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To begin the quick renewal process, simply go online to the SDA website at www.sdaco.org (and if you are a district,

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If you have any questions or need any assistance, please feel free to contact Karla Boughey, Membership Services Coordinator, at 303-863-1733.

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Grab Your Calendar...

Days and Dates for the 2021 SDA Annual Conference Have Changed!

We have shifted the days and dates for the 2021 SDA Annual Conference by one day!

This year's Conference will begin on Tuesday, September 14 and run through Thursday, September 16!

You read that right! We will start on **Tuesday** and end on **Thursday**!

We are excited to try this new timing within the Conference week. Finishing on Thursday will allow attendees the chance to catch up with work on Friday or even just get ahead of the weekend traffic!

Right now we are planning on being back up in Keystone for an in-person Conference, but stay tuned for more information as we move through the winter and spring.

No matter what Conference looks like this year, mark your calendars to join us Tuesday, September 14 through Thursday, September 16!





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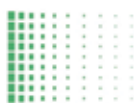
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It's Time to Submit Your Ideas for Speakers and Topics for the 2021 SDA Annual Conference!

It's hard to believe, but planning is already underway for the 2021 SDA Annual Conference, September 14-16 (see page 3 for more information on our new dates!!) Even though we don't know exactly how Conference will look this year, no matter what format we use, one of the most important pieces of the planning process is laying out the schedule of breakout sessions. And this is where you come in!

The Call for Speakers and Topics for the 2021 SDA Annual Conference opens on Wednesday, February 3, and it is the perfect time to send us all your ideas!

As you are thinking about what should be included in this year's breakout sessions, here are a few things that might help get those ideas flowing:

- » **What are the hot topics that districts need to know more about?**
- » **Are there successful projects or case studies from which others could learn?**
- » **Is there a general subject that you could use a refresher course on (and maybe others could, too)?**
- » **Are you an expert who has suggestions on important topics to present?**

Whatever ideas you have, big or small, we want to hear from you!

The process is super easy. Beginning on February 3, **you can simply go to the SDA website at www.sdaco.org to share your suggestions for a breakout session, recommend a great speaker, or both!**

Please remember that the more details you can provide with your suggestion, the better. We strive to bring you topics that are the most pertinent and relevant to the special district world so the more information we have about your idea, the easier it is to see if it might work for the Conference.

As always, please call our office at 303-863-1733 if you have any questions.

Mark your calendars to join us for Conference, and we look forward to receiving your submissions! 🍌

2021 SDA Annual Regional Workshops Still Planned for June!

Although we don't know how they will look yet, we are still planning on offering the SDA Annual Regional Workshops in June!

Whether we are in person, virtual, or a mixture of both, you can be sure that these valuable sessions will still offer a plethora of information and discuss the same pertinent and timely issues!

This lively and educational training applies to all types of districts and is sure to provide a wealth of

beneficial information for your district. We will cover a wide variety of important topics such as open meetings, conflicts of interests, TABOR, and public records, just to name a few.

Whether you are a Board member or district employee, a seasoned veteran or brand new to your position, we will have something for everyone.

We are working on all the details so stay tuned for more! 🍌





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? Ask Evan

Q: Is a financial audit mandatory?

A: Each district must have an audit performed annually, unless the district's revenue and expenditures are less than \$750,000. Unless exempt, the Board shall cause to be made an annual audit of the financial statements of the district as of the end of each year or more frequently if determined by the Board. (§29-1-603, C.R.S.)

The audit report must be submitted to the Board by the auditor by June 30 and filed with the State Auditor within 30 days after the report is received by the district. If the district has authorized but unissued general obligation debt as of the end of the fiscal year, the district shall submit a copy of the audit report or a copy of its application for exemption from audit to the Board of County Commissioners for each county in which the district is located or the governing body of any municipality that approved the service plan.

If neither the district's revenues nor expenditures exceed \$750,000 for the fiscal year, an audit exemption may be sought. To obtain an audit exemption, the district must file an application with the State Auditor within three months of the close of the fiscal year (by March 31). (§29-1-604(3), C.R.S.)

For districts with neither revenues nor expenditures exceeding \$100,000, the application for exemption must be prepared by a person skilled in governmental accounting. For districts with revenues or expenditures of at least \$100,000 but not more than \$750,000, the application must be prepared by an independent accountant with knowledge of governmental accounting. (§29-1-604, C.R.S.)

