

Clearwater and Area Community Wildfire Roundtable

Approved meeting summary as of May 23, 2024

Meeting date: February 27, 2024, 1:00PM to 4:00PM

Location: Dutch Lake Community Centre and online (hybrid)

Present (for at least a portion of the meeting):

BC Parks – Ally Myers

BC Timber Sales – regrets

BC Wildfire Service (BCWS) – regrets

Blackpool Volunteer Fire Department - Mike Savage, Rod Tulett, Dietrich Rempel

District of Clearwater – Mike Smith, Councillor Ken Matheson, James Thackery, Alsid Prime

Fraser Basin Council – Mike Simpson (subcontractor, facilitator, recorder)

Interfor – Jim Magowan

Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness – regrets

Ministry of Forests, Thompson Rivers District – Marina Irwin

Simpcw First Nation – Melanie Stutt

TNRD – Kevin Skrepnek, Director Usoff Tsao, Mike Knauff, Sherri Madden, Daniel Funk

Upper Clearwater Fire Brigade – Chris Novak, Matt Edwards

1. Introductions, Agenda, Objectives

Mike Simpson welcomed everyone unceded territory of Simpcw and the larger Secwepemc nation was acknowledged. A round of introductions took place. The agenda was approved as presented. Mike relayed regrets from many individuals and organizations that couldn't be here today.

2. Previous Meeting Summary

The [meeting summary from November 2, 2023](#), was approved with a few minor edits made. The lessons learned from the 2023 wildfire season were reviewed. Old action items were reviewed; those that remain are at the end of this summary.

3. Information Sharing – What's Underway, Who's Doing What

Blackpool Volunteer Fire Department

- Mike Savage noted that Blackpool VFD has a mutual aid agreement with Simpcw Fire, and they've partnered to put a 6000 gallon tank on the other side of the Little Fort ferry, this enables rapid re-filling of full size fire tenders that the ferry can't transport when full.
- Mike noted that Argo (MOTI contractor that operates the Little Fort ferry) will do extra crossings during emergencies as needed
- Blackpool VFD is getting a new bush truck, their old one will go to Little Fort VFD
- Blackpool VFD has received permits and approvals for 9 dry hydrants, with three being installed this year (Jim Cattle Ranch, end of Blackpool Road, and one near boundary with Little Fort VFD).
 - Lots of technical discussion ensued: lots of effort is needed to get approvals from Fisheries and Oceans Canada and BC government due to presence of salmonids and fish

habitat, as well as BC One Call and MOTI; generally these cost \$10 000 each; 8 inch or 80 spec for all three.

- Blackpool VFD has acquired two 30hp high pressure pumps with 3” outlet; they can each pump 400ft uphill and fill a 2200 gallon truck in 3min, they cost \$14K each.
- They’ll be doing wildland structural training on March 1, and the engine boss course in Barriere on March 30-31
- Blackpool VFD has a complement of 30 trained firefighters, and Little Fort VFD has 15

