in danger. There is also evidence to suggest that even when some people become convinced that their property and they are at great risk from wildland fire, this increased awareness still typically will not alter their behavior (Sims and Baumann 1983, Beebe and Omi 1993). According to Bradshaw (1988) and Cohen (1999), there is an expectation and a widespread misconception by homeowners and the public that fire protection should and will be provided by others. Elected officials and some agency managers are also under the impression that wildland-urban interface problems and risks should be a concern solely for the fire service to deal with. Volunteer fire departments very seldom have the ability, due to lack of resources and training, to effectively protect the public from severe WUI fires.

As rural communities become increasingly more popular as retirement areas and/or second-home bedroom communities, the volunteer fire departments that serve

there will continue to need an ever-increasing amount of training for WUI fires and the proper equipment and vehicles needed to safely and effectively handle these dangerous situations. Training, equipment and vehicles cost money. Unfortunately, it seems like the areas that need the most are also the same areas where current infrastructure is being overrun and volunteer personnel are being asked to do more and more with less time and with greater expectations.

The Wildland-Urban Interface: Problems and Hazards Associated with Fire and Population Growth

The wildland-urban interface (WUI) can be defined as the line, area, or zone where structures and other human development meet or intermingle with undeveloped wildland or vegetative fuels (Butler 1974, Cohen 1999, Stewart, Radeloff and Hammer 2002). In more common terms, it is where houses or commercial development and dense vegetation are both present and in close proximity to one another. The WUI can also be thought of as not just strictly a geographical phenomenon but also as a conditional one.

According to J. Smalley (2001), manager of the National Firewise Program of the NFPA:

Past experience has shown us that the 'where' is really a 'when' – when conditions for interface fires are present. The conditions have existed, judging by the incidence of wildfires in Maine, Michigan, Missouri and Minnesota as well as the 'usual suspects' like California, Montana, Idaho, Wyoming and the other western states. The wildland-urban interface is actually a set of conditions that exist – or could exist – in nearly every community in the country. These conditions include weather, humidity, type of vegetation, building construction, road construction, lot size, topography, and other factors that simply make some communities more vulnerable to wildfire than others (pg. 9).

Smalley (2001) states that according to the most recent census data, nine out of the fifteen fastest growing areas in the U.S. are already in fire prone areas. He concludes that the continuing growth of communities into areas that were once forested is one of the three

major factors that will increase pressures of the wildland-urban interface on communities. The other two factors are unusually severe weather events (i.e. prolonged drought) and inadequate infrastructure due to rapid growth and an aging population. These WUI neighborhoods and communities are now to be found all across the United States, growing at a rapid pace and presenting many new problems and challenges not only for the people who live there but also for the rural and/or volunteer fire departments that respond to emergencies in these areas.

During the 1990's in the Rocky Mountain West, a dramatic increase in new residents marked a sea change in migration patterns. Like the Flathead (Flathead Co., MT), many of the high-growth areas in the west are non-metropolitan, with relatively small population centers. More and more, people make decisions about where to live based in large part on the presence of natural 'amenities' – appealing qualities or characteristics that add value – such as spectacular scenery, accessible public lands, and clean air and water (Swanson, Nickerson, Lathrop 2003, pg. 14).

It is precisely this kind of population growth of formerly urban residents seeking a more relaxed lifestyle in the less congested rural areas of America that is causing the wildland-urban interface to become a greater safety concern. Many people in our modern, often affluent American society are fond of the idea of living outside of the urban sprawl and closer to areas of forest recreation and scenic beauty. While not an inherently wrong or selfish ideal, it is these new wildland/urban immigrants who often give little thought to the hazards of wildland fire and bring with them lofty expectations for the same level of urban emergency services. Population in the WUI has continued to grow as we move further into the 21st century and shows no sign of slowing down. It has now become, in many places, the site of a potential and major fire problem that will only continue to escalate as more people make their homes in or near forested landscapes (USFS 1995). Over 100 years of fire suppression activities has allowed new subdivisions to be built in

environments that are typically, or have now become, highly flammable (Burton et al. 1978). A prime example of this phenomenon is the Oakland Hills Fire (California) in October of 1991, which claimed 25 lives, destroyed 2,866 dwellings and caused \$1.5 billion in property damage (Beebe and Omi 1993).

Increasing population shift from urban to rural areas has overburdened local fire agencies. Consequently, local fire protection agencies are hard-pressed to protect people, their property, and the surrounding natural resources. Additionally, years of fire suppression in these areas have resulted in heavy accumulation of brush and other flammable woody material, often leading to devastating urban wildfires (p. 20).

As seen, natural forest conditions have been altered to the point of causing them to be more prone to high-intensity/high-severity fire, drought is currently dominating the west, and people are moving into the wildland-urban interface at increasing rates. These conditions are a challenge to everyone, but more so to the volunteer firefighters who are expected to protect lives, property and natural resources. Volunteering, then, is at the heart of the challenge.

Volunteerism and Volunteers Defined

Volunteerism, or volunteering, can be defined as “any activity in which time is given freely to benefit another person, group, or organization” (Wilson 2000). Wilson further defines volunteering to mean “acting to produce a public good” and that volunteerism is typically thought of as being an activity that is proactive in nature rather than reactive and will require some commitment of time and effort. This proactive or planned activity would be in contrast to an unforeseen event such as the rendering of aid after a traffic accident, spontaneously and briefly (Wilson 2000, Thoits and Hewitt 2001).

A more detailed and slightly more inclusive definition was included in the President's Task Force on Private Sector Initiatives (1982) which defined the term as follows:

Volunteering is the voluntary giving of time and talents to deliver services or perform tasks with no direct financial compensation expected. Volunteering includes the participation of citizens in the direct delivery of service to others; citizen action groups; advocacy for causes, groups, or individuals; participation in the governance of both private and public agencies; self-help and mutual aid endeavors; and a broad range of informal helping activities (pg. 4).

From this preceding definition we are able to glean two important points. The first being that volunteer work includes not only work performed by unpaid individuals directly serving others in need, but can also be defined as work performed in the realm of political activism and community representation on boards of various agencies (Thoits and Hewitt 2001). The second point being, judging by the final few and rather ambiguous words in the President's Task Force definition, that a "broad range of helping activities" must be considered by some to also fall under the broad definition of volunteering. This inclusion of isolated altruistic acts, caregiving for family members, and so forth is contested by many within the literature of volunteer research including Wilson and Musick (1997). They define "formal" volunteering as "volunteer work in or for the community, where time and effort are given for the betterment of the community in general or for specified subsets of community members who are in need." Thoits and Hewitt (2001) agree with Wilson and Musick on this point and state that just by belonging to a religious group or a secular organization and attending services or group meetings, although clearly voluntary acts, are not sufficient by themselves to qualify as *their* definition of volunteer work. Volunteering one's time on behalf of family or friends, as in the case of caring for an elderly grandparent or a sick neighbor for example, may very well fall under the category

of “informal helping activities” but this person-to-person emotional labor is generally considered a different and distinct activity and not the more formal definition of volunteering (Cnaan, Handy and Wadsworth 1996). Gaskin and Smith (1997) seem to concur with the more formal definition as well by stating that volunteerism is: “Activities or work done of a person’s free will for the benefit of others (beyond the immediate family) for no payment other than, in some case, a small honorarium and/or expenses.” All of this is, of course, highly debatable as is the idea that volunteering is strictly defined as a more formalized, public and highly organized activity (Snyder and Omoto 1992). In the Cnaan et al. (1996) often cited study about the most common perceptions of true volunteerism they found that volunteer work that was 1) uncoerced, 2) performed without any financial benefit, 3) in a formal setting, and 4) done for the benefit of others, was considered by the general public as the purest form of volunteerism. Regardless of this common and narrowly defined public perception Sheard (1995) and Handy et al. (2000) both point out that the term “volunteering” lacks precision and there is no real clear-cut definition of all that it encompasses. There is also no consensus over definition, according to Lyons, Wijkstrom and Clary (1998), “as to whether volunteering refers only to unpaid work done for an organization, or whether it also includes informal volunteering activities outside any organizational context” (Harris 1996).

Volunteers can be defined as “people who offer their labor, skills and experience at no wage cost to the utilizing organization” that they serve (Monga and Treuren 2001). This simple definition does not necessarily mean the volunteer is prevented from benefiting from their work in some way, but whether or not these benefits can include monetary or material rewards is debated by some. Others would argue that workers are

not *truly* volunteers if they are remunerated or compensated in any way (Wilson 2000). Cnaan et al. (1996) argue that the term volunteer is used too broadly in describing a non-salaried worker. They make an attempt to delineate the boundaries of the term volunteer by distinguishing between “pure” volunteers and “broadly defined” volunteers. This is determined by calculating the actual net cost to the individual involved in the activity, or their costs minus benefits. Their study showed the general public perceived a volunteer to be one who incurs a much higher net cost from the activity they participate in than the benefits gained. Their findings did not provide a final definition but it did provide a template used to compare other definitions of the term. According to Wilson (2000) the problem with defining the generic term “volunteering” is due to the fact that it embraces such a vast array of very different activities.

Psychological Factors that Affect the Motivation to Volunteer

On the topic of volunteerism and motivation Cuskelly and Harrington (1997) observed that a “substantial volume of literature has accumulated on the motivation of volunteers.” With this in mind, a complete review of even a *small* portion of this literature would be impractical here. This section will instead highlight some of the more recent research on the topic and will delve into the underlying psychology of human motivation only briefly.

The many different reasons for an individual to initially want to become involved in volunteer work can be classified into two technical categories: motivations centered on others and those centered on oneself (Fuentes and Jimenez 2000). According to Gidron’s (1978) terminology these two stages could be labeled as altruistic and egoistic. Fuentes and Jimenez (2000) concluded that most volunteers consider themselves to be especially

motivated by their own set of values (egoistic). Other motivations that are centered more on others (altruistic) are more closely related to long-term volunteering. People who initially decide to become volunteers usually do so through a combination of both egoistic and altruistic motivations. Those that continue their activities for longer periods of time are generally those who at some point incorporate into their personal identity the role of a volunteer. This self-sacrificing identity is the result of a decrease in the more self-oriented/egoistic motivations and an increase in the more other-oriented/altruistic motivations. Eventually, even this self-sacrificing identity may wear thin and then the individual must find the right balance of altruistic and egoistic motivations for themselves in order to continue the service and avoid volunteer “burnout” (Fuertes and Jiminez 2000). Many researchers have suggested the motivations that initially influence a decision to volunteer are not necessarily the same as those that influence the decision to continue (Gidron 1984, Oda 1991, Winniford, Carpenter and Grider 1995). Volunteers’ motivations often change over time with age, length of service, gender, and marital/family status (Gillespie and King 1985, Fuertes and Jiminez 2000).

In order to classify and describe the different stages in the volunteerism process Omoto, Snyder and Berghuis (1993) and Omoto and Snyder (1995) developed the Volunteerism Process Model. The first stage of this model includes the variables that might be considered antecedents or precursors to volunteer behavior, those being the motivations that lead people to want to become involved with some type of voluntary work in the first place. Omoto and Snyder identified five different motives that might help to explain the behavior of volunteers: 1) values, 2) knowledge, 3) personal development, 4) esteem enhancement, and 5) community concern. In volunteerism there

is a wide variety of different motivations that fulfil different needs and functions for different individuals. Different people may become involved in the same type of volunteer activity but for wholly different reasons (Omoto and Snyder 1995). According to Clary and Snyder's (1991) Functional Theory of Motivation:

When voluntary work is based on an altruistic interest in helping others, on humanitarian values, on a desire to make a contribution to society, or even when it is inspired by religious motives, the functional perspective would indicate that this behavior fulfils a function of the expression of values for the individual (pg. 123).

Parker (1997) has a somewhat shorter and slightly different set of reasons that he argues are the main reasons and motivations for volunteering. They are 1) altruistic, 2) market or economic (expecting something in return), 3) cause-serving (promoting a cause that one believes in), and 4) leisure. Parker's list seems to be on the more narrow and self-serving side of the personal spectrum when compared to Omoto and Snyder's (1995), and Clary, Snyder and Stukas' (1996) list of six broad motivational goals. Those being: 1) social, 2) value, 3) career, 4) understanding, 5) enhancement, and 6) protective. Clary et al. (1996) suggested that people will become involved in volunteer work in order to satisfy socio-psychological goals and those goals will vary widely, even among people involved in very similar activities. They sum up their perspective by stating "people engage in volunteering to satisfy important personal and social needs and goals, and apparently many individuals are pursuing more than one set of goals through their volunteer activity" (Clary et al. 1996).

As a summary of all the literature that currently exists regarding the psychology behind the motivation to become a volunteer, Thoits and Hewitt (2001) developed five theoretical models of volunteer work. The first model, known as the "volunteer

motivations model”, emphasizes individuals’ motivations for or goals in volunteering. According to the theory behind this model, people give service for several different reasons. Some of those being: to learn new skills or prepare for a new career, to enhance one’s self-esteem, to express personal values, or to make a commitment to the community (Omoto and Snyder 1990, 1995, Janoski, Musick and Wilson 1998). The second model which Thoits and Hewitt (2001) title the “values and attitudes model” places greater emphasis on the connection between volunteering and an individual’s beliefs about the importance of community participation and/or charitable contributions (Janoski et al. 1998, Sundeen 1992). The third model, the “role-identity model”, shows that past volunteer service will actually lead to the development of a “volunteer role-identity” and thus motivate and lead an individual toward future volunteer service (Callero 1985, Charng, Piliavin and Callero 1988, Piliavin and Callero 1991, Penner, Midili and Kegelmeyer 1997, Thoits and Hewitt 2001). The fourth model, the “volunteer personality model”, suggests that variables within an individual’s personality or disposition are a determinant of the motivation needed for volunteer work (Penner et al. 1997, Penner and Finkelstein 1998). Studies concluded that a prosocial personality, which includes empathy for others and a simple willingness to be helpful, is related to a volunteers’ length of service and amount of time spent in volunteer activities. This helpful, prosocial attitude is also associated with other positive personality characteristics such as self-confidence and efficiency (Penner and Finkelstein 1998). Allen and Rushton (1983) concluded that individuals with higher self-esteem and greater emotional stability were also those that were more likely to engage in volunteer activity. With this last point in mind, Thoits and Hewitt (2001) proposed a final model which they refer to as the

“personal well-being model.” They point out that the character traits of confidence, self-control, and general feelings of self-worth are all traits that can initiate the desire to become engaged in volunteer work. They hypothesized that “individuals who volunteer – for whatever reason, motivation or goal – are more likely to possess such personal resources, enabling them to pursue their values or goals more easily or effectively” (Thoits and Hewitt 2001).

The Challenges of Recruitment and Retention

Finding volunteers is only the first step, keeping them actively involved in an organization also needs to be considered, and this must be done through showing appreciation for the good work they do. People volunteer their time, energies, and talents because they want to have an impact, and are concerned about public issues. These volunteers must be encouraged and nurtured, as they are irreplaceable in any society which wishes to implement and accomplish social change (De Harven 1984, pg. 62).

Even though greater numbers of Americans report having performed volunteer work in the recent past few years, more evidence suggests that, on average, Americans are spending fewer total hours involved in volunteer service (Ladd 1999, Putnam 2000). It has been suggested that a decline in volunteering within the past two or three decades may be a product of fewer young people willing to get involved in volunteer activities. Some (Joseph 1995, Gaskin 1998) have blamed this decline associated with young people as a problem with “image” and that many volunteer organizations have failed to appeal to the younger post-war generations. According to Auld, Hooper, Ringuet and Jobling (1999 pg. 3) “It is critical to understand the factors that affect volunteer behavior and the ways and means these can be influenced by organizations that increasingly require volunteers in order to survive.” In terms of volunteer recruitment, an understanding of some of the different types of human behavior involved in this process is important in

order to find people and then help them to stay motivated. Noted psychologists McClelland and Atkinson (1986) hypothesized there are three major classifications of people and their corresponding personal motivations and preferences. These classifications are: 1) Achievement People, who are motivated by setting and working toward goals, who are highly organized and can work well alone. 2) Affiliation People, who are motivated mainly by opportunities to develop relationships with others, enjoy pleasing others and prefer to work in groups. 3) Power People, who envision themselves as one who influences and inspires others, enjoys activities such as public speaking and wants to be a manager of others.

A review of literature in this portion of the topic seems to make it very clear that management practices have a profound influence on a volunteer's decision to continue volunteering in the same capacity. A lack of clear and direct leadership from management can act to erode or diminish any altruistic motivations which may have existed in a volunteer, thus having a negative impact on the decision to return and/or continue the volunteer activity (Colomy, Chen and Andrews 1987-88, Grossman and Furano 1999, Monga and Treuren 2001). On the importance of effective management practices and its direct effect on the retention of volunteers Cnaan and Goldberg-Glen (1991) and Noble and Rogers (1998) all agree that the days of running a volunteer operation in either a *laissez-faire* or overbearing fashion are long over. Volunteers have an expectation of efficient management practices (Cnaan and Amroffell 1994), and this expectation is directly connected to a satisfying volunteering experience. This positive experience has strong implications not only on the decision to continue volunteering for the organization in question, but also on the effectiveness of the volunteer during the

actual assignment (Noble and Rogers 1998). Tyzack (1996) also commented on the negative consequences that the *laissez-faire* approach can foster. These include unnecessary volunteer stress, lower levels of service, boredom and turnover. People will continue to volunteer as long as the experience as a whole is rewarding and satisfying to their unique needs (Cnaan and Goldberg-Glen 1991, Noble and Rogers 1998). Bales (1996) states that it is essential to “keep them (volunteers) by making them feel special and by monitoring communication with them so that it tends to maintain or increase their propensity to act.”

Specific Motivations of Volunteer Firefighters

Why would an individual choose to devote a considerable amount of their free time and skills to an organization that requires them to train excessively and often put themselves at great personal risk of injury or even death? What would motivate a person to give up so much of their free time to a volunteer fire department and to repeatedly engage in extremely dangerous activities, all for no monetary gain or reward? According to Schaeffer:

Being a volunteer firefighter satisfies the need to contribute to a worthwhile endeavor while helping others. Volunteer firefighting provides many opportunities. You will enjoy a sense of achievement, increased self-respect, community and personal recognition, the rewards that come from helping others and the opportunity to perfect some skills and learn new ones. Volunteer firefighters are not compensated in the traditional way for their efforts. There is no paycheck, no monetary bonus, and no financial incentive to work harder. The ‘payoff’ comes from the pride you will have in yourself and in our organization (Cited in a recruitment brochure for the Wright City, Missouri, Fire Protection District 2001 p. 5).

The department in Wright City seems to be aiming their recruitment efforts directly at those who have a desire to help others, have a sense of community, wish to be involved,

and like the idea of developing new skills or putting current skills in this area to good use.

The brochure describes some of the positive attributes of a volunteer firefighter:

Someone performing in a firefighting capacity not for any monetary reward but purely for the satisfaction of helping others; someone who wants to make a contribution to his or her community; someone who finds social satisfaction in being a part of a group of people bound together as a team; someone who goes beyond normal activities into the realm of serving whenever needed (Schaeffer 2001 p. 4).

It may also be of interest to note that the Wright City Fire Protection District does indeed also offer several very valuable benefits to its active volunteers who initially pass an eighteen-month probationary/training period. These benefits include: workman's compensation insurance, a \$5,000 accidental death policy, a pension program for twenty years of service, and a \$10,000 life insurance policy tied in with the pension program. The volunteers are also fully equipped and trained at no cost to the individual (Schaeffer 2001). So, even after eight full pages of brochure explaining the intangible benefits received (sense of community, satisfaction of helping others, developing new skills, etc.) the department still feels it is necessary to not only compensate their volunteers in a very generous way with insurance benefits and a pension, but also to make potential volunteer recruits aware of these available benefits. Wright City, Missouri has officially had a fire department in some capacity since 1895. It should be presumed that the leaders of this department have become savvy enough over the years to realize that while there are some very select individuals who *would* volunteer their time for absolutely no economic benefits at all, there are also many individuals who would not. This combination of service to the community coupled with being insured in case of an accident is probably a very effective recruiting tool for this department.

Thompson and Bono (1993) surveyed 354 volunteer firefighters in Ulster County, New York, in order to determine what relationships existed between volunteer firefighting, feelings of alienation in a capitalist economy, the desire to achieve a greater degree of self-actualization, and an individual's career goals. The researchers also conducted several in-depth interviews within this same sample population and observed the activities of two fire departments within Ulster County over a three-year period. Their findings were as follows: Individuals are motivated to be volunteer firefighters as a way to combat their own feelings of alienation within society or within their current paid profession. Being a volunteer firefighter offers the individual an avenue to a greater level of self-actualization. Thompson and Bono (1993) and (Blauener 1964) hypothesize that the act of volunteering for an emergency organization such as a fire department can provide a person with the means to struggle against two forms of "powerlessness" which seem to be commonly present in a modern capitalist society like the United States: the inability of single individuals to significantly alter or change the current state of the world around them, and the inability to control one's own productive activity.

When called to respond to a fire, medical, or rescue emergency, volunteer firefighters participate in an activity which has a real, important, and immediately tangible outcome. They understand that their intervention has the capacity to defeat grave threats to life and property, imbuing these firefighters with a true sense of empowerment (Thompson and Bono 1993, pg. 327).

Thompson and Bono's research also suggests that the day-to-day control that is afforded to volunteer firefighters over their own work is possibly a factor that provides a powerful means for an individual to combat feelings of alienation. The survey research concluded that over ninety percent of volunteer firefighters in Ulster County indicated that they were either highly or at least moderately motivated by "being in control of what we do

and how we do it.” Eighty-seven percent of these same respondents stated that “making a real contribution to an important activity” was an important motivating factor for them. Blauner (1964) pointed out that there is often a perceived meaninglessness associated with modern industrial employment. Volunteer firefighters, in sharp contrast, seem to have a much more well-defined mission with very clear objectives. The successes and failures in their endeavors become more immediately known to them and their work could hardly be described as a fragmented, isolated or meaningless activity (Thompson and Bono 1993).

A study by Patterson and Kim (1991) revealed that firefighting was, and most likely still is, the most highly admired and respected profession in the United States. It is precisely this widespread gratitude, status, and respect given to the volunteer firefighter in his or her own community that seems to be the greatest overall motivating factor if one uses the Thompson and Bono (1993) survey research as a guide. Ninety-two percent of all volunteer firefighters in Ulster County surveyed cited “helping our community in its times of need” as a strong personal motivator. This can also be evidenced by the symbols of identity seen in the forms of jackets, hats, and other clothing worn by volunteer firefighters in public to show affiliation with the local department. Walters (1996) also reinforces this relationship volunteer fire departments have with their local community, by stating:

Volunteer fire departments are pillars of suburban and rural life... Volunteer firehouses are multipurpose town halls, centers of community life for volunteers and ordinary citizens alike. Volunteering at the firehouse is a tradition passed down through families, anchoring them in the community and providing role models of civic leadership for generations (pg. 6-7).

It is this feeling of becoming integrated into a community or a strong sense of the value of community that Chavis and Wandersman (1990) suggest further supports one's sense of control and empowerment and further reinforces self-actualization.

Blauner (1964) and Seeman (1972) both comment on the concept of "self-estrangement", which results from individuals engaging in activities (volunteer or non-volunteer) for extrinsic rather than intrinsic rewards. For volunteer firefighters the most obvious extrinsic reward (that being wages) is generally not there and according to Thompson and Bono (1993) the single greatest intrinsic reward for them seems to be this activity allows them to effectively combat feelings of alienation. For example, "Their volunteer labor empowers them, provides meaning to their work, and yields a degree of social integration" (pg. 330). Thompson and Bono's (1993) work also examined this idea of self-estrangement, and extrinsic versus intrinsic motivations. The survey of firefighters conducted in Ulster County brought out evidence that many volunteer firefighters are indeed motivated by the extrinsic objective of seeking paid employment through directly acquiring firefighting skills as a volunteer. Being a member of a volunteer department may allow an individual to meet influential community leaders, and possibly other employers who may be fellow firefighters. They suggest that motivations based on extrinsic goals can actually reinforce feelings of alienation and even serve to diminish motivation. Deci (1975) found that adding extrinsic with intrinsic incentives will ultimately diminish motivation for volunteer work. Herzberg, Mausner and Snyderman (1957) found job satisfaction was related to intrinsic incentives and job dissatisfaction generally resulted from problems or failures associated with extrinsic incentives. Rothschild-Whitt (1979) believes the pursuit of extrinsic rewards will

promote careerist behavior and is thus at odds with the idea of empowerment, social integration and self-actualization to be found within volunteer service. Based on the research of these individuals (Herzberg et al. 1957, Blauner 1964, Seeman 1972, Deci 1975, Rothschild-Witt 1979 and Thompson and Bono 1993) it would seem that a person who volunteers for a fire department with only intrinsic motivations will be able to find self-actualization, feelings of self-worth and combat alienation more successfully than will an individual who joins a volunteer fire department with more extrinsic/career goals in mind. An individual who is ultimately seeking paid employment or looking for other career connections by joining a volunteer fire department may only find more frustration, feelings of alienation and self-estrangement if unsuccessful in their endeavors.

Efforts to Recruit and Retain Volunteer Firefighters

Nationally, the double task of finding and then keeping quality individuals active within our volunteer fire departments has become a much greater challenge in recent years. Speaking to the U.S. House of Representatives on March 18, 1997, Ken Newton (Director of the National Volunteer Fire Council and volunteer firefighter of 35 years) had this to say about some of the challenges faced by the US fire service.

These volunteers generally work full time jobs and have families in addition to donating their time and expertise for the safety of their communities. They are also the first responders in many communities to the scene of automobile accidents, house fires, medical emergencies, natural disasters and even terrorist attacks. Volunteers responded to the Oklahoma City bombing and the World Trade Center (1993) bombing. More and more Americans are moving away from major metropolitan centers into the suburban and rural areas that are generally protected by volunteer fire departments. This is creating an increased demand on the volunteer service. In spite of this trend, the ranks of the volunteer fire service membership are dwindling at a rate of 2 to 3 percent per year (Newton and NVFC 1997, pg. 2).

These specific challenges Mr. Newton speaks of are exactly what make efforts aimed at recruitment and retention of fire department volunteers all the more difficult. A little more than six years after Mr. Newton's comments to the House, the U.S. Congress on November 7, 2003 announced that it is expected to pass the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Act. This Bill authorizes the administrator of the U.S. Fire Administration to award \$7.6 billion over seven years in annual grants to fire departments on a basis of need. Key provisions of the Act include: Setting aside 10 percent of the total amount appropriated for recruitment and retention grants to enhance the number of volunteer firefighters and another 10 percent of the remaining funds towards actually hiring some of these volunteers and allowing them to draw a salary.

According to National Volunteer Fire Council Chairman Phillip C. Stittleburg:

This legislation will not only address the staffing shortfalls in many urban departments, but these grants will go a long way to reverse the trend of high turnover in the volunteer fire service that has resulted in a loss of nearly 15 percent of the volunteer ranks in the last 20 years (NVFC 2003b, pg. 2).

Because of the shrinking numbers of volunteer firefighters in many states volunteer departments, and the communities that they serve, have begun to look at different ways to recruit new volunteers to replace outgoing/retiring volunteers. Much effort and research has gone into the ideas and philosophies related to better recruitment and retention techniques. Some of these departments have begun looking at the possibility of offering more highly valued economic incentives in an effort to maintain the total volunteer personnel needed for their departments. Other departments have focused less on the economic or extrinsic values, and have put a greater emphasis on

attracting those individuals who have a higher regard for the intrinsic values associated with volunteering.

The North Syracuse Volunteer Fire Department in Onondaga County, New York created an online recruitment website in an effort to increase volunteers within their department. The positive and persuasive language used in this online recruitment brochure seems to be directed at the individual who has a strong sense of community, wants to help others and enjoys being challenged. Excerpts from the website include:

The members of our department are your friends and neighbors, people who live in the community and want to help you when you need it most. We need people just like you to give of themselves and of their time to provide the many services that we offer to the community. The road is not always easy, but the reward of helping others is well worth the journey. This is not for everyone. You need more than just a desire to help. You need courage, dedication and willingness to learn new skills and face new challenges... We are here and prepared for one reason, and that is to provide service to the people of our community. If you feel you have what it takes to meet the challenges of our profession, we welcome you to join us (North Syracuse Volunteer Fire Department 2004, pg. 1-2).

This volunteer department also provides its members with benefits in the form of free training, the use of exercise equipment, a retirement program and life insurance.

In the early 1980's, county officials in Roanoke, Virginia began investigating the idea of granting their volunteer firefighters worker's compensation coverage. Because these volunteers were not on municipal payrolls they would not be protected by any kind of insurance should they be injured in the line of duty. The county officials theorized that offering accident protection to volunteer firefighters would mean the difference between having a reliable roster of trained personnel and having to constantly recruit new members. Eventually, the volunteers were granted coverage that would insure them in the case of an accident or injury on the job. According to Bob Jernigan (American City

and County 1995, pg. 67), risk manager for Roanoke County at the time stated: “We’ve found the benefits we now offer make an excellent recruitment and retention tool. It’s important for us to offer incentives to keep our volunteers and protect them. We appreciate the job they do.” Also according to Jernigan, the program was so successful that the county has now added life insurance and a retirement plan to the overall benefits package for volunteer firefighters (American City and County 1995). While it is encouraging to hear about success stories like this one in Roanoke involving volunteers who are awarded benefits for their hard work, another study in the same state may cast some doubt on the overall effectiveness of economic benefits for volunteer firefighters. In the year 2000, the Virginia General Assembly and the House Committee on Rules considered a resolution to study insurance coverage for volunteer firefighters and any effects it might have on volunteer turnover rates. Their findings showed that there was no significant difference between the departure rates (turnover) in volunteer departments with worker’s compensation insurance and those departments that had no worker’s compensation insurance. In addition, according to their survey results, only 10 percent of volunteer firefighters who left their departments left due to a perceived lack or inadequacy of worker’s compensation insurance. Therefore, it would appear that in the state of Virginia the level of participation in volunteer fire departments does not vary significantly based on whether or not worker’s compensation insurance is available to volunteers (Virginia Legislative Document Summary 2001). There are many conflicting reports from different states all over the U.S. where research and studies have concluded/not concluded that economic incentives are needed for the recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters. Another very recent study, this time conducted in

Oregon during 2001 and 2002 concludes that economic incentives, coupled with a statewide recruitment program, are needed to attract volunteer firefighters. According to Dave Lapof, president of the Oregon Volunteer Firefighters Association and a member of the Oregon state task force assigned to study this idea of economic incentives:

Few towns have the population to support paid fire crews. Finding and keeping good volunteers has become a losing battle. Those who do volunteer say time and training commitments discourage people. They often decide the hours would be better spent with families and jobs... The task force plans to ask lawmakers to support a fire insurance premium tax... The task force also wants the legislature to spend \$200,000 on a statewide volunteer and recruitment program and \$300,000 for the state equipment loan fund, which provides smaller departments with low interest loans (The Register Guard - Eugene, Oregon 2003, pg. 1).

