

## **SEAR (Southern Emergency Access Route) Update – October 2023 FAQs Related to Concept & Support, SEAR Working Group, & Original Design Concept**

In the interest of the widest distribution of information to the Genesee Fire Protection District (GFPD) community and the Genesee Foundation SEAR and GFPD Working Group have compiled the following FAQs pertaining to the potential emergency access route in the southern area of the Genesee Fire Protection District. These FAQs are based on questions that have come from residents, the Genesee Fire & Safety Committee (GFSC), the Genesee Foundation Board, and from community meetings held on September 27 and December 8, 2022, and which included a representative from the Jeffco Sheriff's Office. These FAQs are posted on the Genesee Foundation and GFPD websites and will be updated as the project proceeds and more information is available. Additional Community meetings are planned as the project progresses.

### **FAQs to the Genesee Fire District:**

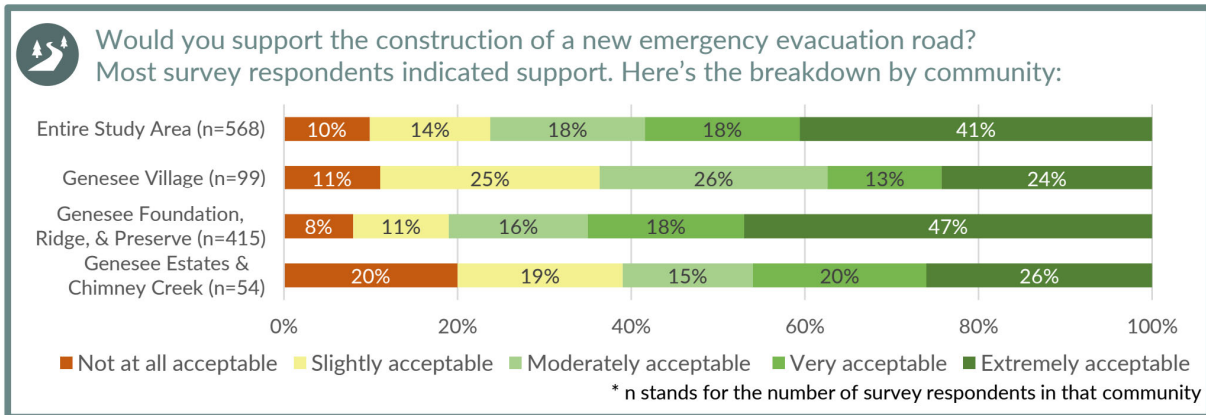
#### **1. Does the fire department support the construction of the proposed southern emergency access route (SEAR)?**

Yes. It was recommended in the [Community Wildfire Protection Plan \(CWPP\)](#) that was developed in 2008 and revised in 2021. The addition of a secondary ingress/egress route is a critical tool that, when coupled with roadway mitigation, increases roadway survivability for both citizens and first responders and provides a secondary means of egress when a primary evacuation route is compromised. The GFPD Board of Directors supported Genesee Foundation's conducting an engineering study to evaluate the feasibility of and formulate a cost estimate for a purpose-built road in the southern part of the GFPD. The GFPD has recently agreed upon and signed two easements with both the GF and the Genesee Water & Sanitation District that will allow the GFPD to build and maintain the proposed SEAR.

#### **2. Does the community support the construction of the proposed emergency access route?**

In 2021, a household survey was conducted for the GFPD and one of the questions asked was, 'Would you support the construction of a new emergency evacuation road?' Those results are depicted below:

## What we might do in the future: Build an emergency road!



### 3. What would the proposed emergency access route be used for?

The proposed emergency access route would be designed and constructed to be safely navigated by passenger vehicles, law enforcement vehicles, and fire apparatus during an emergency. The SEAR will not be used for public transport, recreational, or other day to day use by any person or entity and is intended to be used only for emergency ingress and egress, maintenance/mitigation, and as well as periodic training for firefighters and law enforcement personnel. The SEAR will be access controlled with appropriate gates and security, as well as appropriate signage, locks, and monitoring.

### 4. During the community meeting I heard that the proposed emergency access route would primarily be used for other fire departments to enter Genesee. Is that true?

The proposed emergency access route is a tool that can allow other fire departments to enter the Genesee Fire Protection District to assist in firefighting operations and/or allow GFPD residents to evacuate. Decisions would be made and implemented on a case-by-case basis. There are an infinite number of emergency scenarios that would each dictate a unique strategy and a set of corresponding tactics but, for the sake of illustration, the following three examples illustrate how the SEAR might be utilized during a wildfire:

- A) A wildfire approaching from the south or southwest: residents would be evacuated to the north and the SEAR would be utilized for ingress/egress of firefighting resources and potentially as a firebreak. Law enforcement may elect to allow residents to use one or two lanes on Genesee Ridge and Genesee Trail Roads for egress and, if needed, they may shut down I-70 to allow for the high volume of vehicles entering the highway.
- B) A wildfire approaching from the west or east starting at the midpoint of the district and traveling either east or west: a fire here would likely cut the

district in half in terms of fire operations and evacuation. As such, residents would evacuate both to the north and to the south on the SEAR and first responders would enter both from the north and the south.