Thompson-Nicola Regional District

- Mike Knauff noted that TNRD has 17 evacuation route plans to complete, they’re almost done 5 including the one for this area, Clearwater area. He noted that MOTI hasn’t reviewed this one yet, but that it was challenging to include Forest Service Roads (FSRs), resource roads and the ability to install signage, due to uncertainty about access and status of these roads.
- TNRD emergency staff are preparing for freshet, drought and wildfire season, noting that the [Feb 1 snowpack bulletin](#) indicated 61% of normal for BC and 73% of normal for North Thompson with the next bulletin scheduled to be released March 8
- TNRD did internal and external debriefs of the 2023 wildfire season
- [Voyent Alert](#) continues to be TNRD’s emergency communications platform, it can be used with cellphones, over wifi or sent to a landline telephone.
 - It was noted that it can be challenging for users to sign up for alerts for multiple properties from different local governments (e.g., District of Clearwater and TNRD)
 - It was suggested that a test of Voyent Alert be initiated this spring
- Director Tsao noted that Vavenby VFD may extend fire protection coverage to Birch Island, and that East Blackpool may create a non-profit society to be able to receive training and organize to protect their community
- Daniel Funk noted that there will be additional staff to do FireSmart education and assessments this year, given that the new Community Wildfire Resiliency Plans (CWRPs) are in place for electoral areas (not posted online yet, being reviewed by BCWS). Kim McMillan is now the FireSmart Coordinator for TNRD. There are some rebates available for homeowners who complete FireSmart on their properties. He noted he has 28 assessments lined up for mid-March, [contact him](#) to set one up.
- Dan also noted that TNRD are working on a FireSmart program and seminar for farms and ranches, working with cattlemens’ associations as well as RCMP in regards to evacuations
- Director Tsao also noted that he’s been informed that Argo Road Services (MOTI contractor) maintains vegetation on road rights of way up to 1.8m off side of roads, and they have a priority list and can’t operate during high risk wildfire season.
- Kevin noted that the province-wide [Network of Emergency Social Services \(ESS\) Teams](#) (NESST) conference is in Kamloops April 12-14
- Kevin noted that TNRD’s dedicated emergency operations centre (EOC) space on the 3rd floor of TNRD’s downtown Kamloops office has lots of resources and materials, [contact him](#) if needed

District of Clearwater (DOC)

- Mike Smith noted that an 18ha fuel treatment has been completed at the gun range
- He also noted that Clearwater Fire Department is getting two bush trucks and their fire tender is getting a new chassis
- Their structure protection unit (SPU) is completed but not to BCWS specifications, it stays local

- DOC is looking to apply for funding to update the community wildfire protection plan and fund a FireSmart coordinator position, this is in the 2024 budget
- James added that they are pursuing training in communications, training with TNRD and neighbours and improving communications with neighbouring authorities and jurisdictions, and recruiting for the FireSmart coordinator position, and working with councillors to confirm their roles during an emergency.
- Alsid added that they're working on adding redundancy in internet and communications technology and capacity

Sidebar discussion: stay and defend, evacuation reluctance, rural capacity

There was lots of discussion about evacuation reluctance and making use of local people with significant local knowledge, experience and equipment. Comments were as follows:

- Strategies for managing those that choose to stay and defend were discussed; it was noted that a “top down” approach likely won’t work, it would be better to work locally from “grass roots”
- Mike Savage noted that for VFDs, it’s a good practice to stop in and check on those that stay behind in an evacuation order zone regularly.
- Melanie noted that Simpcw has engaged their community members well before wildfire season, they know who has training and resources
- Local governments and authorities can’t educate people on how to be prepared if they choose to ignore evacuation orders, as this would be contradictory in terms of enforcement
- Access passes for those in evacuation order zones remain challenging to administer, verify rationales for them, and enforce
- Mike expanded on the **Cooperative Community Wildfire Response (CCWR)** initiative he and Alex de Chantal from Fraser Basin Council are working on with BCWS:
 - Aimed primarily at identification of training and equipment requirements of rural non-Indigenous communities outside of structural fire protection
 - Aimed at providing training to groups that are organized as a non-profit society, not individuals.
 - Fraser Basin Council is receiving funding from BCWS to launch training (\$100, \$185, incident command and FireSmart Wildfire Risk Reduction) in spring 2024 for up to 350 participants around the BC Interior

Upper Clearwater Fire Brigade

- Chris noted that they now have 5 x 5000 gallon tanks located around the community, with a 6th on private property at Wells Grey Guest Ranch
- They have a fire skid with a tank and pump, it gets moved with a private pick up truck (their brigade does not have a truck)
- Wells Grey Guest Ranch appears to be best muster point for the community as they have fences for animals, they have solar power, defibrillator as well
- They are signed up for training through the CCWR initiative with Fraser Basin Council
- They are seeking to raise awareness of their brigade with a membership form in their spring newsletter (many landowners are absentee or part time). Options discussed included:
 - It costs \$0.30/mailbox to distribute items via Canada Post
 - TNRD can do a community newsletter to specific areas within an electoral area
 - Land title searches can be done [online](#) but cost \$36/title
- Regarding the old action item about permission to access private land:
 - It was confirmed that if they are hired by and working for BCWS, permission is granted

Interfor

- Jim noted that their log inventory is at a historic low, they are initiating start up plans, likely starting in Raft on the tree farm licence and low elevation areas. They are working to maintain their equipment caches.
- Jim noted he’s retiring at the end of March, Erik Kok will be main contact going forward.

