

WHEELER CREST FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT

129 Willow Road
Swall Meadows, CA 93514
Date: 11-10-2021



Dear Rhonda Duggan, Mono County 2nd District Supervisor and Mono County,

The Wheeler Crest Fire Protection District Board of Directors and its chief, Dale Schmidt, along with the Wheeler Crest Fire Safe Council will be presenting the Swall Meadows Emergency Alternate Route (SMEAR) project during the Mono County Strategic Plan meeting as our "Top Priority" in Swall Meadows. Currently, Swall Meadows has only one road in and out of the community, greatly increasing the risk to residents when evacuating during an emergency and reducing efficiency of firefighting and other resources as they enter. The SMEAR Project would connect Quail Court in lower Swall to Swall Meadows Road near the intersection with Lower Rock Creek Road. We have a pending agreement for an easement across private property in the Pinon Ranch subdivision. The bulk of the route runs across Forest Service land with a small portion of BLM property. This access road will be for emergency use only. Former District 2 Supervisor Fred Stump has presented this project to Mono County in previous years. We believe that now is the perfect time to move this project forward given new availability of Federal funds such as the FEMA -Cal OES grant for such projects through the California Hazard Mitigation Grant Program.

Swall Meadows has been exploring the possibility of a secondary access road for many years. Of the three possible routes, the Quail Court route is by far the most feasible. The Round Fire in 2015, followed by the Rock Creek fire in 2016, provided added urgency to advance the SMEAR Project. During public meetings in the Community and electronic queries residents overwhelmingly support a secondary egress. It was a top priority in the recent Community Wildfire Protect Plan completed in early 2019. And included in the Mono County Hazard Mitigation Plan also completed in 2019.

As part of the exploration and design we have had conversations with both Inyo National Forest and BLM, Bishop Field Office. Their representatives have walked the proposed route and attended Fires Safe Council meetings at the firehouse. Both agree that it is a very viable project and would help keep our community safer in the event of fire or other emergency. They do, however, informed us that Mono County would need to be our "lead agency" on such a project as this emergency egress road would ultimately be an (emergency only) county road. While we believe Mono County would need to lead any grant applications to fund this project, there are several individuals in the Community who would be willing to assist. We would sincerely appreciate your attention to this critical project that would greatly benefit our community. The next fire is not a matter of "if" but a "when."

Sincerely,
Bill Goodman, WCFPD Chairman
760-937-2224