



HAT ISLAND FIRE DEPARTMENT
SNOHOMISH COUNTY FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT 27

The Annual Report for 2023

A report to the property owners of Hat Island

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YOUR FIRE DEPARTMENT

The Snohomish County Fire District 27 was approved in 1978 after 18 residents of Hat Island petitioned the Snohomish County, County Commissioners. The fire district was legally started in 1979 and before the tax dollars came, it was funded by a donation from the Auxiliary and Hat Island Community, Inc. Today, The fire district, also known as the Hat Island Fire Department is the only public government agency with an active, on-site presence on the island.

We are an all-volunteer, full-service fire department that has very unique challenges of serving an isolated island community. No call is too small. Our 32 first responders provide medical, fire, rescue and other helpful services. Almost half of them live on the island. The Auxiliary Team has 13 members who provide assistance, prevention and education. Together, this committed and energetic team of 45 volunteers provides an amazing level of service that helps create and sustain the quality of life on Hat Island.

The strength of the fire department is the commitment to service by every first responder and auxiliary team member. At every call, every member works in a smoothly operating team to provide the best patient care, put out the fire, or provide whatever assistance can be done.

CHIEF'S REPORT

By John Gray, Fire Chief

Calls. In 2023, there were the 26 calls for service. They were:

- 15 medical calls, an all-time record, and 4 patients were airlifted to the hospital,
- 3 fire suppression calls. One was a potentially dangerous wildland fire in a wooded forest area that was first seen from the beach division as flames were in the trees.
- 7 service calls or community awareness events
- 1 rescue

Training. Raising the level of training was an important effort in 2023. Additional training sessions were created to increase the very important initial training to our two new first responders: Dan Rike and Tyler Van Spanje and continue the development of Mark Fulton. The time invested accelerated their confidence and competence greatly. We started a formal debrief process after calls as a method to improve our service and these were summarized, documented and distributed to the whole department. Attending a debrief counted as a training session. The monthly training drills on the second Saturday of the month are usually well attended. Scenario training and small group learning was the dominate training method. Lessons, learning, and getting better was always happening. Because of this effort, training is more fun and confidence in doing the important tasks is rising.

The Emergency Medical Technicians and the Emergency Medical Responders attend annual Continuing Basic Training, and on-line course work throughout the year to maintain their certification. This year the Emergency Medical Technicians and the Emergency Medical Responders were (in alphabetical order): Karl Bangarter, Anisa Daher, Steve Jefferies, Toni Jefferies, Dan McCambridge, Alice Moyal, Steve Slawson, Brad Tinius, and Duan Tinius. Without exception, the feedback from patients and their family members about the care they received has been outstanding.

Grants. As part of a project to increase the number of Automatic External Defibrator (AED's) for the general community, the department applied for and received a grant to purchase two additional AED's that will be available to the community.

Fire Station. The Fire Station was repaired by Rick Bennett for these issues: water had rotten the lower portion of walls at four bay doors, the front screen door was replaced, and new electrical outlets was installed in the kitchen. New locks were installed on the doors. The station was the site of these successful and well-attended events: two pancake breakfasts, one-club golf tournament and lunch-a fundraiser, community safety day, and a community-wide long-range planning event. In addition, the station was the site of yoga classes, a community course in first aid and CPR, meetings of the Board of Fire Commissioners, and groups that a part of the Hat Island Community, Inc.

Goals. A lot of my time as Fire Chief was related to the improving the fire station and administrative work that creates the base level of foundation blocks of the agency. In 2023, I donated \$3,000 of my \$6,000 stipend to purchase basic supplies and items to support the fire department. I worked about 25 hours a week for the fire department which is much more than I had anticipated to accomplish these broad goals:

- (a) More information and communication to the volunteers and the public through signage, written material, update letters to the members, and listening at the monthly training drills. For example, this is the fire district's first annual report, public signage and displays were created, articles published, and creating the means for the department's business phone number (360.444.6886) to be answered all the time.
- (b) More clarity of the duties of officers and Incident Commanders. For example, promoting Andy Grove and Rick Bennett to Assistant Chief, creating job descriptions, an organizational chart, and a resource clipboard for the Incident Commander.
- (c) Raise the level of competency and capacity of the first responders to use the equipment through training and other strategies. Examples: evolving the format of the training drills, new bunker gear was ordered for 3 first responders, cleaning and updating the upstairs training room into a modern learning space, updating the technology, and taking 8 pickup loads of junk and trash to the dumpster.