Research done by the Oregon task force has shown that while call volume and population throughout the state has increased, 75 percent of all volunteer fire departments in Oregon have either recently lost members or merely maintained the same numbers. Their research cannot show a single reason solely responsible for this decline but it is believed that lack of time among residents and a lack of community spirit are contributing factors. Some of the firefighters have stated that the increase in training requirements might also be a significant factor. In some areas where the number of training hours far outweighs the number of actual fire calls, people become frustrated and/or lose interest in the department (The Register Guard – Eugene, Oregon 2003).

Other research has shown that all recruitment techniques for volunteers are not always equally successful. Andrew's (1996) research in Australia about the most effective ways to recruit and retain volunteers for sporting events suggests that a very direct, personalized approach such as "word of mouth" techniques and invitations from current volunteers were many times more successful than advertisements in newspapers.

Hendrick's (1983) study of a community-based psychiatric hospital also found that most of the volunteers working there were recruited by other existing volunteers who had extended invitations to them. It would seem that not only is the more personal and invitational approach to volunteer recruitment often times more successful than some other techniques, it is also free.

The Need for Understanding Issues Facing Volunteer Fire Departments

There are numerous issues volunteer fire departments must deal with on a regular, sometimes daily basis. Training, purchasing department vehicles or safety gear, recruitment and retention of volunteer personnel, and issues concerning funding, limited budgets and obtaining grants are just a few of the more visible and important ones. A volunteer fire department will have issues that are separate and distinct from fully-paid career departments and they must be regarded as a distinct organization. For example, being required to hold a fundraiser or seek community donations in order to obtain a needed vehicle due to a very limited department budget is a common issue. Identifying the specific needs of volunteer departments is the first step in a process of analysis and action, which should be followed by gaining a better understanding of these needs and making an attempt to alleviate them through planning and organization.

In 2001, the Genesee County (New York) Emergency Services Task Force surveyed their county fire departments and published a report, identifying their single biggest issue(s) as being recruitment and retention. They concluded that their volunteer fire and emergency medical personnel were "in danger of becoming extinct" and the underlying problem related to this issue was the excessive time demands placed on volunteers in the forms of required training, family and job obligations and an increase in

call volume. Burnout from time demands and workload, high public expectations, and ineffective leadership were also factors identified as being causes of loss in volunteer membership. The Task Force developed a series of short and long range recommended goals for departments which included: The development of a uniform recruitment program, an equipment replacement plan, and economic incentives for volunteers.

Volunteer fire departments need to operate as a business; being proactive rather than reactive, planning for the future instead of relying on tradition, and being innovative rather than accepting the status quo. They need to improve public awareness and develop working relationships with local municipal officials (Genesee County 2001, pg. 2).

According to the Fire Service Institute at Iowa State University (1996, pg. 3):

“The most valuable resource of any volunteer fire department is the volunteer.” A random survey of Iowa’s 870 fire departments revealed, like Genesee County, that increased demands on volunteers’ time for training was a major issue and fire chiefs in the state were concerned about how much more time they can demand from their personnel. Other information gathered from the Iowa Survey showed 42 percent of all volunteer departments in the state compensated their personnel in some way but the majority of these departments able to provide compensation to volunteers are located in communities with populations of 2,500 or more. Only 20 percent of volunteer firefighters in Iowa thought they would be better firefighters if they were paid. After the survey was completed and analyzed the Fire Service Institute at Iowa State University developed a workbook; “to help communities and fire departments to assess where they are in terms of emergency response services, and to help them decide how to organize to meet future needs” (Fire Service Institute ISU Extension 1996, pg. 4).

The National Volunteer Fire Council agrees that recruitment and retention issues have essentially become the “number one challenge” facing America’s volunteer fire service and the biggest factor contributing to this decline are increased demands on a volunteer’s time. These demands on time come in the form of increased training to comply with more rigorous requirements, increased demands for fundraising activities, commuting distances for people who work outside of their hometown, and an increase in call volume; the result of the expanded role of the fire service into areas such as terrorism and emergency medical services (NVFC 2003a).

The Montana State Volunteer Firefighters Association in an effort to “find solutions to problems that are common to all volunteer fire departments in Montana” developed a mission statement for their organization:

The mission of the Montana State Volunteer Firefighters Association is the bringing together its departments to discuss ways and means for the betterment of the fire services and reducing unnecessary loss of life and property; to exchange ideas and all questions affecting the fire services; to develop a bond of friendship and understanding among the members of the fire service; to promote the development of the fire service through a progressive program of education, public relations and legislation (MSVFFA 2004, pg.1).

Summary

With a forested environment to protect that has had its historical fire regime altered through decades of well-meaning but over-zealous fire suppression, a prolonged drought that has dried out forest fuels and added to the potential for even more intense and severe wildland fires, an ever-increasing population moving into the wildland-urban interface of rural areas with limited economic resources to pay for fire protection, to an increase in training requirements and job description that now includes the possibility of

handling hazardous materials and search and rescue operations; volunteer firefighters in Montana have many reasons to be discouraged and wonder if they can continue in their endeavors. The volunteers who remain committed to their duties, despite the increase of risk to themselves and demands on their time truly seem to fit Wilson and Musick's (1997) definition of "formal" volunteers who "work in or for the community, where time and effort are given for the betterment of the community in general." While some researchers who specialize in the topic of volunteerism may argue that those fire department volunteers who receive stipends for training or other types of economic incentives like health benefits, clothing allowances, etc., are not "pure" volunteers in the strictest definition of the term (Harris 1996, Cnaan et al. 1996, Lyons et al. 1998, Wilson 2000, Monga and Treuren 2001) one would be hard-pressed not to describe them as a benefit to their community.

Whether the volunteers currently serving in Montana's fire departments are motivated by reasons more centered on others or reasons more centered on themselves (Fuentes and Jiminez 2000), it is likely more practical for the rest of us to be concerned more with what can be done to keep them there rather than *why* they are there. Nevertheless, the more that can be understood about the motivations of volunteer firefighters and their particular psyche the more that can be done to keep them from experiencing "burnout." In order to facilitate the "volunteer role-identity," spoken of by Callero (1985) and Thoits and Hewitt (2001) it would behoove anyone currently working as a leader or supervisor of volunteers to gain a greater understanding of how to motivate different types of people with highly variable personalities (Penner et al. 1997, Penner and Finkelstein 1998). Understanding the most common character traits, such as high

self-esteem and emotional stability, which most long-term and effective volunteers seem to possess (Allen and Rushton 1983, Thoits and Hewitt 2001) is also highly valuable information for leaders of volunteers. As De Harven (1984, pg. 62) states: "Finding volunteers is only the first step, keeping them actively involved in an organization also needs to be considered." According to many in the field of volunteer research, effective and quality leadership among the ranks of volunteer fire service personnel seems to be the best way to ensure that retention will be successful (Cnaan and Goldberg-Glen 1991, Cnaan and Amroffell 1994, Noble and Rogers 1998). Bales (1996) stresses the importance of communication and making volunteers feel special.

Volunteer firefighters seem to have many different reasons for wanting to engage in this specific activity; wanting to contribute to a worthwhile endeavor while helping others (Schaeffer 2001), wanting to achieve a greater degree of self-actualization and stave off feelings of alienation brought on by living and working in a capitalist society (Thompson and Bono 1993), looking for job satisfaction not found in their paid work (Herzberg et al. 1957), or a desire to enhance education and job skills in order to advance a career (Thompson and Bono 1993). Because not all volunteers are motivated by intrinsic (non-economic) values (Blauner 1964, Seeman 1972) and because so many volunteer fire departments across the country are losing members rapidly, the idea of economic compensation has become more common when more traditional recruitment and retention efforts fail to produce needed results. The North Syracuse Volunteer Fire Department (2004), while making an attempt to direct recruiting efforts at those who have strong intrinsic values, still find it necessary to provide volunteers with retirement and insurance benefits. Roanoke County found success with recruitment and retention of

volunteers by offering worker's compensation, life insurance and retirement benefits (American City and County 1995). Other studies have shown economic incentives have very little impact on turnover rates in volunteer fire departments (Virginia Legislative Document Summary 2001). The study of volunteers, more specifically volunteer firefighters, should be an ongoing process due to the changing nature of society in general. Volunteer fire departments have specific needs and issues and more localized studies like the one in Genesse County (2001) may prove to be more effective than national studies for mitigating local problems.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

The purpose of this study was to: 1) Determine if there has been a recent (one year) increase or decrease in the total number of active fire department volunteers in the state of Montana; 2) Characterize these volunteers within fire departments in terms of their motivations and incentives; and 3) Assess the needs and priorities of Montana fire departments with an emphasis on economic compensation for volunteers, and volunteer recruitment and retention. To achieve this purpose, a multi-method study was conducted. First, a self-administered mailback survey delivered via the U.S. postal system to all (363) non-federal fire departments in Montana was conducted to assess the current status of volunteer fire departments. Second, a series of in-depth interviews (11) were conducted in Montana, Utah and Texas between November 3, 2003 and March 31, 2004 to explore the motivations behind volunteering as a firefighter.

Mailback Survey Population

On January 5, 2004, a pre-notice letter with a very brief description of an upcoming survey and its importance to the potential respondents was mailed to 371 (non-federal) fire departments in the state of Montana whose addresses were included in the database used and maintained by the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation. It was assumed these 371 addresses represented all known fire departments (volunteer, combination, and career) in the state. A mailing of the complete survey package, including the questionnaire, a cover letter explaining the purposes and importance of the survey, and a self-addressed/stamped return envelope took place on January 9, 2004. All 371 packages were addressed to the chief of the department (the

intended population) and all were mailed on the same day from Missoula, Montana. Three weeks later, “thank you”/reminder postcards were mailed to all respondents. A second mailing of the original and unaltered survey was again mailed three weeks following the postcard. This second mailing of the survey to all departments who had not yet responded also included an additional cover letter restating the importance of the survey and again urged a response from the department. Dillman’s (2000) *Tailored Design Method*, which has been shown to improve response rates considerably, was followed closely in principal although the timing between mail contacts was stretched somewhat in order to allow respondents more time to finish the lengthy 8-page survey and due to the fact that during winter months many rural fire department buildings (i.e. their mailboxes) often remain idle for weeks at a time. Dillman (2000) also suggests that the inclusion of token financial incentives (ball-point pens, five dollars in cash, etc.) with the initial mailing may also help to increase response rates. This particular suggestion from Dillman was not followed because the financial obligation of this suggestion was not agreed to by any sponsoring group involved with the financing of the survey nor was it specifically budgeted for at any time during the planning stages of this project.

During this data collection period it was determined that 12 departments included in the initial mailing were either no longer in existence or had been absorbed into larger neighboring departments. There were also a number of addresses that were essentially doubling a single department, listed under a different department name or with the home address of a former fire chief. In addition to these now defunct or non-existent departments, it was also learned during the survey process that there were 4 *additional* departments that had either begun operations within the past year or were somehow

initially missed on the first mailing. These departments were promptly sent the same materials that had previously been sent to all other departments. Therefore, the original population size of 371 was reduced to 363 (-12 and +4). In addition, it was confirmed through the survey process that eight fire departments in the state are fully-paid/career departments with no volunteer personnel. The population for the purposes of this thesis was again reduced by eight, bringing it to 355 volunteer and combination fire departments.

As stated earlier, all correspondence was clearly addressed to the fire chief of each department, although through past experience with a previous fire department survey in Montana it was assumed that in many cases the questionnaire would actually be completed by an assistant to the chief, such as another fire department officer, treasurer, or secretary. It should be noted that these questionnaires which were completed by an individual who was not the chief of the department were not removed from the main data set because it should not be assumed that the fire chief is the only individual within a department with access to all information requested by the survey. This particular aspect of the data collection, while in this case not necessarily detrimental, is to be expected from a self-administered survey through the mail and is virtually unavoidable.

All departments were urged to comply with the questionnaire by the 16th of March, 2004, although it was again assumed through past experience that some surveys would continue to come in after that date by as much as several weeks. The final completed and returned surveys (2) were actually received on the 27th of April, 2004, and the final tally for collected surveys was 287 (not including the 8 career departments), thus equaling a total compliance rate of 80.8 percent for our sample population. It is assumed

that all mailed correspondence reached its addressed destination and only two calls were received at the DNRC offices by respondents requesting an additional survey after having misplaced the initial one. The entire sequence of events, from the pre-notice letter mailed on January 5th to the final collection of returned surveys on April 27th represents a total of 113 days, or 16.1 weeks.

Questionnaire Design

A copy of the original survey, with all other corresponding cover letters, reminder postcard, etc. can be found in Appendix A of this report. The survey instrument used in this project consisted of 37 questions and/or question sections. For the purposes of this thesis only eight of these questions relating to volunteers and/or volunteer departments were analyzed along with the question about the total number of active volunteers in the department. Questions pertaining strictly to volunteers are to be found within the survey beginning at question #5 through question #11, and then again at question #36. All other data procured through the use of this survey instrument were summarized and analyzed in a formal report for the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation and the U.S. Bureau of Land Management. Those results are not discussed for this thesis.

The overall design and implementation of the survey was based on the well-tested methodology and techniques described by Salant and Dillman (1994) and through the use of Dillman's *Tailored Design Method* (2000). Format, style and question content of the survey questionnaire were written primarily by the this author with additional and valuable input from personnel at the Montana DNRC – Fire and Aviation Management Bureau (Missoula), the Bureau of Land Management – Montana State Office (Billings) and the author's thesis committee at the University of Montana - Missoula. Additional

suggestions for the design of the questionnaire cover page came from Gendall (1996). Other strategies for improving response rates to surveys were found in research by Hassol, Harrison, Rodriguez, Jarmon and Frakt (2003). The survey was designed to be as clear and easily understood as possible, with a medium font size of 11, Times New Roman font style, ample space between questions and sections, and with many uses of italics and/or bolded and underlined words to show emphasis and/or direct the respondent to important words within questions. Any instructions included for individual questions were to be easily found within the questionnaire itself directly above or below the actual question and **not** included on a separate page outside of the questionnaire which, in most cases, would not have been read by the respondents (Dillman 2000). All of these design techniques were implemented during the construction of the questionnaire in order to relieve what is known as “respondent burden”, to reduce the amount of respondent error, and to attempt to increase the overall response rate (Salant and Dillman 1994, Dillman 2000, Hassol et al. 2003). Much effort was placed not only on question construction in this survey but also on question salience, which according to Dillman (2000) is a significant determinant of survey response rates. If an individual becomes bored or uninterested during the process of filling out a survey there is a very significant chance they will either skip a question they feel is unimportant to them or in some cases may just discontinue the survey process and insert the questionnaire into the nearest garbage receptacle. It was found that after using all of the aforementioned survey techniques, not only did this particular survey receive a very robust and impressive overall response rate of 81.3 percent (295 total departments with career departments included), but the total amount of individual question nonresponse was also kept to a minimum.

Attempts to Eliminate Bias and Minimize Respondent Error

The survey instrument was designed in such a way so as to ensure, as much as possible, that every respondent would interpret each question the same way and accurately answer all of the survey questions. However, with any self-administered survey format there will inevitably be several instances of nonresponse and/or obvious respondent error. These errors then bring up the question of whether to simply throw out the unusable information or to make an attempt to clarify the respondent's true intention. It was decided very early on during the survey writing process that the entire sample population would be contacted in the same way, in a consistent manner and that they would not be contacted unnecessarily or in an uneven or biased manner. This decision was made as a way of ensuring that no respondent would be persuaded or influenced in any way by a question asked over the phone or a question stated differently in an email. This decision was also based on the research of Hochstim (1967) who found that respondent answers may differ by as much as 14 percent for the same question when administered by personal interview vs. over the telephone vs. on a paper questionnaire. Biemer (1997) also found a difference of 12 percent in answers to health questions given by the same respondents but through a different survey mode (self-administered vs. personal interview).

In the case of an obvious mathematical error made by the respondent the mistake was simply corrected and then entered into the database with the corrected and modified answer. For example: 15 volunteer firefighters +4 volunteer administrative staff do *not* equal 18 total volunteers. There were also several instances where a respondent would state that no volunteers in their department received any type of economic compensation

in any way (survey question #9), and then within the second half of the very same question would indicate that their department did indeed offer insurance benefits and a retirement pension to their volunteers. This is simply a case of interpreting the phrase “economic compensation” in a way that was contrary to the definition used for the purposes of this study. In this case the answer given by the respondent was also changed to reflect the definition of economic compensation used in this study. In only three separate instances were respondents contacted in order to obtain an answer for survey question #5 (How many active volunteers are there currently in your department?) because the nature of this question requires more of a simple numerical answer rather than an answer based on ranking one item of importance or higher priority against another. At no time was any of the sample population contacted in order to “re-answer” any questions of opinion that were originally left blank. These items of nonresponse were simply left as blank/missing entries within the database.

In-Person Interviews

Between November 3, 2003 and March 31, 2004, a total of 11 personal interviews (12 total individuals actually interviewed) were conducted with fire chiefs of volunteer and combination departments, and other individuals closely affiliated with volunteer fire service personnel. Three interviews were conducted out-of-state; with one fire department and two employees of the Texas Forest Service, and eight interviews were conducted with fire chiefs in the state of Montana. Out-of-state interviews included the director of the Texas Forest Service, the Volunteer Fire Department Assistance Programs Coordinator of the Texas Forest Service, and the chief of a volunteer fire department in central Utah. Interviews conducted outside the state of Montana were done for the

purpose of looking for any obvious or glaring differences between answers given during these interviews and answers given by fire chiefs in Montana. These out-of-state interviewees were chosen based on random opportunities that presented themselves at very specific times and places and again, willingness on the part of the individual to take time out of a busy schedule to sit down for an hour-long interview. Interviews in Montana were selected based on travel costs and time constraints, therefore the western and central portions of the state were favored. Four interviews were in the western portion of Montana (Missoula, Lake, and Ravalli Counties), four were in the central portion of the state (Cascade, Gallatin, Meagher and Broadwater Counties) and none were conducted in the eastern portion. These departments and counties were chosen at random but the decision was based more on the availability and willingness of the interviewee to participate in the interview process on a specific date. The only criteria being that the chief/department in question must have completed the mailback survey *prior* to the interview. This specific criterion was meant as a way of assuring that the respondent would not then produce biased answers on a survey completed at a later date, post-interview. During the interview process, which was recorded entirely by hand with pencil and paper, an attempt was made to ask each interviewee the same basic questions. These questions pertained to volunteers' motivations, their issues and priorities, and the challenges faced by volunteer firefighters in general. This was done so as to then be able to make more accurate comparisons between answers given by different individuals to the same basic questions. This was found to be somewhat of a challenge at times as many interviewees waited to be asked a question whereas others tended to provide information constantly without ever being *asked* a specific question. Great care was

taken to quote the interviewee accurately. Individuals who spoke rapidly were often asked to repeat themselves and/or clarify to the interviewer very important and/or highly pertinent pieces of information. Ultimately, many quotes were paraphrased, out of necessity, but the overall sentiment and opinions of the interviewee were preserved within these quotes.

The purpose of these interviews was to obtain valuable information directly from those who work very closely with fire department volunteers who would be able to accurately and thoughtfully answer questions that might otherwise be severely limited by an impersonal survey delivered in the mail. These more personal, face-to-face interviews were designed to yield more detailed answers and insight to the questions that were posed by the survey. The most pertinent information that was gathered during these interviews is summarized in Chapter 4 (Results). For complete written interviews see Appendix C.

Data Analysis and Report Format

All data analysis is included in Chapter 4 (Results) along with all findings related to research questions 1-4. More detailed tables containing raw data were also included in Chapter 4. The quantitative survey was analyzed using frequencies, percentages and chi-square analysis as well as comparisons between three different regions of the state. The in-depth interviews were analyzed using a content analysis approach based on key words and phrases. As often as possible, interviewees were asked the same basic set of questions, thus making it easier for all responses to these same basic questions to be analyzed accordingly. Key words and phrases which were repeated often during interviews were “flagged” (using the Microsoft Word “find” tool) and if repeated often enough were then considered worthy of further discussion in the qualitative analysis

section of this paper. For example, the words “training” or “train” were mentioned by the interviewees a total of 73 times. “Community”, as in “a sense of community” was mentioned a total of 52 times. By contrast, the term “military”, while still considered an important enough term to warrant further discussion, was mentioned by respondents only a total of 10 times during the entire interview process.

It should also be noted that the survey instrument itself provided a section on the final page in which the respondent was highly encouraged to share any opinions, complaints, issues, etc., that were directly related to either the survey instrument or their respective department. Many of the survey respondents took advantage of this opportunity and several lengthy and valuable quotes were obtained in this manner. While these particular respondents were not *interviewed* in the same manner as the previous 11 interviewees spoken of earlier in this chapter, their input and opinions were included within the data analysis portion of this report when appropriate and valuable. Finally, since this study is an assessment and an exploration of volunteer fire departments: comparative analyses were conducted as additional questions related to the data emerged.

Limitations and Weaknesses of the Study

All surveys will have limitations. In the case of this particular study it is quite possible that the single greatest limitation is the majority of questions (seven out of the eight pertaining to volunteers) that were asked elicited a very subjective response. The final results of the survey are based on the opinions of 287 different fire chiefs (or an assistant in some cases) all with varying degrees of experience, knowledge and different opinions about what is and is not considered “sufficient” or “most beneficial” to them or to their department. Because it would have been completely impractical and impossibly

expensive to survey each and every fire department volunteer in the state of Montana (which, after this study, can now be estimated at over 6,890 individuals) it was decided that this population would instead be represented, as much as possible, by the fire chiefs who manage the departments where these volunteers provide their services. This calculates to roughly one chief's subjective opinion for every 19.4 volunteers (on average) within their respective departments. However, the reader should also be reminded that many of the chiefs are also volunteers themselves. Another weakness of the study is related to the fact that there seems to be a very wide range of opinion among fire department chiefs as to the actual definition of what constitutes an "active" volunteer. These differences are evident when looking at the responses from several different fire chiefs and a single volunteer in Montana when they were asked two pre-test questions posed in an email sent randomly to 28 fire chiefs in September of 2003. The two questions were as follows: "How would you define the word 'active' when it comes to the volunteers within your own department?" and "How do you determine active status among your volunteers?" Responses varied all the way from requiring a volunteer to respond to no less than 50 percent of all emergency responses called in to their department and the strict requirement of attending no less than 36 hours of official training courses during a given year, to the opposite end of the spectrum: "active means someone who shows up to a meeting and shows up to any fire. We only have 12 members, so I guess our definition is a little lax." It is important to realize that the definition of an "active" volunteer adopted by a department will surely have a direct impact on how questions asked in this particular survey were answered. All six separate responses to these two questions regarding the definition of an active volunteer can be

found in their entirety in Appendix B. Basic differences in the interpretation of questions by respondents are an unavoidable reality within any survey design, and even more so in a self-administered survey. According to Dillman (2000) the chief disadvantage of a self-administered survey is that there is no interviewer present to respond to any unclear interpretation of a question. This often produces answers that are prone to a considerable amount of unintentional error. Dillman (2000) also states “I am convinced that many respondents do not read the entire content of questionnaires in a thoughtful way.... some respondents skip many words, with the frequent result that questions get misinterpreted” (pg. 81). Survey questions and techniques used in this project are a perfect example of how a self-evaluation of reality or the interpretation of a current situation by an individual rather than by a group might be considered problematic when interpreting final results. There is a chance that some level of measurement error may have resulted from inaccurate or imprecise answers but there is no real way of knowing just how significant this error was to this study.

An additional weakness of the study is that it was designed to only gather statistical data for the period of a single year. It was decided that due to the possibility of several chiefs being new to their position, inquiring about department status from 3 to 5 years prior might elicit either a blank response or a “best guess” and statistically unreliable response. The ability to track changes in the totals of volunteer personnel over a longer period of time would have proven to be extremely valuable, but if the accuracy of that data were to come into question then the results would also then have to be considered only somewhat reliable and of less overall value.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to:

- 1) Determine if there has been a recent (one year) increase or decrease in the total number of active fire department volunteers in the state of Montana;
- 2) Characterize these volunteers within fire departments in terms of their motivations and incentives; and
- 3) Assess the needs and priorities of Montana fire departments with an emphasis on economic compensation for volunteers, and volunteer recruitment and retention.

In this chapter the results of the survey data and the results of the eleven in-depth interviews are presented with descriptive statistics, in graph or table format with explanations, and through the methodology of content analysis.

Research Question 1: Does Montana reflect the national trend in a declining number of active fire department volunteers?

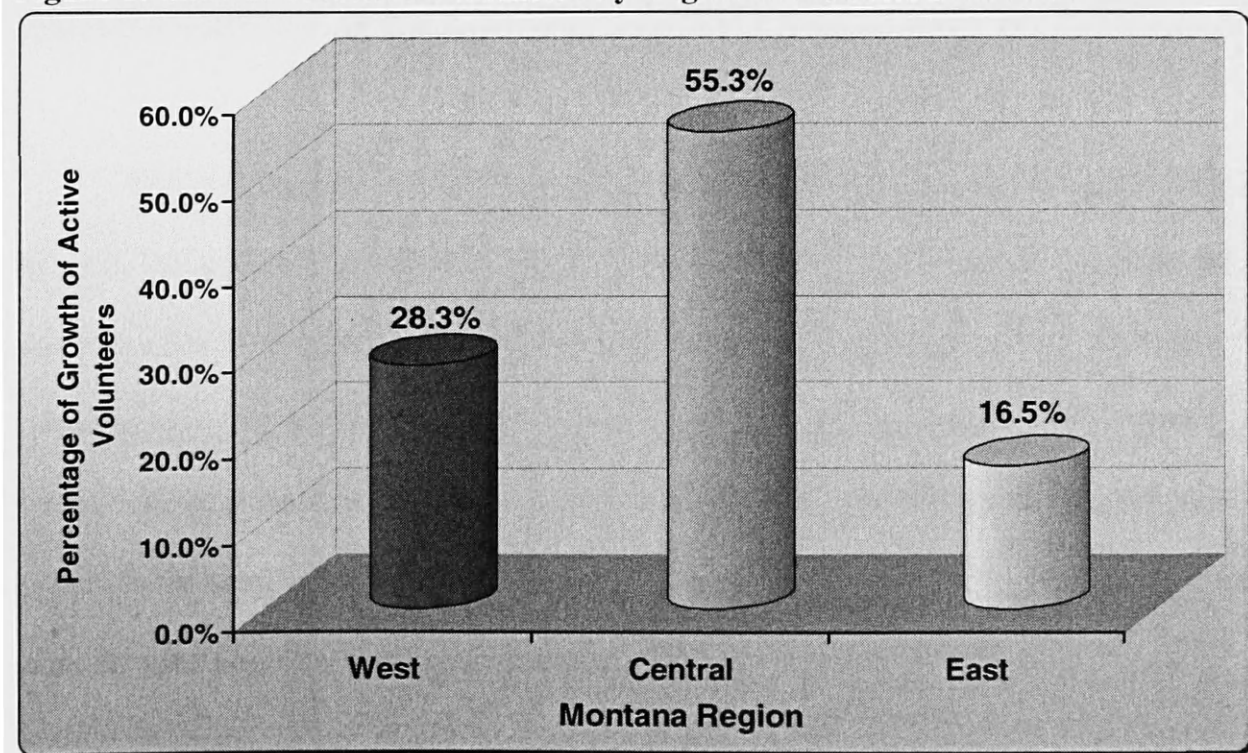
According to the data gathered from the survey, Montana is apparently moving in the opposite direction of the national trend and is actually gaining in its total number of active fire department volunteers at a rate of +4.3 percent for the year 2003. Overall, there was a *reported* net gain of 237 active fire department volunteers throughout the state of Montana during the year 2003. Out of the entire sample population of 355 departments with volunteers on staff, 268 completely volunteer departments and 17 combination departments (80.3% of total population) provided data for this survey question. By extrapolating this reported number of 237, based on data collected from all surveyed departments, a projected total net gain of 296 active fire department volunteers was obtained. Volunteer departments seem to be gaining total active personnel at a

faster rate (+4.4%) than are the combination departments (+3.0%), or at least so during the past year. This gain in volunteers experienced by the state of Montana is opposite of the national trend showing net losses ranging from 3 to 12.5 percent from 1983 to 2002 (FEMA, USFA and NVFC 1998, FEMA, USFA and NVFC 2001, Shannon 2003).

Other Findings:

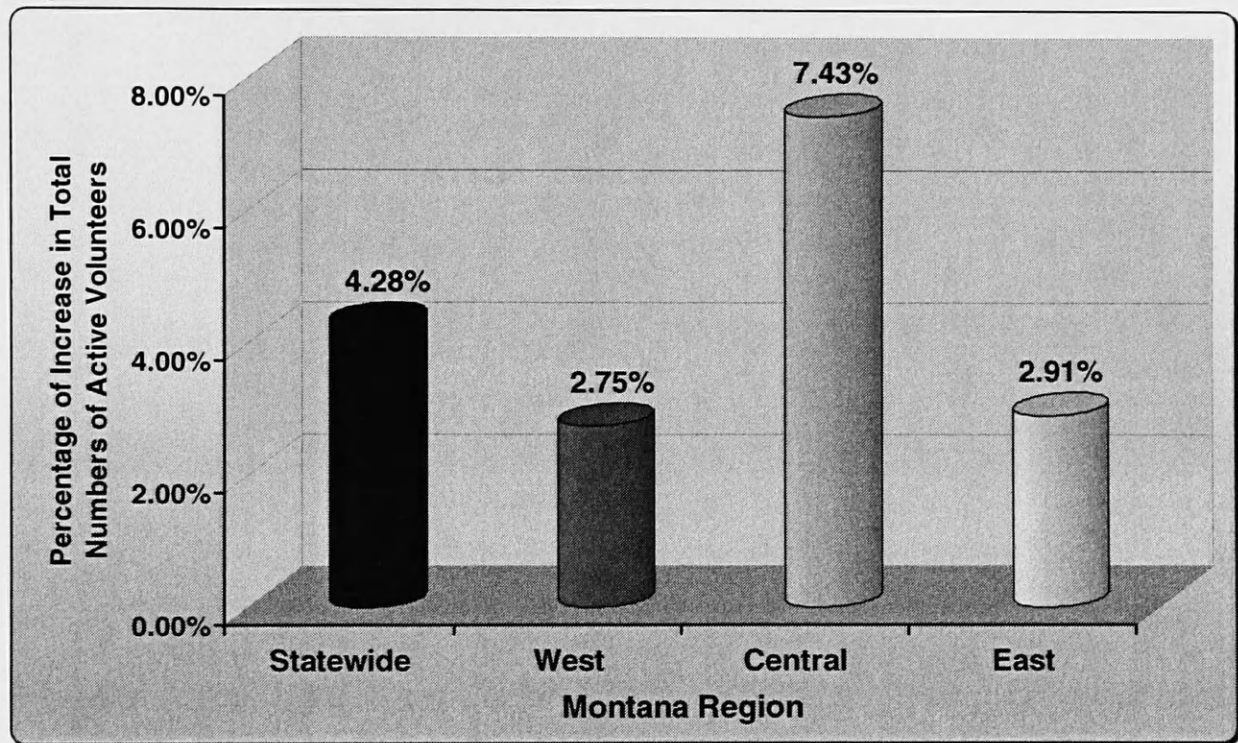
These recent gains are not distributed evenly throughout the entire state. The 16 counties which constitute what is known as the central region of Montana (see Appendix E for map of geographic regions) are, on the whole, gaining volunteers at a faster rate than both the western region (19 counties) and the eastern region (21 counties) of the state (Figure 1). Of the reported net gain of 237 total active volunteer personnel, 131 (55.3%) of these individuals joined departments located within the central region of the state. The western region reported a net gain of 67 individuals (28.3% of total increase) and the eastern region reported a net gain of 39 individuals (16.5% of total increase).

