

Firefighting takes the spotlight at McKinley County Commission meeting

Written by By Cody Begaye Sun Correspondent
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Also on the agenda, Thoreau Fire Station project

Jason Carlisle, McKinley County fire chief, spoke at the April 16 Board of Commissioners regular meeting about a number of items pertaining to the upcoming fire season.

The first was a report and public comment session about the current drought status for McKinley County, and the current fire danger.

According to Carlisle, McKinley County received enough moisture last year to ensure there is undergrowth, and the county expects a moderate monsoon season this year.

Any steps to combat the danger of wildfires will come with future reports, Carlisle said.

“We missed the point where we could ban fireworks,” he said. “But we have to have something in place before Independence Day.”

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According to the National Weather Service website, McKinley County has moderate drought conditions. The most recent drought map was released April 11.

The second item Carlisle spoke about was the Thoreau Fire Station replacement project.

The conceptual design for the new fire station would carry the department well into the future, Carlisle said. The project would involve tearing down the existing firehouse, and then selecting another site for the new building.

But the new building would not be without its drawbacks, which were raised by Commissioner Billy Moore.

“The cost is excessive, and the money from the fire tax would eliminate other projects for up to 20 years,” he said.

Moore cited \$2 million as the project cost for the currently planned location. Carlisle said that they are still taking feedback about where the new firehouse would be located.

Chairperson Bill Lee asked what amount was left in the county fire tax for the project, and was told about \$115,000 a year, which lines up with the 20 year projection by Moore.

Lee said that it is best the county look into other options and locations before fully committing to the project.

The last item Carlisle spoke on was the pilot program dubbed “McKinley County Fire Wildland Fire Team” with temporary seasonal firefighters.

This program would allow the county to expand its wildland firefighting capabilities, Carlisle said.

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He added that this program would allow the county to hire 10 volunteers as part-time seasonal employees, and bolster equipment and staff.

The county was able to recoup about \$200,000 in revenue last year, which can be used for the start up costs of the program, he said.

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