

Rural Housing Service • Community Facilities Program

Removing Barriers to Emergency Medical Care in Remote Community

During a severe ice and snow storm along Interstate 5, the rural town of Myrtle Point struggled to transfer a patient to a larger hospital several hundred miles away using their aging, two-wheel drive ambulance.

Nestled in the foothills of the Coastal Mountain Range in southwest Oregon, Myrtle Point is situated in the center of the timber industry. The twisting, steep roads within this rugged service area spanning 900 square miles of forest and farmland can be treacherous, especially in inclement weather. Responding to calls for assistance, many of which involve remote logging accidents, is sometimes a challenge. “Having a reliable vehicle is especially important in this environment,” said City Manager Darin Nicholson.

One of their two ambulances, however, had outlived its useful life. It had driven 280,000 miles and was no longer reliable. Then it struck a deer and was totaled.

With the help of a \$50,000 grant from USDA Rural Development provided through its [Community Facilities Program](#), Myrtle Point purchased a new vehicle. It has a hydraulic suspension system to provide a smoother ride for patients. A power loader was installed to more safely lift patients into the vehicle while reducing the risk of injury for the EMTs and paramedics. It is also the only four-wheel drive ambulance in rural Coos County.

“Our small town is super thankful for the help from USDA. It really improved our services and reliability,” said Ambulance Department Director Willy Burris.

Since it came into service, the new vehicle’s added capabilities have already been put to use. Over the summer, the ambulance responded to the 25,000-acre Garner Complex Fire, where its four-wheel drive capability made it the only local ambulance able to reach the firefighting staging area. Myrtle Point has mutual aid agreements and will often respond to requests for assistance from neighboring areas, as it did during this wildfire.

Within its own service district, the new ambulance is improving reliability and safety, both for patients and the emergency responders, while ensuring that emergency medical assistance will be available to those in need, even in remote, rugged locations or hazardous weather.



The rural town of Myrtle Point is responding to medical emergencies in its rugged service area more easily with a new four-wheel drive ambulance.

Obligation Amount:	\$50,000 grant
Date of Obligation:	April 2018
Congressional District:	Representative DeFazio, District 4; Senators Wyden and Merkley
Demographics:	Myrtle Point, Oregon; population 2,530
Impact:	A new four-wheel drive ambulance is improving reliability and safety for both patients and emergency responders in the rural community of Myrtle Point, as well as improving their ability to reach remote locations.
