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NEWS RELEASE

Commissioner Espinoza Convenes Wildfire Task Force Meeting

New Mexico Public Regulation Commissioner Valerie Espinoza (District 3) held a Wildfire Task Force meeting Wednesday afternoon, April 1, in Santa Fe, welcoming a host of members. Membership of the Wildfire Task Force include Task Force Co-Chair Espinoza, Co-Chair Luciano “Lucky” Varela, as well as representatives from the State Fire Marshal’s Office, the State Land Office, the state’s Insurance Division, and many others in state government as well as private citizens.

Originally, the Wildfire Task Force was formed in the wake of the Tres Lagunas Fire in Pecos, N.M., in June 2013. At that time, Commissioner Espinoza convened a 25-member task force that included representatives from state, local and tribal government agencies, firefighters, law enforcement agencies, citizens, utilities and co-ops from around the state.

The mission of the task force is to achieve recommendations for best practices in wildfire management in the urban/wildland interface and in forested areas throughout the state of New Mexico. The task force has addressed utility easements, fuel clearing and vegetation management plans.

At several meetings thus far, the group has provided input and recommendations on existing fire management and watershed protection policies, vegetation removal plans, and utility easement regulations for fire prevention in forested areas.



At Wednesday afternoon’s meeting, Commissioner Espinoza welcomed State Fire Marshal John Standefer, who informed those in attendance that just days ago, the City of Las Cruces became the very first community in the state to attain an ISO rating of Class 1.

ISO provides reliable and up-to-date information regarding a community’s fire protection services to help establish appropriate fire insurance premiums for residential and commercial properties through the Public Protection Classification

(PPC) program. The program provides an objective, nationwide standard that helps fire departments in planning and budgeting for facilities, equipment and training. By securing lower fire insurance premiums for communities with better public protection, the PPC program provides incentives and rewards for communities that choose to improve their firefighting services.



John Franchini, the Superintendent of Insurance, spoke of the percentage saved by residents of New Mexico when Insurance Service Office (ISO) Inc., ratings are increased in municipalities located in the state. Superintendent Franchini thanked the State Fire Marshal’s Office for working with the hundreds of fire departments in New Mexico to help insurance policy holders save money. “ISO ratings help drive economic growth,” Franchini concluded.

“I would like to see more collaboration from the Executive [branch of State government,” Chairman Lucky Varela stated, adding, “I want to acknowledge all of the volunteers, fire and EMS.”

Wednesday’s task force meeting revealed that there presently are 17 certified firewise communities in the state, and that, according to a report published in The Taos News, New Mexico has not experienced any wildfire sparked by downed powerlines—an aim of the Wildfire task Force—in the last two years. This speaks well of the undertakings by this task force.

An attorney representing Cochiti Pueblo, which was directly affected by the Los Conchas Fire—a downed-powerline-sparked wildfire—provided an update to the task force, stating that the case is moving forward.

In conclusion, Task Force Chairwoman Espinoza thanked everyone for their participation and for providing valuable information to the task force. Espinoza thanked the volunteer firefighters and EMS personnel throughout the state for their service to residents in cases of fires and other First Responder emergencies.

About the NMPRC

The NMPRC regulates public utilities, telecommunications companies and motor carriers operating in the State of New Mexico. It also administers the State Fire Marshal’s Office, the New Mexico Firefighters Training Academy in Socorro, N.M., and the Pipeline Safety Bureau.

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