Policies were drafted, distributed and adopted. Administratively, a formal mission statement, values, motto and slogan were created.

Our Mission: The mission of the Hat Island Fire Department is to provide protection to life and property through emergency medical service, fire suppression, rescue, assistance, education and prevention.

Our Values are: Service, Teamwork, Compassion, Respect, Safety, Duty, and Perfect Effort

Our Motto: We are neighbors helping neighbors; saving lives and protecting property.

Our Slogan: Help is here

Current Challenges

- A. **Isolation.** We are unique from other fire departments because of our isolation. Mutual aid partners are at least 90 minutes away. We have a low call volume, about 20-25 per year. When the fire district is called for service, who responds and how many volunteers respond is not predictable. More first responders are needed. For serious medical calls, Advanced Life Support must be brought to the island and typically this is from the flight nurses from a medical helicopter service. Weather conditions have cancelled some flight missions forcing evacuation by private boat if sea conditions permitted.
- B. **Access** to the roadless areas of the island remains a continuing challenge. The beach divisions, those accessible by boat-in only, are currently without any meaningful on-site

service from the fire district for probably the first hour of an emergency. Also, the roads to H-division and N-division can deteriorate to prevent access by a fire engine and the fire district is surrounded by water where calls for service happen and the only way to provide a service is to use a private boat.

- C. **Higher competence.** All of our Engines and vehicles are 21 to 44 years old. We are a “working fire museum” and much of the budget is spent on repairing the equipment. Where most fire departments have the same make of engines to ease the learning curve to operate these complex machines, our 5 major apparatus are all different makes and years which creates a varying rate of understanding them. Being confident about effectively operating an apparatus is a continuing goal of the training program.
- D. **Emergency Preparedness.** The Fire District does not have a current or widely available plan for common, predictable emergencies that the department and the community can prepare for.

Future Topics

1. **Wildfire is the largest threat to the island.** For the past three years, the island has received less rain from 40 inches in 2020 to 29 inches in 2023 and this has caused more combustible fuels. Continuing prevention by education and rapid response to small fires are key. The fire department needs to continue its move to training and equipping first responders on wildfire suppression. Having an adequate supply of water to fight a major fire is an on-going concern.
2. **Medical calls dominate the work** of the fire department and is the fastest growing requested service. In the last 7 years, the number of medical calls have doubled from the previous 7 years. This is likely due to more houses with more full-time residents, more population during the peak season of July and August, and the demographic of the typical patient is over 60 years old. Also, the department’s program of Emergency Medical Technicians trained 5 island residents in 2018 and this service is widely known and available. Most of the EMT’s living on the island are in their 70’s and finding new ones in the near future will be very important.
3. **Emergency evacuation by helicopter.** When a night time mission was cancelled by the pilot due to the difficulty of the landing zone, another landing zone at the south end of the island was identified. The number of helicopter evacuations will likely continue to rise. From 2001 to 2015, nearly every year had only one patient airlifted. For the past 7 years, 3 to 6 patients were airlifted each year. In 2022, three flights were declined because there was not enough visibility to comply with Visual Flight Rules. Improvements to this landing zone are needed to allow the pilots to fly in a wider range of weather conditions.
4. **Peak Season Staffing.** 41% of the fire district’s calls for service occur in July and August. The time will soon come when the fire department should have a plan to have reliable staffing levels during this period.
5. **Vehicle replacement planning.** The current fleet is in good operating order. However, some are obsolete and getting parts is very difficult.
6. **Planned replacement of expired personal protective equipment issued to first responders.** Continue the replacement of helmets, coats, pants and boots that are years beyond their 10 year expiration.
7. **Leadership Succession.** I will end my role as Fire Chief in the near future. Identifying and developing the leadership team is important.

BOARD OF FIRE COMMISSIONERS

The Board of Fire Commissioners is responsible to the voters to set budgets, establish policy and provide administrative oversight of the fire department. They conduct the business affairs of the district, make and execute all necessary contracts, employ any necessary services, and adopt reasonable rules to govern the district. They serve six-year terms. The board appoints the Fire Chief and a Secretary.

