

Lillooet and Area Community Wildfire Preparedness Roundtable

Approved Meeting Summary as of November 4, 2024

Meeting date: Monday April 8, 2024, 10:00AM to 2:40PM

Location: Lillooet REC Centre, Mezzanine and online

Present (for at least a portion of the meeting; those noted in *italics* were virtual)

BC Hydro – Ben Cave

BC Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness – *Trish Ryu, Steve Mulholland*

BC Ministry of Forests – Ryan de Visser, Brynley Bertram-Wright

BC Wildfire Service – Justin Waito, Ben Wolf

Canadian Disaster Animal Response Team (CDART) – *Cheryl Rogers*

CN Rail – Matthew Leigh

Forest Enhancement Society of BC – Chris McGourlick

Fraser Basin Council – Alex de Chantal, Mike Simpson (contractor)

Gun Lake Fire Protection – Al Leighton

Individuals – Arlen Ferguson, Darren Oike

Interwest Timber – Brieana van Loon

Landscape Consulting Corp – Sharon French

Lillooet Agriculture and Food Society – Janna Pyke

Lillooet Tribal Council – Darryl Adrian, Daylan Joseph

Marshall Valley Community – Roger Tremblay

Sekw'el'was (Cayoos Creek Indian Band) – Ryan Miller

Squamish Lillooet Regional District – Director Sal DeMare, Director Vivian Birch-Jones, Mike Fusca,
Maude Lussier, Mark Phillips

St'at'imc Chiefs Council – *Chief Michelle Edwards*

Texas Creek community – Geoff Playfair

T'it'q'et – *Sonny Napoleon*

Thompson-Nicola Regional District – *Mike Knauff, Kevin Skrepnek*

Woodlots BC – *Tyler Hodgkinson*

Xaxli'p – *Albie*

Xwisten – Gerald (Bobo) Michel

Yalakom community – Robin Andruss

1. Welcome, Introductions, Agenda, Objectives

Mike Simpson, a facilitator and professional forester on contract to Fraser Basin Council, welcomed everyone and acknowledged unceded St'at'imc Territory. A round of introductions took place for people in the room and those participating online. [*Note that virtual participants could hear those present in person, but those in person couldn't hear virtual participants.*]

The agenda was reviewed and accepted as presented. No early departures were noted.

2. Previous Meeting Summary and Old Action Items

The [meeting summary from Nov 8, 2023](#) was approved. Lessons learned from the 2023 wildfire season were reviewed, Mike Simpson encouraged everyone to consider these throughout the day.

A few old items from previous meetings were discussed:

Vegetative Debris Disposal – initially raised in November 2022, Maude noted that the Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM) Community Resilience Investment (CRI) program funds are maxed out and utilized each year, and there are limits to what can be done with those funds in terms of vegetative debris disposal. Roger noted that burn pits (short term locations for residents or contractors to place vegetative material to cure over a summer, then be disposed of) are no longer permitted; people in rural areas are dumping vegetative debris from their FireSmart works on their properties haphazardly in the bush which is creating other fire hazards that aren't being managed. Robin noted in Yalakom valley, where there are some agricultural options, vegetative material (all except juniper) can be windrowed and composted, this also aids with water runoff when placed at low points of fields. It was noted that future opportunities to fund chipping programs, and take vegetative material at SLRD landfills are part of the solution.

Fire Wardens – Justin and Al explained that BC Wildfire Service (BCWS) does still hire and utilize fire wardens, their role is to share information and talk to people about fire hazards and campfire bans if and when they are in place, monitor fire indices, local weather patterns and report back to BCWS. Justin noted that most fire zones in Kamloops Fire Centre utilize fire wardens, they liaise with BCWS Zone officers as well as Ministry of Forests (MOF) natural resource officers.

Community Liaisons - no significant changes in how these positions for non-Indigenous communities, nothing identified in the [Premier's Expert Task Force on Emergencies: Summary of Recommendations](#); these remain mostly a volunteer role that arises when a wildfire occurs. Several people noted it would have been helpful to have these positions more formally in place in last year's wildfires.