Figure 1: Growth of Active Volunteers by Region of the State 2003-2004



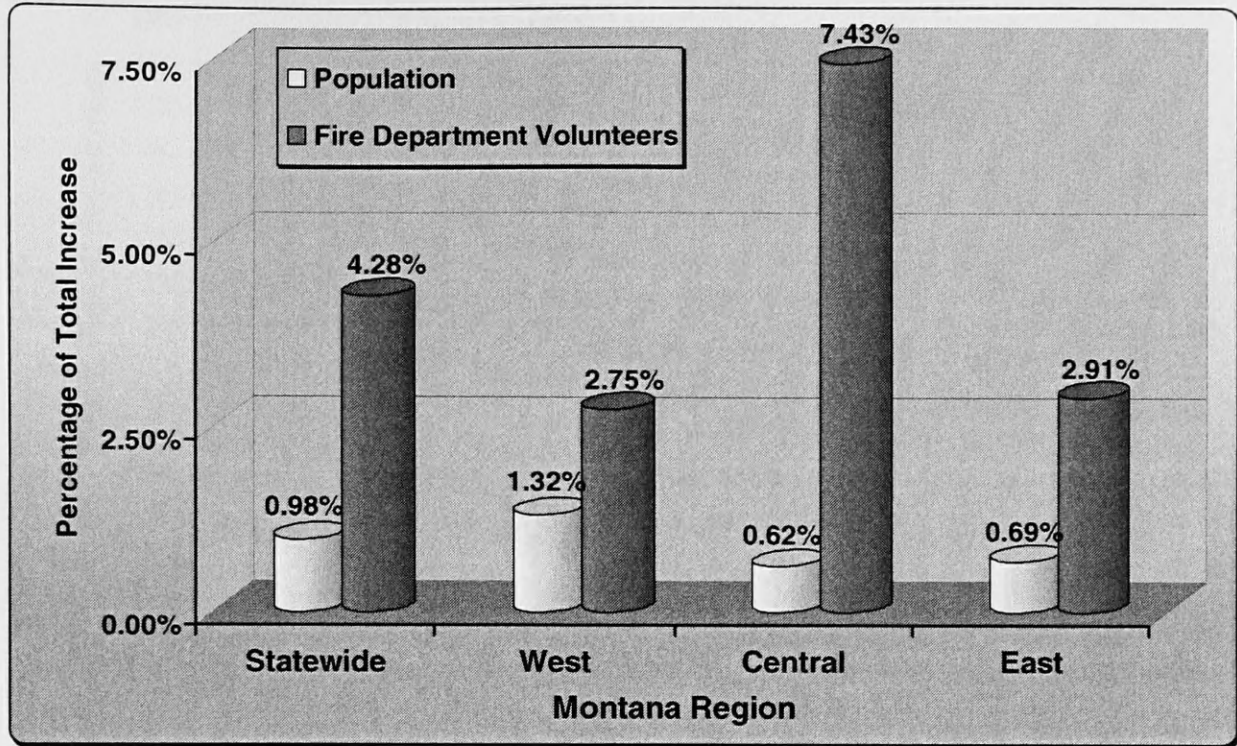
The percentage of increase in department size (total personnel); stratified by region of the state, shows the central region grew the most (Figure 2). Central region fire departments on average, increased by 7.43 percent, compared to departments in the eastern region (2.91%), the western region (2.75%) and the entire state (4.28%).

Figure 2. Changes in Volunteer Personnel within Departments by State and Region 2003-2004



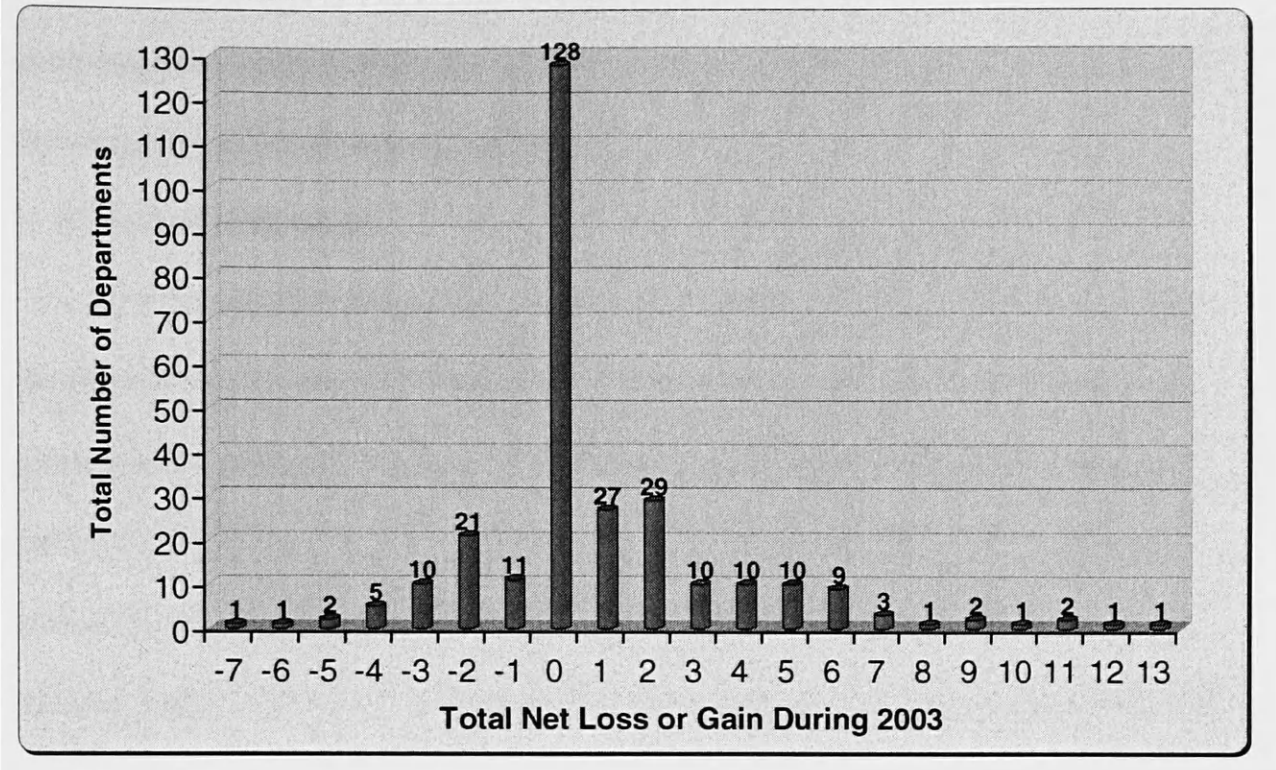
The percentage of increase for total population size in the state of Montana during this same time period (2003-2004) was 0.98 percent (Figure 3). Therefore, according to data furnished by Montana's fire departments, the rate of increase for active volunteers is outpacing the overall rate of increase for state population by an average of 437 percent. Active volunteer increase in the central region of the state is outpacing its own population growth in the same counties of the region at a rate of 1,198 percent. (See Appendix F for more detailed population growth estimate data.)

Figure 3. Percentage of Increase in Total Numbers of Active Volunteers Compared with the Percentage of Increase in State/Region Population for a One-Year Time Period 2003-2004



Gains and losses for the year 2003 range between a gain of 13 active volunteer personnel to a net loss of seven (Figure 4). The distribution of these gains and losses by department are somewhat normal and are clustered heavily between a loss of two volunteers and a gain of two volunteers. Of the 285 total departments that reported gains or losses of volunteer personnel, 128 (45%) showed no change at all in their total number of volunteer personnel, 106 departments (37%) reported a gain of at least one volunteer, and 51 departments (18%) reported a loss of at least one volunteer during 2003.

Figure 4. Loss and Gain of Active Volunteer Personnel in Montana 2003-2004



Research Question 2: What are the motivations behind volunteering for a fire department?

There can be very little hard evidence, in the form of mathematical statistics, to fully analyze and describe this mostly intangible and qualitative aspect of the data. This particular question can only be properly addressed by examining the thoughts, ideas and opinions expressed by those who were interviewed for the purposes of this study. While it would be difficult to analyze every single motivation of every individual involved with volunteer fire departments in Montana, it may be more practical to create several broad categories of these different types of motivations and then examine each category separately. After close analysis of all eleven interviews it appears there are seven basic categories of motivation types or reasons for volunteering as a firefighter. These categories include: 1) A sense of community, 2) training, 3) excitement, 4) camaraderie or brotherhood, 5) the need for a structured, military-type atmosphere, 6) personal or

community events, and 7) economic compensation. The final category, economic compensation is only examined as it relates to research question three, whereas the other six categories will each be examined here.

1. A sense of community

Above all other things, this *sense of community*, or the pride that one feels about their hometown area seems to be the reason mentioned most often as being the single greatest motivating factor behind an individual's decision to volunteer their time to a local fire department. In all eleven interviews this motivating factor was mentioned a total of 52 times, often repeatedly by a single interviewee. Even though training and training related issues were mentioned more total times by respondents, these references to a sense of community (unlike training) were *always* mentioned in positive light. Training was sometimes derided as an anti-motivational aspect of volunteerism. A person's sense of community seems to be associated very closely with their desire to give something back to their community in which they feel some sense of obligation. There is a strong feeling of civic responsibility in many cases and a desire to be helpful to other citizens in the community. Terms like "commitment", "service" and "values" were used often by interviewees as a way to describe how they felt about their volunteer duties and their motivations.

When asked about how to attract new volunteers to a fire department, Hull (Texas Forest Service) states:

You have to build a culture that it is a status symbol to be part of a volunteer fire department. It is not a hobby. It is a commitment to the community.

Hull also points out that in small communities the fire department often functions as the social center in town. When asked what initially attracted him to the position of volunteer firefighter, Vickers (Saratoga Springs VFD) stated he wanted to provide a service to the community. Among the potential volunteers he now interviews as fire chief, Vickers believes the number one reason he hears most often regarding volunteers' interest in the department is the individual wants to give something back to the community in which they live. When asked about successes or failures in the area of recruitment and retention of volunteers, Vickers believes for a volunteer to remain motivated they "need to feel they are providing a critical service to the community."

Lindstrom (Missoula Rural FD) claims in his experience with volunteer firefighters most "just wanted to do something positive for the community." When asked what initially attracted him to the position of volunteer firefighter, Hansen (West Fork VFD) said:

I have always believed in community involvement. It's all about people helping people. If we didn't have people who believed in putting something back into the community then we wouldn't even have volunteer fire departments. Volunteers are there because of a sense of community and they recognize a need for the fire department.

Ehli (Hamilton VFD) was asked about what motivations the volunteers in his department have for doing what they do. He states:

Firefighters, especially here in Hamilton, have historically been placed on a pedestal or a higher level than just the average person in the community... After sixteen years in the department you begin to know what it really means to the community to have a volunteer fire department... It's very important to some people to know that they supply something to a community and that people depend on you.

Ehli also theorized it is going to be harder, nationwide, to recruit volunteer firefighters but not in Montana and especially not in Ravalli County. His reasoning is because the Bitterroot Valley is still a rural community, the volunteers there are given a great deal of

respect and people in small communities enjoy feeling respected. In Polson, Maloney says there are three very distinct volunteer groups in his department. He describes them:

The first group is truly in it to provide a service to the community and just basically want to help people. This is our strongest group. They are the core of the department that pulls everything together. The second group is here for the social aspect of the job. This is their way to socialize. The last group consists of the ones who like the idea of belonging to an organization that makes them feel good about themselves. It's more of a self-gratification thing for them.

When asked about volunteers' motivation, in general, Waters (Belgrade RFD) said:

Some like the idea of the community stature that comes with being a volunteer firefighter and others just seem to have a natural sense of wanting to give something back to their community.

Heppell (Neihart VFD) was asked about why people in his community might be motivated to volunteer their time to the fire department, and he responded:

People here are motivated by a sense of community and a sense of accomplishment. They want to be involved with something that has a worthwhile mission and something that gives them a feeling of job satisfaction... There are many reasons for volunteering for the fire department. There are the people who really just want to serve. These are the people who have an altruistic type of personality and a good sense of community... Our volunteers that are here now seem to enjoy volunteering because it is a needed service for the community.

Ohlson (White Sulphur Springs VFD) had several comments about small communities and the importance of volunteerism there:

I have always believed in the idea of volunteerism. In small communities everybody *should* pitch in. Volunteerism is what keeps these small communities going... I believe in helping other people. It's just the way I was raised, I guess... I also believe that in this faster-paced society that we live in the whole idea of volunteerism is now thought of as less important, in general. I think Montana is going to be different than the majority of states in the U.S. because we are still considered a rural state and we are more isolated from the rest of the country. There is a unique attitude among the people in Montana. In these small towns the idea of volunteering your time remains important to a lot of people.

When asked about what attracts people to the fire department in Broadwater County,

Shindoll pointed out the desire to help out “neighbors” in the community:

My personal attitude about volunteering is that I just want to help all the neighbors that I can. I put in a lot of time doing this... It takes something special to be a volunteer firefighter. You have to want to help the community and you really have to want to *stay* here – that’s the biggest thing. Our volunteers are just neighbors helping neighbors.

Volunteer firefighters in Texas seem to be very similar to those in Montana, according to Galloway (Texas Forest Service), who adds that “community pride” is extremely important to volunteers in Texas and that they “reflect community values.”

While it seems there is a consensus, at least among these interviewees, that a sense of community is the glue that holds the volunteer fire service together in small towns and rural areas, many of these same individuals indicated this sense of community is changing. In some cities and growing towns in Montana this sense of community, once considered to be so pervasive, is slowly waning and giving way to a more transient and temporary mindset. Lindstrom, speaking about the current (lack of) sense of community in Missoula, states:

The true spirit of community exists in small towns but Missoula is different. It’s too big now. People don’t feel the same sense of ownership for a place like Missoula. The population is too transient and diverse and no longer like the small town that it was in 1960. Certain traditions have left Missoula and the sense of community has changed. This has a direct effect on the attitudes of those who would be volunteer firefighters. There are no second generation volunteers (those that follow their parents or grandparents in the fire department) anymore. The University of Montana also exerts a greater influence now on the community than it did when it was a much smaller school. There are over 10,000 students over there but almost all of them will leave once they finish their education.

Maloney (Polson VFD) agrees with Lindstrom (Missoula Rural FD) and comments on both his community and Missoula:

Polson is changing and is becoming more like Missoula. It is less rural and the sense of community is not really there anymore. Polson is not the small town it was 20 years ago, or even 5 years ago. Bill Lindstrom is right about what he says about changing attitudes and the growing community. With the younger generation, nothing is for free anymore.

Waters (Belgrade) also concurs with both Lindstrom and Maloney, adding comments about his own community in Gallatin County:

As a place like Belgrade or Bozeman grows and the population becomes more transient the sense of community is lost. Now a place like Manhattan, Montana, has a population of 1,200 people and they *do* have a sense of community there. But the problem is that many of the people who live there have to work in either Belgrade or Bozeman, so they are not around during the day in Manhattan in order to be volunteers. Their reason for not volunteering in their own local department is that they just simply are not around during the day in their own community... It used to be that most households were single-income households. Now people need a dual-income in their home just in order to survive. This need for two people working has really cut down on volunteer time and in turn, the larger communities where people go to find work do not really have a sense of community.

2. Training

Training opportunities have the potential to be a very valuable part of the motivation and overall morale among the volunteers of a department, or it can become a source of contention and resentment if overused or handled unprofessionally. During the interview process, issues regarding training and how they affected the motivations of volunteers were mentioned quite often.

Training is highly valued because it is often viewed by volunteers as a way to achieve a free education that may have implications on an individual's future career opportunities. Vickers (Saratoga Springs) points out that many of the younger volunteers actually value the training they receive for free as a greater incentive than any type of economic incentives. Many volunteers hope for an eventual full-time career as a

firefighter and they view this training as very valuable experience that could help them get a paid job later. Younger and more career-minded individuals often view their volunteer experience, and the training that accompanies it, as a “stepping-stone” to paid work. Lindstrom (Missoula Rural FD) agrees with Vickers on this point and adds:

We will train them and give them an education to make them more competitive in the job market. It's this idea of an investment in training that gives us an energetic volunteer during the three to five years that they might be here. Quality training is the key... People obtain their education here and then move on to other places. We now have ex-volunteers who were trained and educated right here at Missoula Rural in every other major career department in this state.

Assistant Chief Belts (Missoula Rural FD) believes that the current emphasis on the training program in his department is what has led to a complete and successful turnaround of recruitment efforts there. Waters believes the training program in the Belgrade Fire Department is one of the attractions for people in the community to want to join the department:

The first reason (for people to want to become a volunteer) is the willingness and desire to just simply help people. The next reason is for the potential that some see for a career job. Because we are a busy department, or what I like to call a ‘full-service department’, we run a lot of calls and people gain very valuable experience here. We also have a very aggressive training program.

Ohlson also mentioned the fact that there is a “good training program” in White Sulphur Springs allows his department to be less concerned about the retention of current volunteers, as they view the training as an incentive to remain active. The five volunteer departments in Broadwater County have apparently found success in overcoming the negative experiences of the past by training together as one large group. Shindoll (Broadwater County) believes that: “The fact that we all train together and we all do the same thing together means more to them than any kind of economic compensation.”

As mentioned earlier, training can be a very positive motivator for a volunteer or can become an activity that discourages volunteer activity if excessive or deemed unnecessary by those participating in it. According to Hull (Texas Forest Service), the greater pressures on a volunteer to devote more time to training could actually be a factor in dwindling numbers of volunteers nationwide. He believes that many volunteers are often using their vacation time from work in order to fulfill their training requirements for the fire department. Vickers (Saratoga Springs VFD) believes that the community at large expects a certain training standard to be met by all firefighters and do not care if they are paid for the training or not. The need for training competency among firefighters is increasing yearly, and even though call volume may wax and wane, training should remain a constant. According to Vickers:

Excessive training without ever going out on calls will cause some of the volunteers to become discouraged and lose interest in what they are doing. If we train them to death without them ever going out on any real calls then we face the challenge of keeping them motivated... Training is universally the most demanding activity that demands a volunteer's time. Other commitments get in the way. Being a volunteer firefighter should be the only major activity that a person chooses to have outside of a full-time job and a family. Training and availability of personnel are the biggest issues that this department faces.

Ehli and Maloney both comment on the issue of volunteer "burnout", often caused by an excessive amount of training. Ehli (Hamilton VFD) states:

Pressure on a volunteer's time is difficult. The question is: 'How much can a community ask of its' volunteers?' Burnout from too much training could lead to a loss of motivation, but I haven't seen it yet in Hamilton.

Maloney (Polson VFD), on the issue of burnout, states:

Training is the number one issue for volunteers because of the time constraints it puts on them. Too much training can lead to burnout and you can only ask people to do so much before they just say 'enough is enough'.

Hansen (West Fork VFD) reiterates the challenges faced by most volunteer fire departments in the area of training their personnel:

I have a theory. 'The only thing you can take from me is my time'. So I try to be very conscientious about firefighters' time. The worst thing that you can do is to waste my time. The biggest challenge is to have training that really matters and to have the most effective training possible, but good training is always limited by your budget.

3. Excitement

According to Waters (Belgrade RFD): "Some are motivated by the excitement that comes with being involved in a job like firefighting." Vickers (Saratoga Springs VFD), when asked about his position as fire chief, said he enjoyed the excitement and challenges associated with his work and mentioned the excitement of being a firefighter is a very common desire among potential volunteers. Ehli (Hamilton VFD) says:

I would have to say that the driving force behind a firefighter's motivation is the adrenaline rush that you get when the alarm in the station goes off. Your blood starts pumping, your heart races and in all of this excitement you still must keep your head about you.

According to Heppell (Neihart VFD), this desire for the excitement of being a firefighter can also have its negative downside. He states:

You also have those that just seem to have a 'danger gene'. They crave the excitement of being a firefighter. Unfortunately, most of these 'cowboy-types' are not team players and sometimes are even dangerous to the rest of the members of the department. We are really very lucky to have the eleven volunteers that we have here in Neihart right now. We're not in it for the excitement. We're really just doing our jobs.

4. Camaraderie or brotherhood

This sense of belonging to an organization where others around you share the same sense of dedication and understanding of the work seems to be a very integral part of the volunteer experience for many. Vickers (Saratoga Springs VFD) described how

the volunteers in his department felt more “official” while wearing clothing with the department logo. While speaking about the challenges of leadership, Hansen (West Fork VFD) mentioned it was important for a leader to help develop or nurture a sense of camaraderie among the members of a department. Ehli (Hamilton VFD) believes the greatest incentive to the volunteers in his department was the camaraderie to be found there and that it was much more important than economic compensation. He states: “The number one or most universal answer for why volunteer firefighters do what they do is for camaraderie.” Ehli is concerned if the Hamilton department is ever forced to change over to a combination department with paid employees this “brotherhood”, which he believes to be a very important part of the success of his department, could be seriously challenged. Waters (Belgrade RFD) believes for some volunteers the biggest motivator is the need to belong to a very different or special kind of a “family” organization. He stated many people lack this family environment at home and this idea of “brotherhood” is very strong and very traditional among volunteer firefighters. There are many different forms of this camaraderie/brotherhood ideal and it means different things to different people. Galloway (Texas Forest Service) sums up this sense of belonging:

I think it is a neat thing to be a part of a volunteer fire department but it is not a social club. You get out and drag hose with people at 3 am and you will very quickly decide that either you like it or you don't. I think that if you ask volunteer firefighters why they do what they do, their number one answer will probably be that they really just want to be part of a 'professional' organization. People want to be a part of something that is successful and they want appreciation. They want to be able to take pride in their department.

5. The need for a structured, military-type atmosphere

Waters (Belgrade RFD) believes that many people who come from military backgrounds are especially attracted to volunteer fire departments because of the very

structured organization to be found there. He described the fire service as a paramilitary-type organization where people are expected to follow directions without constant questioning. He believes some people really need this type of structure system in their life in some way and that many who are no longer in the military miss this kind of atmosphere. Hansen (West Fork VFD) was trained as a firefighter during his twenty-two years in the U.S. Navy. It would only seem natural for him to become involved with the fire service in some way after his time in the military. As the current chief of a volunteer fire department he finds it a challenge to be a leader without the rigid rules of the military at his disposal. He pines for this former type of structured atmosphere:

Volunteer organizations are challenging for a leader. The military has a well-developed chain of command and rules are in place for discipline. Volunteer fire departments aren't run this way. Now I have to work with people differently and smooth over hurt feelings just to try to get the right outcome for a job that needs to be done.

Heppell (Neihart VFD) is a retired Air Force Colonel with thirty years of military experience. As the base commander at Malmstrom Air Force Base in Great Falls he was trained in "disaster preparedness" which included training for nuclear disasters, air crashes and security for nuclear weapons. He states that after a 30-year career in the military and at the age of 54 he was not really prepared to stop working at a job that gave him a sense of duty and purpose. After retirement, getting involved with the fire service in some way just seemed to make sense to him. He also pointed out it is no coincidence that there are many ex-military people who are now involved in the fire service. He points out that there is a chain of command and a sense of belonging to an organization very similar to the military that attracts people who feel comfortable within this type of highly structured atmosphere.

6. Personal or community events

There are certain memorable events in a person's life or community that may lead them to suddenly become involved in an organization, like a volunteer fire department, when the person had previously never given any serious thought to the idea. Other than Hansen's (West Fork VFD) extensive firefighting training in the military he also has some very personal reasons for wanting to become involved with an emergency services department. In 1974, the house he lived in with his family in West Fork burned to the ground. At the time there was a volunteer department in Darby but no closer. In 1992, the building that once housed the café he owned burned as well. He also has a brother who was nearly killed after a tree fell on him and his life was saved by a volunteer ambulance crew. Hansen also believes recent events in the Bitterroot Valley have served as a boost to recruitment in the local area:

The fires we had here in 2000 and 2003 really boosted recruiting. We had a real resurgence of new blood after that. When you have incidents like the Fish Creek, Black Mountain, or Cooney Ridge Fires it tends to motivate people and they become more interested in firefighting. Having fire close to your neighborhood and having flames licking your butt will always increase your interest in fire department activity.

Waters (Belgrade RFD) first became a volunteer firefighter in 1978 in Red Lodge, Montana; the town where he was born and raised. Even though his father had been a volunteer firefighter for sixteen years he claims he had no real motivation as a young man to ever become involved in any way with the fire service. It wasn't until a rash of arson fires in and around the Red Lodge area in 1978, which both angered and galvanized the local community that he became involved in firefighting. He describes these events:

At that time I was in business with my parents working in the family clothing store in Red Lodge. This arsonist was targeting buildings, both commercial and residential, and everyone in the town was doing whatever

they could to help out the volunteer fire department. Even the retired firefighters, including my father, would come out to help during this period. Being a young and healthy male at the time, I was later recruited by the fire department after having helped them out several times. It was because of these events that I really fell in love with the idea of helping people and so I decided that I would join the department. I looked at it as a challenge and as an opportunity for an education. I took every single firefighting training class that was offered.

Galloway (Texas Forest Service) described an event which occurred in 1988; a very large grass fire which actually threatened to burn the town of Abilene, Texas, which he claims “raised awareness in the fire service, local fire departments in general, got people interested in firefighting and put the Texas Forest Service on the radar screen after this particular event.”

Research Question 3: Does economic compensation, in its various forms, increase a fire department’s ability to recruit and retain volunteers and should it be considered a necessity?

This question is addressed by analyzing questions on the mailback survey as well as responses in the interviews.

According to survey question 9: “Do any of the volunteers in your department receive any form of economic compensation for their efforts (Table 1)?” Fifty-seven percent (162 departments) indicated they did and forty-three percent (121 departments) indicated they did not. Furthermore, according to survey question 10: “Do you believe that some form of economic compensation is needed for attracting new volunteers and/or keeping the current volunteers in your department active?” forty-five percent (126 departments) answered “Yes”, twenty-seven percent (77 departments) answered “No”, and twenty-eight percent (79 departments) answered “Not Sure.” Of the 162 departments that do currently offer some form of economic compensation to their volunteers, fifty-one

percent (82 departments) believe it is needed for attracting new volunteers and/or keeping current volunteers active and twenty-three percent (38 departments) believe it is not needed. Of the 121 departments who do not currently offer any form of economic compensation to their volunteers, thirty-six percent (44 departments) believe it is needed for attracting new volunteers and/or keeping current volunteers active and thirty-two percent (39 departments) believe it is not needed.

Table 1. Economic Compensation for Volunteers – Is It Necessary?

Questions:	n	Yes	No	Not Sure
“Do you believe that some form of economic compensation is needed for attracting new volunteers and/or keeping the current volunteers in your department active?”	282	45%	27%	28%
“Do any of the volunteers in your department receive any form of economic compensation for their efforts?”	283	57%	43%	n/a
If yes , percentage of departments that believe some form of economic compensation is needed/not needed	162	51%	23%	26%
If no , percentage of departments that believe some form of economic compensation is needed/not needed	121	36%	32%	31%

During the course of the interview process it became apparent that answers to questions regarding the necessity of economic compensation for volunteers could be classified into two distinct groups. The first group is the very adamant “No, it is not necessary” group. The second is the more ambiguous group, where the idea of economic compensation for volunteers is shrugged off as less important but never ruled out entirely as an effective tool for recruitment and retention. Answers and quotes from the first group (the adamant no group) will be examined first, followed then by quotes from the more ambiguous group.

Question: “Do the volunteers in your department receive any kind of economic compensation or other incentives for their efforts?”

We have a retirement program (\$125.00 per month after 20 years of active service), reimbursement for some expenses and the chief gets the use of a department vehicle but this is not why the volunteers are here. The retirement plan is part of our program but it is never really brought up in interviews with prospective members. What *is* brought up in the interview is the question about their ability to make a commitment to training every Thursday night for the next 20 years. They must understand this commitment to the department (Ehli – Hamilton VFD).

My first thoughts about this are that I do not believe in it. I will give you one reason: If a person’s motivation is one of an economic consideration then typically they will not be a good volunteer. I want people who are there because they want to serve the public without consideration for anything other than self-fulfillment. At the same time I also do not expect the volunteers to subsidize the fire organization with their own money. We will provide them with the personal protective equipment, the tools and all the training that they need. Local government should provide these things for the firefighters that serve them (Waters – Belgrade RFD).

We have worker’s compensation and a small retirement pension but it’s not really that much, \$150.00 a month, I think. More compensation would bring in more people to the departments – possibly – but they most likely would not be the same quality as the people that we have now. I think they would be there for different reasons. Honestly, equipment and training are higher priorities to all of us. Our volunteers might *like* to have some compensation but they don’t really seem to be worried about it. The fact that we all train together and we all do the same thing together means more to them than any kind of economic compensation (Shindoll – Broadwater County).

Question: “Do you think some form of economic compensation is needed for the recruitment and retention of volunteers?”