The application for exemption in either case will include a thorough summary of the district's financial condition; will be filed with the State Auditor's Office; and a copy will be kept at the district office, to be available to the public. Once filed, the Auditor's Office will review the application, and if it meets the requirements, the Auditor's Office will notify the district that the exemption is granted, and nothing further will be required of the district for the year.

If the application is not sufficient and not granted by the Auditor's Office, and the insufficiency cannot be corrected, the district will be required to have a complete financial audit completed and submitted to the Board by June 30 and filed with the State Auditor within 30 days.

If required, a request for extension of time to file the audit may be filed with the State Auditor no later than seven months following the end of the fiscal year (July 31). The amount of time requested shall not exceed 60 days. 🍷



Evan Goulding, Consultant and former SDA Executive Director.

If neither the district's revenues nor expenditures exceed \$750,000 for the fiscal year, an audit exemption may be sought.



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Highlands Ranch General Manager Retires after 24 Years

By Susan M. Thornton, M.S.

Change came to one of Colorado's largest metropolitan districts on December 31, 2020 when its long-time General Manager retired.

Terry Nolan, who became General Manager of the Highlands Ranch Metro District in March of 1996, had a long career in public service. Not only did he devote 24 years of service to the District, but prior to that he served as a U.S. Navy Aviator for 26 years, achieving the rank of Captain.

Oversaw Growth and Many Improvements

Highlands Ranch has grown from large areas of undeveloped ranchland in 1980 to now being home to 98,000 people.

During his time as General Manager of the District, Nolan oversaw an operating budget of as much as \$20 million per year and oversaw a reduction in the District's mill levy from 25.25 to 11.205 mills, of which 7.0 mills resulted from the transfer of fire and emergency services from the Metro District to South Metro Fire Rescue.

In addition, the District plans to pay off its remaining debt of approximately \$19 million four years early in December of this year.

The District has 26 parks, 16 of which have been developed on Nolan's watch.

Recreation programs that did not exist when he took over management of the District served 11,000 people per year prior to the onslaught of COVID-19 in 2020.

130 Year-Old Mansion Renovated

The historic Highlands Ranch Mansion, which is 130 years old, was deeded to the District in 2010 by its then-owner, Shea Homes. Under Nolan's guidance, the District spent \$6 million renovating it. Two years later the 27,000 square foot Mansion was opened for public and private events.

Nolan notes that the renovation was completed without the use of taxpayer dollars, and the Mansion has operated successfully since 2012 completely on the revenues from weddings, receptions, special events, etc.

Of course, the coronavirus has caused changes in how the District operates, including at the Mansion which was closed late in 2020 when the virus spread to a "red" danger level.

A Difficult Decision

Nolan says that one of the most difficult decisions the District faced during his tenure as General Manager was deciding to end the long-standing partnership with the District's fire rescue partners—the City of Littleton and the Littleton Fire Protection District—to join South Metro Fire Rescue.

"It had been a great working partnership for many years," he



Terry Nolan

says. But as Highlands Ranch grew larger, the City of Littleton and the Littleton Fire Protection District were "challenged to provide the level of service that we needed."

Five governmental entities worked together for a year on a management agreement to allow the District to leave their traditional partners. South Metro Fire Rescue held a fire service inclusion election in May of 2018 that was approved resoundingly by Highlands Ranch residents, and in January of 2019 the community began to receive fire and emergency services from South Metro Fire Rescue.

"It was a seamless transition," Nolan says.

It is of interest to note that eight months later, in January of 2019, Littleton Fire Rescue joined with South Metro Fire Rescue, a move that was approved by a vote of a

majority of City of Littleton residents. In addition, a new fire station, Station 20, is set to open in Highlands Ranch this March.

Proudest of a Culture of Excellence

Nolan says he is proudest of helping to develop a "culture of excellence" in the District's 85-member staff.

"They take enormous pride in what they do for the community," he says. They do a great job and are a "wonderful staff."

Board Chair Lauds Nolan's Accomplishments

Mark Dickerson, Chair of the District's Board, says that when Nolan became General Manager, Highlands Ranch "was only 25 to 30 percent of what it is now."

Nolan "worked tirelessly and steadily guided the development of the community as a whole" throughout his tenure, Dickerson says.

When Nolan joined the District there were multiple governing Boards in place, each dealing with a different geographic area. The result was confusion among residents, with people living across the street from each other having different governing Boards in some cases.