Simcpw First Nation

- Melanie noted they have 1 bush truck, and are getting a Spanish-built ATARI in the spring
- They have 1 initial attack (IA) truck and are looking to get another
- They are renewing their contract with BCWS to have 2 crews from June 1 to Sept 30, these are available 7 days/week with one IA crew for this specific service area (1hr around Chu Chua, Raft to Fishtrap Creek; Simcpw has discretion for when crews are sent outside this). They are looking to fill a crew lead position, posting is out until March 15, aiming to hire by May 1.
- It was requested for Melanie to identify the best way to contact Simcpw’s IA crew
- Melanie clarified that Simcpw is not practicing cultural burning as they need to engage with knowledge keepers as to what that exactly means for Simcpw. They have, however, been undertaking prescribed burning since 2018.

BC Parks

- Old action item to get BC Parks evacuation plan for Wells Grey park

Ministry of Forests

- Marina noted that Julie Maxwell is back from maternity leave, and Nicola Enderud (formerly McGrath) are joined by Gwenn Hetherington, there is a lot more staff than 2023. They will be looking to coordinate what’s done with MOF’s Wildfire Risk Reduction program in alignment with the recently completed CWRP for TNRD Electoral Area A.

4. Next Steps

It was noted that the [BC Wildfire Resiliency and Training Conference](#) is April 20-24 in Prince George.

It was noted that there is funding for Indigenous engagement for local governments with regards to the new Emergency and Disaster Management Act, with a lot of flexibility for how funds are spent.

Other **funding sources** were noted: Upper Clearwater Fire Brigade got a BC Lotto grant for \$20K; Canada Post, Farm Credit Canada, and North Thompson Community Foundation are other sources.

Next meeting – late May-early June, Mike to seek a date via doodle poll by late March. Suggested to focus on evacuation coordination and then do a field trip to look at a dry hydrant and a nearby completed fuel treatment.

The following action items were either carried over from previous meetings or created today:

Task or activity	Responsibility	Timeframe
Explore creating development permit area requirements for FireSmart principles and/or fuel management	Jason Johnson, interim CAO, Alsid Prime	Long term, needs council approval

Task or activity	Responsibility	Timeframe
Mapping – since the Forsite Mapping Tool is no longer used, what mechanism can there be to share proposed and completed fuel management treatments?	Nicola Enderud (formerly McGrath), Mike Aldred	Before next meeting
Coordinate about evacuation routes, plans and evacuation centres from Wells Gray Park, Upper Clearwater Valley, share ideas and input: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water bar inventory for access/egress routes • FSRs, status (e.g., car friendly, high clearance) maintenance and barriers • BC Parks evacuation plan – share • Share TNRD plan when complete • Clarify roles, inter-agency jurisdiction about evacuation routes, plans, actions 	Everyone George Brcko Ally Myers, Tod H. Mike Knauff Everyone	Discuss further in spring 2024
Encourage/coordinate a test of Voyent Alert system during emergency preparedness week (first week May)	Mike Knauff to lead, EMCR, BCWS	Before first week of May
Actions for MOTI staff: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage management of vegetation on Upper Clearwater Road rights of way • Inform Google and Apple to NOT re-direct heavy truck traffic to Dunn Lake Road when Hwy 5 closed 	Daniel Werkman, Samuel Pantaleo	Before next meeting
Biomass unit – discuss possibility of modifying the material type to take hog fuel from fuel management sites	George Brcko, Mayor Blackwell	Ongoing
Are you hosting an event about FireSmart? Advise Conlan	VFDs, brigades	Ongoing
Talk to BC Wildfire Service prevention people if you need an exemption to venting indices	Those that have piles to burn	Ongoing