

SECTION 9.0 AROMAS TRI-COUNTY FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT FIRE SERVICE

9.1 Overview

The Aromas Tri-County Fire Protection District was formed in 1951 as an independent special district. The District provides fire protection and emergency response services for the unincorporated Aromas community and surrounding lands in San Benito and Monterey Counties, as well as a small portion of southern Santa Cruz County. The District's boundaries encompass approximately 58 square miles. Its sphere of influence (SOI) in San Benito County is coterminous with its boundaries. The North (Monterey) County Fire Protection District serves area to the west and south, the City of Watsonville Fire Department and the Pajaro Valley Fire Protection District serve area to the north, and the San Benito County Fire Department and City of San Juan Bautista Volunteer Fire Department serve area to the east.

The District contracts with CAL FIRE (California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection) to provide management, administration, and personnel under a Schedule A contract that provides year-round structural fire protection and emergency response services. Under a Schedule A contract, the level of service is determined by the contracting agency, and the costs are established by the State. The District is funded primarily through property tax revenue. It has one fire station in Aromas.

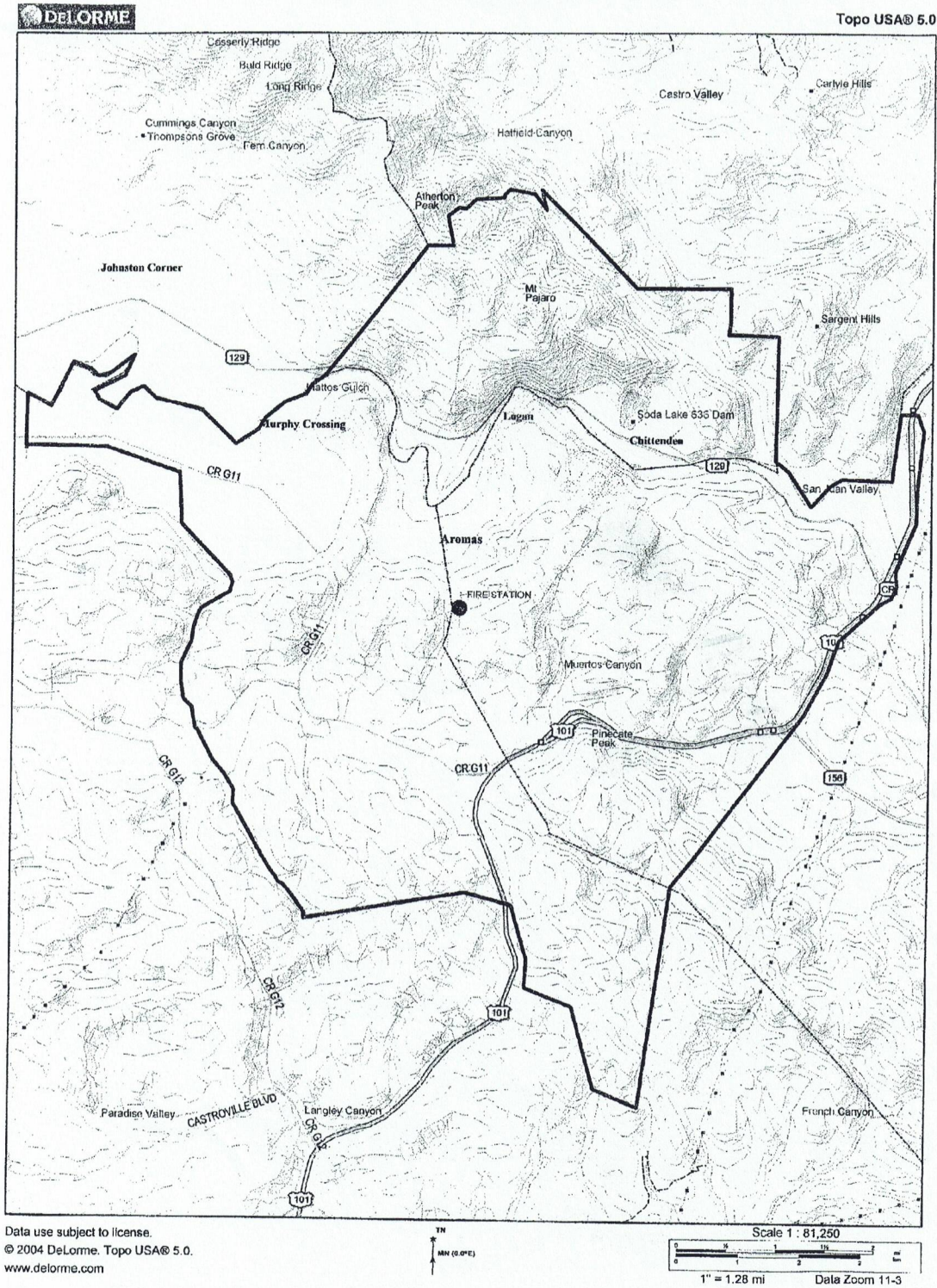
The Aromas Tri-County Fire Protection District was reviewed in the *North Monterey County Municipal Services Review* adopted by the Monterey County LAFCO in February 2006. Per the MSR, the District serves 1,129 parcels in Monterey County, 933 parcels in San Benito County, and 70 parcels in Santa Cruz County.