"It was unwieldy, to say the least," Dickerson says, adding that Nolan led the consolidation to one Board of Directors and managed the transition.

Dickerson says that Nolan always had a commitment to the community and a desire to make it better. "We are benefiting from that now," Dickerson says.

"Highlands Ranch is one of the premier communities in the nation, and I believe that will continue for the next 20 to 30 years. A lot of that has to do with what Terry Nolan built."

Ann Terry, SDA's Executive Director, could not agree more. "Terry embodies a true leader," she says. "He surrounds himself with a capable and strong team, and together they have accomplished incredible things for their community."

Continued on page 11



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“Whatever Might be Beneficial to Others”

What lies ahead for Nolan?

Nolan says his future plans include continuing to give back to the community. “I want to stay busy helping out where I can.”

He will continue volunteering with First Tee, a national nonprofit that teaches life values to young people through the game of golf.

He has applied to be a trustee for Douglas County Libraries.

He hopes to volunteer at the historic Highlands Ranch Mansion when it can re-open.

He wants to become more active in the American Legion, and he is thinking of volunteering with the Douglas County Sheriff’s Office. “Whatever might be beneficial to others,” he says.

With a smile Nolan also notes that because he is retired, he will be able to head up to the mountains for skiing and hiking during the week, happily avoiding weekend traffic backups on I-70.

It is clear that Terry Nolan will not be bored.

New General Manager Named

The District’s new General Manager, appointed by the District’s seven-member Board of Directors, is Mike Renshaw, who has 27 years of local government leadership experience. Most recently he was County Manager for Barrow County, Georgia.

Renshaw is a Navy veteran who served in the Persian Gulf War. He holds a bachelor’s degree in Criminal Justice and a Master’s in

Public Administration from Arizona State University.

Renshaw says, “I want to congratulate Terry on an exceptional career at Highlands Ranch Metro District. In this field, it’s very rare that a manager’s tenure with a single organization spans almost two and a half decades, as Terry’s has done.”

Renshaw added that he feels Nolan’s long tenure is “a testament to his outstanding leadership skills and ability to work and communicate well with an elected body such as the Board of Directors as well as with the staff and residents.”

“I wish Terry the very best in his future endeavors.”

Appreciation for the Work of SDA

Throughout his years of service, Nolan was enthusiastic about the work of SDA, saying that SDA does “a great job” for special districts. He especially appreciates the Colorado Special District Property and Liability Pool (the Pool) for the insurance it provides.

Nolan says he enjoyed serving on the Board of the Pool for several years and attending SDA’s Annual Conferences. He also has praise for the lobbying work that SDA does on behalf of special districts at the Legislature. In fact, Nolan served on SDA’s Legislative Committee for several years.

“I take my hat off to Ann Terry, Evan Goulding, Michael Valdez, Meredith Quarles, Megan Lippard, and the other SDA staff,” he says. “They are a terrific team.”