During 2023, the commissioners were:

Duan Harding Tinius, Commissioner, Chair and Secretary
Serving since 2016

Brad Tinius, Commissioner
Serving since 2015

Ray Stephanson, Commissioner
Serving since 2022

2023 HIGHLIGHTS OF BOARD ACTIONS

- Heard the results of the audit by the state auditor's office
- Approved the new landing zone at the south end and purchased materials
- Approved the interlocal agreement with the Department of Natural Resources
- Approved replacement of the Personal Floatation Devices
- Appointed John Gray as Fire Chief after interviewing two candidates
- Decided to set aside \$10,000 per year toward purchasing a power-assisted gurney
- Approved a policy that expenditures of \$500 or more need Board approval before ordering
- Approved the repairs to the station costing about \$5,800
- Approved the purchase of 3 sets of new bunker gear and forestry hose for the beach division equipment boxes and on Rescue 27.

BUDGET

The budget cycle for the fire district is September 1 to August 31. Revenues are collected from the property assessments within the district by Snohomish County Assessor's Office. Expenses are paid by Snohomish County Finance Department after approval by the Board of Fire Commissioners. All accounts are managed by Snohomish County Finance Department and audited by the Office of the Washington State Auditor. The fire district secretary creates the records and works with Snohomish County to administer the financial affairs of the fire district.

Fiscal Year 2023, Income: \$119,720

Fiscal Year 2023, Expenses: \$64,391

Accounts: A total \$392,957. The accounts and amounts are: approximately \$209,663 in reserve, \$11,432 in an investment account, and an operating account of approximately \$171,862

PERSONNEL HIGHLIGHTS

Mike Worthy retired as Fire Chief effective January 1, 2023. On September 1, 2022, John Gray was appointed as Assistant Fire Chief, resigned as a Commissioner, served as Interim Chief and was appointed Fire Chief in 2023.

MAJOR ASSETS OWNED

- a. The fire station. The fire district owns one of the largest fire stations for a volunteer fire district in the state. The first four bays, public room, kitchen, and upstairs meeting room

were built in 1983 by Mac McDonel, a volunteer firefighter and one of the original three commissioners using a bond issue. In 1995, the shop and service bay was added also by Mac McDonel along with other volunteer help. In 2008, the upstairs storage room was built by Rick Bennett. In 2021, Chuck Bright built the additional three bays that was paid for from reserve funds.

b. Vehicles and Apparatuses. The theme of the fleet is redundancy and a backup apparatus that can respond when another Engine is down for a repair. *If there were significant repairs this year, these are in italics:*

- Aid Car, 2003 Ford, received in 2013: *Battery replaced and turbo serviced.*
- Engine 27, 1998 Freightliner Pierce Fire Engine, received in 2021.
- Engine 27-A, 1980 Western States Fire Engine, received in 2009: *Hoses on the power reels were replaced.*
- Engine 27-B, 1980 Seagrave Fire Engine, received in 2004.
- Engine/Rescue 27, Wildland Fire Engine, 1997 Ford F450, received in 2010: *Two batteries and the engine water pump was replaced.*
- Tender 27, 4000 gallon water tank/truck, 1971 Mack truck frame, received in 2005: *Tire replaced, electrical repairs, and pump engine repairs*
- Transport/Aid 27-A, 1997 Ford Expedition, received in 2013
- Utility 4 wheel drive pickup, 2000 Chevrolet, received in 2018

32 ACTIVE VOLUNTEERS *(in alphabetical order)*

Karl Bangerter	John Gray	Daniel Rike
Brad Bellrichard	Chris Inman	Steve Slawson
Rick Bennett	Steve Jefferies	Philip Spagnoli
Lori Christopher	Toni Jefferies	Kevin Swaney
Anisa Daher	Dan McCambridge	Brad Tinius
Mark Fulton	Alice Moyal	Duan Tinius
Kim Gleason	Nate Moyal	Tyler Van Spanje
Andy Grove	Steve Nielsen	Dennis Wanner

13 AUXILIARY TEAM MEMBERS *(in alphabetical order)*

Judy Burke	Barbara Harris	Julie Wanner
Teri Flores	Michelle Inman	Carolyn Worthy
Laurie Gray	Judy Lee	Mike Worthy
Marcia Gregory	Mary Nielsen	
Joyce Hammel	Karen Van Spanje	

The Auxiliary Team is separate from the Fire Department. Legally, it is a non-profit organization and leadership-wise has its own elected officers and can raise and disperse funds. The Auxiliary Team planned and put on a record number of large events that raised awareness, provided education, created community, and raised funds for items not part of the district’s budget. The 13 members worked very hard to plan, prepare, setup, do, and take-down. Their fundraising activities provided lunch at the monthly training drills, sponsored a community course in first aid and CPR, sponsored the free lunch, prizes and give-a-ways for Community Safety Day, and donated \$3,000 toward the power-assist gurney.