The District's profile is shown in *Table 9.1*, and a map of the District's current boundary is shown in *Figure 9.1*.

**Table 9.1
Aromas Tri-County Fire Protection District**

Service Area / Financial Summary	
District Office:	492 Carpenteria Road Aromas, CA 95004 (831) 726-3130
Service Area:	58 square miles
Population:	6,000 est.
Operating Budget (FY 2007-2008):	Revenues / Expenditures: \$1,521,000 / \$1,358,148
Net Assets 06/30/2007:	\$1,682,629 (from 06/30/2007 Financial Statement)

Figure 9.1
Aromas Tri-County Fire Protection District Boundary



9.2 Growth and Population Projections

The District serves the unincorporated Aromas community and vicinity within western San Benito County and eastern Monterey County. The District's service area extends into southeastern Santa Cruz County as response times are faster from Aromas than from the stations in Watsonville or the Pajaro Valley. The primary land uses in the District's service area are agriculture and rural residential development.

The Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments (AMBAG) has adopted population projections through 2030 for San Benito County. Projected growth within the unincorporated area of San Benito County is negligible, increasing from an estimated 18,099 residents in 2005 to 19,773 in 2030.¹ The 2000 US Census estimated population in the Aromas community at 2,797 residents. The *North Monterey County Municipal Services Review* estimated that the District serves a population of approximately 6,000 residents.

County policies regarding growth and the preservation of agricultural lands will limit population growth within the District's service area in San Benito County. However, the District's boundaries include major commute routes (Highways 101, 129 and 156). These highways increase the demand for emergency medical services, but do not provide compensating revenue.

9.3 Infrastructure Needs or Deficiencies

The District has one fire station on Carpenteria Road within San Benito County, with two fire engines. The Type I engine was acquired in 1998 and has a capacity to pump 1,500 gallons per minute (gpm). The Type II engine was acquired in 2003 and has a pumping capacity of 750 gpm. The Type I engine is staffed with three personnel and provides Basic Life Support services.

The District contracts with CAL FIRE through a Schedule A contract to provide fire protection and emergency medical services, including management, administration, and personnel. The service levels are specified in the contract. The District owns the facilities and equipment, and the CAL FIRE staff are employees of the State. CAL FIRE's San Benito-Monterey Unit is responsible for the Aromas contract.

The staff includes one Battalion Chief, two Captains, two Engineers, and three Firefighters. The District participates in mutual aid agreements within other fire agencies in the region; it also has automatic aid agreements with the North County Fire Protection District (Monterey) and the San Benito County Fire Department. The following summarizes response staff and equipment:

¹ Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments, Projections adopted by the AMBAG Board of Directors April 14, 2004.