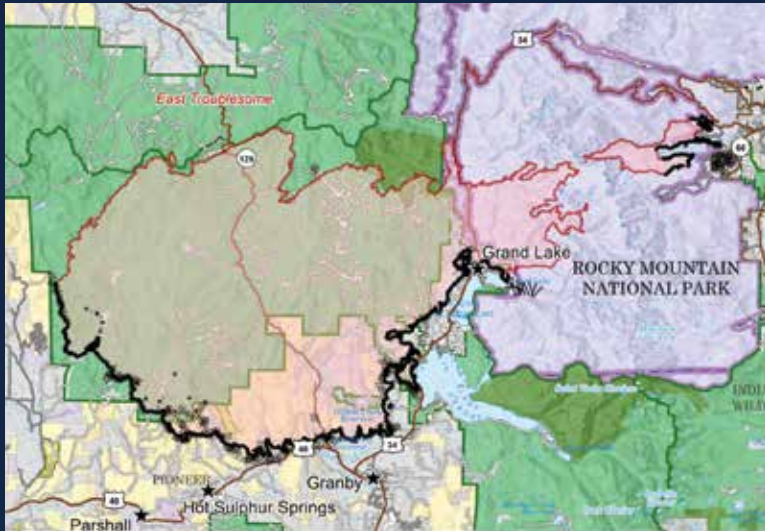


A Brief History of Highlands Ranch and Its Mansion

- » 1859 – Dad Rufus “Potato” Clark filed on a 160-acre homestead in northern Douglas County, where he successfully raised potatoes.
- » 1880 – Samuel Allen Long, one of the first petroleum refiners in Pennsylvania and a member of the Board of Directors of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, moved to Colorado. He homesteaded the Mansion property about 1884 and built a home there in 1891 that he called “Rotherwood.”
- » 1896 – John Springer moved to Denver in hopes of improving his wife’s health. Springer bought the Mansion property in 1897 and added on to the home on the ranch in the style of a Russian castle. When Springer’s wife died, he re-married a woman named Isabelle and renamed the mansion “Castle Isabelle.”
- » 1913 – Springer sold the ranch to his first father-in-law, Colonel William Hughes, who stabled horses in the ranch house and renamed the property “Sunland Ranch.”
- » 1920 – After Hughes’ death in 1918, his granddaughter sold the property to Waite Phillips, whose brothers founded Phillips Petroleum. Phillips introduced the name “Highland Ranch.”
- » 1926 – Phillips sold the ranch to Frank Kistler, who converted it to a ranch to breed dairy and Angus cattle as well as purebred sheep, hogs and chickens. Kistler called it the “Diamond K Ranch” and remodeled the mansion into classic Tudor style.
- » 1937 – Kistler sold the ranch to Lawrence C. Phipps, Jr., whose father had made a fortune with Carnegie Steel. Phipps family members have since been prominent leaders of industry in Colorado with involvement in construction, trucking, professional sports, ranching, and real estate. The family named the property “Highlands Ranch.”
- » 1976 – Following the death of Phipps, the family sold the ranch to oilman Marvin Davis for more than \$13 million.
- » 1978 – Davis sold the property to Mission Viejo Company for development as a master-planned community.
- » 1997 – Shea Homes purchased Mission Viejo Company and continued the development of homes at Highlands Ranch.
- » 2010 – Shea Homes deeded the Highlands Ranch Mansion to the Highlands Ranch Metro District, which renovated it and opened it to the public in 2012.

Source: Highlands Ranch Historical Society and Shea Homes, www.highlandsranch.org

The red outline on the left side of the map shows the East Troublesome fire perimeter on November 9, 2020. Lake Granby is in the lower middle of the map. Graphic: USFS Incident Information System



Squeezed by Two Megafires: **Northern Water's Race to Save Grand Lake**

Guest article by Jerd Smith, Water Education Colorado





Craig Friar and Steve Anderson had seen wildfires smolder and flare before. But they had never seen one run.

Until October 21 when Grand County's East Troublesome fire sprinted 17 miles in less than three hours, threatening to engulf communities across the county and giving these Northern Water staffers and others just hours to decide how best to move the water agency's operations center out of Grand County and over to Northern's emergency operations center in Berthoud, on Colorado's Front Range.

It was uncharted territory. The backup center had never been used before.

Northern Water is the largest exporter of water from Colorado's West Slope to the Front Range, serving farms and dozens of cities from Broomfield and Lafayette to Boulder, Loveland and Greeley.

As dark, fire-stained clouds billowed over the towns of Granby and Grand Lake that day, Northern's West Slope team grabbed operation logs from the Farr pumping plant on the banks of Lake Granby. They tracked down the half dozen or so mechanics, electricians and operators who would need to make quick exits, and figured out how to ferry everyone to safety over the Continental Divide.

Initially they hoped to keep most of their operators on the West Slope by moving the temporary command center farther West to another Northern operations site. But the East Troublesome Fire, already known for its cranky, unpredictable nature, changed direction, blocking access to the local site.

"Those [plans] quickly went away," said Friar, who oversees the utility's collection system. "When things blew up on Tuesday, we said, 'Scrap that.' Wednesday we had a call and began moving everyone over to Berthoud."

Spare Rooms and Horse Trailers

Northern Water General Manager Brad Wind and Director of Administration Karen Rademacher offered their homes to dislocated staffers until hotel rooms could be found.

West Slope staff who weren't evacuated offered trailers to those who had been, hauling household goods and horses. They tracked down housing for co-workers who feared their homes had burned.

They had dozens of calls with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, which owns Northern's system, as well as emergency managers with the U.S. and Col-

orado State forest services and the Grand County fire and sheriff departments, and county emergency response teams.

Hundreds of homes and structures in Grand County were threatened or destroyed, and the lakes and reservoirs there that comprise Northern's water collection system faced the same fate. The agency serves more than 1 million people on the Front Range.

