# FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

North Collier Fire Control and Rescue District
February 26, 2026

# North Collier Fire Commissioners Ratify Historic Lifeguard & Ocean Rescue Agreement

**Naples, FL** — Following historic approval by the Collier County Board of Commissioners on February 24, 2026, the North Collier Fire Control & Rescue District Board of Fire Commissioners ratified — by an enthusiastic unanimous vote (Commissioner Feder not in attendance) — the Interlocal Agreement establishing a comprehensive Lifeguard Program beginning with Big Corkscrew Island Regional Park and North Collier Regional Park's Sun-N-Fun Lagoon.

**A Regional First in Integrated Water Safety**
This milestone makes North Collier Fire the first fire-rescue agency in the region to directly manage a county lifeguard program — joining professional lifeguard services with emergency medical response capabilities and establishing the foundation for North Collier Fire Ocean Rescue.

The District currently employs:
• 93 certified lifeguards
• 26 part-time lifeguards
• Additional lifeguards actively being hired (Visit NorthCollierFire.com )

This level of staffing enables immediate coverage and supports coordinated beach operations.

Fire Chief **Eloy Ricardo** emphasized the significance of the moment:
"This is not a small operational adjustment; this is a bold evolution of public safety in Collier County. In a coastal community like ours, water safety must be embedded in our emergency response framework. By adding lifeguard services to the fire-rescue model, we are accelerating response capabilities, elevating prevention efforts, and building a system that is proactive, coordinated, and designed to save lives."

The Collier County Board's approval on February 24 signaled a forward-thinking commitment to water safety. Today's ratification by the North Collier Fire Commissioners marks the beginning of a new era of protection for all who gather here, wherever water meets our community.

Chairman of the Board of Fire Commissioners, **Christopher Lombardo**, added:
"We are grateful to the Collier County Board of Commissioners for their leadership and collaboration in advancing this agreement. This initiative reflects what can be accomplished

when government partners work together with a shared commitment to public safety. This Board is proud of our District for embracing innovation while remaining responsible stewards of taxpayer dollars."

**Ocean Rescue: Full Rollout by Summer**
Residents and visitors may begin to see Ocean Rescue personnel before the summer season, with the District targeting a full Ocean Rescue rollout by Summer 2026. The program will position trained personnel at designated beach locations to provide coordinated rescue, prevention, and rapid emergency medical response.

Local Scout troops have also received approval to construct up to three lifeguard stands as Eagle Scout community service projects. These projects will be overseen by licensed structural architects and contractors. One of the first examples of the strong, community-driven partnerships supporting this initiative.

**Prevention, Education, and Responsible Stewardship**
Drowning remains the leading cause of unintentional death for Florida children ages 1–4. In a state surrounded by water, every second matters. Brain injury can begin within minutes without oxygen. Rapid intervention saves lives, and by integrating lifeguards under fire-rescue oversight:

- EMT and paramedic-level responders are strategically positioned at Collier aquatic facilities
- Emergency response coordination is seamless
- Prevention education expands

The program also establishes the foundation for a broader North Collier Fire Water Safety Initiative, including:

- Drowning prevention education
- Swim safety outreach
- CPR and AED training
- School and youth programming
- Pool and beach safety campaigns

Water should represent joy, recreation, and family — not tragedy. This agreement reinforces that belief with action.

**Questions?**
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North Collier Fire Control and Rescue District is an independent special fire district that annually responds to more than 25,000 calls for service throughout a 264-square-mile area of Collier County, Florida. The agency's all-hazards response includes advanced life support (ALS) medical response and transport by firefighters/EMTs and firefighters/Paramedics, as well as marine, dive, and beach rescue, hazardous materials, and technical rescue. A five-member board of fire commissioners governs the District. Visit www.northcollierfire.com for more information.