Cooperative Community Wildfire Response – Alex de Chantal explained the current status of the CCWR initiative that he and Mike Simpson have been working on throughout the BC Interior with BCWS. In summary, the initiative worked to identify rural communities that are (or willing to be) organized as non-profit societies outside of structural fire protection and determine interest in basic wildfire training. Fraser Basin Council has secured funding from BCWS to hire training contractors to provide in person S100/S185, online Incident Command System 100 through JIBC, and online FireSmart Wildfire Risk Reduction training this spring. Alex noted that the following groups in this area are engaged:

- Gun Lake Fire Protection Society
- Bralorne Fire Protection Association
- Gold Bridge Fire Protection Society
- Pavillion Lake Residents and Property Owners' Association
- Yalakom Valley Community Society
- Seton Valley Volunteer Firefighters Society
- Tyaughton Lake Ratepayers Association
- Marshall Valley Ratepayers Association (part of Bridge River Valley Community Association)

Questions about CCWR can be directed to adechantal@fraserbasin.ca or 250-314-9660.

3. Information Sharing

Participants were welcomed to share what they have underway with regard to wildfire preparedness (planning, fuel management/wildfire risk reduction, FireSmart, training, acquiring equipment, cultural burning).

SLRD FireSmart

- Maude noted they are supporting 10 SLRD communities towards their FireSmart Canada Recognition this year. They have developed a workplan and will host events around the recognition program.
- Bringing back free FireSmart assessments again this year, assessments from 2023 are still valid.
- Farm & Ranch Wildfire Preparedness Workshop for Electoral Areas A and B to be held May 3 at 1PM at the REC Centre in Lillooet, please register by April 25, see [here](#) for more info.
- They are always looking for FireSmart champions, so if you know someone who is passionate about this topic please reach out to Maude Lussier at MLussier@slrd.bc.ca
- Links to the community wildfire resiliency plans (CWRP) for [Electoral Area A](#) and [Electoral Area B](#)

Q: You mentioned two year timeframe for FireSmart assessments. If someone has an assessment that's five years old but is just now getting to some of the identified tasks. If hazard is still there, shouldn't it be acceptable? A: We're not here to penalize anyone, rebate program is here to support people, especially seniors who need to hire someone to do the work. If FireSmart assessment is older, maybe it just a post work visit to look at what has been done. The rebate program and the type of activities that are eligible for the rebate have changed over the years; many eligible mitigation activities/expenses may not be featured on an older assessment. The amount has increased from \$500 to \$1,000 in 2024 and will be \$5000 in 2025.

SLRD Emergency Management

- Mike Fusca noted that access control in evacuation ordered areas will be improved with Community Response Groups in rural areas. They have struggled with enforcement as there are not enough RCMP staff here in our area. Getting Security companies involved takes time and hasn't been adequate response times as they sometimes travel from Alberta. (In response to a subsequent question, he noted that the Expert Task Force recommendations haven't changed anything in terms of evacuation orders. New legislation is really just including more plain English, lots of updates, but some. Additional requirements to local governments are now required to consult with indigenous governing bodies. Not much change at all for public facing perspective.)
- Emergency operations centre (EOC) exercise was held last week and refreshed local gov staff and trained more people for setting up EOC. Have posted an RFP for contractors to help development an agriculture evacuation plans and meet with producers, farmers, and connecting with ag community. Funding secured through BC Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness (EMCR) to support working with First Nations, updating emergency plans with indigenous knowledge, updating contact list for FNs, and develop protocols for emergency response.
- SLRD Just applied for grant funding through UBCM to contract disaster and pre disposal, hopeful they will be awarded funds.

- Mark Phillips added that they are also seeking funding to improve communications with communities. Also looking to do an audit on other fire departments in the regional district to better understand what is being done.

SLRD Electoral Area Directors

- Sal noted he's been getting lots of interest in training this year, will reach out to Alex. Still in recovery around Gun Lake, 56 properties were affected.
- Vivian added that there also concerns around invasive species coming in to a damaged landscape post-wildfire and taking over.

