

Crested Butte Fire Protection District Strategic Plan 2025



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Purpose of this Plan

This Strategic Plan was created for the purpose of directing the Crested Butte Fire Protection District's ("District") activities for the next five years. The goal is to document the priorities as defined by the department, district, and elected leadership. This plan shall support the emergency medical services (EMS), fire suppression, fire prevention, and administration provided to the residents and visitors of Crested Butte.

Area Served

The District serves approximately 220 square miles of the Upper Gunnison Valley including the municipalities of Crested Butte and Mount Crested Butte as well as portions of unincorporated Gunnison County to including but not limited to Crested Butte South, Gothic, Irwin, Riverland, and Skyland. A legal description of the District and map are contained in Exhibit A.

Community and Economic Summary

The boundaries of the District are mostly contiguous with Colorado Census Tract 9638 which, as of 2023, reported a permanent population of 4,431 in 2,306 households and a total of 4,297 housing units.¹ While the exact number of lodgings, short-term rentals, and seasonal residences are difficult to quantify, it is believed that visitor populations in peak seasonal periods can increase the overall population two to four times the base population, reaching as high as 24,000 people. According to the Crested Butte News, the region received 670,000 visitors in 2024, down from a record 830,000 in 2021.² The median household income was \$86,277 and median value of owner-occupied housing units was \$811,900.³

The population is mostly white (90%) and encompasses all age ranges with most residents between 20 and 60 (65%) with the remaining over 60 (17%) or under 20 (18%).⁴ As of the 2025 school year, the Crested Butte Elementary and Secondary Schools had 303 and 401 students, respectively. This is a significant decrease from the nearly 800 reported in 2021 school year.⁵

The economy of Crested Butte employed 927 people in 2023; growth of 4.16% (890 people) from 2022. The top three job groups for residents are management occupations (324 people), office and administrative support occupations (112 people), and food preparation and serving related occupations (110 people). In 2023, the largest industries were professional, scientific, and technical services (138 people), arts, entertainment, and recreation (133 people), and accommodation and food services (133 people). The highest paying industries were finance and insurance (\$120,455), real estate, rental, and leasing (\$120,455), and manufacturing (\$100,486).⁶

¹ <https://censusreporter.org/profiles/14000US08051963800-census-tract-9638-gunnison-co/>

² <https://crestedbuttenews.com/2025/07/valley-revenues-rising-but-tourism-is-flat/>

³ IBID

⁴ IBID

⁵ <https://www.cde.state.co.us/schoolview/explore/enrollment/1360/2006>

⁶ [https://datausa.io/profile/geo/crested-butte-co#:~:text=In%202023%2C%20the%20largest%20industries,Rental%20&%20Leasing%20\(\\$120%2C455\)%2C](https://datausa.io/profile/geo/crested-butte-co#:~:text=In%202023%2C%20the%20largest%20industries,Rental%20&%20Leasing%20($120%2C455)%2C)



The District is charged with providing emergency services to permanent and seasonal residents as growth continues. This will require adequate staff, facilities, and equipment to match evolving needs.

Organizational History

The District was established in September of 1973. The original boundaries included the Town of Crested Butte incorporated in 1880, the Crested Butte Ski Area as determined by the boundaries of the Mount Crested Butte Water and Sanitation District established in 1963 that later became the municipality of Mount Crested Butte, and a tract of ranch land connecting the two jurisdictions along the Gothic Road (CR 317) corridor. The formation of the district replaced volunteer fire protection provided on an inconsistent basis by the Town of Crested Butte with non-motorized equipment dating back to the 1880s. The initial work to form the District was largely due to the efforts of John Liebson who served as organizer, founding board member, and the first Fire Chief.

The District constructed its first fire station in 1974 at 306 Maroon Ave on land leased from the Town of Crested Butte. The provision of ambulance service by the District began in 1975 and has been a primary activity ever since. After a multi-year process undertaken with rural subdivisions and the Gunnison County Fire Protection District, the boundaries of the District were expanded in 1995 to encompass 220 square miles of the Upper Gunnison Valley. Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s additional stations were constructed in Mount Crested Butte, Crested Butte South, and Buckhorn Ranch. A material modification of the statement of purposes was adopted in 2015 authorizing the District to provide affordable housing to its personnel.

Most recently, the District has completed a 22,000-square-foot fire station headquarters and an adjacent building will house the search and rescue (SAR) team. Both facilities were funded by a general obligation bond issue approved in 2021 and will be occupied in early 2026. The new facilities will replace the Maroon Avenue station.

Financing

The District is primarily funded by an ad valorem tax on property within the Fire District of up to 10.079 exclusive of bond indebtedness. Other major revenue sources include specific ownership tax, ambulance fees, plan review and permit fees, special event charges, grants, and intergovernmental transfers. The District also charges impact fees that are reserved for capital improvements as required by law. The District may participate in investing or financing activities as allowed by law and approved by the Board of Directors and/or the voters.

