

West Pend Oreille Fire District Sub District 1

| | Nigel Cave | David A. Van Natter |
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| 1. What is your name, what office are you running for and why are you running for this position? | <p>Nigel Cave, West Pend Oreille Fire District Commissioner.</p> <p>I'm running for Fire Commissioner because I care deeply about the safety and future of our community. With experience in law enforcement, finance, business ownership, and fire service, I know the challenges our volunteers face and the tools they need to stay safe on the job. I will work to support our firefighters, modernize equipment, and ensure taxpayer dollars are spent wisely — so our fire district is prepared, accountable, and ready to respond when it matters most.</p> | <p>My Name is David VanNatter</p> <p>I am running to be reelected as a Fire Commissioner for West Pend Oreille Volunteer Fire District for a second 4 year term. I have lived in the fire District for over 40 years and feel it is a privilege and calling to serve the taxpayers and the Fire District.</p> <p>We are a volunteer fire district except the Fire Chief and clerical help. Other local Fire Districts have eliminated Volunteers and gone to paid Union staffing at huge expense and lower staffing numbers to the tax payers.</p> <p>The Volunteer model is still very effective for our 10 year average of 8 structure and 5 chimney fires a year. The Volunteers also respond on hundreds of vehicle accidents, rescues, service calls and hazardous situations. The Volunteers support Bonner county EMS with medical help and Idaho Department of Lands on wildfires also on hundreds of call a year.</p> |
| 2. How can your fire district be improved? Please provide your top 2-3 ideas. | <p>1. Strengthen Volunteer Support – Provide stipends, training, and resources so our volunteers are supported and equipped, not buying their own equipment to do the job.</p> <p>2. Modernize Equipment – Replace outdated apparatus and unsafe gear to ensure firefighter safety and help increase response times.</p> <p>3. Ensure Fiscal Responsibility – Manage taxpayer dollars wisely, balancing strong public safety with accountability and transparency.</p> | <p>West Pend Oreille Fire is community supported . We are as strong as the community wants us to be. Our taxpayers have risen to the needs we have, when presented as a respectful request.</p> <p>For District Improvement we always need:</p> <p>#1. Dedicated volunteers, who want to help others.</p> <p>#2. Training, to become more proficient at our responses.</p> <p>#3. Safe working conditions, with quality equipment which is maintained and ready to put to use.</p> |

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| 3. What are your views on the rapid growth of North Idaho? | North Idaho is experiencing rapid growth whether we like it or not, and with that comes new challenges for our fire district and our communities. Growth should never come at the expense of public safety. As we grow in population we need to adapt to the challenges it brings with it to keep our public safe. | <p>Bonner County has averaged 2.6% annual growth in the past 10 years with a highest growth of about 5% in 2021. Priest River Area growth may have exceeded the county growth rate as a bedroom community. Approximately 6 years ago an additional fire station was built 10 miles north of Priest River and volunteer resident housing was added to the Fire station near Oldtown, Idaho.</p> <p>In the last 4 years we have added one additional used water tender and used fire engine to assist with growth.</p> <p>Our tax income has not kept up with the rapid growth of inflation we have experienced since 2020. We may have difficulty maintaining replacing some of our aging fire engines with all being older than 20 years awith the oldest being the oldest is 45 years old. The Volunteers work hard and put in lots of hours for their Community. We value every Volunteer and have better turnout (average of 11 per call) on structure fires than any of the surrounding paid Union Fire Districts.</p> |
| 4. As development continues the fire districts resources are stretched. What are your suggestions on how to fund the fire district to meet its additional obligations? | <p>As development continues, our fire district's resources are stretched, and we must be proactive in planning for the future. I believe funding should be approached with accountability and fairness.</p> <p>First, we must ensure every tax dollar is managed wisely, cutting waste and focusing spending on priorities like volunteers, training, and equipment.</p> <p>Second, I support exploring partnerships with developers and impact fees so that new growth helps pay its fair share of the additional burden it creates.</p> <p>Finally, we should pursue grants and state funding opportunities where possible, reducing the need to place unnecessary strain on local taxpayers. My goal is to strengthen our fire district without compromising fiscal responsibility.</p> | <p>State of Idaho allows Impact fees for new development, to reimburse existing taxpayers for the Fire infrastructure all ready in place. The Fire District could use the Impact fees to purchasing needed capital items.</p> |

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| 5. Do you believe there should be a long-range plan for projected growth to ensure financial resources are able to meet demand? If so, what would it look like? | Yes, absolutely. A long-range plan is essential to ensure our fire district keeps pace with growth without placing an unfair burden on taxpayers. That plan should include a realistic projection of population and development trends, a clear assessment of equipment and staffing needs, and a strategy to fund those needs responsibly. It would balance fiscal accountability with public safety, using tools like multi-year budgeting, grant opportunities, and growth-related impact fees so that development helps pay for the services it requires. The goal is to maintain strong emergency response capabilities while protecting the financial interests of our community. | Yes. we are always planning for the long term, #1. State support of 3% increase of budget base or Cost of Living inflation rate which ever is higher. #2. Community support for any short term bond or levy to replace aging equipment. #3. Support of a state license plate fee or gas tax increase to fund fire response to vehicle accident response so as not to tax burden landowners for this cost. #4. Community support the user fee to bill non taxed fire calls, like vehicle accidents (if the State does not fund). #5. The Staff at the Fire District has been successful obtaining State and federal grants for fire and Safety equipment. This Year we were awarded a \$490,000 federal Grant to replace small and aging Breathing masks to keep firefighters safe Thank You Staff! |
| 6. What are your suggestions to balance the budget for your fire district? | By being transparent, disciplined, and fiscally responsible, we can protect taxpayers while keeping our fire district strong and ready to serve. My first priority would be to carefully review current spending to cut waste and ensure every dollar is used effectively. I would also like a formal audit of the fire district to see what we can keep that will help with insurance rates for our community and what we can surplus to help recoup some funds to be used more efficiently. | Currently the Fire District has a balanced budget and a saving account for a start on a replacement fire engine or or capital expenditures. |
| 7. Should there be any changes to the role that Fire Districts have in the planning and authorization of new developments? | Yes, fire districts should have a stronger voice in the planning and authorization of new developments. Growth directly impacts emergency services, and too often districts are left reacting instead of being part of the planning process. Fire districts should be consulted early to ensure roads, access points, water supply, and safety standards meet the needs of first responders. I also believe new development should share in the cost of increased service demands, through tools like impact fees or developer contributions. This approach protects taxpayers, supports public safety for the future. | Impact fees as allowed by the State of Idaho, to cover buy in of new construction to the existing fire infrastructure. |