Since mid-August, Northern's team had watched the Cameron Peak Fire burning in Rocky Mountain National Park just to the north of Grand County, threatening some of Northern's customers and watersheds, but not the heart of its collection system.

When East Troublesome exploded eight weeks later, the water utility found itself suddenly squeezed between what have now become Colorado's two largest wildfires in recorded history, with Cameron Peak consuming 209,000 acres and East Troublesome 194,000, before both were declared contained in November.

Beyond Bad

"It was worse than any worst-case scenario we had," said Northern's Environmental Services Manager Esther Vincent during a debriefing with the utility's customers and others post-fire.

Water infrastructure in the West is often built in high-altitude mountain ranges in order to collect the winter snows that fall and melt into streams.

For years, Colorado and other Western States have planned for and dealt with wildfires and their aftermath: the scorched soils and trees that clog their delivery systems, fill their reservoirs with eroded soils, and cloud their once-pristine water supplies.

But the situation now is much worse. As climate change and searing droughts have dried out the forests that blanket these watersheds, impossibly large, so-called megafires are becoming the dangerous new norm.

These fires devastated California over the summer and the same phenomenon struck Colorado in the fall.

That Northern Water found itself stranded between the two fires in hurricane-force winds was something no one had ever envisioned. There was a sense of awful wonder, amid all the emergency phone calls and late-night planning sessions, at the sheer size of the disaster.

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Powering Down

There was also plenty of worry. Early on, as the fire raged, Northern staffers knew power to the Farr Pump Plant would be cut off in order to keep firefighters safe from exploding transformers, falling power poles and downed electric lines.

The pumping plant lies almost entirely below the surface of Lake Granby. Without power to run its dewatering system, the plant would flood.

But there would be an even bigger problem once the electricity was cut. The Adams Tunnel takes water pumped from Lake Granby to Grand Lake and pipes it under the Continental Divide to the Front Range. If they couldn't get the Adams Tunnel shut down before the power went off, it would continue to deliver water, dramatically lowering Grand Lake in violation of federal law, something that would trigger an environmental, legal and political firestorm.

The prospect of such an event is unfathomable, Friar said. "I don't know what would happen. And I don't want to know.

We don't even go there."

They moved quickly to get to the controls that operate the tunnel, successfully closing it down.

Ten minutes later, Friar said, the power went off.

For days afterward, they would rotate the chore of going into the silent pumping plant, filling its generators with diesel fuel and checking to make sure the dewatering system was still working.

In and Out

Roads in and out of the area remained closed and it took close coordination with the Grand County Fire Department and sheriff for Northern staffers to get past the fire barricades.

"We had to make sure we could get in, get what we needed done, and get out of there," Friar said.

If there was any comfort during the tense, fast-changing days that the fires ruled Larimer and Grand counties, it was seeing local residents pulling out clothes and food

Roughly 30 percent to 80 percent of Northern's four major watersheds have burned, they estimate. Cleaning them up and protecting the lakes from the debris that is sure to come after the snow melts next spring will take one to three years of "acute" work, fire officials said, and decades of additional treatment, a process so expensive that Northern hasn't yet put a number to it.

If they couldn't get the Adams Tunnel shut down before the power went off, it would continue to deliver water, dramatically lowering Grand Lake in violation of federal law...

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From the Western Slope to the Front Range and beyond

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“For years we’ve planned for treatments [for the overgrown forests already decimated by pine beetles]. And the ultimate treatment is a wildfire, but I don’t think anyone could have gauged the extent of this.” —Greg Dewey, Northern Water

for those in need, offering up spare rooms, spare trucks and trailers, and extra flash lights, snow plows and generators.

“I don’t think anyone up here ever felt alone,” Friar said.

December has delivered more elegant white snows to Grand and Larimer counties since October, when the first winter storm calmed the fires. The white slopes, covered with charred forests that are now stark and black, are a welcome respite from the gray smoke and flames that enveloped the area just a few weeks ago.

Friar and others know they have four short months, the time until winter snows melt, to engineer and put into action a high-stakes rescue plan for the devastated watersheds and reservoirs.

Roughly 30 percent to 80 percent of Northern’s four major watersheds have burned, they estimate. Cleaning them up and protecting the lakes from the debris that is sure to come after the snow melts next spring will take one to three years of “acute”

work, fire officials said, and decades of additional treatment, a process so expensive that Northern hasn’t yet put a number to it.