No it’s not. My volunteers will volunteer for just about anything until the idea of money comes up. For example, on a few occasions we have worked with seasonal Forest Service employees, helping them fight fires in the area. Some of these firefighters like to talk about how much overtime pay they are getting for the season, right in front of some of my volunteers, and it really irritates them to listen to this. Everybody is there doing the same job, only some of them are getting paid good money for it and others are paid nothing (Shindoll – Broadwater County).

Economic compensation does not equate to retention in our department. It has been tried and the results do not deliver retention (Lindstrom – Missoula Rural FD).

No. As a matter of fact, we have actually surveyed our own department and asked them what exactly it was that they wanted from the department in terms of incentives. Ninety percent of our volunteers said that they do not want to receive economic compensation. We do provide our volunteers with a fuel reimbursement stipend for going out on calls or going to training and really only about 25 percent will actually even accept the money. The rest just really don't seem to care about it. Our firefighters look at it like this: They would rather we use the money to buy better tools and equipment for them so that they are able to do the best job they can. We keep the money in the department and this is why we have some of the best equipment in the state (Waters – Belgrade RFD).

Other quotes and thoughts from the first (adamant no) group:

Five years is the average time here now for our volunteers. There are no more career volunteers here anymore. It used to be that P.E.R.S. (Public Employees Retirement System, sponsored by the state) was the main motivation, but not anymore. The newer volunteers here want to know what can be done for them *now*. Not 20 or 30 years from now. They want to know how they can get education and experience now so that they will become more able to be hired as a career firefighter either here or somewhere else (Belts – Missoula Rural FD).

Capitalism in the fire service bothers me. I think that people who would profit from the losses of others are wrong. In rural communities and smaller towns in this country I believe that the fire service should always be completely volunteer. Any grant money that goes to our department(s) should go to the entire department for things like training and personal protective equipment and not towards salary of any kind (Shindoll – Broadwater County).

The next set of questions and answers are from the second (more ambiguous) group.

Question: “Do the volunteers in your department receive any kind of economic compensation or other incentives for their efforts?”

We have a clothing allowance/reimbursement of up to \$30.00 per month based on whether or not a volunteer member shows up for training classes. We also have a committee set up that is looking into the idea of some sort of a stipend similar to the one that the department in Ronan currently has. The idea is that people who do more will be compensated more. This will

be a benefit for those who are here all the time. I am really big into the reward aspect. I believe that if you do more for the organization you should get more from the organization. I came from a volunteer department in New York that actually charged *me* \$60.00 a year just to be a volunteer member of the department. I think we are sending a good message to our volunteers by reimbursing them for clothing (Maloney – Polson VFD).

We do have worker's compensation insurance in the case of someone getting hurt but we don't get any kind of reimbursement for out-of-pocket expenses, or any opportunity to receive a retirement pension of any kind. Regardless of this lack of reimbursement or compensation we still seem to be doing quite well in this department. Most of us are already retired so the idea of an additional retirement pension doesn't really mean much (Heppell – Neihart VFD).

We do have some insurance coverage, worker's compensation, but we do not have the luxury of having a good retirement plan the way the bigger departments do. We just don't have a big enough tax base in a town the size of White Sulphur Springs (population ~1000). Actually, the retirement system right now in Montana is almost a joke. \$200.00 a month is nothing, but I suppose it could still be considered an incentive (Ohlson – White Sulphur Springs VFD).

Question: “Do you think some form of economic compensation is needed for the recruitment and retention of volunteers?”

They aren't here for the money. As a matter of fact, some of them won't even accept the reimbursement money for clothing when it's offered to them. We have a program for the installation of smoke alarms into homes that pays our volunteers \$20.00 for every alarm that they install. Many of them give the money right back to the organization. Most of them like the idea of being compensated in some way but it is not necessary... Overall, better management is really the key to good morale in a department, not economic compensation (Maloney – Polson VFD).

What I have seen is that economic incentives are usually 'second-tier' motivators. Stipends might be a good way to show appreciation but department camaraderie is more important to the volunteers (Galloway – Texas Forest Service).

Economic compensation has the potential to be an additional drawing item for department recruitment but I really don't know if it would help this department. We have a retirement plan that is in the works, possibly (Hansen – West Fork VFD).

Yes, I believe that reimbursement for out-of-pocket expenses and the opportunity for a retirement pension are needed for recruitment and retention. Compensation would be an added value to the department. These forms of compensation may attract some but our volunteers that are here now seem to enjoy volunteering because it is a needed service for the community. We (current volunteers) actually have it easier than most. We are a lot different than the poor guy trying to work, raise a young family and volunteer all at the same time. Right now the people in this department can afford the non-reimbursed expenses so our concerns are more with equipment and vehicles than issues like compensation (Heppell – Neihart VFD).

First of all, nobody is here (in this department) for the money. But I do believe that after 25 or 30 years of volunteer service a person should be compensated somehow. After all of the exposure to smoke and hazardous materials they should get *something* back. My biggest concern, personally, for these volunteers is that they are rewarded somehow for dedicating 25 to 30 years of their life to training, responding to accidents, and just the time spent away from their families for all those years. They do this because they believe in it and it would just be the right thing to do to thank them for their time and dedicated service (Ohlson – White Sulphur Springs VFD).

The department is new and for the first 6 months there was absolutely no economic compensation at all for any of the volunteers. This made recruiting very difficult initially. We wanted to be able to demonstrate to them that we cared about them and their service to the community so I approached the City Council and proposed to them the idea that we should compensate the volunteers somehow. The main reason for the compensation was for the required clothing and for the expense of gas. There were a few complaints about these things early on. Most of the volunteers would not have quit if the stipend were never put into place but it was just a good idea and there is a possibility that some of them may have eventually quit without it. Some other form of appreciation needed to be shown to them for the amount of time and effort that we were asking of them. There are some volunteers that definitely view the extra income as a strong incentive. Now that these incentives are in place, if they were for some reason taken away then most likely many of them would take it as a slap in the face and might walk away from the department (Vickers – Saratoga Springs VFD).

There were several additional comments gathered from survey respondents regarding the question of the necessity for economic compensation for the purposes of recruitment and retention. Comments from eight different departments are included here.

(Regarding granting some form of economic compensation to volunteers)
This is a complex question. Some compensation can help, but it can make recruitment and retention more difficult as well. (Red Lodge FD)

After the first 8 hours of a fire, some sort of pay would really make the job easier. But to drop everything, this only affects the person fighting the fires and no one else. People don't realize just how much time is spent in a season with no compensation. (Reed Point VFD)

I feel that we (volunteers) should be put on the payroll when we have to help the US Forest Service on a fire. We will go anytime, day or night, fight or put out fire on private or national forest land, strictly as volunteers without pay. However, I feel we should be paid. If we have to remain on scene after the Forest Service takes over, this would help defray the expense of running our fire trucks and also would give the individual firemen a few paid hours! Very nice after the hundreds of unpaid hours and unpaid miles driven with a fireman's own vehicle! Personally, I have paid for some of my own training, plus furnished some of my own tools. Actually, some of us furnished our own wildfire protective clothing. It's not too hard to see why new members are slow to sign up and older members, aged sixties and seventies (I'm 72) have to carry a lot of the load. (Libby VFD)

Since we all own property, property tax relief and/or income tax relief would be very welcome. (Winifred RFD)

Paying (people) for responses may result in incentives for some to set fires. (Harlem VFD)

It would be nice if there were (health insurance) programs that provided for families of the firefighters. (Rollins VFD)

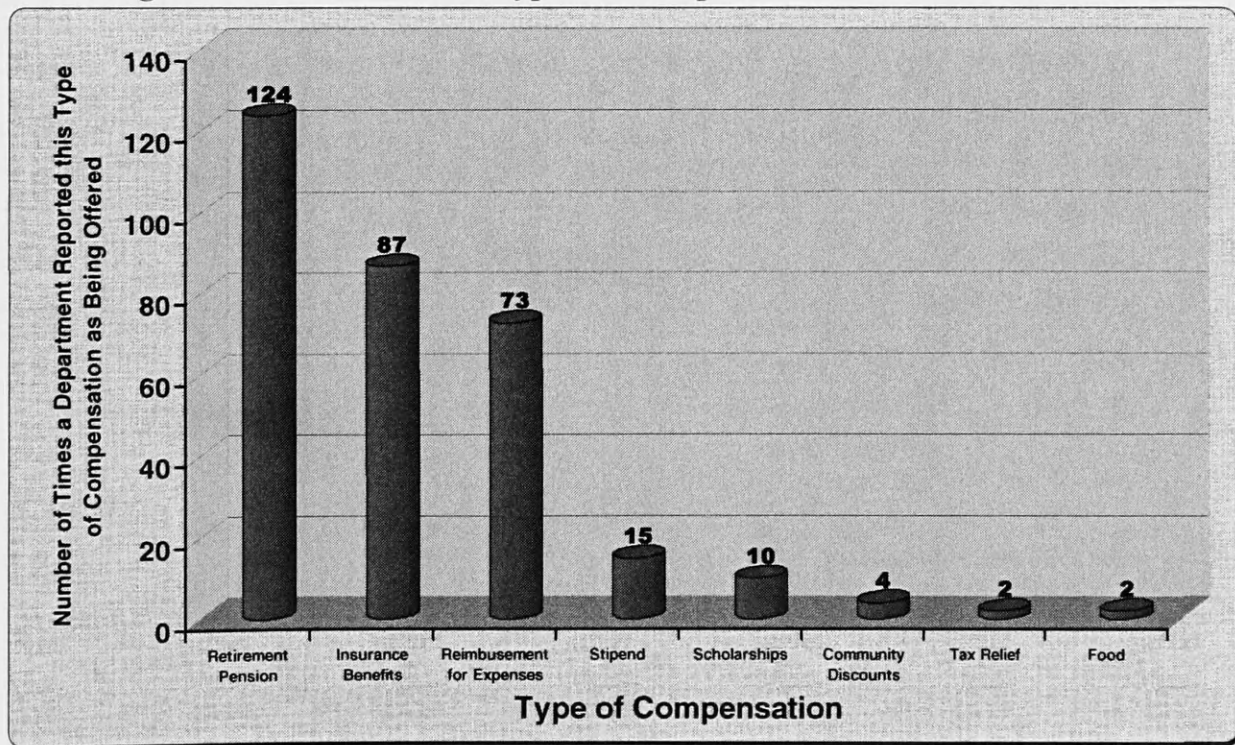
(Regarding whether or not some form of economic compensation is needed for recruitment and retention purposes) It would take substantial compensation to make any difference. (Bear Paw VFD)

(Regarding whether or not economic compensation is necessary and what is considered most valuable) A program that gives the volunteer firefighter tax relief at the bare minimum. They should not have to pay taxes on their homes for fire coverage, with all the time they donate to the fire service. (Lewis and Clark Co. FD)

Other Findings:

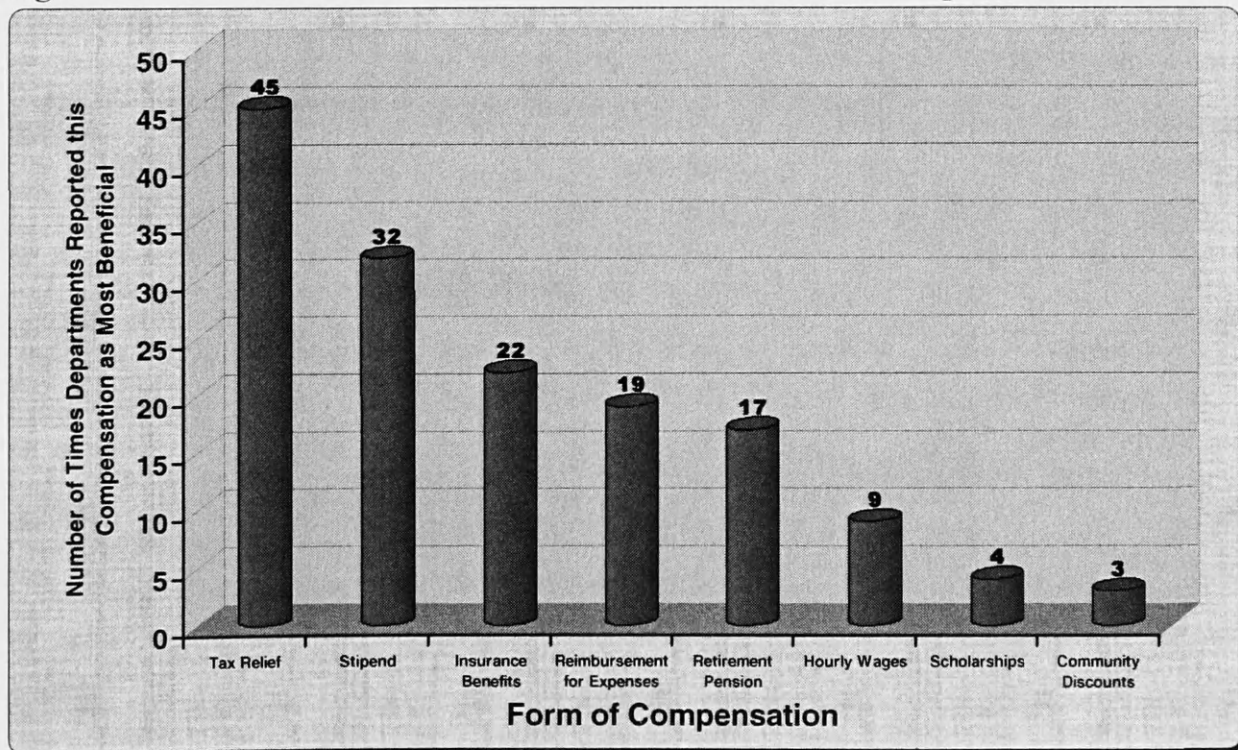
Of the 162 reporting departments that do offer some form of economic compensation to their volunteers (Figure 5), 124 departments (76%) offer the opportunity for a retirement pension after a certain length of activity, 87 departments (54%) offer some type of life or health insurance benefits such as worker's compensation, 73 departments (45%) offer reimbursement for travel expenses, required clothing, or other out-of-pocket expenses incurred by their volunteers, 15 departments (9%) offer some form of a stipend either for training or for responding to incidents, 10 departments (6%) offer scholarships and/or other opportunities for free or subsidized education, 4 departments (3%) offer (or have access to) discounts or free services from the local community, 2 departments (1%) enjoy some form of tax relief, and 2 departments (1%) offered free food or dinners to volunteers.

Figure 5. Most Common Types of Compensation Offered to Volunteers



Survey question 11 asked: “If yes (you believe some form of economic compensation is needed for recruitment and retention purposes), which form of economic compensation (of any kind) do you believe would be (or is) the most beneficial to the volunteers, or potential volunteer recruits, in your department?” Of the 126 departments who had previously answered “Yes” to question 10, about the need for economic compensation, 117 chose to answer the following question about the “most beneficial” form of compensation (Figure 6). Most respondents gave multiple answers to this open-ended question and thus only total numbers of responses, rather than percentages, are reported. Tax relief was most commonly listed as “most beneficial” compensation with 45 total mentions. Tax relief was followed by a stipend for training or call responses (32 mentions). Insurance benefits was third most commonly mentioned (22 mentions) followed by reimbursement for expenses (19 mentions), a retirement pension (17 mentions), hourly wages (9 mentions), scholarships (4 mentions), and community discounts (3 mentions).

Figure 6. What is Considered the Most Beneficial Form of Compensation?



Research Question 4: Where does the recruitment and retention of volunteers fit into the overall needs and priorities of fire departments in Montana?

Survey question #36 asked respondents to rank (by circling) on an “importance scale” of 1 to 5 (1 being most important and 5 being least important) eight different categories of priorities or issues that a fire department would most likely deal with on a daily or weekly basis. This question was designed to show where the two separate and distinct issues of 1) new volunteer personnel recruitment, and 2) current volunteer personnel retention, fit into the overall needs and priorities of these surveyed departments. Generally speaking, if a particular category consistently received a ranking/score closer to 1.00 it can be assumed this is an issue either problematic for many departments and/or an issue that causes tension or difficulty. Thus, a department would most likely consider this issue a higher priority on a list of issues that require attention and/or department resources. A total of 286 volunteer and combination departments (80.6% of the total population) chose to respond to this question. There were three instances of item nonresponse within certain categories of these 286 respondent answers.

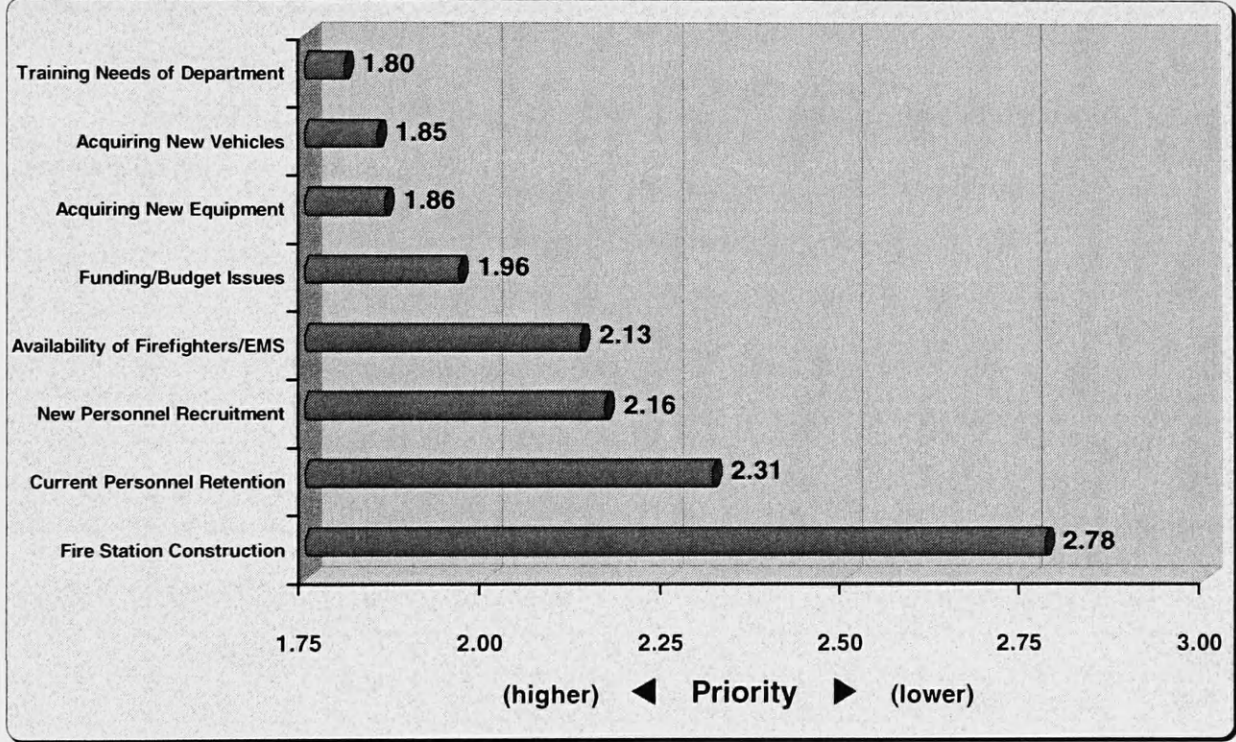
Table 2. Priorities/Issues of Importance to Fire Departments

Priority/Issue			very				very
Category:	n	mean*	high	high	medium	low	low
Training Needs	286	1.80	43%	37%	16%	2%	1%
Acquiring New Vehicles	286	1.85	50%	24%	18%	7%	1%
Acquiring New Equipment	285	1.86	49%	27%	16%	5%	3%
Funding/Budget Issues	286	1.96	41%	33%	19%	5%	3%
Availability of Firefighters	285	2.13	35%	34%	19%	6%	5%
New Personnel Recruitment	286	2.16	35%	31%	22%	6%	6%
Current Personnel Retention	285	2.31	28%	31%	27%	9%	5%
Fire Station Construction	286	2.78	33%	15%	15%	17%	20%

*Scale: 1= very high priority, 2= high priority, 3= medium priority, 4= low priority, 5= very low priority

Results shown in Table 2 and Figure 7 indicate, by examining the mean score of each category, that the issues of recruitment and retention actually rank 6th and 7th out of the eight priority/issue categories. On average, training needs seem to be the highest overall priority for volunteer and combination departments, followed closely by issues pertaining to acquiring new equipment and new vehicles for the department. As shown by these data, *all* the issues presented here are important to volunteer and combination departments in Montana.

Figure 7. Mean Ranking of Overall Department Priorities and Issues



Tables 3, 4, 5 and Figure 8 indicate that overall the western region of the state seems to place a higher overall priority on the dual issues of recruitment and retention than the other two regions. The central and western regions place the highest overall priority on training needs while in the eastern region it was placed third in priority. The issue of fire station construction is the lowest overall priority for all three regions.

Table 3. Priorities/Issues of Importance to Western Region Fire Departments

Priority/Issue			very				very
Category:	n	mean*	high	high	medium	low	low
Training Needs	118	1.78	46%	36%	14%	5%	0%
Acquiring New Vehicles	118	1.85	49%	26%	16%	8%	1%
New Personnel Recruitment	118	1.90	42%	32%	20%	3%	2%
Acquiring New Equipment	118	1.92	45%	30%	15%	8%	2%
Funding/Budget Issues	118	1.93	38%	39%	15%	7%	1%
Availability of Firefighters	117	2.05	38%	35%	17%	5%	5%
Current Personnel Retention	118	2.19	31%	33%	25%	9%	2%
Fire Station Construction	118	2.65	36%	16%	14%	15%	19%

Table 4. Priorities and Issues of Importance to Central Region Fire Departments

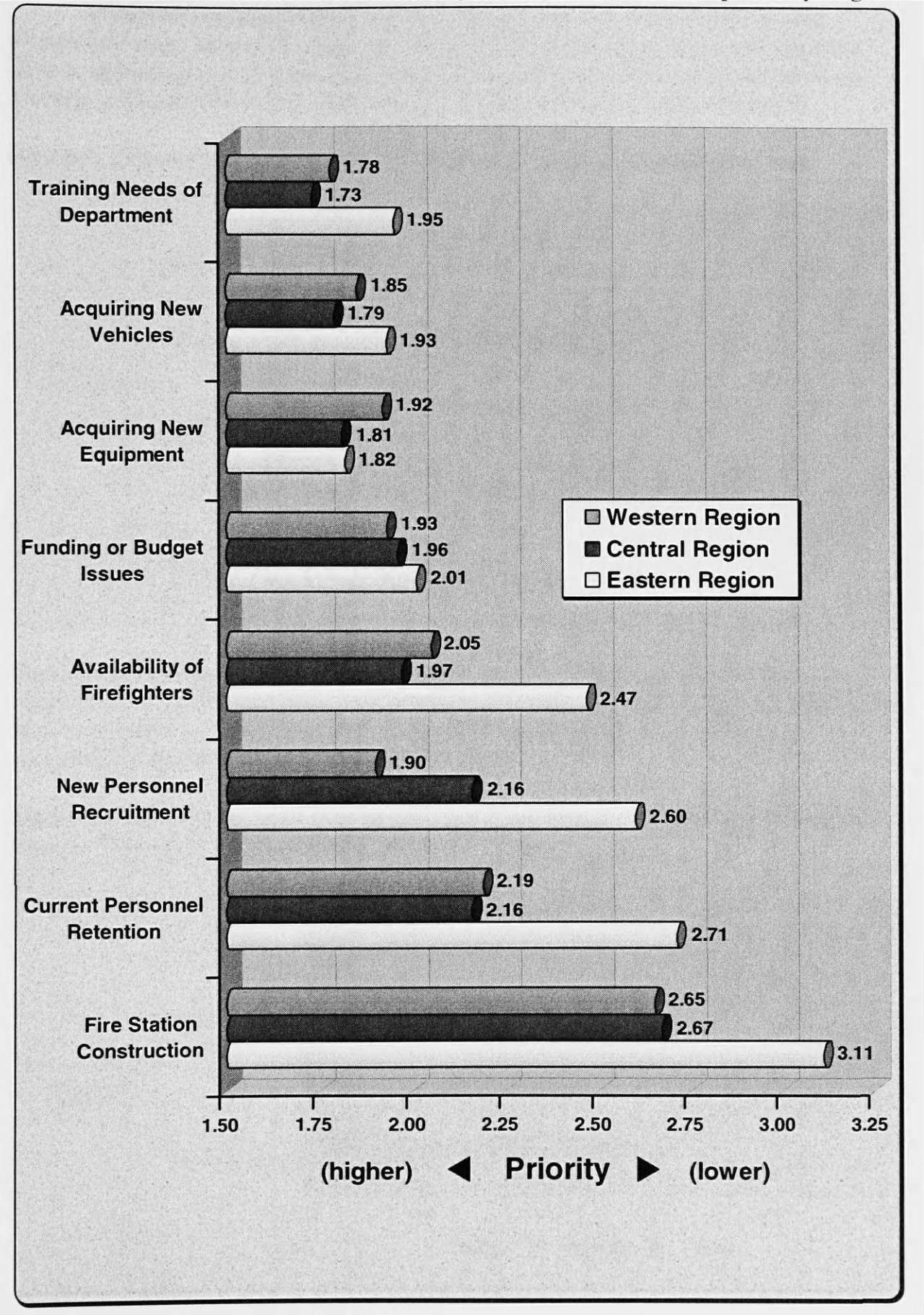
Priority/Issue			very				very
Category:	n	mean*	high	high	medium	low	low
Training Needs	95	1.73	47%	35%	17%	0%	1%
Acquiring New Vehicles	95	1.79	54%	22%	17%	6%	1%
Acquiring New Equipment	94	1.81	55%	19%	18%	4%	3%
Funding/Budget Issues	95	1.96	45%	23%	25%	3%	3%
Availability of Firefighters	95	1.97	45%	25%	20%	6%	3%
New Personnel Recruitment	95	2.16	37%	28%	23%	5%	6%
Current Personnel Retention	94	2.16	36%	29%	24%	4%	6%
Fire Station Construction	95	2.67	36%	16%	15%	13%	21%

Table 5. Priorities and Issues of Importance to Eastern Region Fire Departments

Priority/Issue			very				very
Category:	n	mean*	high	high	medium	low	low
Acquiring New Equipment	73	1.82	47%	33%	16%	0%	4%
Acquiring New Vehicles	73	1.93	48%	22%	22%	5%	3%
Training Needs	73	1.95	34%	44%	18%	1%	3%
Funding/Budget Issues	73	2.01	38%	37%	15%	4%	5%
Availability of Firefighters	73	2.47	16%	45%	22%	8%	8%
New Personnel Recruitment	73	2.60	19%	34%	25%	11%	11%
Current Personnel Retention	73	2.71	15%	30%	32%	15%	8%
Fire Station Construction	73	3.11	25%	11%	15%	27%	22%

*Scale: 1= very high priority, 2= high priority, 3= medium priority, 4= low priority, 5= very low priority

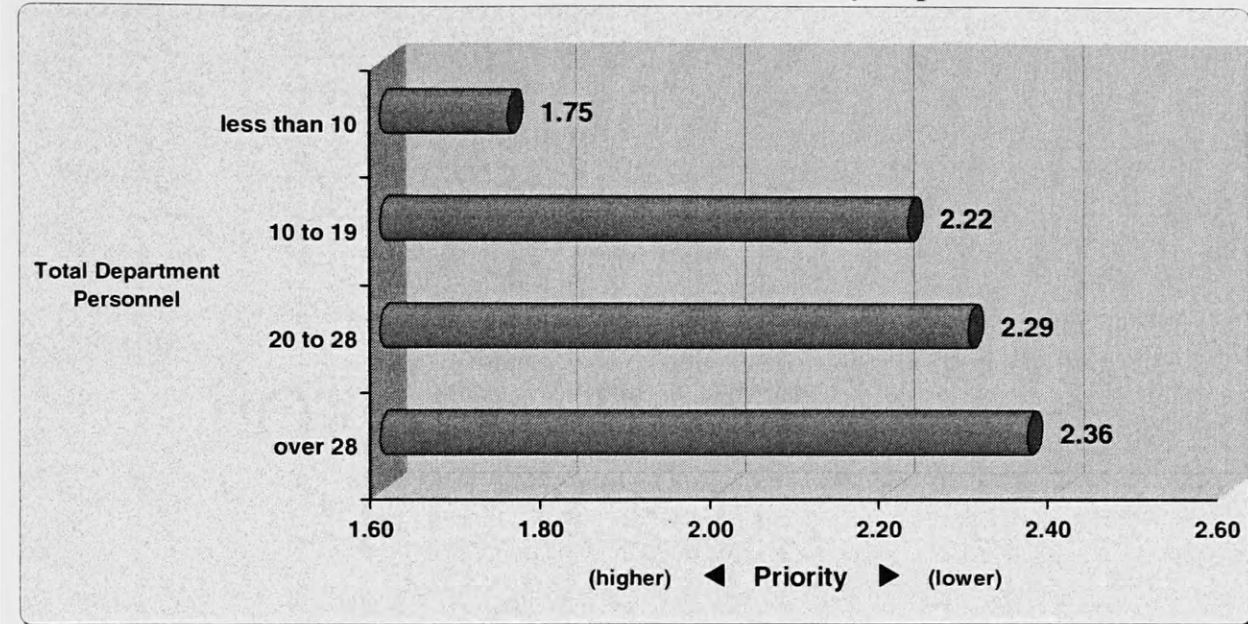
Figure 8. Volunteer/Combination Fire Department Priorities Compared by Region



Other Findings:

Volunteer fire departments with less than 10 total members (6.3% of total population) place an overall higher priority on the issues of recruitment and retention than do departments with more personnel. These priorities also seem to diminish, on average, as the number of total personnel in the department increases (Figure 9).

Figure 9. Priority of Recruitment and Retention Issues by Department Size



Departments that have recently lost personnel place an overall higher priority on the issues of recruitment and retention than do departments who have either had no change in their total number of personnel within the past year or departments who have gained personnel during the past year (Figure 10).

