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## **COUNTY UNIFIES RURAL FIRE AGENCIES**

From Dianne Jacob

*(Information from Dianne Jacob released June 25, 2008)*

SAN DIEGO— The San Diego County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously Tuesday to consolidate a dozen unincorporated area fire agencies that have struggled over the years to operate on shoestring budgets and haphazard staffing.

Vice Chairwoman Dianne Jacob, who has championed the consolidation effort, called the decision “historic” and said it radically transforms the region’s network of fire protection and emergency medical services.

“Over half the County will be unified into a single, less-fractured, more efficient agency. This means stronger and better coordinated services in our rural areas. And, it brings us significantly closer to our eventual goal of creating a Countywide fire entity to serve the region,” Vice Chairwoman Jacob said.

Under the plan, Supervisors agreed to spend \$15.5 million dollars annually to bring additional resources and firefighters to more than 50 existing fire stations throughout the Backcountry, where devastating wind-driven wildfires tend to start.

The plan calls for 12 agencies to merge in three phases, starting with six volunteer companies: Sunshine Summit, Intermountain, Ranchita, Shelter Valley , Ocotillo Wells and Dulzura. The Campo, Boulevard, San Pasqual and Mount Laguna fire agencies would be next to join while the Rural and Pine Valley fire protection districts would join in a final third phase.

The plan requires final approval from the Local Agency Formation Commission, the state agency responsible for creating and dissolving public entities.

Jacob praised fire officials who took part in the consolidation process. She especially commended fire chiefs and fire board members for rising above past turf battles and recognizing that consolidation vastly improves fire and emergency medical services for the region as a whole.

“When it comes to fire, we are all in this together,” Jacob said.