- 1st Alarm Residential Response: 1 Chief Officer and 2 Type I Engines (Basic Life Support) with a total of 7-8 personnel. The second engine is achieved through Automatic Aid.
- 1st Alarm Commercial Response: 1 Chief Officer and 3 Type I Engines (Basic Life Support), with a total of 10-11 personnel. The second and third engines are achieved through Automatic Aid.
- 1st Alarm Wildland Response: 1 Chief Officer, 1 Local Government Engine, augmented by State resources including, but not limited to, one air tactical, one copter, two air tankers, one dozer, two hand crews, ten Type III engines.

Table 9.2 summarizes the incidents to which the District responded in 2006. The District is dispatched through the CAL FIRE system. The District's average response time is 7:40 minutes. The counties contract with private ambulance companies for some response areas and transport. The average response time for the private ambulance companies (AMR and Westmed) that can provide Advanced Life Support within the District's service area is approximately 13:00 minutes.

**Table 9.2
Aromas Tri-County Fire Protection District
2006 Incident Summary**

Incidents	No.	%
Fires		
Structure Fires	7	
Wildland Fires	45	
Vehicle Fires	28	
Misc. Fires	4	
Total Fires	84	16%
False Alarms	10	2%
Smoke Checks	29	5%
Fire Menace Standby	18	3%
Medical Aid	165	31%
Vehicle Accident	148	28%
Mutual Aid	8	2%
Public Assistance	24	5%
Automatic Aid	37	7%
Hazardous Materials	9	2%
Total	532	100%

The State has the primary responsibility for providing wildland fire protection within designated State Responsibility Areas (SRAs). SRAs are determined by the State of California Board of Forestry and Fire Protection and contain timber, brush or other vegetation that serves a

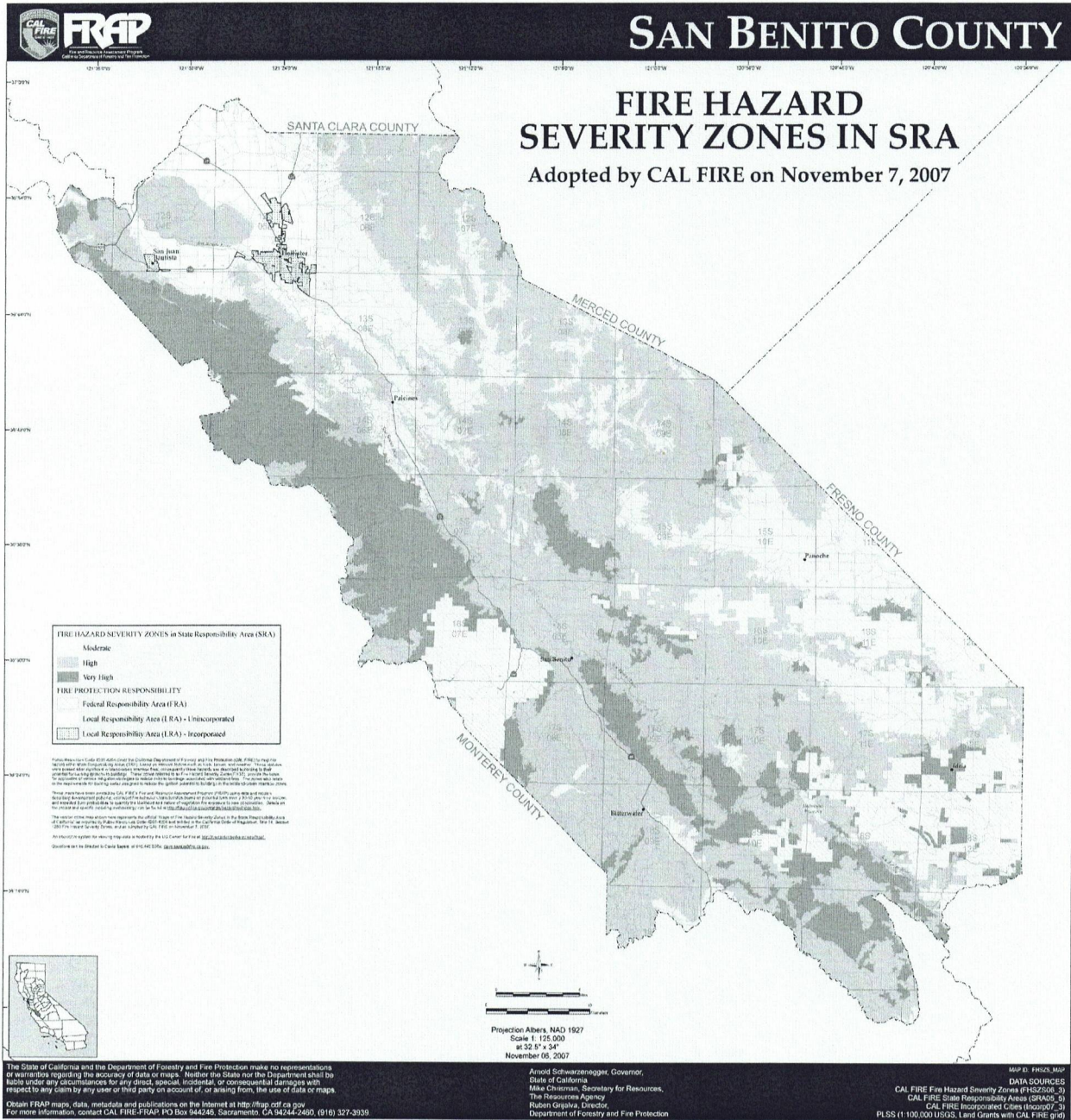
commercial purpose or has a natural resource value such as providing watershed protection. Although SRA lands may have structures, areas are generally removed from an SRA when housing density exceeds three units per acre. CAL FIRE crews are based in State-owned fire stations to carry out their primary responsibilities for wildland fire protection within the local SRA.