Introduction and Executive Summary

The Board of Directors, administrative leadership, chief officers, and legal counsel met to discuss the future direction of the District in November 2025. The District Commissioner shared a future vision of the plans for capital improvement, vehicle replacement, staffing, and employee housing. Legal counsel and the Board President led a discussion on board governance, conflicts of interest, and board succession planning. Following the discussion sessions, each attendee was asked to rank their top five priorities for the District. The results included:



Priority	Item
1	Affordable Housing
2	Mutual and Automatic Aid
2	Training and Education
3	Emergency Medical Response
3	Fire Prevention and Life Safety Education
4	Wildland Firefighting
5	Water Supply for Firefighting
5	General Rescue and Extrication
6	Emergency Mental or Behavioral Health Services
6	Medical Support of Tactical and Wilderness Operations
6	Administration
6	Fire Code Enforcement
6	Life Safety Inspections

Greater detail on each topic is provided below.

General Statement of Purpose

The District is organized pursuant to the Colorado Special District Act for the purpose of providing protection to the community from a variety of hazards and emergencies. The primary services provided by the District include Emergency Medical Services (EMS), fire protection, and related services.

Emergency Medical Services

1. Emergency Medical Response (#3 Priority)

The District staff would like to see a greater emphasis on educating the public to have a greater impact on patient outcomes through reducing the time until first critical intervention. Suggestions raised included community hands-only CPR courses, public access defibrillators, and a Stop the Bleed campaign. PulsePoint or similar software to inform the community of emergencies happening near them was identified as a technological opportunity.

2. Ambulance Service

Every two years, there should be a rate adjustment to ensure that the District's charges are consistent with region.

3. Inter-Facility and Critical Care Transport

Due to the fragile nature of blood products, specialized storage requirements, and the relatively low frequency of use, the District will continue its operational partnership with Gunnison Valley Health EMS (GVH-EMS) to ensure access to prehospital blood products when clinically indicated. During this planning period, the department will also evaluate the operational, financial, and logistical feasibility of developing an internal prehospital blood program. This assessment will consider factors such as storage capabilities, training requirements, medical oversight, and call volume to determine whether implementing an in-house program would enhance patient care and system efficiency in the future.



4. Medical Standby Service

No new priorities identified.

5. Community Health Services

Moving forward, the District would like to strengthen its relationship with GVH staff. The GVH Mountain clinic and other GVH primary care resources are crucial to delivering primary and preventative healthcare, which reduces the need for EMS responses.

6. Emergency Mental or Behavioral Health Services (#6 Priority)

There is a desire to deliver the right type of care to all patients, including those suffering from a behavioral health condition. Discussion centered around identifying outside experts who could help the District identify ways to support these patients. The existing GVH-sponsored mobile crisis team is a new asset that is working well. The District should continue to support and partner as needed.

7. Medical Support of Tactical and Wilderness Operations (#6 Priority)

Most tactical and wilderness responses have a medical component that the District is best suited to manage. To support law enforcement needs, a goal was established for one tactical EMS (TEMS) paramedic per shift. These members will need the education, equipment, and on-going training to perform effectively with law enforcement.

For wilderness operations, the District has a strong working relationship with Crested Butte Search and Rescue (CBSAR) for rescues in the backcountry. This includes staffing when available. The District has developed the resources necessary to support “side-country” rescues (i.e., those within a half mile of a paved road). This includes equipment and a quick response vehicle.

8. Injury and Illness Prevention

Like fire prevention, the District desires to reduce medical calls through public education. Topics prioritized for the next two years include helmets for any type of riding activity, bike safety, and e-bike safety. The Western Regional EMS and Trauma Advisory Council (WRETAC) has public education resources, including a mobile trailer to assist with injury prevention, that are available to expand the District’s prevention efforts.

Fire Protection Services

1. Structural Firefighting

Discussion generally agreed that the current services are robust. The priority for this planning session focused on creating best practices to implement locally and updating the standard operating guidelines.

2. Wildland Firefighting (#4 Priority)

The District leadership identified that the community is threatened by wildfires, and action is needed. Over the past 5 years the District has been able to develop deployable wildfire capacity in order to gain more knowledge and experience in wildfire operations that will be of benefit for local incidents. The District intends to continue outside deployments when feasible and will look into seasonal wildland positions as resources permit.



3. Aircraft Rescue and Firefighting

Due to the limited traffic at the local airport and no commercial flights, this is a low priority for the District. Should the use change, it would be reevaluated. Should surplus resources become available for airport rescue and firefighting ARFF equipment the district may consider acquisition of a light duty unit.

4. Drones/Unmanned Aerial Vehicles

There is preliminary discussion about whether a drone program would benefit the District for increased wildfire situational awareness and supporting search and rescue efforts. Technology is progressing into the fire service with autonomous drones capable of supporting multiple hazards – initial fire suppression, search and rescue, water rescue, restocking equipment to rural areas, etc. There may be ways to prevent a fire in a remote canyon from growing due to lack of access while minimizing firefighter risk.

5. Hazardous Materials Response

Due to the low frequency of calls for hazardous materials, the District is focused on coordination with existing resources within Gunnison County. No increase in local capabilities is under consideration unless the District demographics related to hazardous materials change. The GCFD has asked us to consider qualifying a few members as hazardous materials technicians to assist with countywide capacity.

