

## A Conversation with the Chief

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Karen Rasmussen, TCPOA Board Secretary, talked with our Fire Chief, Steve Simons, last fall prior to his retirement on December 1, 2019. The following is a summary of the meeting, edited for clarity and length.

Note: In this article we will be referring to Meeks Bay Fire Protection District as “Meeks Bay” and North Tahoe Fire Protection District as “North Tahoe”

Karen: I have a few questions about the article on the back page of the *Firewatch* newsletter we received last summer, entitled “Alternate Governance and Standards of Cover Studies.” I understand it’s about the merger of Meeks Bay Fire with North Tahoe Fire. I thought we were already merged with them. It’s a little confusing- can you explain what it’s about?

**Chief Simons: Meeks Bay has contracted with North Tahoe to provide staffing and services since 2014. Part of the agreement was to explore legal unification after two years. One could say the Fire Districts have been “engaged” five years and are now considering “marriage.”**

**The Meeks Bay Board of Directors needs community input, either in favor of the merger, or against, before proceeding with the legal reorganization.**

Karen: What is North Tahoe providing to Meeks Bay?

**Chief Simons: North Tahoe provides fire, paramedic, rescue, and community services (such as defensible space inspections, building plan reviews, etc.). With this arrangement, the Tahoma/West Shore community has gained far more services than Meeks Bay was able to provide on its own, at the same cost.**

Karen: What benefits would we get if we “tie the knot?” What would we lose?

**Chief Simons: Legal unification will eliminate redundancies. The Emergency Services Consulting International study identified up to \$70,900.00 in savings annually. Other advantages are harder to quantify and assign a dollar value, as they are related to staff time and the differences between the two districts. We estimate the overall savings will allow for additional firefighter staffing on the west shore.**

**As a part of legal unification, we will have seats added to the Board of Directors. These seats would have to be filled by residents of our community- to ensure we don’t lose representation. The meetings will take place in Tahoe City. You won’t have board meetings in Meeks Bay any longer.**

Additional Information:

*Firewatch* Newsletter: <https://www.meeksbayfire.com/our-newsletter>

NTFPD and MBFPD Joint Board Meeting April 15, 2019 (Located on <https://www.ntfire.net/board-minutes>): [https://a1a57985-b06a-4ce2-980f-c62ebe0e4c45.filesusr.com/ugd/35dc29\\_656c4f166e4c4cd1a891f31c27246d50.pdf](https://a1a57985-b06a-4ce2-980f-c62ebe0e4c45.filesusr.com/ugd/35dc29_656c4f166e4c4cd1a891f31c27246d50.pdf)

Performance Review and Examination of Alternative Governance Models, 2018 by Emergency Services Consulting International, p. 127, presented at the Joint Board Meeting April 15, 2019:

**Additional Potential Cost Savings from Consolidation**

A review was made of the Meeks Bay Fire Protection District budget to identify potential cost savings that would be possible through a merger of the two Districts. The prior agreements between the two Districts have produced significant cost savings through the reduction of duplicate command and administrative staff positions. The potential cost savings are not included in the forecast. The following figure lists the cost account and the potential savings:

Figure 104: Potential Annual Cost Savings from Consolidation

Cost Account	Potential Savings
Board of Directors may be reduced or eliminated	\$ 7,000
Internet service could be consolidated with NTFPD	\$ 5,700
Computer systems could be fully integrated and system maintenance combined	\$ 12,000
Liability insurance could be combined and while it would not fully eliminate the amount it would be significantly reduced due to the consolidation	\$ 11,000
Subscriptions and memberships	\$ 1,000
Board expenses may be reduced or eliminated	\$ 10,200
Annual audit and OPEB valuation would be reduced	\$ 4,000
Dispatch service costs would be reduced	\$ 20,000
<b>TOTAL POTENTIAL ANNUAL SAVINGS</b>	<b>\$ 70,900</b>