

# **MADERA COUNTY, NF RANCHERIA & NF CDC SIGN INNOVATIVE AGREEMENT TO BUILD NEW NF FIRE STATION**

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**Innovative three-way agreement links local Tribe and communities in development of critical public safety and social services from fire-prone foothills.**

**MADERA, Calif.** – The foothills community of North Fork, CA will have a new volunteer fire station thanks to an innovative, three-party agreement signed Tuesday, May 12, 2009 by Madera County, the North Fork Rancheria of Mono Indians (“Tribe”) and the North Fork Community Development Council (“CDC”).

The MOU solidifies the construction and relocation of the North Fork Volunteer Fire Station on a 2.6-acre parcel at the old North Fork Mill Site. The MOU represents years of effort to replace an inadequate and dilapidated station that currently sits underneath the North Fork Library. It also benefits the North Fork Rancheria who will obtain land to build much-needed senior and social services facilities for tribal members, and the North Fork CDC who will further its redevelopment efforts for the Mill Site and town of North Fork.

“As a life-long resident of North Fork, I can’t begin to explain how rewarding it has been to have a hand in this project,” said Supervisor Tom Wheeler, whose district includes North Fork. “This station has been at the top of my priority list as I know just how desperately the volunteers need a new station. This MOU offers us a win-win situation by improving our quality of emergency services, assisting the Tribal community, and helping the North Fork CDC with the desperately-needed development of the Mill Site.”

District 1 Supervisor Frank Bigelow underscored the creative approach of the Tribe that accessed funds under an Indian Community Development Block Grant (“ICDBG”) saying, “This Tribe does not see itself as a Tribe only but as part of the community who put back into the community. This is what they are all about.”

Ms. Elaine Bethel-Fink, Tribal Chairperson of the North Fork Rancheria of Mono Indians, stressed the collaborative, constructive nature of the agreement, saying “Today is a great day as we celebrate the culmination of years of hard work by our Tribe and local partners working together to address the needs of our town and the foothills. This is a win-win-win agreement for everyone.”

According to Fink, once built, the fire station will join a long list of construction and renovation projects by the Tribe within the community including housing, office space, community meeting areas, and, of course, down the road, the proposed casino resort near Madera. “This agreement is good example of a modern, sovereign American Indian government working to address the economic, social, and environmental needs of Tribes and surrounding communities simultaneously,” added Fink.

For the town of North Fork, the project represents both an important step in addressing the fire-safety needs of a fire-prone foothills’ community and in the redevelopment of the economy of North Fork, CA after the closure of its logging mill back in 1994.

“This agreement is a model of how community and governmental organizations can work together to bring positive change to our community. This is the first, we hope, of many, development projects that will revitalize the North Fork economy,” stated Dan Rosenberg, President of the North Fork CDC which, together with its local partners, has been working since the closure of the mill to attract jobs and business back to the site and community. “For those of us who have worked for years to clean up the site, put infrastructure underground and keep the organization functioning, it is thrilling to be on the verge of building something new at the site. The fire station will be the first new building constructed at the mill site in more than four decades,” stated Rosenberg.

The new facility will provide housing for the firefighting equipment of the all-volunteer North Fork Fire Department and Fire Department Auxiliary but will not initially include space for sleeping and eating though those facilities may be built in the future.

The MOU establishes the responsibilities of each entity:

- The County will contribute up to \$400,000 from its Capital Improvement Funds to the project
- The Mono Tribe will contribute up to \$496,000 from federal ICDBG funding to the project
- The North Fork CDC will donate approximately 15 acres of the old Mill Site to the County, who will deed most of the land to the Tribe for the fire station and social services facilities, and part of it back to the CDC for future development

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