In 2007, the State of California Board of Forestry and Fire Protection reviewed fire hazards across the state and is in the process of adopting updated Fire Hazard Service Zone Maps. The current maps for San Benito County are shown in *Figure 9.2, State Responsibility Area* and *Figure 9.3, Local Responsibility Area*. The SRA map was adopted in November 2007; the draft Local Responsibility Area map has not been adopted yet. Local governments have responsibility for fire protection within the Local Responsibility Area, with support through mutual aid agreements.

It should be noted that the Aromas Tri-County Fire Protection District serves an area that includes lands designated as High and Very High Fire Hazard Service Zones. The rural residential developments generally have narrow roads and include large lots and some ranches, with grasslands and oak woodlands. These site conditions make fire protection and suppression difficult. The closest fire agency resource in San Benito County is the City of San Juan Bautista Volunteer Fire Department. As discussed in *Section 3.0*, the Department has limited equipment and staff resources. The nearest San Benito County Fire Department station is approximately 10 minutes away. The *North Monterey County Municipal Services Review* notes the need for a second fire station in the eastern portion of the District.

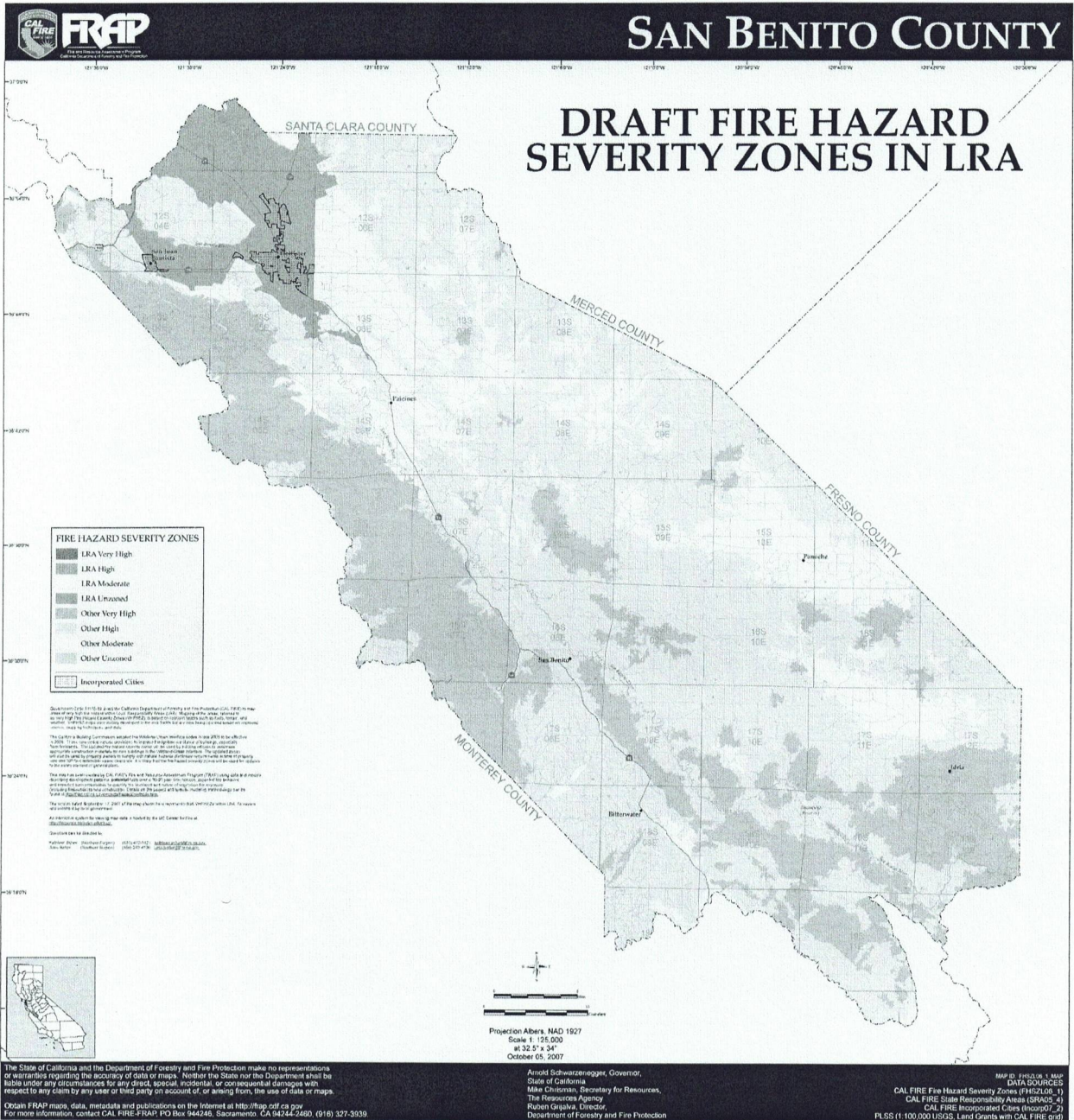
