

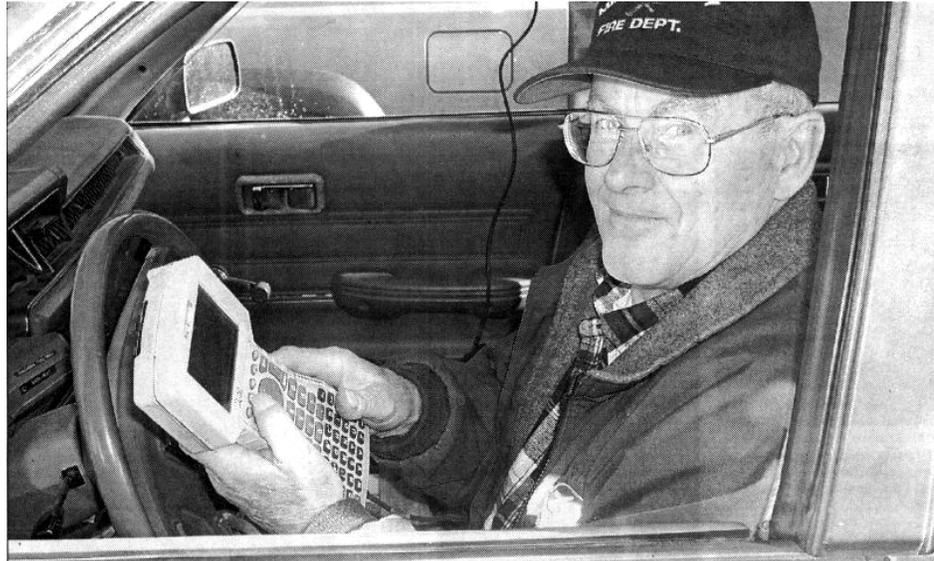
Rural driveways, road part of mapping system

Plumas FireSafe Council uses grant funding for project

By Victoria Metcalf

Staff Writer

Driveway by driveway, the Plumas County FireSafe Council is attempting to better prepare homeowners for wildfire survival through satellite technology. In a comprehensive study of rural housing driveways, roads and water sources, special representatives of the FireSafe Council are updating existing county information



Armed with a \$15,000 Global Positioning System, on loan to the Plumas County FireSafe Council from the Forest Service, Warren Grandall demonstrates how he can record information. Photo by Victoria Metcalf

with the Global Positioning System. By developing detailed maps with rural housing addresses and up-to-date information on access and water sources, the FireSafe Council is attempting to do what it can to protect homes in case of wildfire.

The fire pre-attack and emergency services planning project is funded through a grant from the National Fire Plan Grant program by the Plumas National Forest and the Bureau of Land Management. Before designing the pre-attack plan, Plumas County FireSafe Council coordinator Mike DeLasaux became familiar with Butte County's pre-attack plan. In the event of a wildfire or another emergency, Butte County has computerized mapping available to show personnel specific locations within their area. Each rural home site is identified with an address, access location; surface type, length and condition of driveways or roads; and important water sources and how they may be accessed. With that direction in mind, Plumas is now upgrading its information to give firefighters a much better understanding of not only where rural homes exist, but critical emergency information about each private area. Warren Grandall, a member of the Plumas County Fire-Safe Council, volunteer for the Meadow Valley Fire Department, and Forest Service retiree, is one of the men hired through the grant to record information. Dividing the county into sections, Grandall and his counterpart, Ray Nichol, travel the country recording readily available information. DeLasaux said they are careful to record information that is readily available and avoid trespassing. Grandall said his experience is that homeowners are more than happy to allow him access. They understand that it benefits them, he said. "When a fire does threaten, we have all the maps and know where all the roads are," DeLasaux said. Using county plot maps that have boundaries, but little additional information, Grandall drives from one place to the next. Stopping at one of the areas plotted on the county map, Grandall said he's interested

in where the access road is. It is his experience that on some parcels, the address is in one area, but the access road is in another. Sometimes there is quite a distance between the two. When moments are critical having detailed information saves valuable response time. Whether it's a Forest Service engine or the closest fire department, if the access road is known, help arrives as quickly as possible, Grandall said. In removing as many of the unknowns as possible now, it smoothes out the process later, Grandall said. By integrating the GPS system with local maps, someone from an engine doesn't have to walk the length of a private road to determine its condition. As they are driving to the scene, firefighters are already armed with the length and width of a road, whether it's dirt, gravel or paved and if it's steep. They also know if there's a turn around place or adequate room to negotiate a turnaround—valuable information when considering the size of engines.

Having information on available water sources is also important. Grandall said that just the other day he noted a fire hydrant in front of one building. When he took a second look he realized it was for decorative purposes. However, if a fire crew arrives knowing there's a hydrant, pond, stream, or a tank makes a big difference. Grandall also includes information about the type of hookups required for some hydrants or water pipes. Here again, he recently found some that



When using the Global Positioning System, Warren Grandall mounts an outer space-looking device to the top of his vehicle. The antenna and globe-like object are part of the positioning link to a satellite.

don't match what is commonly available on fire trucks. Having the advanced information, once again saves time that might be needed to protect a structure. Also knowing in advance whether firefighters will have access to a water supply with pressure or whether they will need to draw the water from the source, are important considerations. Grandall also notes the number of structures within an area. Barns, sheds, separate garages and other structures go on his list. Grandall and Nichol are also interested in utilities in given areas. If they are underground, engines can pass over. If they are overhead, an engine may become snagged on it, or it might come down during the fire. Whether or not properties have locked gates is another important factor. Grandall and Nichol have already covered many places in the Quincy, Meadow Valley areas, and Eastern Plumas areas and are now making their ways toward Indian Valley