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VENTURA COUNTY
GRAND JURY

EXHIBIT 1

FY 2013-2014 GRAND JURY FINAL REPORT

RESPONSES TO FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Report Number (& Date)	Report Title	Respondents (With FI and R #)
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REPORT NO. 01 May 14, 2014

Title: **Firefighting Air Assets: The Camarillo Springs Fire**

Required
Respondents:

Board of Supervisors

(FI-03, FI-04, FI-05, FI-06, FI-07, FI-08 and FI-09)
Plus (R-01, R-02, R-03, R-04, R-05 and R-06)

Ventura County Sheriff *

(FI-03, FI-04, FI-05, FI-06, FI-07, and FI-09)
Plus (R-01, R-02, R-03, R-05 and R-06)

Response
Invited by CEO:

Ventura County Fire Protection District

(The Grand Jury Did Not Specify any Findings or Recommendations
to which the Fire Protection District was expected to reply).

* Provided to the Board of Supervisors for information only, approval is not required.

Response to 2013 - 2014 Grand Jury Report Form Cover Page

Report Title: Firefighting Air Assets: The Camarillo Springs Fire

Report Date: May 14, 2013

Responding Agency/Dept: Board of Supervisors

Response Prepared by: Frank Chow

Title: Program Management Analyst

FINDINGS

- I (we) agree with the findings numbered: **None**
- I (we) agree partially with the findings numbered: **FI-03, FI-04, FI-05, FI-07, FI-08, FI-09**
- I (we) disagree with the finding numbered: **FI-06**
(Attach a statement specifying any portions of the findings that are disputed; include an explanation of the reasons therefore.)

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Recommendations numbered (**None**) have been implemented.
(Attach a summary describing the implemented actions.)
- Recommendations numbered (**None**) have not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.
(Attach a timeframe for the implementation.)
- Recommendations numbered **R-01 through R-06** require further analysis.

The Board has an established policy for formulating long-range plans to address capital needs submitted by County departments/agencies – see Administrative Policy Manual, Chapter II – 8. The CEO has been working with the Sheriff and Fire District to develop a new helicopter services Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) that is scheduled to go before the Board in September. This MOA includes a provisions that will address the recommendations made within this report.

- Recommendations numbered (**None**) will not be implemented because they are not warranted or are not reasonable.
(Attach an explanation.)

Date: 9/9/2014

Signed: _____

Chair, Ventura County Board of Supervisors

Number of pages attached: 3



Response to 2013-2014 Grand Jury Report

Report Title: Firefighting Air Assets: The Camarillo Springs Fire

Report Date: May 14, 2013

Response by: Board of Supervisors

FINDINGS

- We agree partially with the finding numbered: ***FI-03 – The VCSD helicopters are between 39 and 45 years old and are legacy aircraft. Parts are becoming scarce for these helicopters. The practical lifespan of these helicopters is about ten years.***

The noted age of the helicopters is correct, however the Board of Supervisors (Board) agrees with the Sheriff in that the life of the existing VCSD helicopters may extend well beyond ten years. The Sheriff's Aviation Unit maintenance staff are in the best position to assess the practical lifespan of the existing helicopters and they indicate the lifespan may extend well beyond ten years. County Executive Office (CEO) staff has been working with the Sheriff and Fire District to develop a new helicopter services Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) that is scheduled to go before the Board in September. This includes a funding plan to begin addressing the need for replacement helicopters.

- We agree partially with the finding numbered: ***FI-04 – There is a need for additional and newer helicopter capabilities for the VCSD. There are no low-cost new or used replacement helicopters.***

Though there may be a need for additional and newer capabilities, the Board believes other factors such as but not limited to the County's crime rate, population growth, helicopter condition, County's financial condition, acquisition costs, and an assessment of future fire-fighting needs should be considered. The CEO staff has been working with the Sheriff and Fire District to develop a new helicopter services MOA that is scheduled to go before the Board in September. This MOA includes a funding plan to begin addressing the need for replacement helicopters.

- We agree partially with the finding numbered: ***FI-05 – Because of the age of the fleet, pilots and mechanics experienced with these helicopters are becoming harder to find.***

The Board defers to the Sheriff's Office on this finding. However, County Human Resources records show that the last recruitments for a helicopter pilot and a mechanic resulted in 38 (in 2006) and 12 (in 2011) qualified applicants respectively. Also, with the return of veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan, there may be a potential for more people who may not have the experience with Hueys, but possess the ability to perform the job.

- We disagree with the finding numbered: ***FI-06 – The VCSO lacks an adequate number of helicopter mechanics to maintain their fleet.***

This finding implies the Sheriff's staff has not been able to adequately maintain the helicopter fleet. CEO staff is unaware of any such occurrence or issue that would threaten the Aviation Unit's excellent safety record. However, with the additional investments planned under the previously noted new MOA, provisions for an additional helicopter mechanic are included within the MOA.

- We agree partially with the finding numbered: ***FI-07 – When all current helicopters are operational, there is an immediate need for one additional pilot for the VCSO.***

The Board believes this finding is unclear because no reasons or evidence were provided as to why the Grand Jury believed this was an immediate need. The Board agrees with the Sheriff's response that an additional pilot would provide improved scheduling and response capacity. With the additional investments planned under the previously noted new MOA planned for Board consideration in September, provisions for an additional helicopter pilot are included.

- We agree partially with the finding numbered: ***FI-08 – The BOS lacks a capital funding plan, outside of the Sheriff's operational budget, for VCSD helicopter replacement.***

The Board agrees funding for a replacement helicopter is not in the current adopted budget or the Five-Year Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). The Board has an established policy for formulating long-range plans to address capital needs submitted by County departments and agencies, (County Administrative Manual Chapter II-8). The new MOA that is scheduled to go before the Board in September includes a funding plan to begin addressing the need for replacement helicopters. Once the MOA is approved by the Board, the components dealing with capital investments will be included in the Board's Capital Improvement Plan (CIP).