In FY 2006/2007, the District completed repairs to the roof of the fire station and improved the parking lot and driveway. The District also acquired \$66,675 in staff and utility vehicles. For FY 2007/2008, the District budgeted \$100,000 for unspecified capital improvements.

Figure 9.2
State Responsibility Area



Source: California Fire Resource and Assessment Program (<http://frap.cdf.ca.gov/>)

Figure 9.3
Local Responsibility Area



Source: California Fire Resource and Assessment Program (<http://frap.cdf.ca.gov/>)

9.4 Financing Constraints and Opportunities

The Aromas Tri-County Fire Protection District's primary source of revenue is property tax, supplemented by interest, Proposition 172 funds, and fire mitigation fees. The District has reserves and no long-term debt. *Table 9.3* summarizes the financial history of the District.

**Table 9.3
Aromas Tri-County Fire Protection District
Financial Summary**

	FY 2004-2005 Actual	FY 2005-2006 Actual	FY 2006-2007 Actual	FY 2007-2008 Budgeted
General Revenues	\$1,074,085	\$1,187,004	\$1,301,584	\$1,130,000
Program Expenses	\$1,104,751	\$1,138,744	\$1,160,194	\$1,358,148
Change in Net Assets	(\$30,666)	\$48,260	\$141,390	
Beginning Balance	\$1,523,645	\$1,492,979	\$1,541,239	\$1,682,629
Net Assets, End of Year	\$1,492,979	\$1,541,239	\$1,682,629	

At June 30, 2007 the District had unrestricted net assets of \$978,707.