Figure 10. Priority of Recruitment and Retention Issues of Departments based on Gain or Loss of Personnel during 2003

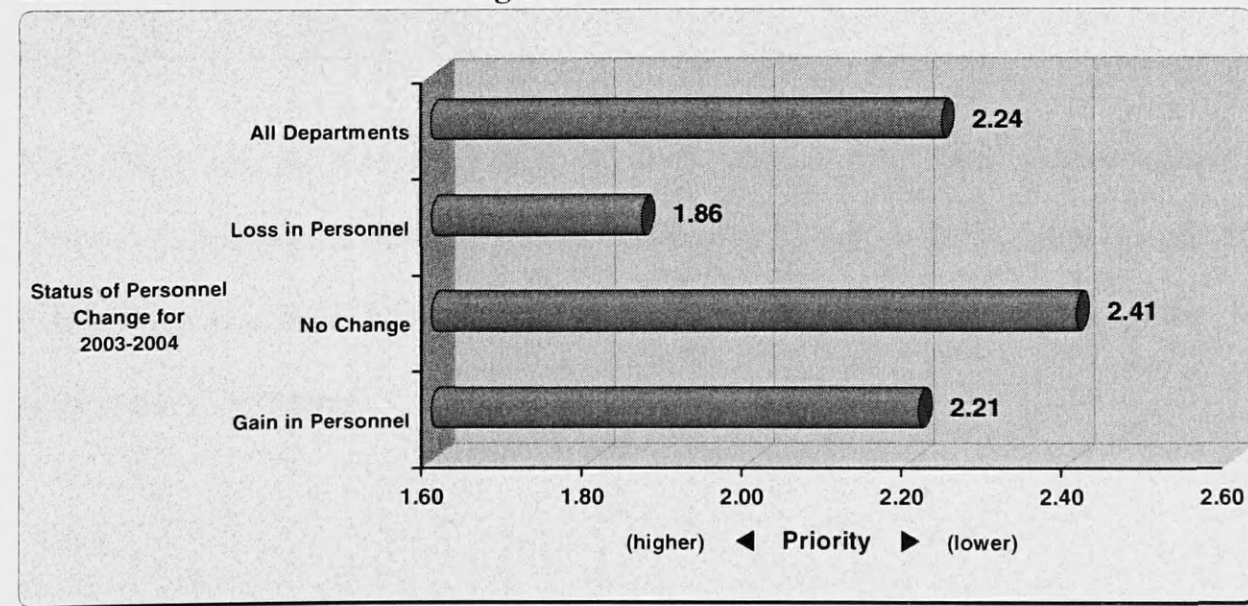


Table 6. Chi-Square Analysis: Rating of Sufficiency vs. Economic Compensation

Question: Is the current amount of total volunteer personnel sufficient for the needs of your department during an average year?					
		Rating of Sufficiency			
		Very Sufficient	Somewhat Sufficient	Not at all Sufficient	Row Subtotals
Question:	Answer:				
Do any of the volunteers in your dept. receive any form(s) of economic compensation?	None	30	75	16	121
	Yes 1	14	43	5	62
	Yes 2	11	39	4	54
	Yes 3	5	29	1	35
	Yes 4	1	5	3	9
	Yes 5	0	1	0	1
Column Subtotals		61	192	29	282

$H_0 =$ There is **no** association between a departments ability to maintain sufficient numbers of volunteer personnel and whether or not (and how much) their volunteers receive compensation

 $H_1 =$ There **is** an association between a departments ability to maintain sufficient numbers of volunteer personnel and whether or not (and how much) their volunteers receive compensation

Reject H_0 if $X^2_c > X^2(10, 0.05) = \mathbf{18.31}$

$X^2_c = \mathbf{12.37}$

We will reject H_1 and accept H_0 (Table 6). There seems to be no significant association between a department's ability to maintain sufficient numbers of volunteer personnel and whether or not, or how much, any form of economic compensation is provided by the department to volunteers.

Table 7. Chi-Square Analysis: Recent Gain or Loss of Volunteer Personnel vs. Economic Compensation

Question: Has there been a net gain or loss of total volunteer personnel during the past year?					
Net Gain or Loss of Volunteers					
Question:	Answer:	No			Row
		Gain	Change	Loss	Subtotals
Do any of the volunteers in your dept. receive any form(s) of economic compensation?	None	37	62	21	120
	Yes 1	28	26	9	63
	Yes 2	21	22	11	54
	Yes 3	13	13	9	35
	Yes 4	6	2	1	9
	Yes 5	0	1	0	1
	Column Subtotals	105	126	51	282

H_0 = There is **no** association between a departments ability to recruit and retain volunteer personnel and whether or not (and how much) their volunteers receive compensation

 H_1 = There **is** an association between a departments ability to recruit and retain volunteer personnel and whether or not (and how much) their volunteers receive compensation

 Reject H_0 if $X^2_c > X^2(10, 0.05) = 18.31$

 $X^2_c = 9.51$

We will reject H_1 and accept H_0 (Table 7). There seems to be no significant association between a department's ability to recruit and retain volunteer personnel and whether or not, or how much, any form of economic compensation is provided by the department to volunteers.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter will summarize the major findings of each of the four research questions and discuss the meanings and possible management implications of each. Other research and findings, previously mentioned in the literature review will be compared with the findings of this study. The final section of this chapter will provide suggestions for further research needs.

Major Findings

Does Montana reflect the national trend in a declining number of active fire department volunteers?

The results of this study show the total number of active volunteers in the state increased during the year 2003 at a rate of 4.3 percent. This is in direct contrast to other recent studies conducted by FEMA, USFA, and the NFPA (2002) who predicted nationwide losses of volunteers ranging from 3 to 12.5 percent between 1983 and 2002. Montana seems to be faring much better than other western states such as Oregon where the situation there has been described as: "Finding and keeping good volunteers has become a losing battle" and 75 percent of all departments in the state have either recently lost volunteers or merely maintained their numbers (The Register Guard, Eugene, Oregon 2003). While it would be easy to assume that Montana is also experiencing the same recruitment and retention problems as Oregon and the rest of the nation, there is the distinct possibility that Montana is still a place where volunteer fire departments will flourish and continue to grow. Chief Ron Ehli of the Hamilton Volunteer Fire Department had this to say about the different atmosphere found in Montana:

Nationwide it is going to be harder to recruit volunteers but not in Montana and not in Ravalli County. The Bitterroot Valley is still a rural community and it is still respected here to be a firefighter.

Chief Otto Ohlson of the White Sulphur Springs Volunteer Fire Department also speaking about the distinction of the state said:

I also believe that in this faster-paced society we live in, the whole idea of volunteerism is now thought of as less important, in general. I think Montana is going to be different than the majority of states in the U.S. because we are still considered a rural state and we are more isolated from the rest of the country. There is a unique attitude among the people in Montana. In these small towns the idea of volunteering your time remains important to a lot of people.

Note that both men, while describing Montana as being different from other places, used the word “rural.” Chief Ehli connected this rural atmosphere with respect for firefighters and Chief Ohlson connected small town life with the idea that volunteering is still considered important. Assuming these things to be true one could then make the assumption that in a state like Oregon, and specifically the City of Eugene (2002 population: 140,395); being a volunteer firefighter is either losing some of its luster or is quite possibly considered by many to be *less* important than it once was. If Montana is truly more “isolated” from the rest of the country then it would make sense to assume that the rural atmosphere is rapidly giving way to urban areas in other places, like Eugene, Oregon, at a much faster rate than a city like White Sulphur Springs, Montana. Speaking directly on this topic of a changing atmosphere in what once was considered a small town, Chief Lindstrom of the Missoula Rural Fire District said:

The true spirit of community exists in small towns but Missoula is different. It’s too big now. People don’t feel the same sense of ownership for a place like Missoula. The population is too transient and diverse and no longer like the small town it was in 1960.

Comparing the rural community (750 residents) of West Fork to Missoula; Chief Hansen states: “The volunteers in West Fork are different from the volunteers in some places, like Missoula for example, because once they’re here, they’re here to stay.”

Chief Maloney agrees with this sentiment when describing his own community: “Polson is changing and it is becoming more like Missoula. It is less rural and the sense of community is not really there in general anymore.” Chief Waters: “As a place like Belgrade or Bozeman grows and the population becomes more transient the sense of community is lost.” There is a consensus of opinion here. As a community’s population increases, it eventually gets to a point where it will “outgrow” its need and appreciation for a volunteer fire department. This sense of community, spoken of so often by these fire chiefs seems to slip away as the population grows. Using Missoula, Belgrade or Bozeman as examples of this phenomenon, one can then make the assumption that like Oregon, if Montana continues to grow it may soon also come to the point of “fighting a losing battle” when it comes to keeping its force of volunteer firefighters. Montana may be on the brink of change, but for now the situation seems positive.

It is important to note that there is currently little or no consensus among fire departments in Montana on what constitutes the definition of an “active” firefighter (see Appendix B). Therefore, whatever conclusions are drawn in this report are based on data gathered from departments that each have their own separate and distinct definitions of the word and presumably answered survey questions #5 and #6 using their own definition. It is difficult to make a direct comparison to other studies that asked this same basic question regarding how many active firefighters there are currently in the department due to this difference of opinion and interpretation. There is even the very

distinct possibility that data provided by Montana fire departments for this survey and report represent a distorted and/or an exaggerated reality.

What are the motivations behind volunteering for a fire department?

Montana's volunteers seem to be highly motivated by factors such as a strong sense of community, a desire to help others, and the desire to obtain training and/or education which in some cases may advance the individual's career goals in the fire service. The findings of this study show that there is a combination of both altruistic motivations (centered on others) and egoistic motivations (centered on oneself) to be found within the ranks of Montana's volunteer fire service (Gidron 1978, Fuertes and Jiminez 2000). The need for excitement, brotherhood, camaraderie, and a sense of belonging to a worthwhile organization are also strong motivators for many. The five different motives spoken of by Omoto and Snyder (1995) that help to explain the behavior of volunteers (values, knowledge, personal development, esteem enhancement, and community concern) all seem to be very well represented by fire department volunteers in Montana. The study also concludes with most of Parker's (1997) findings that volunteers are motivated by altruistic, economic, cause-serving, and leisure reasons. There is no evidence to conclude that any of the fire department volunteers in Montana are engaged in fire service activities as a way to spend leisure time. As a matter of fact, according to Hull (Texas Forest Service) and Vickers (Saratoga Springs) the job is "not a hobby" and the days of drinking beer and shooting pool at the fire station are very quickly becoming activities of the past. This is due to a greater expectation from the public and because there is now so much more expected from a volunteer fire department. According to Waters (Belgrade): "Our department is not run like a social

club. It is a very professional emergency services organization and we consider all of our members to be professionals.” To a somewhat lesser degree, some volunteers are motivated by the desire to recreate a military-type atmosphere that is now missing in their lives, and others were motivated by very specific events in their personal lives such as seeing a loved-one rescued by firefighters or a community-wide event like a threatening fire. Of the five theoretical models of volunteer work developed by Thoits and Hewitt (2001) the first model, known as the “volunteer motivations model”, is the best way to categorize the findings of this study. The volunteer motivations model emphasizes individuals’ motivations for or goals in volunteering and theorizes that people give service for several different reasons. Some of those being: to learn new skills or prepare for a new career, to enhance one’s self-esteem, to express personal values, or to make a commitment to the community. All of these findings seem to agree with Clary et al. (1996) that people will become involved in volunteer work in order to satisfy socio-psychological goals and those goals will vary widely, even among people involved in very similar activities.

Does economic compensation, in its various forms, increase a fire department’s ability to recruit and retain volunteers and should it be considered a necessity?

The idea of economic compensation being a necessity for volunteer firefighters in Montana is still inconclusive. Forty-five percent of all departments surveyed stated yes, it was indeed necessary for the recruitment and retention of volunteers within their respective departments. Twenty-seven percent of the surveyed departments stated no, economic compensation was not necessary and twenty-eight percent indicated they were not sure. Upon further examination into this matter, through the process of in-depth

interviews it now seems clearer that economic compensation is not the driving force behind the motivations of *most* volunteer firefighters in the state of Montana. Economic compensation is definitely on the list of motivations, especially for certain types of people, but it does not seem to rank above previously mentioned motivating factors such as concern for the community or the desire to help others. There also seems to be no obvious or identifiable link between economic compensation and a Montana fire department's ability to successfully recruit and retain volunteers. Departments in other states such as Virginia, Oregon, New York, Missouri and Iowa have all made different attempts to provide some form of economic compensation to their volunteer firefighters but results are mixed and inconclusive. In Virginia it was found there was no significant difference between volunteer turnover/departure rates in departments with worker's compensation insurance and those with none (Virginia Legislative Document Summary 2001). In Oregon, research has found no single reason solely responsible for a decline in volunteer firefighters but it seems more likely that it is related to lack of time among residents and a lack of community spirit more so than any reason related to economic compensation (The Register Guard – Eugene, Oregon 2003). A report published in the state of New York concluded that excessive time demands on volunteers was the single greatest factor related to the loss of volunteers. While granting economic incentives to volunteers was mentioned as a way to address this problem it was not thought of as the only possible solution (Genesee County 2001). Recruitment techniques in Missouri were aimed at attracting people who had a desire to help others, had a sense of community, and wanted to learn new skills. Economic incentives are a part of this recruitment effort but are mentioned more as a bonus or an afterthought rather than as a main selling point

(Schaeffer 2001). A random survey of 870 volunteer fire departments in the state of Iowa revealed that while 42 percent of these departments compensated their volunteers in some way for their efforts, only 20 percent of all surveyed volunteer firefighters in the state thought they would be better firefighters if they were paid (Fire Service Institute ISU Extension 1996). Montana's situation is similar to these previously mentioned states. There are several other more important factors related to recruitment and retention, not related to economic incentives, which affect a department's ability to maintain an adequate staff of fire department volunteers. In the words of Chief Lindstrom (Missoula Rural FD) speaking about his staff of volunteers: "I can't get anybody to work for me by handing them one-hundred dollar bills." Galloway (Texas Forest Service) adds: "What I have seen is that economic incentives are usually 'second-tier' motivators. Stipends might be a good way to show appreciation but department camaraderie is more important to volunteers." Chief Shindoll (Broadwater County) sums up the answer to this question: "Our volunteers might *like* to have some compensation but they don't really seem to be worried about it."

Where does the recruitment and retention of volunteers fit into the overall needs and priorities of fire departments in Montana?

Due to the fact that the number of volunteers in Montana is assumed to be increasing at a healthy rate, it would only make sense then that the issues of recruitment and retention are much lower on a priority list than training issues, the need for equipment and vehicles, funding and budget issues of the department, and the availability of personnel during emergency situations. The only issue ranking lower, on average, than the issues of recruitment and retention was the need for fire station construction.

On a regional level, departments located in the western portion of the state of Montana place a higher overall priority (combined average) on the dual issues of recruitment and retention than do the other two regions. The western region is the fastest growing region in terms of total population growth (1.32%) and departments there are most likely finding it more difficult to keep up with the protection of a rapidly expanding wildland-urban interface. Western departments gained new volunteer personnel at the lowest overall rate (2.75%) when compared to the eastern region (2.91%) and the central region (7.43%). This slower growth rate for new personnel, coupled with the highest regional population growth rate in the state is most likely what is driving the concern for the issues of recruitment and retention higher for departments in the western region.

Based on size, fire departments with less than 10 total members place an overall higher priority on the issues of recruitment and retention than do departments with more personnel. These priorities also seem to diminish, on average, as the number of total personnel in the department increases.

Departments that have recently lost personnel place an overall higher priority on the issues of recruitment and retention than do departments who have either had no change in their total number of personnel within the past year or departments who have gained personnel during the past year. Departments who have recently gained personnel place a higher priority on recruitment and retention than departments who have maintained their personnel numbers most likely due to the idea that if a department is currently increasing its numbers; the department is probably actively *seeking* new recruits and thus the issue is currently a higher priority. Many departments who have seen no recent fluctuation in total personnel may not be actively seeking new personnel and may

have possibly reached a limit or equilibrium in their department's personnel needs. It should also be noted that an unknown number of departments currently maintain a waiting list for new volunteers wanting to become members of the department. These departments probably have very little concern currently for the issues of recruitment and retention and would also be experiencing no recent fluctuation in their total number of volunteer personnel.

Management Implications

Statewide, the definition of what actually constitutes an "active" firefighter needs to be addressed and a consensus on this matter needs to be reached by most departments at some point in the near future. This study seems to demonstrate quite clearly that the total number of active volunteers in Montana is growing at a healthy rate (as reported by the fire departments themselves) but if indeed these numbers are over inflated by a definition of "active" that is too lenient or inconsistent, then a false sense of security may actually be the final result. Lawmakers, politicians, resource managers, government agencies, and the general public in this state would not be served well by the incorrect assumption that there are more active firefighters and/or EMTs willing and able to respond to emergency situations than there actually are available. The statistics and information presented in this study are merely a reflection of the subjective opinions of those who chose to participate in the survey process. The overall assumption should be that these opinions and observations are based on knowledge, experience and the good intentions of well-meaning and dedicated individuals who care about their departments and the people that they serve. Nevertheless, the fact does remain that an individual who may be defined as an active member of one fire department could very well be classified

as just a “name in the books” in a neighboring department, based on a different set of criteria for defining active/non-active volunteer status. In terms of setting up a strict criterion for what should constitute this definition, training hours per year seems to be the best starting point. Thirty hours per year, or an average of 2.5 hours per month, of organized/group training sessions per individual seems to be the most reasonable and most agreed upon standard. Defining a volunteer’s activity status based on percentage of call response is a more problematic approach to solving this dilemma. Total number of incidents per year for the different departments in Montana will range from 0 to over 1500, with some departments covering hundreds of square miles within their primary response area. Some departments also experience huge summertime increases in non-permanent residents. The West Yellowstone (combination) Volunteer Fire Department reported 335 total incidents for the year 2003, covers an area of 750 square miles, report an annual summertime population increase of 8,800 non-permanent residents (733% above permanent population of 1200) and all incident responses are currently handled by a total of 15 firefighters. In complete contrast to the West Yellowstone department, the Sedan Rural Fire District (located approximately 20 miles north of Bozeman) reported no incidents for 2003, covers an area of 40 square miles, protects a total of 64 residents, have no summertime increase in population and currently have 10 volunteer firefighters in the department. As seen by these two completely different sets of circumstances involving differences in call volume, size of primary response area, permanent/non-permanent population, and available volunteers; judging a volunteer’s activity status based on call response is not only unrealistic, it is also unfair. Regardless of call volume, population, etc., departments will have much greater control over how much training is

offered to their members and the volunteers themselves should also have more control over their own number of training hours during a given year.

Even though it has been shown that almost half of all volunteer fire department fire chiefs in the state consider economic compensation necessary, there seems to be no direct link between volunteer recruitment/retention and economic compensation. There are several other motivating factors that seem to have a greater effect on volunteer firefighters, but there is still enough evidence to consider the idea of economic compensation a valuable (if not necessary) part of an overall effort to recruit and retain volunteers. If training needs are indeed the single greatest overall issue and priority of volunteer fire departments in Montana then it would seem appropriate to combine the ideas of compensation with the need for training in the form of granting stipends for attending organized training classes. This would not only encourage more training but might also help to alleviate what Fuertes and Jiminez (2000) and chiefs Ehli (Hamilton) and Maloney (Polson) describe as volunteer "burnout." Second only to tax relief, stipends were considered by departments to be most highly beneficial. By combining training with the opportunity to receive a stipend, an effective incentive to meet minimum requirements for training can be created. Chief Maloney states that "paying people to train is not really going to solve the problem", and according to both Chief Waters (Belgrade) and Chief Shindoll (Broadwater County) both agree that granting economic compensation to volunteers might attract people they consider to be less valuable to their departments. Therefore, this idea of stipends for training should be considered as a gesture of goodwill but care should be taken that the idea is not overdone or abused so

that it becomes considered by some to be extra income or that training is a way to make extra money while attempting to avoid responding to emergency calls.

It also seems that, if at all possible, all departments should at least have some form of health insurance, worker's compensation in case of an accident on the job, or the possibility of a retirement fund for active volunteers. As Chief Ohlson (White Sulphur Springs) states:

I do believe that after 25 or 30 years of volunteer service a person should be compensated somehow. After all the exposure to smoke and hazardous materials they should get *something* back. My biggest concern, personally, for these volunteers is that they are rewarded somehow for dedicating 25 or 30 years of their life to training, responding to accidents, and just the time spent away from their families.

Gillespie and King (1985) and Fuertes and Jiminez (2000) all agree that volunteers' motivations often change over time with age, length of service, marriage status, etc., and the ideas of health insurance and a retirement pension will seem more valuable to a married individual at age 40 than they would to the same unmarried individual at age 20.

Further Research Needs

The idea of economic compensation for volunteer firefighters and its overall value to them is an important one, and deserves the attention of future research. Through this study it has been found that tax relief, in its various different forms, was mentioned more often than any other form of economic compensation as being "most beneficial" to volunteers. Despite this, it is virtually non-existent among departments and mentioned only twice as a form of compensation currently being offered to volunteers. Other possible research question might include: Have departments in other states attempted to make this form of compensation available to fire department volunteers? Were they

successful in meeting recruitment and retention objectives and was tax relief considered responsible in any way in this success?

Socioeconomic factors such as income, education and unemployment and their relationship to volunteerism were originally considered as an objective of this study. Because of the depth of the topic and the wealth of information from previous studies it was eventually determined that objectives related to socioeconomics was well beyond the scope of this study. Wilson and Musick's (1997) research regarding the definition of "formal" volunteering also briefly discusses the relationship between education and income and the propensity of an individual to participate in volunteer service. According to Thompson (1993); "Volunteer firefighters are more likely than other members of their community to have graduated from high school but less likely to have a college degree." Gaining a greater understanding of what socioeconomic groups are more likely to volunteer their time for a fire department would prove to be very valuable for the purposes of recruitment and retention. This information could assist recruiters of volunteers in deciding where to direct efforts and place funding for programs.

Further research in the area of fire department volunteers could greatly benefit from a study more focused on the rank and file volunteers themselves, rather than just the fire chiefs. Are their answers to the same questions asked of the leaders of the departments similar, or is there a significant difference in how they feel about these same issues? A study more focused on the volunteers as a sample population could allow a researcher to determine the average age of Montana's volunteer firefighters and compare these finding to those of FEMA, USFA and NFPA (2002) where it was found that the

current percentage of firefighters at age 40 or higher has increased from 36 to 44 percent since 1986.

Finally, this study either in all or in part of its entirety could be repeated again at a future date. As stated previously in the Methods chapter, in regards to limitation and weaknesses of the study, this survey instrument was designed to only gather data from a one-year time period (see pg. 53 of this report). All findings in this study could be compared to an identical study done in 5 years, 10 years, etc., in order to track changes in total volunteer personnel in the state. A comparative study could also be undertaken in another state in order to make comparisons of volunteers and volunteer fire departments with those in Montana, possibly in a region that is known to be losing volunteer fire department personnel.

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APPENDIX A: 2004 State of Montana Fire Department Survey with all Correspondence to Fire Departments

Pre-Notice Letter – Initial Contact:

January 5, 2004

Chief John Deere
999 John Deere Road
John Deere, Montana 59416

Dear Chief:

A few days from now you will receive in the mail a request to fill out a survey questionnaire very similar to the one that was sent to all fire departments in the state of Montana in October 2002.

This new survey will ask many questions that are similar to the previous one but will be much more concise. Questions you will be asked this time will be easier to understand with a better explanation of intent, have been pared down to only those that are most necessary and essential, and in most cases will require only a simple yes or no answer. For the purpose of a research project currently being undertaken at the University of Montana in Missoula there will also be a few additional questions regarding the issues of recruitment and retention of volunteers.

We are writing in advance because we knew that you would appreciate being told ahead of time that you would be contacted. The information that will be gathered with this survey is important. It will help government agencies better understand the needs of your department and will mean a more efficient and proper dispersal of grant money and assistance. This is also a way for us to determine whether your expectations of us are being met and how we can improve our service to you and your department.

We thank you for your time and continued patience with this survey process. We learned a great deal from the last questionnaire and we believe that we have put those lessons to good use in this second attempt. As always, your help and cooperation are vital and necessary and we appreciate all of the hard work and service that fire departments like yours provide to the citizens of this great state of Montana.

Sincerely,

Michael W. Wiederhold
Rural Fire Program Coordinator

P.S. With this new survey we will be providing a self-addressed/stamped envelope for you to return the questionnaire to us. We apologize for overlooking this simple courtesy last time.

Survey Cover Letter – Second Contact:

January 9, 2004

Chief John Deere
999 John Deere Road
John Deere, Montana 59416

Dear Chief:

As per the letter you received from us a few days ago, enclosed is the 2004 Montana Fire Department Needs Analysis Survey.

The information we are attempting to obtain from your fire department will have a direct impact on the future of the fire service in the state of Montana. The information that you provide will be a complement to the 2002 FEMA/USFA and NFPA Needs Assessment of the U.S. Fire Service. The National Association of State Foresters intends to present a final report with data collected from every state to a congressional committee later this year.

To ensure the validity of the data collected, please be sure to include only information that is directly related to your individual department. Do not include information from other departments within your county and/or fire councils as they will also be receiving a copy of this same questionnaire.

We will publish the results from this survey in its entirety on the DNRC Fire and Aviation website but we will not publicly identify any of your individual answers or comments. We will keep all returned survey forms on file here in the DNRC offices in Missoula and will only use this information whenever necessary. We will not distribute or make copies of your questionnaire for any other use.

Again, we thank you for your time and attention to this continuing survey process. We realize that you have many other important and pressing issues that demand a great deal of your time. For these reasons we are allowing until **March 16, 2004**, to collect all data for our final analysis. This represents a period of roughly 9 weeks from the time you have received this survey until then. We anticipate that the entire questionnaire should take no more than 90 minutes of your time to complete.

Sincerely,

Michael W. Wiederhold
Rural Fire Program Coordinator

P.S. Please don't hesitate to call us with questions, concerns, or for any other reason at 542-4206. We will be happy to assist you in any way because we believe that this survey is important and we want to make sure that all questions are interpreted the same way by all departments. We also want to ensure that the results of this survey are truly representative of the fire service in Montana.

Postcard – Third Contact:

February 2, 2004

About three weeks ago a questionnaire/survey seeking information about your fire department was mailed to you. This survey is part of a nationwide effort to obtain very valuable data that will be used by the National Association of State Foresters in a report to Congress later this year.

If you have already completed and returned the survey to us, please accept our sincere thanks. If not, we ask that you please take the time to fill it out and return it to us in the self-addressed stamped envelope that was included in the package with the survey.

If you did not receive a copy of the survey, or if it has been misplaced, please give us a call at 542-4206 and we will send another one to you in the mail right away.

As of today, more than 30% of the surveys have been returned, which is a good response rate for just three weeks time. In order for us to turn in a robust statistical analysis to the NASF we are hoping to get at least an 85% response rate. Your information is a very important part of that overall percentage. We thank you again for your time and consideration.

Michael W. Wiederhold
Rural Fire Program Coordinator
Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation

Cover Letter with Second Mailing of Survey – Fourth Contact:

February 23, 2004

Chief John Deere
999 John Deere Road
John Deere, Montana 59416

Dear Chief:

The reason we are contacting you again is because we have not received a response yet from your department regarding the 2004 Montana Fire Department Needs Analysis Survey. As of today, we have achieved a statewide response rate of 46%, which is not bad but we are still hoping to get upwards of 80% by the cutoff date of March 16th. So, we still have a long way to go and we really need your help to achieve this goal. We ask that you would please reconsider taking the time to fill out the questionnaire and send it back to us as soon as you can. Please also remember to use the self-addressed/stamped envelope that was included in the original mailing to your department back in January.

We hope that you will agree that the questions we have asked in the questionnaire are important, not only for our records, but for your department and the state as a whole. The information collected from fire departments in Montana will be used by the National Association of State Foresters as part of a larger, nationwide survey of the United States fire service. This information will then be used in a report to Congress later this year in hopes that it will mean more funding for fire departments like yours. We also plan to use this collected data to publish our own report of the fire service right here in Montana and then make it available to all interested parties.

We have included another copy of the original survey form just in case you misplaced the first one. Thank you again for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Michael W. Wiederhold
Rural Fire Program Coordinator

P.S. Please don't hesitate to call us with questions, concerns, or for any other reason at 542-4206.

State of Montana Fire Department Survey 2004

Montana Dept. of Natural Resources and Conservation

United States Bureau of Land Management



Please Return your Completed Questionnaire
in the Enclosed Envelope by March 16, 2004 to:

**DNRC - Fire & Aviation Management Bureau
2705 Spurgin Road
Missoula, Montana 59804-3199**

2004 Montana Fire Department Needs Analysis Survey

Office Use Only:

County: _____

Land Office: _____

Is the address above correct for all future correspondence? Yes No (If no, please include the correct or updated address on the return envelope when you return the survey form to us)

Name of person completing form: _____ Date: _____

Title of person completing form: _____

E-mail address: _____ Dept. Phone: _____

Questions:

1. What is the current **Population** of permanent residents in your department's Primary Response Area (Do not include mutual aid areas): _____

Please note: If your department protects all residents of an entire county or within the entire city limits of a town only, you may simply state: "Entire County ofonly" or "Entire City/Town ofonly"

2. Is there a seasonal increase of non-permanent residents in your Response Area? Yes No
If yes, what then is the total population of residents during this peak season? _____

3. What is the **Area** in Square Miles of your department's Primary Response Area?
(Do not include mutual aid areas): _____

Please note: If your department protects the area of an entire county or the entire city limits of a town only, you may simply state: "Entire County of only" or "Entire City/Town ofonly"

4. How many **Fully Paid Personnel** are currently in your department? (count part-timers as 1/2)
Firefighter or EMT _____ + **Admin. Staff Only** _____ = **Total** _____

Fully Paid-only Departments - skip questions 5 through 11. (Go straight to question 12, pg. 3)

5. How many ACTIVE VOLUNTEERS are there currently in your department?
Firefighter or EMT _____ + **Admin. Staff Only** _____ = **Total** _____

Please note: The definition of "active" is determined by each individual department, but generally an active volunteer will be one who regularly attends department meetings, training classes, helps out with fundraising ourselves available for emergency calls. For the purposes of this survey we Please include all volunteers who hold administrative/staff-only positions.

6. By this same definition, how many **Active Volunteers** were in your department one year ago?

Firefighter or EMT _____ + **Admin. Staff Only** _____ = **Total** _____

7. How sufficient do you feel your current amount of total volunteer personnel (active volunteers, plus administrative staff-only) is for the needs of your department during a normal or typical year (in terms of total number of incidents, help with fundraising events, office duties, personnel management, etc.)?

Very sufficient Somewhat sufficient Not at all sufficient

8. Does your department currently have a program or a plan that addresses the need to recruit volunteers from the local community?

Yes No, but it would be helpful No, this is not needed for our department

9. Do any of the volunteers in your department receive any form of economic compensation for their efforts? (*Check either No, or all that apply to Yes*):

No. Our volunteers receive no form of economic compensation in any way

Yes, our volunteers receive economic compensation in the form of:

Tax relief (property tax, income tax)

Scholarships and/or other opportunities for free or subsidized education

Reimbursement for travel, required clothing, or other out-of-pocket expenses

Life or health insurance benefits (including worker's compensation)

Opportunity for a retirement pension after a certain length of activity

Discounts or free services from local community businesses

Other: (*please specify*) _____

10. Do you believe that some form of economic compensation is needed for attracting new volunteers and/or keeping the current volunteers in your department active?

