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# Keowee wants out of \$2.9 mill levy

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SENECA — Keowee Fire District has appealed to the Oconee County administrator for relief from the county's 2.9 mill levy to fund rural fire protection.

Chief Richie Caudill confirmed Tuesday that his department had asked Scott Moulder to consider letting them out of paying their share of the 2.9 mill special tax instituted to pay for fire protection in unincorporated areas of Oconee County.

"Since we already pay for fire protection, we were looking at what we'd have to do to stop paying for fire protection twice," Caudill said.

The Keowee Fire District is funded by a special 14.5 mill tax on the property of its owners.

That money funds a fire department staffed by both volunteers and paid personnel.

The vast majority of the \$1.2 mil-

lion collected via the 2.9 mill levy is devoted to contracts with municipal fire departments in Seneca, Westminster and Walhalla.

Those contracts cover the unincorporated areas roughly five miles outside their respective city limits.

Seneca's latest one-year deal totaled \$550,000, while Westminster and Walhalla are still in the middle of deals worth about \$220,000 per year.

After that, the special fund money is distributed at about \$8,000 per fire station and \$4,000 per rescue squad.

Caudill said Keowee district homeowners already pay their fair share of taxes for their own fire protection, and get little return on their investment from the county-wide levy.

"We don't get a whole lot out of it," Caudill said. "We do have some county trucks, so there's a little to offset it there, but we still don't get

what we pay in."

Keowee, like other communities around the lakes, pays the lion's share of the special tax collected. Keowee represents roughly 15 percent of the total assessed value in all of the unincorporated areas of Oconee County, and, with Keowee, Ebenezer and Salem, comprise roughly 40 percent of the total collected.

"The problem is we're not immune from the 2.9 tax like the cities are, so we're caught in a catch 22," Caudill said. "We're not making a fuss about it. We're just looking to save our homeowners a little money. I think the new administrator (Moulder) has some answers for it. I do believe it will all work out."

Moulder was unavailable for comment Tuesday as he prepared to roll out his first budget to County Council last night.

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