A Daunting Future

Denver Water, the only utility larger than Northern in Colorado, battled two smaller—but still epic—fires within the past three decades: the 1996 Buffalo Creek Fire and the 2002 Hayman Fire, which until this year had been the state’s largest. They spent \$28 million cleaning up and restoring reservoirs in the first 10 post-fire years and continue to spend millions annually planting trees and doing erosion control, according to Christina Burri, a watershed scientist with Denver Water.

Northern’s Greg Dewey will oversee the fire restoration work. The prospect, he said, is daunting.

“For years we’ve planned for treatments [for the overgrown forests already decimated by pine beetles]. And the ultimate treatment is a wildfire, but I don’t think anyone could

have gauged the extent of this,” he said.

The Cameron Peak and East Troublesome megafires have blazed permanent images in the minds of people across Grand and Larimer counties.

What Anderson remembers most now is returning to his Granby home when the evacuation orders were finally lifted. There, he and his family encountered a strange sight:

The house was unharmed, but the front door stood wide open.

As they walked warily up the front steps the first thing they heard was the fire alarm, issuing one piercing screech after another, providing a crazy, haunting reminder of those days in October, when two megafires ruled the skies, the forests and their lives. 🍷

Editor’s Note: This story was first published December 21, 2020 by Fresh Water News, an independent, nonpartisan news initiative of Water Education Colorado. Its editorial policy and donor list can be viewed at wateredco.org

SDA’s Own Meredith Smith Quarles Elected to COLOTRUST Board of Trustees

SDA’s Director of Operations, Meredith Smith Quarles, has been elected to the Board of Trustees of COLOTRUST! She will serve a three-year term beginning in 2021 and running through 2024.

The COLOTRUST Board is elected by participants of the fund, and it is responsible for overseeing the management of COLOTRUST, including establishing operating standards and policies. The Board is currently comprised of representatives from a variety of local governments, including towns, cities, counties, and school districts. In her role as

a Trustee, Meredith will be representing special districts.

“Meredith has a very strong financial background and a wealth of experience on which to draw. She will be a very valuable addition to the Board, and we are thrilled for this new opportunity for her,” said Ann Terry, SDA’s Executive Director.

Meredith is also excited for the chance to represent special districts. “I am looking forward to joining the Board and working with the other local government representatives on behalf of our districts.” 🍷



Meredith Smith Quarles

Standard IRS Mileage Rates Decrease for 2021

The Internal Revenue Service has issued the 2021 optional standard mileage rates used to calculate the deductible costs of operating an automobile for business, charitable, medical, or moving purposes. As units of local government, special districts do not need to calculate deductions for income tax purposes. However, many districts follow the standard IRS business mileage rate to reimburse Board members and employees for miles driven for district business.

Beginning on January 1, 2021, the standard mileage rates for the use of a car (also vans, pickups, or panel trucks) will be:

- » 56 cents per mile driven for business use (down 1.5 cents from the rate for 2020)
- » 16 cents per mile driven for medical, or moving purposes for qualified active duty members of the Armed Forces (down 1 cent from the rate for 2020)
- » 14 cents per mile driven in service of charitable organizations (the rate is set by statute and remains unchanged from 2020)

The standard mileage rate for business use is based on an annual study of the fixed and variable costs of operating an automobile. The rate for medical and moving purposes is based on the variable costs.

It is important to note that under the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act,

taxpayers cannot claim a miscellaneous itemized deduction for unreimbursed employee travel expenses. Taxpayers also cannot claim a deduction for moving expenses, unless they are members of the Armed Forces on active duty moving under orders to a permanent change of station. For more details, see *Moving Expenses for Members of the Armed Forces* on irs.gov.

Taxpayers always have the option of calculating the actual costs of using their vehicle rather than using the standard mileage rates.

Taxpayers can use the standard mileage rate, but must opt to use it in the first year the car is available for business use. Then, in later years, they can choose either the standard mileage rate or actual expenses. Leased vehicles must use the standard mileage rate method for the entire lease period (including renewals) if the standard mileage rate is chosen.

Notice 2021-02, posted on irs.gov, contains the optional 2021 standard mileage rates, as well as the maximum automobile cost used to calculate the allowance under a fixed and variable rate (FAVR) plan. In addition, the notice provides the maximum fair market value of employer-provided automobiles first made available to employees for personal use in calendar year 2021 for which employers may use the fleet-average valuation rule in or the vehicle cents-per-mile valuation rule.

—Internal Revenue Service

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