Yes, compensation is needed for recruitment and retention of volunteers in our department

No, it is not necessary for recruitment and retention in our department

Not Sure

11. If **yes**, which form of economic compensation (of any kind) do you believe would be (or is) the most beneficial to the volunteers, or potential volunteer recruits, in your department

(*please specify*) _____

12. Please rank (by circling) *current* **Equipment Needs** of your department on a **Priority Scale of 1 to 5**:

- Key:** 1= Very High Priority
 2= Somewhat High Priority
 3= Medium Priority
 4= Low Priority
 5= Very Low or No Priority

PRIORITY:

	(Higher)			(Lower)	
Wildland Engine	1	2	3	4	5
Structure Engine	1	2	3	4	5
Water Tender	1	2	3	4	5
Communications Equipment	1	2	3	4	5
SCBA Equipment	1	2	3	4	5
Rescue Equipment	1	2	3	4	5
Bunker Gear	1	2	3	4	5
Wildland Protective Gear	1	2	3	4	5
Hoses and Nozzles	1	2	3	4	5
Generators	1	2	3	4	5
Portable Pumps	1	2	3	4	5
Portable Tanks	1	2	3	4	5
Hand Tools	1	2	3	4	5
Chainsaws	1	2	3	4	5

13. If your dept. needs/uses **Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus**, are all Active Firefighters equipped with functional *and* NFPA approved SCBAs?

- Yes No We don't use this

14. If your dept. needs/uses **Bunker Gear**, are all Active Firefighters equipped with functional *and* NFPA approved Bunker Gear?

- Yes No We don't use this

15. If your dept. needs/uses **Wildland Protective Gear**, are all Active Firefighters equipped with functional *and* NFPA approved Wildland Protective Gear?

Yes No We don't use this

16. Please rank (by circling) the *current* **Training Needs** of your department on a **Priority Scale of 1 to 5**:

Key: 1= Very High Priority
 2= Somewhat High Priority
 3= Medium Priority
 4= Low Priority
 5= Very Low or No Priority

PRIORITY:

	(Higher)			(Lower)	
Basic Wildland Firefighting	1	2	3	4	5
Intermediate Wildland Firefighting	1	2	3	4	5
Wildland Fire Behavior	1	2	3	4	5
Wildland-Urban Interface	1	2	3	4	5
Incident Command System	1	2	3	4	5
Wildfire Prevention/Education	1	2	3	4	5
Basic Structural Firefighting	1	2	3	4	5
Advanced Structural Firefighting	1	2	3	4	5
Use of SCBAs	1	2	3	4	5
Safety and Personal Protective Equip.	1	2	3	4	5
First Aid/First Responders	1	2	3	4	5
Pump Operations and Maintenance	1	2	3	4	5
Water Delivery/Tender Operations	1	2	3	4	5
HAZMAT Awareness/Operations	1	2	3	4	5
Search and Rescue Operations	1	2	3	4	5
Fire Dept. Organization/Administration	1	2	3	4	5
	1	2	3	4	5

17. Does your department participate in a **Firefighter Certificate Program**? Yes No

18. How many in-house **Training Hours** (on average) are provided by your department to personnel on a monthly basis?

(Average number of training hours per month): _____

19. Does your department participate in **Wildland Firefighting Training**? Yes No

20. As part of the standard training in your department, which of the following **National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG)** courses are the personnel in your department required to take? (Check all that apply)

I-100 Introduction to the Incident Command System

S-110 Wildland Fire Suppression Orientation

S-130 Basic Firefighter Training

S-131 Advanced Firefighter Training (Squad Boss)

S-132 Standards for Survival

S-133 Look Up, Look Down, Look Around

S-190 Introduction to Wildland Fire Behavior

S-205/215 Fire Operations in the Urban Interface

S-230 Crew Boss (Single Resource)

S-231 Engine Boss (Single Resource)

S-290 Intermediate Wildland Fire Behavior

Other NWCG training courses required for standard training of personnel in your dept.

(please specify) _____

21. Did any personnel in your dept. attend **State Fire Training** last year? (Check all that apply)

Yes - Fire Services Training School Yes - Dept. of Natural Resources None

22. Did any of the personnel in your department attend a regional fire school or the **National Fire Academy** last year?

Yes No

23. To what degree are the **Training Opportunities** currently available to the personnel in your department adequate for the department as a whole to safely and effectively handle all emergency situations?

Somewhat adequate Not at all adequate

24. Based on your department's ability to safely and effectively handle various **Emergency Response Situations**, please rank these categories (by circling) on a **Difficulty Scale of 1 to 5**. Your ranking should be based on the availability of personnel, their training for these specific situations, your department's equipment and apparatus, and the requirement of strenuous effort by, or possible danger to, your firefighters and/or your EMS personnel:

Key:

- 1= Situations are easily handled by our department and we are well-trained and well-equipped
- 2= Situations are usually handled well by our department and we are trained and equipped
- 3= Situations can sometimes be challenging and we need further training and better equipment
- 4= Situations always pose a challenge and we are inadequately trained and/or poorly equipped
- 5= Situations are completely beyond our control and we have no proper training or equipment
- n/a= Not applicable to our department and/or we have not yet experienced these situations

Difficulty Level for Our Department:
(Less Difficult) (More Difficult)

Wildland Firefighting	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
Structural Firefighting	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
Vehicle Fires	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
Motor Vehicle Accidents	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
Search and Rescue	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
Medical/EMS	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
Hazardous Materials	1	2	3	4	5	n/a

25. Does your dept. belong to a **Local Association** such as a County/Multi-County Association or Fire Council?

Yes No

26. Does your department levy a **Tax** and/or charge a **Service Fee**?

Yes, we levy a tax or a service fee No, we receive money from other sources

27. If your department levies a tax or a service fee, then in terms of a **Legal Classification**, what is your department classified as and/or associated with?

Rural Fire District Fire Service Fee Area
 Emergency Services District Municipal Fire Dept. Other _____

28. Does your department receive any of its **Funding** and/or **Budget** from any of the following sources? (Check all that apply or none at all)

Fund Raisers Grants Donations Contract Services
 Supplemental City or County Funds Other (please specify): _____

29. If your department has received any **Grants** during the past two years, which type(s) of grants were received? (Check all that apply or none at all)

FEMA VFA RFA NFP Other (please specify) _____

30. Does your department report all **Incident Response** information to the National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS)?

Yes, we report all incidents Yes, we report some or most Not at all

31. If **yes**, how do you report? Electronically via email or the Internet
 Regular postage mail to the State Fire Marshall's Office

32. If your department does not report any Incident Response information to NFIRS can you please state why you do not report? (Check all that apply)

- The process is too time consuming and/or too difficult
- There is no real incentive, financial or otherwise, to report this information
- There are just not enough total incidents within our jurisdiction to warrant reporting
- We were unaware of any need to report this information to NFIRS
- Other reasons not listed here (please specify): _____

33. If your department does not report Incident Response information to NFIRS can you please report the **Total Number of all Incidents** that your department responded to during the last calendar year?

Total Number of all **Incidents** for the last calendar year (include mutual aid): _____

How many of these Total Incidents were actually **Mutual Aid**? _____

How many of these Total Incidents were actually **Wildland Fire** Incidents? _____

34. If the dispersal of all grant monies were directly tied to the reporting of incident response information to NFIRS would your department be more likely to report this information?

Yes No We would report this information regardless

35. Does your department have an **Insurance Service Office** (ISO) rating or a public protection classification/rating of 1 to 10?

- Yes, and that ISO rating is: _____
- Yes, but ISO rating unknown
- No, our department has not been rated by ISO
- Unknown whether or not our department has been rated by ISO

36. Based on the *current Issues* that your department deals with on an everyday basis can you please rank (by circling) on a priority or **Importance Scale of 1 to 5** to show just how important these following issues are to your department:

- Key:** 1= Very High Priority or Importance
 2= Somewhat High Priority or Importance
 3= Medium Priority or Importance
 4= Low Priority or Importance
 5= Very Low or No Priority or Importance

Priorities or Issues of Importance to Our Department:

	(Higher)			(Lower)	
Acquiring New Equipment/Gear	1	2	3	4	5
Acquiring New Vehicles/Apparatus	1	2	3	4	5
Fire Station Construction	1	2	3	4	5
Availability of Firefighters/EMS	1	2	3	4	5
Funding/Budget Issues	1	2	3	4	5
New Personnel Recruitment	1	2	3	4	5
Current Personnel Retention	1	2	3	4	5
Training Needs of Our Department	1	2	3	4	5

37. Please list information for all **Fire Apparatus and Vehicles** currently in use by your dept:
 (Use the back of this sheet if you need to list more than 15 vehicles)

Vehicle	ICS Type*	Year	Vehicle has Mobile Radio (Y/N)
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			
11			
12			
13			
14			
15			

* for ICS Type please specify if: Engine, Ladder, Water Tender, Rescue, Ambulance, etc.

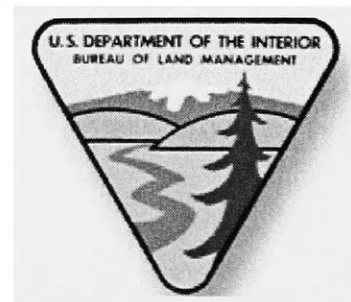
We sincerely appreciate and thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. The information that you have provided to the Montana DNRC and the U.S. Bureau of Land Management will help these organizations to better serve you and your department now and in the future.

If you have any additional comments or suggestions you would like to share about this survey or how it could be improved for future use please do so in the space provided below.

For more assistance please call: (406) 542-4206

Please Return your Completed Questionnaire in the Enclosed Envelope by March 16, 2004 to:

**DNRC - Fire & Aviation Management Bureau
2705 Spurgin Road
Missoula, Montana 59804-3199**



**APPENDIX B: The Definition of an “Active” Volunteer Firefighter,
According to Answers from Six Fire Departments in Montana (pre-test
question, September 2003)**

“This is a question that has been a topic at many Department Board meetings. First, a little background: We are a rural department that covers an area of over 200,000 acres (312.5 square miles). With an area that large it becomes obvious that not all of our firemen are going to be close enough to any given fire to respond very quickly. All of the guys in the department are willing to respond - IF we can get a hold of them. The majority of our people are farmers/ranchers and do not sit by a phone or radio all day. Many of the areas that we serve are not served by pager service. Because of these issues we find ourselves looking to other criteria to determine an ‘active’ status. Probably the major point we use is training. If a guy doesn't show up for a set amount of training or is not willing to help on equipment maintenance etc., our department considers him to be ‘inactive’ - even if he has responded to a fire during the year. The problem we are now having is deciding where the people who have no training and a number of responses fit in. Also under debate is what the minimum number of hours of training should be to be considered active.”

Gary Gregoire – Bear Paw Volunteer Fire Department

“We are currently changing the status here for membership. We will increase the training hours and required alarm responses beginning in the next fiscal year. We are currently requiring 30 percent (response to calls) to be active and 30 hours (training) for the firefighters. Of course we encourage more. We feel that this is reasonable but we are increasing these things. Our fire department has had a waiting list for membership since 2000. We currently have 6 applicants wanting membership. We run about 225 calls per year average and have one career fire chief/fire marshal. We don't run EMS except for crashes and requests by EMS. We also cover 134 square miles and 10,000 year round residents with a population May - October approximately 20,000.”

Thomas J. Maloney – Chief, Polson Fire Department

“When you say incidents, are you referring to fire calls, or training, business meetings, community service and fund raising efforts? There is a lot more than making X number of fire calls to being a professional and active member.”

Steve Harada – Chief, Wolf Point Volunteer Fire Department

“Two years ago, we had 17 volunteers. We lost six since then; all were between age 17 and 21 and all moved to town for employment. We now have 11 volunteers. They are all active in that they attend most (at least 60%) training sessions and respond to the few emergency calls we have had in the last year. There are always conflicts in our schedules, but if a volunteer is able to attend at least 50 percent of our training and 50 percent of the calls, I am satisfied. I would expect those numbers to be much higher (maybe 80%) in an area that has more volunteers available, but here where there are only a very few full-time residents, I'll take what I can get. We have no inactive volunteers (less than 50% attendance). Oh, and by the way, any volunteer who does not regularly attend training has no business responding to alarms. It is both a safety issue and a teamwork efficiency issue.”

Alan Tresemer – Chief, Painted Rocks Fire and Rescue

“Our active volunteers are people that do at least 30 hours of training a year and are on half the calls. This varies as we have people that only do fire and others that do EMS also. There are 20 on our department and about 12 make most of the calls. The others are required to do the training or they are off the department.”

George Reich – Chief, Willow Creek Rural Fire Department

“I am a trustee and will pass this to the chief, but here in our department; ‘active’ means someone who shows up to a meeting and shows up to any fire. We only have 12 members, so I guess our definition is a little lax.”

Chris West – Volunteer, West End Volunteer Fire Department

APPENDIX C: Complete Transcripts to all Interviews conducted between 11/03/03 and 3/31/04

Interviews:

1. **James “Jim” Hull:** Texas State Forester and Director of the Texas Forest Service – 11/03/03
2. **Dave Vickers:** Chief of Saratoga Fire Department, Saratoga Springs, Utah – 12/30/03
3. **Fire Chief Bill Lindstrom and Assistant Fire Chief Curt Belts:** Missoula Rural Fire District, Missoula, Montana – 2/12/04
4. **Mike Hansen:** Chief of West Fork Rural Volunteer Fire Department, Ravalli County, Montana – 2/17/04
5. **Ron Ehli:** Chief of Hamilton Volunteer Fire Department, Hamilton, Montana – 2/17/04
6. **Thomas J. Maloney:** Chief of Polson Volunteer Fire Department, Polson, Montana – 2/19/04
7. **Brett Waters:** Chief of Belgrade Fire Department and Rural Fire District, Belgrade, Montana – 2/19/04
8. **Stephen Heppell:** Chief of Neihart Volunteer Fire Department, Neihart, Montana – 2/28/04
9. **Otto Ohlson:** Chief of White Sulphur Springs Volunteer Fire Department, White Sulphur Springs, Montana – 2/28/04
10. **Ed Shindoll:** Chief of Broadwater County Rural Fire District, Townsend, Montana – 2/28/04
11. **Donald Galloway:** Volunteer Fire Department Assistance Programs Coordinator of the Texas Forest Service – 3/31/04

Interview with James “Jim” Hull: Texas State Forester and Director of the Texas Forest Service - 11/03/03

(Interview conducted at the Interior West Fire Council Annual Conference, Salt Lake City, Utah)

Jim Hull is a 36-year veteran of the Texas Forest Service and graduated from the School of Forestry at Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, Texas. He has extensive experience in all areas of forestry, especially forest management, policy, and wildfire protection and administration. In 1996, Mr. Hull was selected by the Texas A&M Board of Regents to become the 7th State Forester of Texas. Mr. Hull also serves as chair of the Fire Protection Committee of National Association of State Foresters and as the NASF representative on the National Wildland Fire Leadership Council.

Q: Do you believe that the numbers of volunteer firefighters in your State, and nationally, are dwindling?

Yes, the numbers are dwindling. Volunteers are deciding that because of an increase in the demand for their services, especially with an increase in people living in the wildland urban interface, that they no longer have the time to devote to this job. There is now a greater pressure on them to devote more time to training, and many are using their vacation time to train as a firefighter. There is also a greater safety risk involved with their increased duties.

Q: What can we do to keep the numbers of volunteer firefighters active and continue to attract more?

You have to build a culture that it is a status symbol to be part of a volunteer fire department. It is not a hobby. It is a commitment to the community.

Mr. Hull also commented that the volunteer fire department is often the social center of small rural communities.

Q: What do you do in your home State to try to increase your numbers of volunteers?

Instead of hiring or replacing one single firefighter I try to hire a leader. By hiring one single leader this can actually mean an increase in hundreds of new firefighters. This leader needs to be a person who knows how to build the capacity of volunteer fire departments through organizational skills. We refer to these people as regional fire coordinators. Their job is to equip, train and stay in constant communication with the volunteer departments.

Note: The state of Montana does have an equivalent to these positions that Mr. Hull speaks of. They work at the Land Office level (Billings, Missoula, Helena, Miles City, Lewistown, Kalispell) as part of the Montana County Co-op Agreement. Michael Wiederhold is currently the Rural Fire Program Coordinator for the state of Montana.

**James B. Hull - Director
Texas Forest Service
301 Tarrow - Suite 364
College Station, Texas 77840-7896**

Interview with Dave Vickers: Chief of Saratoga Fire Department - Saratoga Springs, Utah 12/30/03

Q: How long have you been a volunteer firefighter and a fire chief?

Dave Vickers has been involved with volunteer firefighters for 30 years, since high school in 1974. 21 years as a full-time volunteer and currently 3 years as the full-time paid chief of Saratoga FD. Mr. Vickers started out as an intern in high school in Santa Clara, CA, traveling around to other fire stations in the area picking up mail for the departments and cleaning their equipment.

Q: What attracted you to this position?

Dave Vickers started his career as a policeman but volunteered with the local fire department because his real interest was there and he wanted to get started on a career path in firefighting. His interest in firefighting began in high school. He knew that he did not ever want to sit behind a desk for a career and he also wanted to provide a service to the community. He enjoys the excitement and the challenges and the fact that everyday and each call is different.

Q: What is it that initially attracts a volunteer for a position in this department in the first place?

Among the potential volunteers that he interviews Chief Vickers believes that the #1, or universal answer that he gets to a question like this is that the volunteer wants to give something back to the community they live in. He also mentions that the excitement about being a firefighter is a very common desire among potential volunteers. Many of them work full-time jobs that are boring to them and/or do not afford them any kind of physical activity.

Q: What motivates your volunteer firefighters to do what they do?

Going on calls is actually a good motivator. Excessive training without ever going out on calls will cause some of the volunteers to become discouraged and lose interest in what they are doing. If we train them to death without them ever going out on any real calls then we face the challenge of keeping them motivated. We try to use training scenarios to keep them sharp with their training but if they are only taking part in 2 calls per year then how can they expect to stay competent? (Saratoga FD had a total of 200 calls for 2003). All the training in the world cannot compensate for being involved with real calls.

Q: What kind of incentives do people have to be a volunteer within your department?

It's not about the money. The motivation for the volunteers that become long-time members is the same from day one. I try to make sure that they feel appreciated for what they do. Out of all the people that I interview for a position here only about 1 out of every 15 will actually ever become a long-time member of the department.

All volunteers in the Saratoga Fire Department are required to "write off" every Wednesday night due to training courses for a minimum of 2 hours, and all volunteers must be on-call every 6th night and must also be available for at least two day shifts per month. Every potential volunteer is given this information up front and this is why only 1 in 15 of those interviewed will actually become an active volunteer within the department. He considers all of his volunteers as "professionals" because they all have to meet the same minimum amount of training. The community expects a certain training standard to be met and they do not care whether the firefighters or EMTs are paid or not. The need for training competency among all firefighters increases every year. The old-school thinking of the local fire station as a social club where people came to shoot pool and drink beer is rapidly being phased out as an acceptable standard. Socializing among

friends within the Saratoga Springs fire department is acceptable but only after training for 2 hours on Wednesday night.

Q: Do your volunteers receive any kind of economic compensation for their efforts?

All active volunteers within his department that make themselves available for a minimum of 2 day-shifts a month and attend all Wednesday night training classes (2 hours) will receive a minimum stipend of \$50.00 per month. This stipend is meant to offset costs for gas and for clothing that is required for volunteers (shirts with the department logo that identify them as a member are required for EMTs when they show up to a call). At Christmas they receive gift certificates for local businesses and occasionally they will receive a pullover jacket or sweater with the department logo. This clothing makes them feel more “official” and gives them a greater sense of belonging to the department. The volunteers that rise to the ranks of “officers” (known as captains) will receive a minimum stipend of \$100.00 per month. This compensation is given to them as a token sign of appreciation and it is not meant to be a salary for them from a part-time job. This is made clear to them in the initial interview. Many of the younger volunteers actually value the training that they receive for free as a greater incentive. Many of them hope for a full-time career as a firefighter or an EMT and they view this training as very valuable experience for them that will help them to get a paid job later.

Q: Do you believe that economic compensation is necessary for your volunteers?

The department is new (organized July 1, 2000) and for the first 6 months there was absolutely no economic compensation at all for any of the volunteers. This made recruiting very difficult initially. We wanted to be able to demonstrate to them that we cared about them and their service to the community so I approached the Saratoga Springs City Council and proposed to them the idea that we should compensate the volunteers

somehow. The main reason for the compensation was for the required clothing and for the expense of gas. There were a few complaints about these things early on. Most of the volunteers would not have quit if the stipend were never put into place but it was just a good idea and there is a possibility that some of them may have eventually quit without it. Some other form of appreciation needed to be shown to them for the amount of time and effort that we were asking of them. There are some volunteers that definitely view the extra income as a strong incentive. Some of them want to sign up for extra day shifts and earn an extra \$25.00 per every extra day-shift that they volunteer to be on-call for. There is an opportunity for some of them to earn as much as \$350.00 a month for these extra shifts. Those that volunteer for these extra day shifts are also allowed to take a company vehicle home with them but they are considered to be on-call and are not allowed to leave town during this time. Now that these incentives are in place, if they were for some reason taken away then most likely many of them would take it as a slap in the face and might walk away from the department.

Q: Were you aware that total numbers of volunteer firefighters in the United States is shrinking? Why do you think this is?

Yes, I am aware of this. Training is universally the most demanding activity that demands a volunteer's time. Other commitments get in the way. Being a volunteer firefighter should be the only major activity that a person chooses to have outside of a full-time job and a family. Training and availability of personnel are the biggest issues that this department faces.

Q: Other successes or failures in the areas of recruitment, retention or motivation:

The department has no control over the volume of calls but motivation does tend to wane when the call volume is low. The most motivated volunteers always seem to be the ones who are also the busiest. The ones who are less involved, or choose not to be involved are the ones whose interest seems to quickly fade. I have heard many complain about 'not getting any good calls' or others that say 'why did I go through all of this training and now I don't really seem to do anything?' They need to feel that they are providing a critical service to the community. The other extreme is those that feel that 'they are doing all the work'. 3 or 4 calls a day for a single individual is way too much and can lead to burnout. This can also lead to some developing the attitude that 'we're carrying all the load during the day and not enough people are willing to cover the day shifts'. A balance between these two extremes is very important for morale and motivation.

Q: Other suggestions, thoughts, opinions, observations related to recruitment and retention of volunteers:

The first initial interview with a potential volunteer is extremely important. It will be expected of them to make this commitment the highest priority in their life after their families and their jobs. I always ask them up front if they understand the time commitment that they are being asked for. It is also very expensive to completely supply a firefighter with protective clothing and gear. It can cost up to \$2000.00 to completely outfit them with everything they need and it all has to fit properly. This is a huge investment when you add in all of the time and costs to then train them as well. I have to be as sure as I can that these potential volunteers are going to stay around for a long time. I always tell the potential volunteers that they are expected to meet a minimum standard for covering a certain amount of shifts and that they need to discuss this time commitment with their spouse before they make a decision. They also need to know that fires and emergencies happen on Thanksgiving and Christmas Day as well and if you are on call on a holiday you are still required to respond. This is not an option. In the area of retention, one of the biggest issues for them is that within 18 months of first starting here they are required to have the minimum training required for, and to be certified, as either a firefighter I or as an EMT basic. Finding the time for training is often difficult for many volunteers. The requirement of Wednesday night is very important and not flexible because this is when we take part in joint training exercises with other departments in the county. It is very important that the volunteers train together as a team. This is an issue of trust among all the members of the department. They must learn to trust the competency level of those around them if they are going to be able to function as a team.

**Chief Dave Vickers
Saratoga Fire Department
2015 S. Redwood Road
Saratoga Springs, UT 84043**

Interview with Fire Chief Bill Lindstrom and Assistant Fire Chief Curt Belts of the Missoula Rural Fire District - Missoula, Montana 2/12/04

Q: How long have you been in the current positions that you are both in now?

Bill Lindstrom has been the chief of the Missoula Rural Fire District since 1980. His interest in firefighting actually began as he observed and worked closely with firefighters while a police officer very early in his professional career. Mr. Lindstrom did not begin his current career in the fire service as a volunteer but rather as a fully-paid fire chief. Assistant Chief Curt Belts also began his career in the fire service at Missoula Rural in 1980 (hired at the same time as Chief Lindstrom) after a different job within the public safety sector. Mr. Belts, like Mr. Lindstrom, has always been a fully-paid employee of the Missoula Rural Fire District. According to both men this dual-hiring in 1980 of two individuals from outside the department caused quite a controversy. Apparently, the idea of suddenly hiring two people who had not “paid their dues” or put in their proper amount of volunteer time was considered a breach of protocol among the long-time, current members of the department. This brotherhood of volunteers, as Chief Lindstrom points out, had very strong ideas about the proper right of passage for an individual who should eventually assume the role of leadership in a fire department. Missoula Rural Fire District had never hired anyone for any paid position prior to 1980.

Q: What is it that initially attracts a volunteer for a position in this department in the first place?

Prior to the 1990’s, which Chief Lindstrom noted was the point at which a noticeable change in demographics was taking place in the City of Missoula, most volunteer firefighters from the community claimed they “just wanted to do something positive for the community.” As the dual-income family began to become more common

and simultaneously the time demands placed on a volunteer firefighter began to increase, the newer and younger volunteer in Missoula began to think of their services as more of an investment in their own future. Some from this newer generation of volunteers come to the department with hopes that the experience they gain now will help them to possibly secure a paid position later, either in Missoula or elsewhere. These younger and more career-minded individuals look at their volunteer experience as more of “stepping stone” to paid work.

Q: In terms of recruitment and retention, is there a difference now compared to previous decades in the department’s ability to attract and retain volunteers from the local community?

Assistant Chief Belts:

Five years is the average time here now for our volunteers. There are no more career volunteers here anymore. It used to be that P.E.R.S. (Public Employees Retirement System, sponsored by the state) was the main motivation, but not anymore. The newer volunteers here want to know what can be done for them *now*. Not 20 or 30 years from now. They want to know how they can get education and experience now so that they will become more able to be hired as a career firefighter either here or somewhere else. This may possibly be very different in other, smaller towns in Montana but this is how it is in Missoula.

Chief Lindstrom:

The true spirit of community exists in small towns but Missoula is different. It’s too big now. People don’t feel the same sense of ownership for a place like Missoula. The population is too transient and diverse and no longer like the small town that it was in 1960. The industries are also different. Certain traditions have left Missoula and the sense of community has changed. This has a direct effect on the attitudes of those who would be volunteer firefighters. There are no second generation volunteers (those that follow their parents or grandparents in the fire department) anymore. The University of Montana also exerts a greater influence now on the community than it did when it was a much smaller school. There are over 10,000 college students over there but almost all of them will leave once they finish their education.

Q: What has the department done to change its methods for recruitment and retention to reflect this change in the local community?

Assistant Chief Belts:

We have found greater success by changing our recruiting methods. Training is now much more emphasized than it ever was before. We also put greater emphasis on our educational program. This program allows for our resident firefighters, who live right here at the fire station, to qualify for up to \$1,000.00 per year for tuition costs. We had to change our recruiting efforts because it was becoming difficult for us to find enough volunteers. We now have a waiting list for those who want to be volunteers.

Q: Do you believe that economic compensation is necessary for the volunteers in your department?

According to the answer given on the Fire Department Survey question #10, regarding whether or not economic compensation was necessary for volunteers, Chief Lindstrom indicated that he really did not know the answer to this question. He stated in a comment written directly on the survey: "Economic compensation does not equate to retention in our department. It has been tried and the results do not deliver retention." It was through the process of this interview that the Chief's comments on the survey have been clarified. In this written comment he was making reference to the fact that while the department had earlier made an attempt to grant economic compensation to volunteers in the form of "deferred" compensation and a gasoline reimbursement, the total number of volunteers in the department continued to go down during that time period. It was not until later, after the department's recruiting methods were revamped, that they experienced any measurable amount of success in this area.

Q: Which types of economic incentive(s) are most valuable to your volunteers?

According to Assistant Chief Belts, due to the fact that most of their current volunteers will probably actually only be with the department for less than an average of

five years the only incentives that are of any real value to these individuals are those that are more of a short-term benefit. If a volunteer has no plans of staying a volunteer for very long then the idea of a retirement pension is really of very little or no value to them. Chief Lindstrom agreed, adding that short-term incentives such as tuition reimbursement for a college education and free training leading to a state firefighter certification are of much more value to the younger volunteers because they seem to possess more the attitude of “what can you do for me right now?” He also pointed out that most of them would never stay around long enough to qualify for a long-term reward such as a retirement pension.

Q: Other successes or failures in the areas of recruitment, retention or motivation:

According to Assistant Chief Belts, during the late 1980's in an attempt to boost dwindling numbers of volunteers in the department, Missoula Rural developed a deferred compensation program. This incentive program was designed with retention of current volunteers in mind as the deferment time required for receiving the compensation was a full ten years of service. During the early 1990's at the request of volunteers the department introduced a gasoline reimbursement program but the total numbers of volunteers continued to decline. According to the Assistant Chief, “We had to do something.” The volunteers had asked for reimbursement but they also requested that their personal requirements and obligations as members of the department be decreased. It was at this point that the recruiting methods used by the department began to be reevaluated in order to become more in tune with the rapidly changing demands of younger volunteers.

Q: Other suggestions, thoughts, opinions, observations related to recruitment and retention of volunteers:

Chief Lindstrom:

I can't get anybody to work for me by handing them one-hundred dollar bills. But we will train them and give them an education to make them more competitive in the job market. It's this idea of an investment in training that gives us an energetic volunteer during the three to five years that they might be here. Quality training is the key. Missoula is the epicenter of the state for training and education for volunteer firefighters. People obtain their education here and then move on to other places. We now have ex-volunteers who were trained and educated right here at Missoula Rural in every other major career department in this state (except possibly Billings) and in Spokane as well.

Chief Lindstrom also stated that younger and more energetic volunteer firefighters are now more common in the department. This seems to have a positive effect on the older generation of volunteers, many of whom who have now developed a greater desire for education for themselves. Some have even expressed the desire to actually pursue an associate's (2-year) degree in fire science. The Chief believes that this older generation of volunteers is being pushed in this direction toward more education by the younger generation who place a greater emphasis on its importance.