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| 8. Do you believe access to city managed water should be increased to rural communities? Why or why not? | Access to reliable water is critical for fire protection, especially in rural areas where hydrants are limited or nonexistent. While expanding city-managed water to rural communities could improve fire safety it comes with an heavy cost. Any expansion should be driven by community needs and balanced against the costs to taxpayers. We currently use water tenders and drafting sites to ensure our volunteers have the resources they need to respond effectively for more rural areas of our fire district. | Good working hydrants assist in fire fighting efforts and lower Fire insurance costs. Access to water outside City limits is a City government decision and could be cost prohibitive in our District. Here is what we have in place for rural water supply. The Fire District has 5 fire engines from 500 to 1000 gallons, 5 water tenders from 1500 to 3000 gals, large portable pumps for lakes and streams and temporary storage tanks available to help with water supply during fires in rural areas. that do not have City water. The District has also entered in to mutual aid agreements with the surrounding Fire Districts to assist with additional large water delivery tenders. Normally there is sufficient water supply in the rural parts of the district within 30 minutes of a fire call. |
| 9. In your opinion, are there areas can be improved with forest management in your fire district? | Yes. Forest management directly affects wildfire risk, and there are improvements that would help protect our community. We need to focus on reducing fuels through thinning, clearing defensible space, and maintaining safe access routes for fire crews. Partnerships with landowners, state agencies like IDL, and the Forest Service are key, because good forest management requires coordination across property lines. By being proactive, we can reduce wildfire danger, protect homes and businesses, and make sure our firefighters can respond safely and effectively. | The Fire District acts in supportive and advisory capacity for forest management with in the fire district and regulatory in the city. # 1. Road access kept open and cleared for fire vehicles # 2. Spacing of trees to keep branches from touching other trees and cleared away from structures. # 3. Slash piles should be kept free from dirt, small as possible in size and away from structures. (we have had mutable large fires in the county and district from dirt mixed in piles which allows machine plies burned in the fall or spring to rekindle the following summer). # 4. Logging systems that mulch or compact slash in the woods reduce fire spread and intensity while leaving nutrients and moisture holding capacity for future tree growth. |
| 10. What should be the role of the fire district be in working with local governing authorities (county commissioners, city planners, etc.) and why? | The fire district should play an active advisory role with local governing authorities. Growth and development directly impact emergency services, and it's essential that county commissioners, city planners, and developers understand the fire district's capabilities and needs before projects move forward. By being involved early in the planning process, the district can ensure roads are accessible, water supply is adequate, and safety standards are met. This collaboration protects public safety, reduces long-term costs, and ensures growth happens responsibly while respecting taxpayer dollars. | The Fire District is a separate government authority responsible to our tax payers for wise and legal use of their funds for fire protection. We provide input to other governmental functions as requested primarily in regards to fire code compliance. It is always good to be cooperative with all Governmental agencies in emergencies to provide effective services we offer together. We support our volunteers with Emergency Medical Technician training to help Bonner County EMS with 200-300 calls a year with minimal cost to the tax payers. Our fire district also assists with approximately 100 vehicle accidents a year with occupant extraction, fire suppression, or hazardous material reporting and stabilization. We act as an Initial wildland fire fighting force until the Idaho Department of Lands or US Forest Service arrives, assisting and protecting structures. |

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| 11. What is your background and why do you feel it qualifies you for this position? | <p>I bring a blend of public safety, financial, business, and firefighting experience that prepares me to serve as Fire Commissioner for the West Pend Oreille Fire District.</p> <p>Together these experiences give me a balanced perspective: I understand the tactical needs of first responders, the financial constraints of a public agency, and how to run an organization efficiently and transparently. I'm committed to supporting our volunteers, modernizing equipment, and ensuring fiscal responsibility so our district can meet current demands and plan responsibly for future growth.</p> <p>I'm invested in the communities safety and future. I'm running to make sure our firefighters have the resources they need and that taxpayer dollars are spent wisely.</p> | <p>As a Fire Commissioner in the past four years, I am part of a 3 person board that interfaces between the Fire District and the Community to provide the best possible service with the funds available. I have been a resident in my fire district for over 40 years, Employed or working for State or local Government since 1982. Over the years I have been trained and gained experience in how State laws and procedures are used to protect the public and help in management decisions for local government.</p> <p>I have been a Wildland firefighter, most of my life with training and experience with Structure fire fighting and Emergency Medical Technician calls.</p> <p>Thank you for the opportunity to serve you, now and in the future.</p> |