Forest Enhancement Society of BC (FESBC)

- Chris McGourlick, Operations Manager with FESBC gave a [presentation](#) on what FESBC is, what they do, and the funding they have available
- Reach out to Chris with any questions or to discuss ideas for funding wildfire risk reduction projects cmcgourlick@fesbc.ca 250-668-7030
- Questions and discussion raised the following:
 - Q: Regional districts cannot conduct fuel mitigation on crown land. Using the CWRP we've put polygons onto maps and have reached out to MOF-WRR for making these prescriptions operational. If they don't get funding from CRI, then they can apply to FESBC?
 - A: Yes, we try to build off of crown land program. FESBC fills in when more capacity is needed, they complement their program.
 - Q: In the future, to fast forward these projects, could we involve SLRD to becoming land manager just for prescriptions in wildland urban interface (WUI). Or, can they become an applicant to make sure we maximize the funding and accelerate the funding.
 - A: I'd have to get back to you to answer that question. We are meeting next Friday to discuss next round of funding, and talk about funding moving forward.
 - Q: Been following FESBC for a number of years now. Tree thinning programs in that urban interface area. What's the process for getting community engagement that they're happy with these programs?
 - A: We don't engage with community, but we do rely on the proponents to do that. We do address community concerns whenever needed, and we can pivot if outcomes are not supported by the community.

BC Hydro

- Ben Cave noted they have lots of infrastructure in this area, vegetation management, access and road building, and lots of overlap with objectives in this room. Transmission system province wide is 18 000km in length, distribution system is 80 000km in length. Workplan in this area is clearing over 180 hectares of transmission corridor. Doing debris management, vegetation management etc. Two primary risk mitigation factors is the debris management of the vegetation that's cut and the risk reduction assessment from danger trees near transmission lines. Partners with MOF and agency and works very closely with them for shared decision making around areas near their transmission lines. In regards to wildfires, following a fire, BC Hydro is usually first one in. Working directly with leads on incident command team, then we manage new construction, new infrastructure to re-energize systems to get communities up and running again. Have an incident commander that works with other agencies during these emergencies.

- Discussion and questions raised the following:
 - Q: Darren wondering if BC Hydro looks at pre-treatment prior to communities that are on alert or fire approaching. This might minimize any outages. A: 100% we do this, ranking system internally, about wildfire interface, risk, exposure. Highly prioritize radio feeds in rural communities. Number of electrical circuits we have in this area, grubbing around poles.
 - Q: Looking at fire break project around Lillooet, thank you to BC Hydro for their cooperation and involvement in this planning. A: Our infrastructure surrounds Lillooet runs parallel around District boundaries. Assure you we have preventative maintenance ongoing in this area. Debris management is very high on the priority list.
 - Q: The transmission lines have extensive tree felling and treatments below. Is there an opportunity to work with small communities who also might need access to large scale chippers? Lot of people could benefit in the area. A: I don't see why not, with proper communication, this could be possible. When we have crews available and in this area, it might be possible to work together.
 - Q: Spray on fire retardant was being used on wooden power poles, have you heard about it? A: Yes there is a mesh applied to poles 8' up, and spray on retardant spray (usually red). Q: Is that done through BC Hydro crews? A: No it's contracted work

Ministry of Forests – Cascades District

- Ryan noted he is here on behalf of Richard Chavez who leads the wildfire risk reduction work.
- MOF's wildfire risk reduction (WRR) program is wrapping up fuel treatment near Lytton, 20 hectares in total. Working in Bridge River with Xwisten totalling 20 hectares as well, still in progress. Looking into next year, our plan is: fuel management prescriptions for SLRD Area A, five different areas. Also in Texas Creek 6 hectares. Carry on with Xwisten, didn't finish last fiscal year. Have been challenges with staffing, trying to adapt to high workload. \$1M is available for this area, but seeing some large expensive treatments being done. Merritt has a local wildfire roundtable [*not a Fraser Basin Council community wildfire roundtable*] that met to identify areas that need treatment. Lillooet is trying to get a group together to strategize on the work here at a very local level.
- Bobo noted that a prescribed burn was conducted 42yr ago at Carpenter Lake, it got away and there were lessons learned. He'd like to do more burns like the one this past spring. He asked whether species at risk are considered when planning for prescribed burns? Yes, species at risk are considered in the burn plan, and if any are present during the burn, it is postponed.