**Chief Bill Lindstrom
Assistant Chief Curt Belts
Missoula Rural Fire District
2521 South Avenue West
Missoula, MT 59804-6407**

Interview with Fire Chief Mike Hansen of the West Fork Rural Volunteer Fire Department – Ravalli County, Montana 2/17/04

Q: How long have you been in the current position that you are in now?

Mike Hansen has been chief of the West Fork Rural Volunteer Fire Department since the year 2000 and has been a volunteer firefighter with the department since 1995.

Q: What initially attracted you to the position of a volunteer firefighter?

Chief Hansen was trained as a diver and a firefighter during his 22 years in the US Navy. Other than this extensive training he also has some very personal reasons for wanting to become involved with an emergency services department. In 1974 the house he lived in with his family in West Fork burned to the ground. At that time there was a volunteer department in Darby but no closer than that. In 1992 the building that once housed the café that he owned burned as well. He also has a brother who was nearly killed after a tree fell on him and his life was saved by a volunteer ambulance crew. In his own words, Mr. Hansen says:

I have always believed in community involvement. It's all about people helping people. If we didn't have people who believed in putting something back into the community then we wouldn't even have volunteer fire departments. Volunteers are there because of a sense of community and they recognize a need for the fire department.

Q: What are some of the challenges that you face as the chief of West Fork, a completely volunteer fire department?

Volunteer organizations are challenging for a leader. The military has a well-developed chain of command and rules are in place for discipline. Volunteer fire departments aren't run this way. Now I have to work with people differently and smooth over hurt feelings just to try to get the right outcome for a job that needs to be done. A good leader will be able to show leadership qualities that others will want to follow willingly. A good leader can also greatly help to develop a sense of camaraderie among the members of the department. The other challenge of a volunteer fire department leader is to develop a sense of purpose for the department.

Chief Hansen also pointed out that the West Fork area has a very sparse population and there are usually only about 15 total volunteers in a given year to cover an area of 148 square miles with 700-750 residents to protect. Some of these volunteers within the department are family members of other volunteers who live many miles away from the station. According to the fire department survey that Chief Hansen returned to the DNRC he indicated that he considers the total number of volunteers in West Fork to be not at all sufficient for the needs of his department. He also noted that some other departments located in larger cities that have the luxury of many people to choose from could be more selective than his department when it comes to recruitment of new members.

Q: What incentives do the volunteers in West Fork have to do what they do for the department and for the community?

I don't really know how to answer that. It's an intangible thing that is hard to measure. It's all self-motivation for sure. Sometimes I wonder myself why I do it.

Q: Do the volunteers in West Fork receive any kind of economic compensation for their efforts?

Chief Hansen stated that there was absolutely no type of economic compensation for West Fork volunteers. According to him, they are 100% volunteer in every sense of the word.

Q: Do you believe that economic compensation is necessary for the recruitment and/or retention of volunteers in your department?

Economic compensation has the potential to be an additional drawing item for department recruitment but I really don't know if it would help this department. We have a retirement plan that is in the works, possibly.

Q: Do you have some kind of a plan or a program then for recruiting people from the local community?

Chief Hansen stated that once people in the West Fork area are recruited into the department they tend to stay there indefinitely. The membership in this department is very steady and there is very little turnover or fluctuation within the department.

The volunteers in West Fork are different from the volunteers in some other places, Missoula for example; because once they're here they're here to stay. We don't really have any younger members, except for my daughter who is 20 and a college student, who are not settled down here to stay. Recruitment here is almost always done through personal contact. The last member that joined our department did so just because I said: 'Hey, you need to join my fire department' and he did. I do think that we could benefit from having a better program for recruitment.

Note: the department saw a gain of two additional volunteer firefighters during 2003.

Q: According to a recent study conducted by FEMA it seems like the numbers of volunteer firefighters in the U.S. is dwindling. Were you aware of this trend?

No. I have no idea about this study or statistics about anything that deals with firefighters on a national basis. I do think that the Bitterroot Valley does much better than the national average though. The fires that we had here in the year 2000 and 2003 really boosted recruiting. We had a real resurgence of new blood after that. When you have incidents like the Fish Creek, Black Mountain, or Cooney Ridge Fires it tends to motivate people and they become more interested in firefighting. Having fire close to your neighborhood and having flames licking your butt will always increase your interest in fire department activity.

Q: What effect does training (or excessive training) have on the morale of your volunteers?

I have a theory. 'The only thing you can take from me is my time'. So I try to be very conscientious about firefighters' time. The worst thing that you can do is to waste my time. The biggest challenge is to have training that really matters and to have the most effective training possible, but good training is always limited by your budget.

**Chief Mike Hansen
West Fork Rural Volunteer Fire Department
7236 West Fork Road
Darby, MT 59829**

Interview with Fire Chief Ron Ehli of the Hamilton Volunteer Fire Department – Hamilton, Montana 2/17/04

Q: How long have you been in the current position that you are in now?

Ron Ehli is the new chief of the Hamilton VFD having started in the position just 90 days prior to this interview. He replaced the retiring chief who had held the position for over 23 years. Chief Ehli is originally from Circle, Montana, moved to Ravalli County in 1972, graduated with a degree in business management from Montana State University in Bozeman and now currently owns and operates the Bitterroot Laundry and Cleaners in Hamilton. He has been involved with the Hamilton Volunteer Fire Department since 1989.

Q: What initially attracted you to the position of a volunteer firefighter?

Chief Ehli recalled how the original building that housed his laundry business was right in the middle of downtown Hamilton, just one block away from the fire station. He stated that he was “intrigued” by the constant activity that always seemed to be going on around the station, like the fire trucks constantly going to and from incidents. He was eventually approached by some of the volunteer members of the department during a period of active recruiting in the late 1980’s. He described these events and his feelings about them:

I was never under the impression that I could be a firefighter. I always admired firefighters but I had absolutely no background at all in fire. They approached me because they were actively looking for firefighters at the time and more specifically for people who were self-employed because of the need for a flexible schedule during the daytime.

Q: What motivations do the volunteers in Hamilton have to do what they do for the department and for the community?

Firefighters, especially here in Hamilton, have historically been placed on a pedestal or a higher level than just the average person in the community. All kids want to grow up to be doctors, astronauts and firefighters. There are also many people in the department who have family members who are also in the department, or who were at one time. The training and the job gets into your blood and once you get into it, it's hard to get away from it. I personally know several people who have actually altered career plans just in order to stay on as a member of a volunteer department. It is a huge part of the decision-making process in the lives of some people. After 16 years in the department you begin to know what it really means to the community to have a volunteer fire department. You experience so much as a firefighter and kids and old people are in awe of firefighters. It's very important to some people to know that they supply something to a community and that people depend on you. Being a firefighter carries a lot of weight in this community. But still I would have to say that the driving force behind a firefighter's motivation is the adrenaline rush that you get when the alarm in the station goes off. Your blood starts pumping, your heart races and in all of this excitement you still must keep your head about you.

Q: Do the volunteers in Hamilton receive any kind of economic compensation or other incentives for their efforts?

We have a retirement program (\$125.00 per month after 20 years of active service), reimbursement for some expenses and the chief gets the use of a department vehicle but this is not why the volunteers are here. The retirement plan is part of our program but it is never really brought up in interviews with prospective members. What *is* brought up in the interview is the question about their ability to make a commitment to training every Thursday night for the next 20 years. They must understand this commitment to the department. We also ask their spouse whether or not they can give up their partner once a week and also for all the calls and incidents. Some of them ask us if we would be able to take their spouse away from them for more than just one night a week.

Q: Do you believe that economic compensation is necessary for the recruitment and/or retention of volunteers in your department?

Chief Ehli indicated in the survey that he completed and returned to the DNRC, and in this interview, that economic compensation was not necessary for the recruitment or retention of volunteers in the Hamilton Volunteer Fire Department. Rather, he stated

that the greatest incentive to the volunteers in his department was the camaraderie to be found among other members and the prestige that comes with being a volunteer firefighter in Hamilton.

Q: Do you have some kind of a plan or a program then for recruiting people from the local community?

No, we don't need one. They just come in. We have actually limited our enrollment to 28 and we have 3 on a waiting list now. Turnover in the department is not an issue here and we have a very high percentage of volunteers who will make it all the way to retirement age and some of those people will be around for longer than even the required 20 years. We have only lost 4 members of the department who left (or were asked to leave) for reasons other than retirement during the entire 16 years that I have been here. Bigger departments probably have more turnover, like Belgrade (Montana) for example, but we don't recruit people who seem like they might only be around for a short time. Hamilton can't afford to train people who will only be around for 3 to 5 years.

Q: According to a recent study conducted by FEMA it seems like the numbers of volunteer firefighters in the U.S. is dwindling. Were you aware of this trend?

Yes. Nationwide it is going to be harder to recruit volunteers but not in Montana and not in Ravalli County. The Bitterroot Valley is still a rural community and it is still respected here to be a firefighter and people like this feeling of respect from a small community. The reason that the fire service in Montana is growing and not shrinking like the rest of the U.S. is because there is still a great need for more fire services here. There is a greater demand for fire services and the population of the state is growing. In Hamilton we are actually about to add an additional substation to the department.

Q: What effect does training (or excessive training) have on the morale of your volunteers?

Pressure on a volunteer's time is difficult. The question is: 'How much can a community ask of its' volunteers?' Burnout from too much training could lead to a loss of motivation, but I haven't seen it yet in Hamilton. In our department we average about 285 hours per person per year of total calls, training, etc. This equals out to a little more than the equivalent of 7 weeks of full-time work per year for an individual.

Q: Other thoughts or opinions related to volunteers and why they do what they do:

The number one or most universal answer for why volunteer firefighters do what they do is for camaraderie.

Chief Ehli pointed out that the City of Hamilton currently has a population of approximately 3,700 residents but that annexation of some parts of Ravalli County is soon to take place, possibly increasing the population to over 5,000 and thus classifying Hamilton as a class II city. If this happens, then according to state law the Hamilton Volunteer Fire Department will then be required to begin hiring paid staff to augment their current volunteer staff. Chief Ehli believes that this could cause problems and possibly some friction between the paid staff and the current volunteers unless it is controlled in the correct manner. This change from a completely volunteer department to a combination department could pose a serious challenge to the camaraderie that he has spoken of. He is concerned about this because he believes that this “brotherhood” is an extremely important part of maintaining an effective force of volunteer firefighters.

**Chief Ron Ehli
Hamilton Volunteer Fire Department
223 South 2nd Street
Hamilton, MT 59840**

Interview with Fire Chief Thomas J. Maloney of the Polson Volunteer Fire Department – Polson, Montana 2/19/04

Q: How long have you been in the current position that you are in now?

Tom Maloney has been the paid fire chief of the Polson Volunteer Fire Department for 5 years. He is currently the only paid individual in the department. He is originally from upstate New York where he attended college at Cobleskill State College, majoring in animal husbandry with a minor in business. The two things most important in his professional life he claims are farming and fire because he enjoys the hard work involved in agriculture and he appreciates the teamwork aspect of working in the fire service. Chief Maloney is currently pursuing a master's degree in public administration.

Q: What initially attracted you to the position of a volunteer firefighter?

Chief Maloney became involved in the volunteer fire department in Eagle Mills, New York, in 1984. Six years later he was chief of that same department and had a full-time job with the State of New York as an education coordinator, teaching fire courses to firefighters in over 1800 fire departments in the state.

I do not come from a family with any kind of a background in the fire service but ever since I was a little boy I have been fascinated with fire trucks and can still remember them going by my family's house. I'm still just as excited now to be doing this as I was when I first started as a volunteer in 1984. I love what I do and I can't remember a single day when I didn't enjoy doing this. I feel privileged to be compensated for what I do. The fire service is basically everything I do. Actually, I think maybe I need to find other hobbies.

Q: What motivations do the volunteers in Polson have to do what they do for the department and for the community?

We have three very distinct groups here in the department in Polson. The first group is truly in it to provide a service to the community and just basically want to help people. This is our strongest group. They are the core of the department that pulls everything together. The second group is

here for the social aspect of the job. This is their way to socialize. The last group consists of the ones who like the idea of belonging to an organization that makes them feel good about themselves. It's more of a self-gratification thing for them. Regardless of what reasons they might have for being here, we have the responsibility of training them all.

Q: What attracts people in Polson to volunteer their time for a fire department?

Chief Maloney stated that five years ago the department had seven volunteer openings needing to be filled. It was then that he decided the department needed to develop a strategic plan and change the direction of recruiting practices. It was this newer, clearer direction that immediately attracted seven new recruits that filled these positions.

We now have clearly stated goals and objectives for the department. This attracts the type of people that want to provide a service for the community. We allow people to succeed as much as they want to. We listen to their input and hopefully this makes the organization better. It's not about one single person but about the community. If we didn't do these things we would not currently have a waiting list of applicants who want to join. We try to be at all the community functions in town and we try very hard to keep this a family organization. At all of our gatherings, like the Fireman's Ball, we try to involve families. The community really enjoys the Fireman's Ball and it's the biggest thing in Polson in the wintertime. This is where we hand out all of the awards. This fire department has now become more of the *community's* fire department. Now, it's not "the" fire department but "our" fire department. We also have a great relationship with our police department.

Q: Do the volunteers in Polson receive any kind of economic compensation or other incentives for their efforts?

We have a clothing allowance/reimbursement of up to \$30.00 per month based on whether or not a volunteer member shows up for training classes. We also have a committee set up that is looking into the idea of some sort of a stipend similar to the one that the department in Ronan currently has. The idea is that people who do more will be compensated more. This will be a benefit for those who are here all the time. I am really big into the reward aspect. I believe that if you do more for the organization you should get more from the organization. I came from a volunteer department in New York that actually charged *me* \$60.00 a year just to be a member of the department. I think we're sending a good message to our volunteers by reimbursing them for clothing.

Q: Do you believe that economic compensation is necessary for the recruitment and/or retention of volunteers in your department?

Chief Maloney indicated in the survey that he completed and returned to the DNRC, and in this interview, that economic compensation was not necessary for the recruitment or retention of volunteers in the Polson Volunteer Fire Department.

They aren't here for the money. As a matter of fact, some of them won't even accept the reimbursement money for clothing when it's offered to them. We have a program for the installation of smoke alarms into homes that pays our volunteers \$20.00 for every alarm that they install. Many of them give the money right back to the organization. Most of them like the idea of being compensated in some way but it is not necessary.

Chief Maloney also indicated that he thought that the current situation was going to eventually change to one of more compensation being needed for the Polson department. He believes that they will not be able to continue to provide the level of service that the community expects and not then need to provide more economic compensation to the volunteers. He stated that the Polson volunteers are currently "putting in a lot of hours" and that in the future he sees the need for possibly paying the volunteers a stipend per call that they respond to.

Q: Do you have some kind of a plan or a program then for recruiting people from the local community?

No, we don't have a program. People are literally beating down the doors to get into this place right now. I currently have 5 applications sitting on my desk. Now, this might change in the future but right now people really enjoy being here. Morale is high.

Chief Maloney believes that while Polson might not be having a problem with the recruitment and retention of volunteers he does believe that the state of Montana as a whole, especially in very rural areas, is having a problem. While there seems to be no shortage of willing and able volunteer personnel within the city limits of Polson, the

department's substation in the tiny village of Big Arm (12 miles to the north, population under 200) doesn't seem to fare as well in this regard.

The area around Polson has a huge seasonal fluctuation in population, going from about 10,000 permanent residents in the winter to over 20,000 people during the warmer months. This does cause a problem for having enough volunteers in our rural areas. The Big Arm station only has three people working there and one of those three leaves for the winter. I think in general, smaller towns are going to have a harder time attracting enough people to volunteer.

Q: Have you noticed if Polson is changing in its overall sense of community and becoming more similar to larger Montana cities, like Missoula for example?

Polson is changing and it is becoming a little more like Missoula. It is less rural and the sense of community is not really there in general anymore. Polson is not the small town it was 20 years ago, or even 5 years ago. Bill Lindstrom (chief, Missoula Rural Fire District) is right about what he says about changing attitudes and the growing community. With the younger generation, nothing is for free anymore.

Q: What other changes, if any, are you seeing in the types of people who are volunteering for the fire service?

The level of education among our volunteers is increasing. More educated people are being attracted to the fire department and I welcome that. About one-third of our department now is college-educated. Some people here own businesses and for a while the Polson city attorney was actually a volunteer firefighter in our department.

Q: What effect does training (or excessive training) have on the morale of your volunteers?

Training is the number one issue for volunteers because of the time constraints it puts on them. Too much training can lead to burnout and you can only ask people to do so much before they just say 'enough is enough'. I have two small children at home so I am sympathetic to the needs of our volunteers who have families. I don't want to be the one responsible for wrecking someone's marriage by asking too much of that person. I don't like the idea of families and marriages falling apart.

Chief Maloney pointed out that one of the biggest issues his department faces, in terms of training, is the fact that they are expected to meet certain mandates (HAZMAT training,

CPR training, proficiencies and requirements, etc.) but, according to him, these training mandates are not always funded sufficiently.

These unfunded mandates that we are expected to comply with are a real problem. We can't always expect everyone to be 100% proficient at every single thing. You can only ask people to do so much. We send at least two people every year to the Fire Academy (Emmitsburg, Maryland) and this means that two people have to take two full weeks off from their job. It's a huge commitment to do that. I also just sent six people to 'bomb school' in Albuquerque. The problem is we just don't have the time or the funding to do everything that we are expected to do. What I am finding is that we may be *good* at a lot of things, but we *great* at none. Paying people to train is not really going to solve the problem. These training mandates must be properly funded.

Q: Other thoughts or opinions related to volunteers and why they do what they do:

We have a great group of folks and I am only as good as they are. They do an awesome job. We are truly blessed here. Overall, better management is really the key to good morale in a department, not economic compensation. We do everything we can to provide them with a safe working environment.

Observation: The walls in Chief Maloney's office are covered in posters depicting firefighters involved in various emergency situations and other décor with pictures and quotes regarding the September 11th tragedy. There is one interesting bumper sticker attached to a filing cabinet that reads: "If they sent us to Hell... We'd put it out."

**Chief Thomas J. Maloney
Polson Volunteer Fire Department
106 First Street East
Polson, MT 59860**

Interview with Chief Brett Waters of the Belgrade Fire Department and Rural Fire District – Belgrade, Montana 2/19/04

Q: How long have you been in the current positions that you are in now?

Brett Waters has been the paid chief of both the Belgrade Fire Department and the Belgrade Rural Fire District since September of 1995. In 1996, he was appointed to the Fire Marshall's Advisory Board and now currently serves as president of that organization. In 1998, he became the Gallatin County Fire Warden and in 2000 became the president of the Montana County Fire Warden's Association. In 2001, Mr. Waters began working on Steve Frye's National Type I Incident Management Team as a structure protection specialist and Division Group Supervisor/Local Government Liaison. And most recently, in January of 2004, he was elected as Chairman of the Montana Fire Alliance Board of Directors. According to Mr. Waters, he "loves his work."

Q: What initially attracted you to the position of a volunteer firefighter?

Chief Waters first became a volunteer firefighter in 1978 in Red Lodge, Montana, the town where he was born and raised. Even though his father had been a volunteer firefighter for sixteen years he claims he had no real motivation as a young man to ever become involved with the fire service in any way. It wasn't until a rash of arson fires in and around the Red Lodge area in 1978, which both angered and galvanized the local community that Mr. Waters became involved in firefighting. He describes these events in his own words:

At that time I was in business with my parents working in the family clothing store in Red Lodge. This arsonist was targeting buildings, both commercial and residential, and everyone in the town was doing whatever they could to help out the volunteer fire department. Even the retired firefighters, including my father, would come out to help during this period. Being a young and healthy male at the time, I was later recruited

by the fire department after having helped them out several times. It was because of these events that I really fell in love with the idea of helping people and so I decided that I would join the department. I looked at it as a challenge and as an opportunity for an education. I took every single firefighting training class that was offered.

After joining the Red Lodge Fire Department Mr. Waters wasted no time in becoming heavily involved in the local firefighting community. By December of 1979 he had spearheaded a petition drive in order to obtain funding for a rural fire district outside of the city limits of Red Lodge. At that time there was no fire protection for the residents of this part of Carbon County who lived outside of the city. The petition was successful; the department was funded and created and is still in existence today known as the Red Lodge Rural Fire District #7. Mr. Waters became the fire chief of that department in January of 1981.

Q: What attracts people in and around Belgrade to volunteer their time for a fire department?

The first reason is the willingness and desire to just simply help people. The next reason is for the potential that some see for a career job. Because we are a busy department, or what I like to call a 'full-service department', we run a lot of calls and people gain very valuable experience here. We also have a very aggressive training program and we have very good equipment. Our department is not run like a social club. It is a very professional emergency services organization and we consider all of our members to be 'professionals'. The only difference at all is that some of the professionals receive a paycheck and the other professionals do not.

Q: What about volunteer firefighters in general? What is it that motivates them to do what they do?

Some are motivated by the excitement that comes with being involved in a job like firefighting. Some like the idea of the community stature that comes with being a volunteer firefighter and others just seem to have a natural sense of wanting to give something back to their community.

Chief Waters pointed out that the possibility of career opportunities was probably the biggest motivator for people to volunteer but for some people it is the need to belong to a

very different or special kind of a “family” organization. He stated that many of these people lack this family environment at home, for whatever reason, and this idea of “brotherhood” is very strong and very traditional among volunteer firefighters. He also believes that many people who come from military backgrounds are especially attracted to volunteer fire department because of the very structured organization that is to be found there. He described the fire service as a “paramilitary” type of an organization where people are expected to follow directions without always asking “why?” Some people really need this structured system in their life in some way and many who are no longer in the military miss this kind of atmosphere.

Q: Do the volunteers in Belgrade receive any kind of economic compensation or other incentives for their efforts?

My first thoughts about this are that I do not believe in it. I will give you one reason: If a person’s motivation is one of an economic consideration then typically they will not be a good volunteer. I want people who are there because they want to serve the public without consideration for anything other than self-fulfillment. At the same time I also do not expect the volunteers to subsidize the fire organization with their own money. We will provide them with the personal protective equipment, the tools and all the training that they need. Local government should provide these things for the firefighters that serve them.

Q: Do you believe that economic compensation is necessary for the recruitment and/or retention of volunteers in your department?

No. As a matter of fact, we have actually surveyed our own department and asked them what exactly it was that they wanted from the department in terms of incentives. Ninety percent of our volunteers said that they do not want to receive economic compensation. We do provide our volunteers with a fuel reimbursement stipend for going out on calls or going to training and really only about 25 percent will actually even accept the money. The rest just really don’t seem to care about it. Our firefighters look at it like this: They would rather we use the money to buy better tools and equipment for them so that they are able to do the best job they can. We keep the money in the department and this is why we have some of the best equipment in the state.

Q: According to a recent study conducted by FEMA it seems like the numbers of volunteer firefighters in the U.S. is dwindling. Were you aware of this trend? How do you think Montana fares?

Yes, I am very aware of the national problems with recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters. I think that Montana is probably losing volunteers and it is because of demographics. It used to be that most households were single-income households. Now people need a dual-income in their home just in order to survive. This need for two people working has really cut down on volunteer time and in turn, the larger communities where people go to find work do not really have a sense of community.

Q: Have you noticed if Belgrade is changing in its overall sense of community and becoming more similar to larger Montana cities, like Bozeman for example?

Yes it is changing. As a place like Belgrade or Bozeman grows and the population becomes more transient the sense of community is lost. Now a place like Manhattan, Montana, (10 miles west of Belgrade) has a population of 1,200 people and they *do* have a sense of community there. But the problem is that many of the people who live there have to work in either Belgrade or Bozeman and so they are not around during the day in Manhattan in order to be volunteers. Their reason for not volunteering in their own local department is that they just simply are not around during the daytime in their own community.

Note: The Manhattan Rural Fire District currently reports a total of 26 active volunteers in their department and makes the claim on their survey form that they actually increased this number by a total of 7 volunteers during the year 2003. The Manhattan RFD also state that they consider their current total numbers of volunteers to be “somewhat sufficient” for their needs and they do not have a plan or a program for recruitment. The next closest volunteer fire department to Belgrade is located in Gallatin Gateway, 14 miles to the south. This department reports no change in total number of volunteers (24) from 2003 to 2004, but they also point out that they consider this total amount to be “not at all” sufficient for their needs and yet they also claim to have a program in place for recruitment purposes. Two departments both located within the same county and less

than 25 driving miles apart, yet two very different situations happening there simultaneously. The Manhattan department reports that two different forms of economic compensation (insurance benefits, retirement pension) are offered to their volunteers, while the Gallatin Gateway department claims that nothing at all in the way of economic compensation is available for their volunteers.

Q: Other thoughts or opinions related to volunteers and recruitment and retention:

As for the national problem of recruitment and retention, I am not really sure what the answer is. I think that there are only going to be *local* solutions to these problems. It is not going to be a 'one size fits all' solution. It is going to be up to a local area to evaluate their needs and to come up with a plan to meet their local needs. The process of evaluation must be ongoing. We can't just continue to keep doing things in the same way forever. Since 9/11, things have completely changed in the fire service and in law enforcement. Perspective has changed about what we are expected to do now and in the future. We (fire departments) are the first responders to this nation when it comes to issues like terrorism and national security. The events of 9/11 showed everyone in this country that *we* are really the first line of defense in these situations. This is the same whether it is in Manhattan, New York City or in Manhattan, Montana.

**Chief Brett Waters
Belgrade Fire Department/Belgrade Rural Fire District
205 East Main
Belgrade, MT 59714**

Interview with Fire Chief Stephen Heppell of the Neihart Volunteer Fire Department – Neihart, Montana 2/28/04

Q: How long have you been in the current position that you are in now?

Steve Heppell has been the fire chief in Neihart for almost 10 years. He is a retired Air Force Colonel, age 62, born and raised in Seattle, Washington. He attended Washington State University, majoring in police science and administration and then immediately joined the US Air Force after college, entering as a 2nd lieutenant. During the 30 years he spent in the military he also completed a master's degree in public administration from Michigan State University in East Lansing. Chief Heppell currently lives about 12 miles north of Neihart on a property directly adjacent to a US military facility which houses (3) minuteman intercontinental ballistic missiles. His front door is literally less than 300 yards away from 3 nuclear weapons in underground silos.

Q: What initially attracted you to the position of a volunteer firefighter?

As the base commander at Malmstrom Air Force Base in Great Falls Chief Heppell was trained in "disaster preparedness" which included training for nuclear disasters, air crashes and security for nuclear weapons. He states that after a 30-year career in the military and at the age of just 54 he was not really prepared to stop working at a job that gave him a sense of duty and purpose. So getting involved with the fire service in some way just seemed to make sense. He also pointed out that it is no coincidence that there are many ex-military people who are now involved in the fire service. There is a chain of command and a sense of belonging to an organization that is very similar to the military that attracts people who feel comfortable within this type of atmosphere.

Q: What motivations do the volunteers in Neihart have to do what they do for the department and for the community?

People here are motivated by a sense of community and a sense of accomplishment. They want to be involved with something that has a worthwhile mission and something that gives them a feeling of job satisfaction. We have one volunteer who did all the electrical work during the construction of the new fire station and we have another volunteer who is a welder and a plumber. He built this hose dryer, the tool bench and did all the plumbing in the building. They volunteered their time and services for these projects and they get a sense of job satisfaction out of doing things like that. I myself get job satisfaction out of bringing people together through a leadership role as fire chief. I believe that the process of trying to attain excellence is a never-ending process and when peoples' lives are at stake then it is of utmost importance.

The new fire station that Chief Heppell spoke of was built entirely through volunteer labor from the local community in 1998. According to the chief, the old fire station building was in a complete shambles when he inherited it nearly ten years ago. It was in this condition because apparently there was no fire department at all in Neihart for as long as fifteen years from the early to mid-1980's until the mid-1990's. He keeps a photo album in the new fire station that contains all newspaper articles about the fire department and the construction of the station along with photographs of the entire sequence of events. He seems to take great pride in anything that is related to the fire department or to the community of Neihart.

Q: What attracts people in Neihart to volunteer their time for a fire department?

There are many reasons for volunteering for the fire department. There are the people who really just want to serve. These are the people who have an altruistic type of personality and a good sense of community. Then you also have those that just seem to have a 'danger gene'. They crave the excitement of being a firefighter. Unfortunately most of these 'cowboy-types' are not team players and sometimes are even dangerous to the rest of the members of the department. We are really very lucky to have the eleven volunteers that we have here in Neihart right now. We're not in it for the excitement. We're really just doing our jobs.

Note: The fire department in Neihart is made up almost entirely of retired individuals who responded to a total of seven incidents during the year 2003. There has only been one structure fire in the community since 1986 and according to Chief Heppell, usually only one wildland fire incident within their jurisdiction every two years or so. Neihart is completely surrounded on all sides by US Forest Service land (Lewis and Clark National Forest) and therefore most wildland fires in the area are almost always up at a higher elevation than the town and out of the local jurisdiction. Most incidents located within Neihart are actually automobile accidents that require an individual trained in EMT. The department owns a total of three vehicles, one of which is a 1957 Type III pumper engine with only 10.625 miles logged on its original engine.

Q: Do the volunteers in Neihart receive any kind of economic compensation or other incentives for their efforts?

We do have worker's compensation insurance in the case of someone getting hurt but we don't get any kind of reimbursement for out-of-pocket expenses, or any opportunity to receive a retirement pension of any kind. Regardless of this lack of reimbursement or compensation we still seem to be doing quite well in this department. Most of us are already retired so the idea of an additional retirement pension doesn't really mean much.

Chief Heppell explained that for a retirement pension to be set up for the volunteers in Neihart a plan for funding would have to first be approved by the mayor and city council and then be funded by the local community. He believes that the very tiny population of permanent residents in Neihart would just not be able to provide a large enough tax base to afford this kind of a retirement plan. The funding that provided the means for the construction of the fire station was made up almost exclusively by money donated by the wealthier non-permanent summer residents of the town.

Q: Do you believe that economic compensation is necessary for the recruitment and/or retention of volunteers in your department?

Yes, I believe that reimbursement for out-of-pocket expenses and the opportunity for a retirement pension are needed for recruitment and retention. Compensation would be an added value to the department. These forms of compensation may attract some but our volunteers that are here now seem to enjoy volunteering because it is a needed service for the community. We (current volunteers) actually have it easier than most. We are a lot different than the poor guy trying to work, raise a young family and volunteer all at the same time. Right now the people in this department can afford the non-reimbursed expenses so our concerns are more with equipment and vehicles than issues like compensation.