- C) A wildfire approaching from the west, northwest, north, northeast, or east in the upper portion of the district: residents would evacuate to the south on the proposed SEAR. First responders would enter the community from the north.

Again, there are numerous scenarios but, when possible, residents would be routed to the north. The reason for this is that during high stress/low visibility situations, following a familiar path is safer and much more likely to get residents out of harm's way in the most efficient manner.

### **5. Why not just shelter in place? I've mitigated around my home.**

Based on our analysis, there are currently no areas within the GFPD that could serve as a fully safe, designated area for wildfire evacuation emergencies under conditions of 10-20 mph winds and especially winds greater than 20 mph due to steep slopes and heavy fuel loads (2021 CWPP 3F, page 59). Survivability is highly uncertain if you elect to shelter in place or delay your evacuation.

### **FAQs to the Genesee Foundation SEAR Working Group:**

#### **6. What is the Genesee Foundation SEAR Working Group?**

The Genesee Foundation SEAR Working Group was created by the Genesee Foundation Board in early 2022 to explore the development of an emergency access route in the southern area of Genesee. They began working with representatives of the boards of GFPD and Genesee Water & Sanitation District (GWSD) and this three-group combination was named the Tri-Board Working Group. This group has since compiled a summary of objectives and key parameters necessary for any purpose-built road. The Tri-Board Working Group has currently paused its meetings and activities.

#### **7. What is the purpose of the southern emergency access route (SEAR) project?**

To explore the design and construction of an emergency access route within the corridor generally bounded by Montane Drive, Bitterroot Lane, Daisy Lane, and CO Highway 74. The SEAR is to be designed and constructed to be safely navigated by passenger vehicles, law enforcement vehicles and fire apparatus during an emergency. The SEAR will not be used for public transportation, recreational or other day-to-day use by any person or entity and is intended to be used only for emergency ingress and egress, maintenance/mitigation, and training.

The SEAR will be access-controlled with gates and other security measures, including appropriate signage, locks, and monitoring. The ownership, maintenance and use of the SEAR will be governed by an easement agreement entered into between the GFPD and the GF. The agreed upon route crosses GF Open Space and GWSD property and does not cross private residential property.

#### **8. Has the Genesee Foundation EAR Working Group made use of the Genesee Fire & Safety Committee's EAR and Risk/Priority Matrices?**

The Genesee Foundation SEAR Working Group has made use of both the EAR and CWPP Risk/Priority Matrices developed by the Genesee Fire & Safety Committee (GFSC). GFSC undertook two major projects in 2021-2022 following publication of the CWPP. The first was an evaluation of additional potential egress routes; the second was development of a risk/priority matrix based on the risks identified in the CWPP and the possible mitigation strategies for each. The EAR Matrix compiled and evaluated possible evacuation routes in addition to current egress routes (i.e., Genesee Ridge, Vista, and Trail Roads). The southern EAR was deemed to have the highest evacuation value, the highest fire protection value, and the highest chance of success. Other possible emergency access routes were identified in the western, eastern, and southern directions. The alternate routes remain under consideration and may be pursued in the future.

The Genesee Foundation SEAR Working Group has also adopted the top three mitigation priorities identified by the GFSC using the CWPP Risk/Priority Matrix they developed. They are: 1) improve survivability along existing egress routes through fuel reduction; 2) pursue additional access routes; and 3) reach out to local law enforcement to understand evacuation procedures. The Genesee Foundation EAR Working Group will continue to build on the GFSC's work and draw on resident, community, and committee expertise.

The EAR and CWPP Risk/Priority Matrices may be found using the Emergency Access Route tab on the opening page of the Genesee Foundation website ([geneseefoundation.org](http://geneseefoundation.org)). Also, see the article in the December 2022 issue of The Genescene by Dan Krygowski, a GFSC member, on the CWPP Risk/Priority Matrix and how you can use it to identify and communicate your priorities.

#### **9. Who will be able to use the SEAR? What would be the balance between ingress and egress?**

As currently envisioned, the SEAR would be a two-lane road, allowing access to emergency vehicles for the purpose of emergency response into the community (e.g., for wildfire containment) and evacuation of residents from the community.

Both ingress and egress would be on an as-needed emergency basis, as determined by law enforcement and firefighters (see also FAQ #4).

**10. Will this be a public road?**

As per Jefferson County requirements, the SEAR is presently conceived of as a road controlled by GFPD, in accordance with the terms of easement agreements entered into between GFPD and Genesee Foundation and Genesee Water & Sanitation District. Under the terms of the easement agreements, the SEAR will only be used for ingress and egress by emergency vehicles, community residents in case of a wildfire emergency, and periodic fire department and law enforcement training.

**11. What are the potential funding options?**

The anticipated source of funding is a bond-offering by GFPD. The ability of GFPD to issue bonds is conditioned on the approval of a mill levy increase by GFPD voters. An election to approve a mill levy increase will be held if the GFPD Board adopts a resolution to place the issue on a ballot.