6. Fire Code Enforcement (#6 Priority)

Due to recent changes in internal leadership, there is a desire to conduct outside strategic planning targeted in this area. In addition, the staff assigned to this task might benefit from team-building efforts to improve working relationships.

7. Life Safety Inspections (#6 Priority)

Looking into the future, the District desires to see line staff conducting more middle/high-level inspections. This approach will increase situational awareness and building knowledge for all firefighters.

8. Fire Mitigation and Fuels Treatment

The District will focus on supporting outside agencies that are already engaged in these efforts. In the future, as staff and financial resources are reevaluated, the District may consider a larger role in defensible space and vegetation management. One example would be seasonal firefighters who conduct these tasks until needed for a wildland fire.

9. Water Supply for Firefighting (#5 Priority)

Several priorities were identified to improve water supply access. This includes developing a hydrant map (i.e., integrated into existing maps), completing static water agreements with large water sources, and improving hydrant access. One concept suggested for the latter would include an “adopt-a-hydrant” program to ensure the snow is cleared from around each hydrant. Residents could be rewarded with a monthly drawing for a prize (e.g., pizza). Further discussion brought forward that a similar program for gas meters would be beneficial.



10. Fire Prevention and Life Safety Education (#3 Priority)

Due to the rural nature of the District, there is ongoing interest in a residential sprinkler ordinances. The marginal cost during construction is far outweighed by the lives saved and minimized property loss. Further discussion identified address signs as a valuable tool for locating call locations quickly. Educating the public on wildfire defensible space and the dangers of falling snow from roofs are other opportunities to engage with the public to reduce their risk factors.

11. Mutual/Automatic Aid (#2 Priority)

The District has excellent mutual aid experience with the GVH Paramedics, and it desires a stronger working relationship with the Gunnison Volunteer Fire Department (GVFD). The significant improvements in career staffing, training, and equipment since 2017 are not widely known outside of the District. Therefore, we are not being regularly requested to support fire calls for Gunnison Fire. The goal identified to address this concern is increased mutual training and automatic aid with Gunnison Fire.

Rescue Services

1. General Rescue and Extrication (#5 Priority)

Priorities were identified to increase training and education for confined space and trench rescue, including the best approach to managing these calls (e.g., local or regional team). Staff would like to see improvement in initial rope rescue and stabilization. Changes in vehicle construction, especially electric cars, drive the need for more extrication and vehicle fire training. It may require capital improvement upgrades in extrication tools to meet the need.

2. Water Rescue

District line staff have completed initial education and purchased sufficient equipment to respond to water rescue calls. Continued training will be required to maintain their proficiency for this less used skill.

3. Mountain Rescue

Continue joint training with the SAR team including how District staff respond to incidents prior to SAR callouts. There was interest in exploring how offroad motorcycles or utility terrain vehicles (UTVs) might augment the SAR response.

4. Dive Rescue

The National Park Service at the Curecanti National Recreation Area maintains an effective and available dive rescue team that meets the District's needs. To formalize this relationship, a mutual aid agreement should be developed.

Support Services

1. Affordable Housing (#1 Priority)

The top priority for the District is maintaining and expanding its ability to support the housing needs of its staff. The lack of affordable housing makes this critical to recruit and retain all ranks from firefighter through commissioner. A supporting objective is having a maintenance budget to sustain the current District-owned housing.



2. Maintenance and Repair

Like housing units, the District will need to maintain and repair the fire stations. With the opening of the new headquarters station, other stations may need renovations to accommodate new roles and staff for the District. This could include dedicated apparatus maintenance space with mechanical lifts capable of fire engine servicing.

3. Training and Education (#2 Priority)

Multiple goals were identified to support District operations. These include reviewing and further developing a training academy for volunteer, and part-time reserve firefighters. This effort will increase surge capacity through engaging the qualified local residents. New reserve members will further benefit from both fire and EMS field training and evaluation (FTEP) programs to guide them through joining the department. Annual proficiency protocols should be developed to ensure all staff are properly trained in critical tasks. With medical calls being the predominant response and the long transport times, additional medical education was identified as an additional objective. This may include tracking and publishing clinical key performance indicators that help focus the District's efforts on those that improve patient outcomes. Examples include time on scene for critical patients, airway management, medication administration and pain control. Since most 911 calls are medical in nature, there may be advantages to establishing an EMS training officer focused on the factors to save lives.

4. Administration (#6 Priority)

The District identified several opportunities to enhance administrative operations. This includes finding a new auditor to support comprehensive annual financial reporting and placing the ambulance billing contract out to bid in 2027. There may be additional revenue available from billing the inspections conducted; if the workload to invoice does not exceed the value. The District could benefit from review and improvement to human resources information systems (HRIS) to ensure they meet the District needs. As stated earlier, the fire prevention division will have new leadership that may benefit from additional or shared support staff.

Succession planning for chief officers should be another planning consideration with Assistant Chief and Maintenance Director Jeff Duke retiring within the next three years. Ensuring the proper maintenance of the apparatus fleet is crucial to daily operations.