



MEMORANDUM

To: Whatcom County Executive Satpal Sidhu
From: Jake Logan through Kayla Schott-Bresler, Deputy Executive
Subject: Interlocal Agreement for Galbraith Mountain Emergency Medical Services with City of Bellingham and South Whatcom Fire Authority
Date: November 7, 2025

Background and Purpose

Galbraith Mountain is a popular recreational area primarily used for mountain biking, with significant economic development and tourism value to both Whatcom County and the City of Bellingham. The City holds a 2,200-acre recreational easement over Galbraith Mountain, recorded in 2018, which falls within unincorporated Whatcom County. While the 2018 easement required the City to develop a Galbraith Mountain Management Plan (GMMP) that included provisions for fire and rescue coordination, no specific operational plan or compensation mechanism for EMS services was established at that time. The GMMP referenced annual meetings with South Whatcom Fire Authority (SWFA) to review emergency procedures, but SWFA has historically provided emergency medical services to the area on an uncompensated basis as a courtesy, despite Galbraith Mountain falling outside SWFA's jurisdictional boundaries. In Washington State, forestlands without structures are excluded from all fire service providers' jurisdictional boundaries, meaning fire districts and fire authorities have no legal duty or funding obligation to serve these areas. Galbraith Mountain technically falls within Whatcom County's Search and Rescue jurisdiction. However, the high-use recreational nature of the area and its proximity to Bellingham's urban boundary create community expectations for emergency medical response capabilities.

SWFA raised concerns about the uncompensated demand on its resources in July 2023. In December 2024, SWFA formally notified the County and City that it would be building new response plans that exclude popular recreational areas outside its jurisdictional boundaries, including Galbraith Mountain. Without a compensated emergency medical services agreement, public safety protocols would require alternative emergency response strategies for recreational users who call 911.

This interlocal agreement, established under RCW 39.34, addresses the gap left by the 2018 easement by creating a formal, compensated arrangement for SWFA to provide first response Basic Life Support emergency medical services on Galbraith Mountain and surrounding areas on the same basis as services rendered elsewhere within SWFA's service boundaries. The agreement ensures consistent emergency medical response capabilities remain available to recreational users, addressing public expectation and community safety needs.

Funding Amount and Source

The total annual cost for SWFA services is \$147,287 per year. Under the three-party cost-sharing arrangement, Whatcom County's share is one-third of the annual payment, equaling approximately \$49,095 per year.

2025: \$49,000 budgeted (General Fund, Cost Center 10004061.7210 – Galbraith Recreation Emergency Response Support) - Previously approved through SBR #5006 in the 2025 Adopted Budget.

2026: \$50,000 (General Fund, Cost Center 10004061.7210 – Galbraith Recreation Emergency Response Support) - Included in the 2026 Proposed Budget through SBR #5109.

Total County obligation for the two-year period: \$98,191.33

Payment mechanism: The City of Bellingham receives the annual SWFA invoice and makes payment to SWFA. Whatcom County reimburses the City for one-third of the annual payment amount based on City invoices. For 2025, payment is due within 30 days of SWFA invoice. For 2026, payment is due by January 31, 2026.