

Interim Energy Development & Transmission Committee

Testimony by:

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Chairman Wardner and members of the committee, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to come before you to tell our story on the current status of response issues in Western North Dakota. I am not only the full time Emergency Manager for McKenzie County but I also serve as a volunteer firefighter and EMS provider with the Alexander Volunteer Fire Department.

McKenzie County consists of 2,847 Square Miles in Western North Dakota. Within our county we have 9 Volunteer Fire Departments. Each Volunteer Fire Department has approximately 20 personnel, which are mostly comprised of volunteers. The only paid fire department staff is with the Watford City Fire Department for weekend coverage. They have 3 firefighters who stay in town at the fire hall all weekend.

Some employers cover wages of the volunteer firefighters getting called out while at work, while others insist the employee use their own vacation time. Our fire districts can only ask for 5.0 mills without going to a vote. Even if we were to put the full 13 mills in place, this would only give us the money needed for the 10% match which we would apply towards the grant projects we receive.

Most Volunteer Fire Departments in the county also operate as a QRU (Quick Response Unit). These departments do not transport patients and do not receive any state or county funding to provide this special service.

There has been tremendous growth in Watford City over the past few years. In Watford City there are now at least 70 multi-story buildings which now exist, and the Fire Department is now fortunate to have a ladder truck. But volunteer staffing still continues to be a struggle.

Training for our Fire Departments is very difficult to obtain, and it is difficult to find the time for our volunteers to leave work or their family life. Our county has a great deal of oil field infrastructure which has increased our emergency call volumes throughout the county. See the attached list for an example of emergency response calls the QRU has responded to in the Alexander fire district.

We have had several oil & gas companies willing to do exercises with our firefighters, but that is usually held during the daytime hours when our volunteers are working their daytime jobs. So this option has not been as successful as we would have hoped.

A few members on the McKenzie County Ambulance Service do receive a full time salary, but the majority of their staff is only paid minimum on-call wages, and a stipend to go on an ambulance call. Most ambulance services in our area are volunteer based.

The County has been put in a position needing to help fund equipment needs, buildings or special projects with the volunteer organizations. This takes funding away from other departments and services needed in the county.

There are some grants available, but they are less frequent than in the past and the award amounts have diminished greatly. The Energy Oil Impact Grants were very successful in our county for the fire department and ambulance service, but those funds have since then disappeared.

The rural counties included in this project for consideration certainly have many of the same issues. We are very concerned about our volunteer departments being able to keep up with this pace. We can't afford to lose any volunteers. I thank you for your time and consideration towards such an important project.

Alexander First Responder Calls 2008-2017

2008

Medical Calls 7

2009

Medical Calls 10

2013

Medical Calls 29

Traffic Accidents 25

Rig Accident 1

Miscell Calls 5

Total Calls 60 Calls

2014

Medical Calls 58

Traffic Accidents 40

Rig Accident 6

Mutual Aid 1

Fire Standby 7

Miscell Calls 6

Total Calls 125 Calls

2015

Medical Calls 38

Traffic Accidents 26

Rig Accident 1

Fire Standby 5

Miscell Calls 12

Total Calls 82 Calls

2016

Medical Calls 31

Traffic Accidents 8

Fire 5

Rig Accident 1

Miscell Calls 3

Total Calls 48 Calls

2017

Medical Calls 25

Traffic Accidents 12

Rig Accident 1

Fire Standby 4

Miscell Calls 1

Total Calls 43 Calls