

SW Polk Fire District

Statement from the Board of Directors

March 13, 2026

In November 2025, the SW Polk Fire District's operating levy renewal fell short of voter approval by just over 300 votes. The Board of Directors wants our community to know that we heard you. A "no" vote is a legitimate and important expression of community priorities, and we fully respect the outcome of that election.

Following the vote, the Board immediately directed staff to begin adjusting the District's budget to reflect the loss of levy funding. Over the past several months, we have carefully reviewed every aspect of the District's operations, reduced costs, and evaluated what level of service can realistically be maintained with the funding currently available.

Despite those efforts, the financial reality is clear: without levy funding, the District cannot sustain its current staffing levels.

As a result, the District has issued layoff notices for six positions, effective June 30, 2026. These positions represent frontline emergency responders who answer calls for help when members of our community experience some of the most difficult moments of their lives. These individuals respond to structure fires, wildland fires, medical emergencies, vehicle crashes, hazardous materials incidents, and rescue calls across our service area.

Issuing these layoff notices was not a decision made lightly, nor was it one we wanted to make. The Board understands the personal impact these decisions have on the firefighters and their families, as well as the operational impact they will have on emergency response within our District.

The Board's decision to place a levy replacement on May 19, 2026, ballot is not about disregarding the will of the voters. Rather, it reflects our responsibility to ensure that the community has a clear understanding of the consequences of the levy's failure and an opportunity to reconsider the issue with that information in mind.

Over the past several years, the previous voter-approved levy allowed SW Polk Fire District to make critical improvements to emergency services within our community. Those improvements included:

- Significantly reducing emergency response times across the District
- Providing consistent, guaranteed staffing to ensure rapid response when emergencies occur
- Improving firefighter and responder safety through adequate staffing levels
- Strengthening support for our volunteers and regional mutual aid partners

These improvements were not theoretical—they produced measurable results. In 2020, emergency response times in some areas of the District, including Bridgeport, averaged approximately 25 minutes for 90% of calls. With the addition of stations, equipment, and staffing supported by the levy, average response times were reduced to less than 10 minutes in 2024.

At the same time, the demand for emergency services has continued to grow. Call volume in SW Polk Fire District has increased dramatically in recent years, reflecting both population growth and

the increasing complexity of emergency incidents. These calls include fires, medical emergencies, traffic crashes, and wildfire response, among many others.

Even with the improvements made possible by the previous levy, our firefighters and volunteers are responding to more calls than ever before. Without the staffing funded through that levy, the District will be forced to reduce service levels at a time when community demand for emergency response continues to increase.

If the levy is not renewed, the layoffs scheduled for June 30 will take effect. This will result in reduced staffing, longer response times, and fewer resources available when multiple emergencies occur at the same time. It will also increase reliance on mutual aid from neighboring agencies that are facing many of the same staffing and resource challenges.

The Board wants to be clear: this levy reattempt is not about expanding services or growing government. It is about preserving the level of emergency service that this community has already built and come to rely upon over the past several years.

Without adequate funding, those service improvements cannot be sustained. Once staffing levels are reduced, restoring those capabilities in the future becomes significantly more difficult.

We believe the public deserves transparency, accountability, and a clear understanding of the choices before them. On May 19, 2026, voters will decide whether SW Polk Fire District can retain the staffing necessary to respond quickly and effectively when emergencies occur.

The Board also believes our community deserves the opportunity to consider this decision with a full understanding of the real-world consequences involved—not only for the firefighters who serve this District, but for every resident who depends on emergency services when seconds matter.

More information will be available through upcoming community meetings, on the District website and social media, and by visiting any SW Polk fire station. Community members are also invited to attend the District's Annual Pancake Breakfast on May 3, 2026, to learn more and speak directly with firefighters and District leadership.

If you value the response time improvements that have been achieved, the firefighters and volunteers who serve your community, and the safety of your family, neighbors, and property, we respectfully ask you to support the levy replacement on May 19.

This vote represents the community's final opportunity to prevent these layoffs and preserve the emergency service capabilities that protect SW Polk residents every day.

Respectfully,

The Board of Directors
SW Polk Fire District