Although new construction conforms to updated building codes that reduce the potential for fire loss, the natural conditions within western San Benito County and the anticipated increase in the number of daily commute trips will increase demand for District services. The District has limited ability to increase revenues in response to increased service demands.

9.5 Cost Avoidance Opportunities

The District is controlling costs by contracting with CAL FIRE for management and personnel. This allows the District to leverage the resources available through CAL FIRE and avoid District personnel costs.

9.6 Opportunities for Rate and Fee Restructuring

Fire agencies typically charge for development plan checks, construction inspections, and other non-emergency services. However, the District does not charge service fees to recoup the staff time for these functions. This could be a potential source of income for the District.

9.7 Opportunities for Shared Facilities

The District shares facilities with CAL FIRE through its contract. In addition, the District participates in mutual aid agreements for the region as well as automatic aid agreements with the North County Fire Protection District and the San Benito County Fire Department.

9.8 Evaluation of Management Efficiencies

The District is achieving management efficiencies through its contract with CAL FIRE.

9.9 Government Structure Options

The Aromas Tri-County Fire Protection District serves the unincorporated Aromas community and vicinity, with lands in San Benito, Monterey, and Santa Cruz Counties. Adjacent special district service providers include the North County Fire Protection District and the Pajaro Valley Fire Protection District. The City of San Juan Bautista Volunteer Fire Department serves the city and the surrounding area (approximately 70 square miles) by agreement with the San Benito County Fire Department. Three government structure options were identified:

- **Consolidate with the North County Fire Protection District:** The advantages could include increased efficiency and resources; however, the North County District has its own staff and does not contract with CAL FIRE. A consolidation could result in reduced efficiency and/or increased costs. Further study would be necessary to evaluate the benefits and costs.
- **Consolidate with the fire service agencies in the Pajaro Valley:** In 2007, Santa Cruz LAFCO completed a study of fire service consolidation for the Pajaro Valley within southern Santa Cruz County. The Aromas Tri-County Fire Protection District was identified as a potential participating agency in the consolidation to improve efficiency and reduce costs. Further study would be necessary to evaluate the benefits and costs.
- **Annex additional territory to the Aromas Tri-County Fire Protection District so that it could serve the City of San Juan Bautista:** The City currently has a volunteer fire department that has limited financial and staff resources. There are only two fire stations to serve this portion of the county – one in downtown San Juan Bautista and one in Aromas. State regulations make it increasingly difficult to provide adequate fire service with a volunteer force due to training requirements. Expanding the District's boundaries could increase service levels for the city and reduce response time throughout the area, as well as provide a second station for the District. Further study would be necessary to evaluate the benefits and costs.

9.10 Local Accountability and Governance

The Aromas Tri-County Fire Protection District is governed by a five-member Board of Directors elected at large by voters within the District. The governance is summarized in *Table 9.4*.

**Table 9.4
Aromas Tri-County Fire Protection District**

Date Formed:	October 29, 1951		
Statutory Authorization:	Fire Protection District Law of 1987 (Health and Safety Code §13801 et seq.)		
Board Meetings:	Fire Station, 492 Carpenteria Road, Aromas Periodic, 7 times per year		
Member	Title	Term Expires	Compensation
George Mortan	President	November 2008	
Gina Aubrey-Clark	Vice President	November 2008	
Kenneth Mahler	Director	November 2010	
Alan Mitchell	Director	November 2010	
Jim Miller	Director	November 2008	

Per the *North Monterey County Municipal Services Review*, meeting agendas are posted and faxed to local newspapers. An annual newsletter that discusses fire prevention techniques and District news is mailed to all property owners within the District. The District does not have a website.

9.11 Determinations

9.11.1 Growth and Population

Purpose: To evaluate service needs based upon existing and anticipated growth patterns and population projections.