Q: Other thoughts or opinions related to volunteers and why they do what they do:

With our small numbers of volunteers, their ages, and their needs to live normal lives – moneywise we need a lot. We need more training and equipment but the reality is the volunteers are doing about all they can to sustain what we have now.

Observation: The tiny bedroom community of Neihart has only 31 permanent residents and grows to over three times that size during the summer months. With 11 individuals currently serving as volunteers in the local fire department, this equates to more than 1/3 of the permanent population being a member of the Neihart Volunteer Fire Department. Most of the homes nestled into this very tight and narrow canyon in the Little Belt Mountains of central Montana are very expensive summer/second home type residences. There is virtually no commercial industry in the community and seems to be made up almost entirely of retirees with higher than average incomes and/or healthy retirement pensions.

**Chief Stephen E. Heppell
Neihart Volunteer Fire Department
Box 37
Neihart, MT 59465**

Interview with Fire Chief Otto Ohlson of the White Sulphur Springs Volunteer Fire Department – White Sulphur Springs, Montana 2/28/04

Q: How long have you been in the current position that you are in now?

Otto Ohlson has been the volunteer fire chief in White Sulphur Springs for close to eighteen years. Originally from Nashua, Montana, (in the northeastern section of the state) and from an agricultural background, Chief Ohlson has been a resident of White Sulphur Springs for over thirty years. Recently retired from a long career with the Natural Resource Conservation Services he is now serving as the supervisor of Meagher County noxious weed control in addition to his duties as fire chief.

Q: What initially attracted you to the position of a volunteer firefighter?

I have always believed in the idea of volunteerism. In small communities everybody *should* pitch in. Volunteerism is what keeps these small communities going. I agree with what President (John F.) Kennedy said: 'Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country'. I believe in helping other people. It's just the way I was raised, I guess. There was some talk here quite a while back about putting the fire chief on a salary and I told them (city council) that as long as I was the chief here I would rather them use whatever money there was for the entire department and not just for the salary of one person.

Chief Ohlson states that he was active as a youth in 4H activities and he is the only member of his family to ever be involved in the fire service in any way.

Q: What attracts people in White Sulphur Springs to volunteer their time for a fire department?

We don't really seem to have a problem with recruitment and we don't really have a program designed for recruiting because people here just seem to really want to be on the department. We have a big representation of employees from federal agencies, like the US Forest Service, here in Meagher County. We have some members of the department who are actually professional firefighters with the Forest Service and they just really seem to like what they do.

Q: Do the volunteers in White Sulphur Springs receive any kind of economic compensation or other incentives for their efforts?

We do have some insurance coverage, worker's compensation, but we do not have the luxury of having a good retirement plan the way the bigger departments do. We just don't have a big enough tax base in a town the size of White Sulphur Springs (population ~1000). Actually, the retirement system right now in Montana is almost a joke. \$200.00 a month is nothing, but I suppose it could still be considered an incentive. It would be nice if small towns in Montana could be covered and subsidized by the State Rural Retirement System in the same way that rural volunteer fire departments are. The problem is that fire departments are very expensive to maintain. After you buy the equipment and the trucks, and then pay for the heat and the telephone there is just really not much money left over for benefits.

Chief Ohlson explained that very little revenue is generated from fire insurance policies in a small town because there are just not enough people that have this coverage. A certain percentage of the payments made by residents for this fire insurance go into a fund for firefighter retirement pensions. It is for this reason that rural departments are subsidized by the state because it is assumed that there is virtually no population at all in most rural areas where this same type of revenue could be generated. Chief Ohlson claims that the town of White Sulphur Springs is actually "losing ground" in its ability to generate a retirement fund.

Q: Do you believe that economic compensation is necessary for the recruitment and/or retention of volunteers in your department?

First of all, nobody is here (in this department) for the money. But I do believe that after 25 or 30 years of volunteer service a person should be compensated somehow. After all of the exposure to smoke and hazardous materials they should get *something* back. My biggest concern, personally, for these volunteers is that they are rewarded somehow for dedicating 25 to 30 years of their life to training, responding to accidents, and just the time spent away from their families for all those years. They do this because they believe in it and it would just be the right thing to do to thank them for their time and dedicated service.

Q: What about the retention of your current volunteers within the department? Is it a problem?

There is not a lot of fluctuation in population in the community and not much fluctuation in the number of volunteers in this department either. We might go plus or minus five members of the department a year, at the most. We don't ever really lose firefighters because of a lack of motivation. If we lose people it's almost always because they have either retired or just moved away to somewhere else to find employment. We do have a problem sometimes with the younger generation moving away for job opportunities elsewhere. Because of this we probably have an average age of firefighters in our department that is well above the normal or national average.

The White Sulphur Springs Volunteer Fire Department reported on their survey form a net loss of one firefighter during the year 2003.

Some volunteer fire departments have a group of very 'inactive' members, whereas others have a very, very active department. We probably fall somewhere in between those two extremes but we provide a very effective service here to this community. We have good equipment and a good training program, so the retention of our current personnel is something that we are just not really that concerned with.

Q: According to a recent study conducted by FEMA it seems like the numbers of volunteer firefighters in the U.S. is dwindling. Were you aware of this trend?

Yes. Twenty years ago there were less dual-family incomes than there are today and this means less time is available now for volunteer activities. I also believe that in this faster-paced society that we live in the whole idea of volunteerism is now thought of as less important, in general. I think Montana is going to be different than the majority of states in the US because we are still considered a rural state and we are more isolated from the rest of the country. There is a unique attitude among the people in Montana. In these small towns the idea of volunteering your time remains important to a lot of people.

Q: Other thoughts or opinions related to volunteers and why they do what they do:

Chief Ohlson describes the town of White Sulphur Springs as a "poor, ex-logging community." He also believes that low income has to have some kind of an effect on the psyche of the volunteers in his department, but he doesn't quite know exactly what it is or

how to put in into words. He reiterates the fact that his biggest personal concern for his volunteers is their financial well-being after retirement. According to Chief Ohlson, social security wages are very low and any way to supplement a retired firefighter's income is, he believes, the right thing to do.

Chief Otto Ohlson
White Sulphur Springs Volunteer Fire Department
Box 358
White Sulphur Springs, MT 59645

Interview with Fire Chief Ed Shindoll of the Broadwater County Rural Fire District – Townsend, Montana 2/28/04

Q: How long have you been in the current position that you are in now?

Ed Shindoll is actually the fire chief of five separate departments (Toston, Duck Creek, Townsend Rural, Winston, and Radersburg) within the County of Broadwater and has been so for six years. He is responsible for a total of 53 other volunteer firefighters within these 5 departments. He currently works for Big B Ready Mix in Townsend as a truck driver and mechanic.

Q: What initially attracted you to the position of a volunteer firefighter?

Chief Shindoll has been a volunteer firefighter for over fifteen years and went through three years of initial firefighter training before even being admitted into the department. He was born and raised on a farm in Townsend, Montana and still has dozens of family and extended family members in the local area.

My personal attitude about volunteering is that I just want to help all the neighbors that I can. I put in a lot of time doing this.

Q: What kind of challenges do you face trying to be a leader for five different departments all at once?

Chief Shindoll pointed out that training sessions in the past were very often *not* positive experiences for the members of the departments. There was fighting among the five different stations in the County and he believes that it was caused by some issues related to favoritism. Things have changed now and all training for the five departments is done together and this fosters a more positive attitude amongst the volunteers.

I do not run our departments like the military. I don't expect them to be at everything and I don't expect them to *do* everything. Our attitude in Broadwater County is that if we see smoke we all go to it and then we decide later whose jurisdiction it really is.

Q: What attracts people in Broadwater County to volunteer their time for a fire department?

It takes something special to be a volunteer firefighter. You have to want to help the community and you really have to want to *stay* here – that’s the biggest thing. Our volunteers are just neighbors helping neighbors. They might complain about certain things, like training, but they just do it anyway. Most of them are ranchers who can get away from their normal daily work if they need to.

Q: Do the volunteers in Broadwater County receive any kind of economic compensation or other incentives for their efforts?

We have worker’s compensation and a small retirement pension but it’s not really that much, \$150.00 a month, I think. More compensation would bring in more people to the departments – possibly – but they most likely would not be the same quality as the people that we have now. I think they would be there for different reasons. Honestly, equipment and training are higher priorities to all of us. Our volunteers might *like* to have some compensation but they don’t really seem to be worried about it. The fact that we all train together and we all do the same thing together means more to them than any kind of economic compensation.

Chief Shindoll described an incident where the members of the Radersburg Department were unhappy with the current condition of their main firefighting pumper engine and felt like they really needed to get a new one. Through a grant they were able to get a new truck and this made everyone in the department very happy and made them feel more valued for what they did. This is an example of the department receiving something as a group, and not as individuals receiving smaller rewards, and Chief Shindoll believes that this group reward is much more valuable to the volunteer firefighter than anything else.

Q: Do you think some form of economic compensation is needed for the recruitment and retention of volunteers here in Broadwater County?

No it’s not. My volunteers will volunteer for just about anything until the idea of money comes up. For example, on a few occasions we have worked with seasonal Forest Service employees, helping them fight fires in the area. Some of these firefighters like to talk about how much overtime pay they are getting for the season, right in front of some of my volunteers, and it really irritates them to listen to this. Everybody is there

doing the same job, only some of them are getting paid good money for it and others are paid nothing. I can also tell you that the idea of a combination department would not sit well with these volunteers.

Q: What about the recruitment and retention of volunteers within the County? Is it a problem?

It is tough to get people interested in the fire department. Turnover is a mild problem. It's tough to make a living here and a lot of the younger people are leaving to find work. We have one eighteen year-old in the district but our average age (of firefighters) is probably in the high-30's. We also are no longer getting family members following other family members into the department.

According to the survey completed by Chief Shindoll, he reports no change in the total number of volunteers (54) for all five departments under his jurisdiction during 2003.

Q: Other thoughts or opinions related to volunteerism in the fire service:

Capitalism in the fire service bothers me. I think that people who would profit from the losses of others are wrong. In rural communities and smaller towns in this country I believe that the fire service should always be completely volunteer. Any grant money that goes to our department(s) should go to the entire department for things like training and personal protective equipment and not towards salary of any kind. 93 percent of all the incidents within our response area are wildland fires and our departments really need to keep up with the training. This is a higher priority for us.

**Chief Ed Shindoll
Broadwater County Rural Fire District
Box 686
Townsend, MT 59644**

Interview with Donald Galloway: Volunteer Fire Department Assistance Programs Coordinator of the Texas Forest Service - 3/31/04
(Interview conducted at Texas Forest Service Office, College Station, Texas)

Don Galloway is a 15-year veteran of the Texas Forest Service, graduated from Louisiana Tech. University in 1988 with a bachelor of science in forestry and became a certified forester in 2002. Mr. Galloway is originally from a rural area of southeastern Louisiana and was somewhat familiar with the activities of volunteer fire departments as a youth but did not become actively involved with the fire service until moving to east Texas after graduating from college. He was an active volunteer firefighter for over eight years but eventually felt that his job with the Texas Forest Service created a conflict of interest between his professional work and his volunteer activities.

Q: What are some of your thoughts about your experiences with volunteer fire departments and firefighters, in general?

I think it's a neat thing to be part of a volunteer fire department but it is not a social club. You get out and drag hose with people at 3 am and you will very quickly decide that either you like it or you don't. I think that if you ask volunteer firefighters why they do what they do, their number one answer will probably be that they really just want to be part of a 'professional' organization. People want to be part of something that is successful and they want appreciation. They want to be able to take pride in their department.

Q: Do you believe that the numbers of volunteer firefighters in your State, and nationally, are dwindling?

I don't know if the actual numbers of volunteers are currently shrinking or growing but I do know we are facing the demographic problem of an aging force of volunteers. Younger people are not coming in and replacing those that are retiring. There is also a problem of firefighter availability during the day (working hours) because many people are working in other towns away from their own volunteer department's response area. The numbers of volunteers seems to be constantly changing and there is a three-tiered layer of the different types of volunteers in these departments. 1/3 of the members are fully-active and there is usually only one or two actual leaders in a department. 1/3 are

newer or transitional members who are really there just as a way of 'trying it out' and the final 1/3 are on the books but are not at all active.

Mr. Galloway described an event which occurred in 1988, a very large grass fire which actually threatened to burn the town of Abilene, Texas, which he claims "raised awareness in the fire service, local fire departments in general, got people interested in firefighting and put the Texas Forest Service on the radar screen after this particular event."

Q: What are some of the biggest issues facing the volunteer fire departments in the state of Texas?

According to Mr. Galloway, by the 1940's and through the 1950's most of the state of Texas had been completely plowed and grazed. Then the demographics began to suddenly and rapidly change, with younger people moving out of rural areas and into the more densely populated urban centers of Dallas, Houston, San Antonio, etc., looking for employment. The farmland then went mostly idle until the late 1970's when people began moving back into these smaller towns to escape the urban sprawl. With the influx of this formerly urban population into smaller towns the wildland-urban interface began to become an issue and the emergency services and infrastructure of these small towns were basically overwhelmed. People who had previously been accustomed to their fire service being a fully-paid/professional organization, like those found in a larger metropolitan area, had much different expectations than what these smaller and completely volunteer departments were able to deliver.

This population boom into these small towns had a tremendous impact on infrastructure and the abilities of the volunteer fire departments to keep up with the increased demand for their services. Volunteer fire departments are now the initial attack forces for all wildland fire incidents in the State and 90 percent of wildland fires are put out by volunteer fire departments. The Texas Forest Service was formed in 1915 and while the agency is

now (since 1993) responsible for statewide fire suppression, we have never been sufficiently staffed or funded for this responsibility. We now have about 350 total employees but we are responsible for a population of over 23 million people in 254 counties. This population is like a double-edged sword. While we have a lot of people available as potential volunteers, 90 percent of all wildland fires in Texas are caused by people.

Mr. Galloway also pointed out that there are now many people with very different personal/educational backgrounds living in rural areas that did not previously live in these areas. Many of them are not used to living in a forested environment and the idea of defensible space is not really a big concern for them.

Q: How do you feel about the idea of economic compensation being offered to volunteer firefighters?

What I have seen is that economic incentives are usually 'second-tier' motivators. Stipends might be a good way to show appreciation but department camaraderie is more important to volunteers. Once you introduce the idea of economic compensation in a department you must also set standards for who is or is not entitled to them. This means tracking individual activity levels and other personnel issues. The idea of management and the enforcement of rules and regulations is not something that everybody wants to do, or is even capable of doing. Some chiefs are not comfortable with this more intensive role of management and some are just not experienced enough with it. Trial and error can become ugly in this type of personnel experiment.

As to whether or not offering economic compensation to volunteers for their services could possibly attract the wrong kind of people into a volunteer department, Mr.

Galloway stated that: "in any endeavor, it is better to have the *right* kind of people rather than to just have a lot of people."

Q: What do you do in your home state to try to maintain a high level of motivation among the volunteer firefighters?

I believe the role of our government organization is to try to remove barriers. We don't want to become like 'Big Brother' to them. We are trying to keep them motivated and to cut down on the levels of frustration within the volunteer departments. Respect is important to them. Good public relations are good for recruitment and retention.

•
Other information provided by Mr. Galloway:

According to the "Rural Fire Defense Guiding Principles", the Texas Forest Service: "Recognizes the independent nature of Texas volunteer firefighters and of local government", "Recognizes that volunteers are just that; volunteers. They have jobs and private lives. They volunteer their time to their communities" and the Texas Forest Service "Will treat volunteer firefighters with the respect they deserve."

In an email to Mr. Galloway on the topic of volunteer recruitment and retention, Mr. David Abernathy – Assistant Chief Regional Fire Coordinator and Homeland Security Coordinator of the Texas Forest Service, states:

Here at the department where I am chief (Pittsburg, Camp County, Texas), we have the largest number of personnel (29) that we have ever had in years, and most are active members. We pay our personnel, per call, based upon certification level. This encourages attendance and participation in training. Like most departments our size, we also participate in the state retirement program. We furnish department t-shirts and caps, portable radios and all personal protective equipment. All new personnel must complete an introductory course (70 hours) within the first six months of entry to the department prior to become eligible to remain on the department.

In March of 2004, Mr. Galloway asked several of the fire chiefs in the state of Texas to give him suggestions and comments for what they each considered better ways to effectively recruit and retain volunteer firefighters for their respective departments. The following page is a synopsis of these comments as provided by fire chiefs in Texas and compiled by Don Galloway:

Donald Galloway
Volunteer Fire Department Assistance Programs Coordinator
Texas Forest Service
301 Tarrow - Suite 304
College Station, Texas 77840-7896

Effective Member Recruitment and Retention Comments from Texas Fire Chiefs

- Community pride
- Team building
- Professional appearance and behavior
- Standard hats, caps, shirts (often provided by department)
- Interview/meeting with member and spouse, kids/family
 - o Upfront about time/work commitment
 - o Network/support system for families
- Probationary period
- Training requirements
- Active training program (not a social club)
- Members need to be able to take pride in the dept.
- Track member participation on response calls
 - o Annual awards or prizes (recognition) of most active member (s)
- Pay per run (\$1, 2,...6.8 per run)
- Other economic incentives (cell phone discounts, insurance, retirement, water bill discounts)
- Find a place for everyone (young, old, etc.), can have active, productive members who fill rolls other than response.
 - o Support/logistics responsibilities
 - o Admin, records and paperwork
 - o Community PR
 - o Need to be respected and treated as “full-fledged members”
- Avoid “family dynasties” where they begin excluding non-family members
- Have and enforce the same rules for everyone

Traits of Texas Volunteer Firefighters/Departments:

- Money Poor, Attitude Rich
- Highly Motivated
- Reflect Community Values
- Small Core of Steady, Dedicated Members
- Most Members are “Blue Collar”
- Major Influence is Local Politics, Not State or National
- Fire Issues at State and National Level are Low Priority
- Very Few “Bad Apples”
- Want and Deserve Recognition and Respect
- Resourceful and Creative
- Conservative and Traditionalists
- Action-Oriented
- Don't like “Big Government”

APPENDIX D: Survey Compliance Rate & County Roll-call

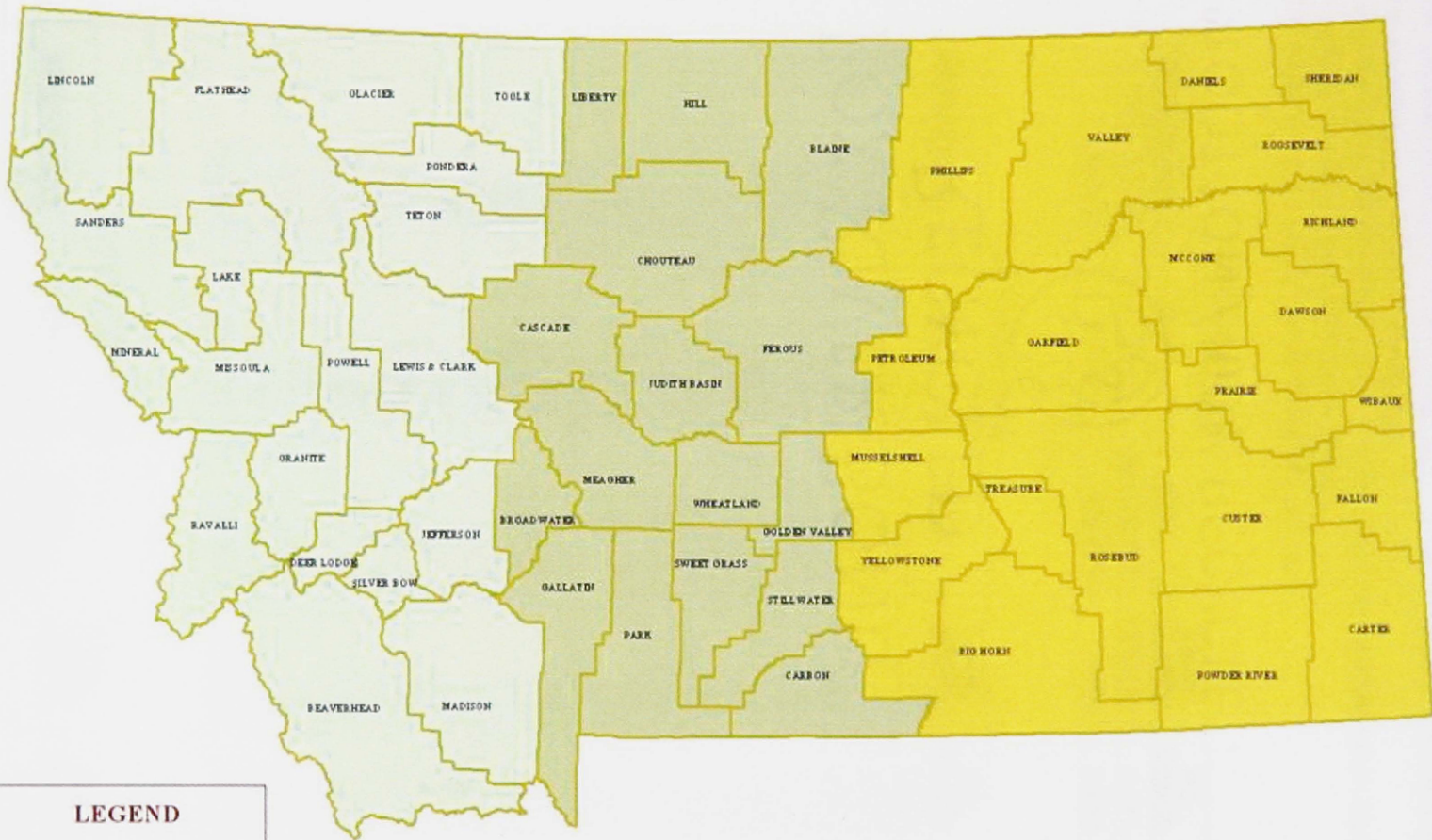
	County	Total No. of Departments	Complied to Survey	Pct. of Compliance	Geographic Region of State:		
					West	Central	East
1	BEAVERHEAD	7	7	100.0%	x		
2	BIG HORN	3	3	100.0%			x
3	BLAINE	6	3	50.0%		x	
4	BROADWATER	6	6	100.0%		x	
5	CARBON	8	7	87.5%		x	
6	CARTER	2	1	50.0%			x
7	CASCADE	17	16	94.1%		x	
8	CHOUTEAU	7	5	71.4%		x	
9	CUSTER	3	3	100.0%			x
10	DANIELS	5	4	80.0%			x
11	DAWSON	3	3	100.0%			x
12	DEER LODGE	6	5	83.3%	x		
13	FALLON	2	2	100.0%			x
14	FERGUS	13	13	100.0%		x	
15	FLATHEAD	20	14	70.0%	x		
16	GALLATIN	20	11	55.0%		x	
17	GARFIELD	1	1	100.0%			x
18	GLACIER	5	3	60.0%	x		
19	GOLDEN VALLEY	4	3	75.0%		x	
20	GRANITE	2	2	100.0%	x		
21	HILL	11	7	63.6%		x	
22	JEFFERSON	7	4	57.1%	x		
23	JUDITH BASIN	5	3	60.0%		x	
24	LAKE	9	8	88.9%	x		
25	LEWIS AND CLARK	17	15	88.2%	x		
26	LIBERTY	2	1	50.0%		x	
27	LINCOLN	10	9	90.0%	x		
28	MADISON	6	2	33.3%	x		
29	McCONE	1	1	100.0%			x
30	MEAGHER	3	3	100.0%		x	
31	MINERAL	3	2	66.7%	x		
32	MISSOULA	8	7	87.5%	x		
33	MUSSELSHELL	5	5	100.0%			x
34	PARK	9	8	88.9%		x	
35	PETROLEUM	1	1	100.0%			x
36	PHILLIPS	4	4	100.0%			x
37	PONDERA	6	4	66.7%	x		
38	POWDER RIVER	4	3	75.0%			x

County	Total No. of Departments	Complied to Survey	Pct. of Compliance	West	Central	East
39 POWELL	7	6	85.7%	x		
40 PRAIRIE	4	3	75.0%			x
41 RAVALLI	12	9	75.0%	x		
42 RICHLAND	4	4	100.0%			x
43 ROOSEVELT	9	6	66.7%			x
44 ROSEBUD	6	4	66.7%			x
45 SANDERS	9	8	88.9%	x		
46 SHERIDAN	7	7	100.0%			x
47 SILVER BOW	14	11	78.6%	x		
48 STILLWATER	8	8	100.0%		x	
49 SWEET GRASS	1	1	100.0%		x	
50 TETON	5	5	100.0%	x		
51 TOOLE	2	2	100.0%	x		
52 TREASURE	1	1	100.0%			x
53 VALLEY	8	7	87.5%			x
54 WHEATLAND	4	3	75.0%		x	
55 WIBAUX	1	1	100.0%			x
56 YELLOWSTONE	10	10	100.0%			x
Totals:	363	295	81.3%			

Geographic Region	Total No. of Departments	Complied to Survey	Pct. of Compliance	Volunteer Depts.	Combo Depts.	Career Depts.
1 WEST	155	123	79.4%	144	7	4
2 CENTRAL	124	98	79.0%	115	6	3
3 EAST	84	74	88.1%	79	4	1
Totals:	363	295	81.3%	338	17	8

Geographic Region	Total No. of Departments	Total No. Counties	Avg. No. of Depts. Per County
1 WEST	155	19	8.2
2 CENTRAL	124	16	7.8
3 EAST	84	21	4.0
Totals:	363	56	6.5

MONTANA GEOGRAPHIC REGIONS



LEGEND

- Montana Counties
- Geographic Regions
- WEST 1
- CENTRAL 2
- EAST 3



50 0 50 100 Miles

APPENDIX E: Map of the Three Geographic Regions of Montana

APPENDIX F:

MONTANA POPULATION PROJECTIONS: NPA Data Services Inc.

The Demographic Database of the 2003 Regional Economic Projections Series, issued December 2003, is prepared and copyrighted by NPA Data Services, Inc.

The database reflects the U.S. Census Bureau county level data that were available as of July 2002.

The year 2000 numbers are from Census 2000 (April 1, 2000).

The 2003-2004 numbers are July 1 projections by NPA Data Services.

NPA Projections						
AREA	2000 CENSUS	2003	2004	1 year growth	pct. Growth	
United States	281,421,906	291,168,400	294,031,500	2,863,100	0.98%	
MONTANA	902,195	924,630	933,650	9,020	0.98%	
Western Region	NPA Projections					
County	2000 CENSUS	2003	2004	1 year growth	pct. Growth	State Region
Beaverhead	9,202	9,160	9,200	40	0.44%	1
Deer Lodge	9,417	9,020	8,970	-50	-0.55%	1
Flathead	74,471	79,320	80,920	1,600	2.02%	1
Glacier	13,247	13,360	13,380	20	0.15%	1
Granite	2,830	2,910	2,910	0	0.00%	1
Jefferson	10,049	10,820	11,020	200	1.85%	1
Lake	26,507	27,890	28,400	510	1.83%	1
Lewis & Clark	55,716	57,830	58,760	930	1.61%	1
Lincoln	18,837	18,720	18,770	50	0.27%	1
Madison	6,851	7,100	7,170	70	0.99%	1
Mineral	3,884	3,900	3,920	20	0.51%	1
Missoula	95,802	99,150	100,660	1,510	1.52%	1
Pondera	6,424	6,390	6,390	0	0.00%	1
Powell	7,180	7,100	7,120	20	0.28%	1
Ravalli	36,070	39,250	40,270	1,020	2.60%	1
Sanders	10,227	10,680	10,810	130	1.22%	1
Silver Bow	34,606	33,090	32,910	-180	-0.54%	1
Teton	6,445	6,480	6,500	20	0.31%	1
Toole	5,267	5,180	5,160	-20	-0.39%	1
Totals:	433,032	447,350	453,240	5,890	1.32%	
Central Region	NPA Projections					
County	2000 CENSUS	2003	2004	1 year growth	pct. Growth	State Region
Blaine	7,009	6,970	6,970	0	0.00%	2
Broadwater	4,385	4,600	4,680	80	1.74%	2
Carbon	9,552	9,920	10,020	100	1.01%	2
Cascade	80,357	80,140	79,980	-160	-0.20%	2
Chouteau	5,970	5,780	5,770	-10	-0.17%	2

Fergus	11,893	11,810	11,780	-30	-0.25%	2
Gallatin	67,831	72,090	73,350	1,260	1.75%	2
Golden Valley	1,042	1,030	1,040	10	0.97%	2
Hill	16,673	16,620	16,580	-40	-0.24%	2
Judith Basin	2,329	2,290	2,280	-10	-0.44%	2
Liberty	2,158	2,110	2,110	0	0.00%	2
Meagher	1,932	1,950	1,950	0	0.00%	2
Park	15,694	16,050	16,220	170	1.06%	2
Stillwater	8,195	8,760	8,910	150	1.71%	2
Sweet Grass	3,609	3,650	3,670	20	0.55%	2
Wheatland	2,259	2,170	2,160	-10	-0.46%	2
Totals:	240,888	245,940	247,470	1,530	0.62%	
Eastern Region		NPA Projections				
County	2000 CENSUS	2003	2004	1 year growth	pct. Growth	State Region
Big Horn	12,671	13,000	13,100	100	0.77%	3
Carter	1,360	1,360	1,350	-10	-0.74%	3
Custer	11,696	11,390	11,390	0	0.00%	3
Daniels	2,017	1,960	1,940	-20	-1.02%	3
Dawson	9,059	8,790	8,740	-50	-0.57%	3
Fallon	2,837	2,710	2,680	-30	-1.11%	3
Garfield	1,279	1,220	1,210	-10	-0.82%	3
McCone	1,977	1,870	1,850	-20	-1.07%	3
Musselshell	4,497	4,510	4,540	30	0.67%	3
Petroleum	493	480	470	-10	-2.08%	3
Phillips	4,601	4,430	4,410	-20	-0.45%	3
Powder River	1,858	1,790	1,770	-20	-1.12%	3
Prairie	1,199	1,190	1,180	-10	-0.84%	3
Richland	9,667	9,360	9,360	0	0.00%	3
Roosevelt	10,620	10,630	10,650	20	0.19%	3
Rosebud	9,383	9,560	9,680	120	1.26%	3
Sheridan	4,105	3,870	3,830	-40	-1.03%	3
Treasure	861	790	790	0	0.00%	3
Valley	7,675	7,330	7,230	-100	-1.36%	3
Wibaux	1,068	1,050	1,050	0	0.00%	3
Yellowstone	129,352	134,050	135,720	1,670	1.25%	3
Totals:	228,275	231,340	232,940	1,600	0.69%	

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