BC Wildfire Service

- Justin noted that they were very happy to partner with Xwisten for the recent prescribed burn, and they thought it went well. They have additional prescribed burns planned for East Lillooet above the airport, but capacity is hampered by earlier starts to the wildfire season and training underway.
- In response to a question about doing things differently, Justin responded that they have changed hiring practices, opened it up more. Last year not enough applicants, this year had too many, over 500 applied. Not everyone will get into boot camps though. Really communicating with contractors earlier, getting heavy equipment signed up. Focus is on getting training done, taking a week early spring to get all the training done. It takes years to build up a wildland firefighter, have shifted a ton of focus to training. Some crew leaders are on full time through

the winter now. Has also been a crew uplift, Initial Attack (IA) went from 3 to 4 person crews. They are also adding more crews strategically around the province.

- BCWS is considering campfire bans by fire centre; the fine for having a campfire during a ban is \$1150.
- Category 2 and 3 burn restrictions (larger fires, industrial activities, WRR works) are not restricted yet in Kamloops Fire Centre, they want to enable crews to burn debris piles

District of Lillooet

- Darren retired from his position as Fire Chief, the position is vacant but there is a deputy fire chief and interviews are underway for the position
- Darren gave a short update, though technically he is no longer District of Lillooet staff
- District has \$186 000 secured for a FireSmart program, including rebates and a FireSmart coordinator position
- Darren is still engaged in local wildfire risk reduction work and is involved in the East Lillooet prescribed burn. He is also consulting in emergency management.
- Darren noted that East Lillooet has very little water supply; Delta Irrigation of Kamloops has equipment to provide mass water delivery systems and can work with communities to assess and create water access plans. Equipment can be leased or bought to work with BCWS if a wildfire occurs, including a 40 foot container with no lid to enable bucketing operations.

Lillooet Tribal Council

- Darryl noted lots of planning, training, summits, workshops underway, hosting 6 training sessions for local First Nations. Hiring a communications officer as well. Seeking funding from Telus for drone equipment. Three schools are planned for emergency planning FireSmart education awareness presentations. Possibly hiring a FireSmart coordinator if funding applications are successful.
- Working on some interviews and video production for more education/awareness; ACTION: for Darryl to send Mike the link when finalized.

CN Rail

- Matt noted that they have just finished retrofitting two fire train cars with deck guns that can fight fires. There are now three in their network, stationed in Kamloops, Prince George and Edmonton will be available for use this wildfire season. We are limited to fighting fires near our tracks. They had good interface with BCWS near Box Canyon wildfire last year.

Interwest Timber

- Briana noted that while she's attending as a representative of Interwest Timber (major forest licensee), she grew up in Goldbridge and the Bridge River Valley and was there during the wildfire last year and has moved back to Goldbridge. She had the opportunity to go in and assist this year with preparedness. Looking to create a larger industry wide plan. Want to reforest areas that are burnt and protect areas that we still have.
- Discussion and questions raised the following: Is there consideration of leaving some of the burnt trees standing for birds etc? A: Very difficult for Interwest to lay out areas that we consider sustainable for long term. When laying out a cutblock, many considerations, some areas are too steep. Landslide risk is also very high. The amount of timber when salvage logging that available is also considered. There will always be large areas that we can't log, especially

very rocky areas. Also looking for access, like existing roads, so many factors when looking at new cut blocks. 3-5% of total burned area is harvestable, but a lot of replanting can be done

Yalakom

- Robin noted that she feels powerless in a small community, she’s encouraged to see 85 ha of wildfire risk reduction treatments identified for the area, but email correspondence indicates things won’t get initiated (assessments) until 2025, which means implementation will be even later. Elderly community with limited infrastructure and high fire hazard.

4. Next Steps

Request to add BC Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure to this roundtable. Many rural roads are MOTI jurisdiction, have significant maintenance issues that affect evacuation, and high fire risk in rights of way.

Next meeting – Fall 2024, exact date to be determined based on a scheduling poll, and dependent on extent of wildfire season. Consider doing a field trip to one of the following:

- Xwisten prescribed burn from this spring
- East Lillooet prescribed burn (if it happens)
- Local wildfire risk reduction treatments

Task	Responsibility	Timing
Questions about proposed fuel management/wildfire risk reduction treatments? Maude Lussier at SLRD or Craig Sine or Ryan de Visser at MOF Cascades are key point people.	Everyone	Ongoing
Explore a data sharing mechanism such as Sharepoint	Mike Fusca, Maude Lussier	Before spring meeting
Note which organizations have basic wildfire training, and who is a fire warden on the contact list	Mike Simpson, Alex de Chantal	Ongoing