The District serves the unincorporated Aromas community and vicinity located in western San Benito County and eastern Monterey County, and a portion of southeastern Santa Cruz County. The District serves an estimated population of approximately 6,000 residents. However, the District's boundaries include major commute routes (Highways 101, 129 and 156) which increase the demand for emergency medical services, but do not provide compensating revenue.

9.11.2 Infrastructure Needs or Deficiencies

Purpose: To evaluate the infrastructure needs and deficiencies in terms of supply, capacity, condition of facilities, and service quality.

The Aromas Tri-County Fire Protection District's service area includes territory within San Benito, Monterey, and Santa Cruz Counties. The District has one fire station on Carpenteria Road within San Benito County. The District contracts with CAL FIRE through a Schedule A contract to provide management, administration, and personnel; the District owns the facilities

and equipment. A new fire station is needed in the eastern portion of the District to reduce response times.

9.11.3 Financing Constraints and Opportunities

Purpose: To evaluate a jurisdiction's capacity to finance needed improvements and services.

The Aromas Tri-County Fire Protection District's primary source of revenue is property tax, supplemented by interest, Proposition 172 funds, and fire mitigation fees. The District has reserves and no long-term debt. Although new construction conforms to updated building codes that reduce the potential for fire, the natural conditions within western San Benito County and the anticipated increase in the number of daily commute trips will increase demand for District services. The District has limited ability to increase revenues in response to increased service demands.

9.11.4 Cost Avoidance Opportunities

Purpose: To identify practices or opportunities that may help eliminate unnecessary costs.

The District is controlling costs by contracting with CAL FIRE for management, administration, and personnel.

9.11.5 Opportunities for Rate and Fee Restructuring

Purpose: To identify opportunities to impact rates positively without decreasing service levels.

The District does not charge service fees for development plan checks, construction inspections, and other non-emergency services. This could be a potential source of income for the District.

9.11.6 Opportunities for Shared Facilities

Purpose: To evaluate the opportunities for a jurisdiction to share facilities and resources to develop more efficient service delivery systems.

The District shares resources with CAL FIRE through its contract. In addition, the District participates in mutual aid agreements for the region as well as automatic aid agreements with the North County Fire Protection District and the San Benito County Fire Department.

9.11.7 Evaluation of Management Efficiencies

Purpose: To evaluate the internal organizational structure of the jurisdiction.

The District is achieving management efficiencies through its contract with CAL FIRE.

9.11.8 Government Structure Options

Purpose: To consider the advantages and disadvantages of various government structures to provide public services.

The Aromas Tri-County Fire Protection District serves the unincorporated Aromas community and vicinity, with lands in San Benito, Monterey, and Santa Cruz Counties. Three government structure options were identified:

Consolidate with the North County Fire Protection District: The advantages could include increased efficiency and resources; however, the North County District has its own staff and does not contract with CAL FIRE. A consolidation could result in decreased efficiency and/or increased costs. Further study would be necessary to evaluate the benefits and costs.

Consolidate with the fire service agencies in the Pajaro Valley: In 2007, Santa Cruz LAFCO completed a study of fire service consolidation for the Pajaro Valley in southern Santa Cruz County. The Aromas Tri-County Fire Protection District was identified as a potential participating agency in the consolidation to improve efficiency and reduce costs. Further study would be necessary to evaluate the benefits and costs.

Annex additional territory to the Aromas Tri-County Fire Protection District so that it could serve the City of San Juan Bautista: The City currently has a volunteer fire department that has limited financial and staff resources. There are only two fire stations to serve this portion of the county – one in downtown San Juan Bautista and one in Aromas. State regulations make it increasingly difficult to provide adequate fire service with a volunteer force due to training requirements. Expanding the District's boundaries could increase service levels for the city and reduce response time throughout the area, as well as provide a second station for the District. Further study would be necessary to evaluate the benefits and costs.

9.11.9 Local Accountability and Governance

Purpose: To evaluate the accessibility and levels of public participation associated with the agency's decision-making and management process.

The District is governed by an elected Board of Directors. The District encourages public participation by noticing meetings and providing an annual newsletter to residents.