**12. What will be the cost to GFPD residents?**

The cost to Genesee Fire Production District residents will depend upon the project costs (see also FAQ #11).

**13. What is the timing to build a Southern EAR?**

If a feasible and cost-effective route is identified, construction could commence after the necessary funding is obtained and a full design is approved, most likely in 2025.

**14. Why aren't we spending our money to increase mitigation of our current egress routes (Genesee Ridge, Vista, and Trail Roads) instead of or in addition to an EAR?**

We are. The Genesee Foundation Open Space budget has been increased from \$55k in 2022 to \$96k in 2023, a 75% increase. The contractor budget has been increased from \$1k to \$50k to employ more seasonal help. The bulk of these increases will be dedicated to mitigation in Genesee Foundation Open Space along our current egress roads. The challenges here are paying a competitive wage to seasonal workers and finding contractors in a competitive business environment. Additionally, approximately 25% of the high-priority evacuation routes that need mitigation (as identified in the CWPP) abut private property and would require the agreement of the owners to allow roadside mitigation on their property. We are doing roadside thinning on Genesee Foundation Open Space and encourage every

resident to complete defensible space on their own property, which should include removing trees along their personal evacuation route which, in turn, would increase the efficacy of our efforts.

This effort to mitigate along current evacuation routes is not a substitute for providing an alternative route for emergency vehicles to access the community, to reduce evacuation time for residents of the greater Genesee area, or to provide alternative egress if access to I-70 is compromised during an emergency.

### **15. Why was the conceptual Baseline study conducted in the first place and how much did it cost?**

The 2021 Baseline conceptual study was intended to answer one question: Is it possible to build a road from Genesee to Highway 74? To answer that question five deliverables were agreed upon: Site Visit, Preliminary Roadway Alignment and Grading, Roadway Section Detail, Construction Cost Estimate, Written Narrative of Findings, Assumptions, and Observations. The total cost to the community for this conceptual study was \$6,500, split between the Genesee Fire Protection District and the Genesee Foundation, each paying \$3,250. Baseline Engineering's 2021 study included the agreed upon deliverables, which are typical of a conceptual road study.

### **16. What did we learn from the conceptual Baseline study?**

The concept of building an emergency access road has been discussed for decades without any meaningful progress. The 2021 Baseline conceptual study was an important first step to move the process forward. It provided an answer to the question of whether it was possible to build an emergency road, but it was also limited in terms of scope. Baseline Engineering was given a starting point, an ending point, and a general outline of the route rather than being provided with a wider geographic area to explore as does the current project. Since the 2021 Baseline study, the project has proceeded, albeit slowly until recently. Some assumptions that were thought to be operative when the 2021 study was performed have changed, and conditions have also evolved. For example, the Marshall Fire of December 2021 heightened awareness of our vulnerability to wildfires. In addition, in 2022 the Genesee Water and Sanitation District reached the decision to proceed with their Reservoir #1 in the middle of the study area. We now understand that the road may connect to Highway 74 at locations other than the access to GWSD's Reservoir #2, giving us additional flexibility. Conditions are now right to proceed with this project, which is so essential to Genesee residents' survivability in the event of a major fire event.

## **17. Why did we do another engineering study when we already have the Baseline Engineering Study?**

The 2021 Baseline Engineering Study was a limited conceptual study that was restricted to assessing the feasibility of building an emergency evacuation route to CO Highway 74 over property owned by the Genesee Foundation and GWSD. A full engineering study exploring various other potential routes within the Southern Corridor was needed to adequately assess the viability of building an evacuation route. The more detailed study was completed in April 2023 and addresses a broader range of issues, including geologic hazards, drainage issues, potential ingress/egress volume and speed, and protection of GWSD facilities. Baseline Engineering, with the advantage of their previous work, responded to our October 2022 Request for Proposal with a comprehensive and cost-effective proposal for an engineering study to identify a viable emergency access route or routes within the Southern Corridor. The completed study also includes an estimated project timeline, cost estimate and risk matrix for each identified option that is of sufficient quality to support financing and construction decisions.

### **Links to Additional Information:**

#### **Where I can I find more information about the CWPP?**

<https://geneseefpd.colorado.gov/community-wildfire-protection-plan>

#### **Where can I find more information about preparing for a wildfire?**

<https://geneseefpd.colorado.gov/wildfire-info>

#### **Where can I find more information about the Emergency Access Route (EAR), and the EAR and Risk/Priority Matrices?**

<https://geneseefpd.colorado.gov/emergency-access-route-info>

#### **How can I get more involved with wildfire preparedness?**

<https://geneseefpd.colorado.gov/ambassador-hub>

Jason Puffett, Chief, Genesee Fire Protection District: [jpuffett@geneseefire.org](mailto:jpuffett@geneseefire.org)  
Genesee Foundation EAR Working Group (Diane Davies, Rick Sarg and Wayne Ackerman: [board@geneseefoundation.org](mailto:board@geneseefoundation.org))