- We agree partially with the finding numbered: ***FI-09 – The Bell Long Rangers helicopter refurbishment program is not adequately funded or staffed.***

The Board agrees partially with the finding. Staffing may be an issue but is currently undergoing analysis as part of the larger funding plan under development and previously noted. The new MOA that is scheduled to go before the Board in September includes a funding plan to begin addressing this need. (See responses to recommendations.)

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Recommendations numbered **R-01 through R-06** require further analysis.

R-01 – The Grand Jury recommends that the VCSD hire at least one and probably two helicopter mechanics as soon as possible.

The CEO staff evaluates all hiring requests from County departments/agencies before making a recommendation to the Board. The CEO has been working with the Sheriff and Fire District to develop a new helicopter services Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) that is scheduled to go before the Board in September. This MOA includes a provision for an additional helicopter mechanic.

R-02 – The Grand Jury recommends that the VCSD hire an additional helicopter pilot.

As noted in response to the previous recommendation the CEO has been working with the Sheriff and Fire District to develop a new helicopter services MOA that is scheduled to go before the Board in September. This MOA includes a provision for an additional helicopter pilot.

R-03 – The Grand Jury recommends that the BOS commit the necessary resources for the expedited completion of the Bell 206 L-3 Long Ranger refurbishment.

The CEO is actively working with the Sheriff and Fire District to fund the completion of the refurbishment of the Bell Long Ranger as part of the MOA that is scheduled to go before the Board in September.

R-04 – The Grand Jury recommends that the VCSD use the Bell Long Ranger for appropriate missions, to save wear and tear on the legacy fleet as well as reduce operational costs.

The Board will defer to the Sheriff on making operational decisions regarding its fleet.

R-05 – The Grand Jury recommends that the BOS establish a capital expenditure fund, add to yearly, designated for the replacement of the legacy aircraft within the next ten years or when appropriate aircraft becomes available. The unavailability of the Huey helicopters leaves only the next generation of helicopters, possible Blackhawks, as replacement for the Hueys. The cost for these helicopters (acquisition, maintenance mechanics, and pilots) will be significantly higher than the County has experienced using Hueys.

As previously noted the Board has an established policy for formulating long-range plans to address capital needs submitted by County departments/agencies. The CEO staff has been working with the Sheriff and Fire District to develop a new helicopter services MOA that is scheduled to go before the Board in September. This includes a funding plan to replace a Huey.

R-06 – The Grand Jury recommends that the BOS fund a new replacement helicopter for the VCSD for use as a dedicated search and rescue vehicle.

As previously noted the CEO staff is actively working with the Sheriff and Fire District to address the long-term needs of the Aviation Unit.

VENTURA COUNTY FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT

MARK LORENZEN
County Fire Chief



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August 14, 2014

The Honorable Brian J. Back
Presiding Judge, Superior Court of California
County of Ventura
800 South Victoria Avenue
Ventura, CA 93009

Subject: Grand Jury Report: "Firefighting Air Assets: The Camarillo Springs Fire"
Dated May 14, 2014

Dear Judge Back:

This letter is in reference to the above named report. I appreciate the Grand Jury's focused review on the use and availability of aviation assets on the Springs Fire. I agree in general with the findings contained within the report and am working with the CEO and the Sheriff to develop a new helicopter services Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) that is scheduled to go before the Board in September. Additionally, I have testified to the value of air assets and the struggles the fire service is experiencing in this area in the national context. While the Fire District was not identified as being required to respond to the findings in the report, I would like to offer the Fire District's perspective on two observations that were contained within the final report.

The first is in regards to a comment in the report that some first responders believed that if a second VCSD helicopter had been both available and dispatched during the initial response, the fire would have been stopped sooner. While this statement may have been made by a first responder, it is not an accurate assumption or observation in this particular case.

There are times when the fuel and weather conditions are such that an expedient air resource response can make a significant difference in the containment of a wildland fire, however, this was not one of them. On May 2, 2014, the vegetation within the county had been stressed by drought and on that particular morning we were experiencing single digit humidity and sustained wind speeds in the 20-30 mph range with gusts over 50 mph, the proverbial "perfect storm" for a wind-driven wildland fire.

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Could aircraft have made a difference in this situation? Perhaps, but in my opinion it would have required them to be in the air in the vicinity of the ignition when it occurred. This fire quickly moved from the side of the freeway to the top of the cut bank where it spread rapidly in alignment with the northeast winds. The fire was out of control within just a few minutes of ignition and, accordingly, it is highly unlikely that multiple helicopters at the ready at the Sheriff's heliport would have made a difference in extinguishing the fire on this day.

The second point relates to the statement that there is a systemic bias against the use of military aircraft and that this bias negatively affected our ability to properly fight the fire. The report recognizes that there is a process in place to access military assets and that this process has been developed well outside the scope of local government jurisdiction. The fact that the federal government requires other available air resources to be exhausted before accessing Air Guard resources may be construed by some as bias. As to the impact that this process had on the Springs Fire, I can attest that all of our requests for air resources were filled through the normal system and, to my knowledge, there was not a point in time, outside of a period when aircraft were grounded due to wind conditions, when we did not receive the requested fixed wing aircraft. My professional opinion is that with this particular fire, the fact that the C-130s from the local Air National Guard base were not deployed and our air resource orders were instead filled with state and federal aviation assets had little to no impact on the final size, control or containment of the Springs Fire.

I appreciate the opportunity to comment on the Grand Jury's report. Should you have any additional questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at (805) 389-9704.

Sincerely,



Mark Lorenzen
Fire Chief