

Mosquito Fire Department

By Members of MFPD, MVFA, Mosquito Historical Society and Friends of Fannon

History

The Mosquito Volunteer Fire Department (MVFD) was founded in 1972, not long after development began on the Swansboro Country subdivision in 1968. Much of the early historical information of Mosquito comes from written recollections of Lois Pearson and Lucille Davies. In her book, "Mosquito Memories", Lois describes her grandfather, Adam Melchior arriving in the area in 1852 by ox-team from Pennsylvania. The community was named Mosquito in 1853.

It seems a few miners were sitting around the campfire thinking about naming the area, and agreed the next word out of anyone's mouth would be the name. Just then one of the miners was bit by a Mosquito and yelled, "Damn Mosquito!" Well they couldn't call it "Damn".

The early years of the area saw continuous use of the land. First, as a mining community after James Summerfield constructed a water ditch in 1850 from Slab Creek to provide water to miners in Mosquito Canyon.



The Mosquito Bridge spans South Fork American River



MFPD; Firefighters in Blue, Support Group in yellow

Then, lumber operations proceeded under various companies, including the El Dorado Lumber Co., which built a 3,000-foot long steam-operated cable tramway to move lumber from North Cable on the north side of the river to South Cable point on the south side - 1,200 feet above the river. A narrow-gauge railroad connected South Cable to Camino, California crossing three summits with grades as steep as 7 percent.

After large-scale lumber operations diminished around 1949, the Mosquito area supported numerous farms and orchards.

The Mosquito Bridge (wood, suspended by cables), originally built in 1867 is one of two main routes into the community. Fire engines, ambulances and other heavy vehicles cannot cross the bridge and must use Rock Creek Rd. This creates a minimum 40-45 minute delay in getting emergency resources and paramedics to a Mosquito incident. During wildland season, use of aircraft is critical while waiting for ground resources to arrive.

The developers of the Swansboro subdivision donated land and some materials, and with volunteer labor and money from fund raisers, the original volunteer fire department station was built in 1973. In 1978, the Mosquito Fire Protection District (MFPD) <https://mfpd.us> was formed by voter initiative using the boundaries

of the Mosquito Election Precinct. The district is 15 square miles and is entirely State Responsibility Area bordered by the El Dorado National Forest. The district population is approximately 2,000.

In 1997 the state condemned the Finnon Lake dam as seismically unsafe and offered the property to the Mosquito Volunteer Fire Department (MVFD), which bought it for \$1.00. The intent of the purchase was to restore the dam, and maintain a large body of water for fire suppression. The purchase came with restrictions that it must be maintained for public recreation.

In late 2006, MVFD changed its name to Mosquito Volunteer Fire Association (MVFA), and reorganized as a 501(c)(3) self-supporting non-profit California corporation - www.GoMVFA.org. The dam was replaced in 2011, resulting in creation of the 121 acre Finnon Lake Recreation Area, which is a venue for wildfire training used by MFPD and other local fire departments. During the King Fire, Finnon Lake Campground was designated a safe zone - secondary to the airport - and many fire fighters were camped there between duty shifts. www.finnonrecreationarea.com.



Equipment arriving in Mosquito during King Fire



MFPD firefighters in training

Present Day

MFPD Station 75 is supported by property taxes from district property owners, and enables the district to employ a paid Chief and several paid fire fighters. Volunteers from within the local community and surrounding areas complete the staffing of the district.

The Mosquito Fire Protection District is managed by a five-member Board of Directors, each elected to four year terms. Currently, the department operates as a combination paid/volunteer organization.

Chief Jack Rosevear is the current chief of the district. Preceding Jack as MFPD chief was Eddie Dwyer, Mike Hazlitt, Chris Johns, Tom Stuart, Bob Davis, George Kellison, Leo Chaloux, Mel Guthrie, Paul Hinds and Bill Smith. The original MVFD Chiefs were Orval Beckett and Bill Reid.

Present equipment includes two engines, E75 and E275, one 4,000 gal. tender, T75, and a Squad, S75. In addition, MFPD is receiving a new OES-Type 6 Engine.

Mosquito is now and has always been a volunteer community. The District recognizes the value of every individual volunteer, with or without fire fighter experience. Chief Rosevear and his staff seek and promote volunteers with specialized skills such as medical, administrative, equipment operations, etc.

What's more, MFPD has working relationships under Joint Operations Agreements (JOA) with Georgetown, Garden Valley and Pioneer Fire Districts.

Unique in some respects to other rural fire departments, is the MFPD Support Group. The group is composed of community volunteers, and engaged in duties such as emergency traffic control, monitoring weather events, running errands, operating fire hydrants and auxiliary pumps for water tender and helispot operations. Support Group members are encouraged by the Chief to attend Tuesday training sessions to prepare them for on-site emergency protocols, radio operations, and to perform such tasks such as hose recovery and maintenance.

Support Group personnel stayed behind during the King Fire of September, 2014. These folks performed duties such as answering the phones, preparing meals, station maintenance (Station 75 was used as the command center), running errands to town, and printing area maps for out-of-state fire fighters. There is an excellent book about this event available on Amazon: "The King Fire, Memoirs of a Rural Community".

Several local groups offer support to Station 75, and keep residents connected with our community. The Swansboro Pilots Association (SPA), worked with several past fire chiefs to develop an evacuation plan using the Swansboro airport as the designated Temporary Refuge Area and evacuation point.



Equipment staging at Swansboro Airport: King Fire



MFPD Support Group members in training

SPA hosts evacuation drills, assists with the airport during emergencies, and offers scholarships to high school students and Mosquito firefighters.

The Swansboro Country Property Owners Association (SCPOA) maintains a close relationship with Station 75 and the Chief, and includes an appropriation for fire prevention activities within their annual budget.

The Mosquito Firefighters' Association, (MFA), is a 501(c)(3) California non-profit corporation composed exclusively of fire fighters. MFA has hosted fund-raising events such as community raffles and Fire Fighter Breakfasts.

The Mosquito Fire Safe Council is an unincorporated associate member of the El Dorado County Fire Safe Council, and recently collected data of in-kind work for the Mosquito Vegetation Management Project, managed by the El Dorado Resource Conservation District (RCD).

MVFA maintains the "Station 75 Fund" which provides money to buy items for the fire department at the request of the Chief. Thousands of dollars have been donated to purchase these items since the fund was created. MVFA publishes the monthly "Mosquito Byte" community newsletter, which includes the Chief's column, and also publishes the Mosquito Phone Book.

MVFA owns the community's only café, Frank's Diner at Finnon Lake (formerly the

Firehouse Café), where Station 75 firefighters often enjoy meals alongside other customers.

The MVFA board maintains the name MVFA out of respect and memory for its founder and third generation Mosquito resident Lois Pearson. A memorial to Lois is erected in the pavilion gardens of Finnon Lake Recreation Area. Lois is one among many Mosquito volunteers who built this community with hard work and neighborly love.

All of these organizations work together to provide community support and education. They keep residents connected and informed by hosting various community events such as the SPA Scholarship Fund, Spaghetti Feed, Christmas Dinner, Christmas Gift Baskets, Easter Egg Hunt, Yard Sale, Community Clean-up Day, Veteran's events, Halloween events, and other dinner and breakfast events.

Mosquito Station 75 is the epicenter of volunteer activity for our community, and always has been since its origin in 1973.

Note: Much of the article above was submitted to CalFire for its annual newsletter at CalFire's request.

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MFPD in training at Finnon Lake boat ramp
Frank's Diner in background.