East County Fire and Rescue State of the District 2026

By Josh Seeds, Fire Commission Chair

East County Fire and Rescue entered 2026, our twentieth year as a Fire District, on solid ground. In 2025, Chief Steve Black began his role as our Fire Chief and led the recruitment of our Deputy Chief, Sammy Brown. We have fifteen career firefighters, three of whom are captains who lead our three shifts. This staffing level meets the commitment we made when we requested a levy lid lift in 2024 and allows us to reliably staff fire stations on both sides of the Washougal River.

At the same time, our training program expanded to ensure the highest standards of emergency response. Our firefighters train regularly in structural firefighting, emergency medicine, forced entry, and patient extrication from vehicles. We run an annual volunteer firefighter academy that draws trainees from across the region, and ECFR is becoming a training destination. The trainees stay with ECFR and work shifts as volunteers alongside our career firefighters. Our Emergency Medical Service (EMS) levy will be up for renewal on the August primary ballot. This money helps fund the Camas-Washougal Fire Department's ambulance so that our District is covered by that publically-funded service. It takes effort and resources to ensure that when you call 911, skilled first responders arrive ready to help.

The Board of Fire Commissioners prioritizes readiness, sound finances, and thoughtful planning. We save money each year for future needs while investing in people, fire apparatus, and equipment. Without skilled personnel, we cannot do our job as a fire district; the days of operating with only volunteers are long behind us. We purchased a new water tender to replace our oldest (from 1999) and will be getting a new engine later this year. Both were purchased with saved cash to avoid paying interest. We also nurture our strong partnership with the Camas-Washougal Fire Department and the city governments to ensure we work together seamlessly. This will continue with the newly formed Camas-Washougal Regional Fire Authority. Because of our hard work and the trust of ECFR's voters, the Washington Fire Protection Bureau recently changed our insurance rating from 5 to 4, which is excellent for a rural fire district and could lower fire insurance costs for our residents.

This spring has been notably drier and warmer than usual, resulting in an extremely low snowpack. We are already observing a few outdoor fires, and forecasts suggest a very active fire season ahead. Now is a good time to clear defensible space around your home, clean your roof and gutters, and safely pile woody debris—either to chip or burn once the weather becomes wetter in autumn. For safe outdoor burning advice, visit beforeyouburn.net, and burning permits can be obtained from our website at www.ecfr.us. Practicing good fire safety at home and during recreational activities is essential to ensure this summer remains safe and the air stays clear.

East County Fire and Rescue (ECFR) is the sixty square mile district located north and outside of the cities of Camas and Washougal, serving over 10,000 citizens. Every year since 2015, East County Fire & Rescue's (ECFR) Board Chair has submitted this column as a special outreach to our citizens, as well as those in the areas we provide mutual aid (Camas, Washougal, Skamania County, Vancouver, etc.). 2025 Chair Joshua Seeds wrote this year's column.

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