

Lillooet and Area Community Wildfire Preparedness Roundtable

Approved Meeting Summary as of April 8, 2024

Meeting date: Wednesday November 8, 2023 10:00AM to 3:00PM

Location: Lillooet REC Centre, Mezzanine and online

Present

BC Hydro – Ben Cave

BC Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness – Terry Olsen, Nick Hamilton

BC Ministry of Forests – Jennifer Reid, Greg van Rossum

BC Wildfire Service – Jennifer Young, Alyssa Christianson, Verne Rasmussen

Canadian Disaster Animal Response Team (CDART) – Cheryl Rogers

District of Lillooet – Darren Oike

First Nations Health Authority – Alan Leung

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

Gun Lake Fire Protection – Al Leighton

Individual – Arlen Ferguson

Landscape Consulting Corp – Sharon French

Lillooet Agriculture and Food Society – Janna Pyke

Lillooet Tribal Council – Darryl Adrian, Darian Edwards, Moon Moore

Sekw'el'was (Cayoose Creek Indian Band) – Liza Adolph

Split Rock Environmental – John Redan

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

Texas Creek community – Geoff Playfair

Woodlots BC – Tyler Hodgkinson

Xaxli'p – Anishia LeBourdais, Jason Jacob, V. Dan

Xwisten – Gerald (Bobo) Michel, David McKay

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 moment of silence was observed for those who lost their lives fighting wildfires this past season. A round of introductions took place for people in the room and those participating online.

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

2. Debriefing the Fire Season – What did we Learn?

Participants were encouraged to reflect on the 2023 wildfire season, not just in Lillooet and the surrounding area, but the whole province and think of lessons learned that we could apply here.

Feedback was as follows:

Reflection	Lesson Learned to Apply
Drought going into the wildfire season, likely going to continue into 2024	Conserve water, prepare for longer more intense wildfire seasons
Local capacity – need more training and equipment in rural communities	Push BCWS to have a minimum training and equipment standard for non-OFC VFDs, such as VFD societies, fire brigades and community associations
Local capacity – need agreements in place with local VFDs, fire brigades, community associations	Existing “inter-agency” agreements are in place between local government funded VFDs and BCWS, but nothing exists for these other types of organizations
Local capacity – how to pay for it, liability concerns, WorkSafe BC and occupational health and safety concerns	BCWS to standardize whether they pay the local organization (i.e., VFD or community association) or pay people individually. Or identify people as “convergent volunteers” (defined by EMCR here)
Local equipment – BCWS knowing where it exists, having equipment signed up in advance	Sign up early with Zone staff. Dispel the myth that an equipment owner is obligated to provide equipment if they’re signed up; they are not if they’re busy doing regular work.
Local capacity and utilizing it during a wildfire, who’s in command, there was confusion whether it was the local government or BCWS	Develop systems to utilize local trained people. Clarify that it’s BCWS that is in command of local VFDs or fire brigades or locals that have training. Use BCWS Incident Command System (ICS)
Build on good working relationships, such as between BCWS and Gun Lake Fire, and others (e.g., BCWS and Knutsford group on the Ross Moore Lake wildfire near Kamloops)	What worked well? BCWS learn from those situations, as opposed to where it didn’t work well
Community Liaisons should be made more formal, in non-Indigenous communities as well as Indigenous and be funded by BCWS or EMCR	They exist in Indigenous communities, let’s set them up in rural non-Indigenous communities too – coordinate training, but also communication.
Evacuation reluctance – it was noted that some people refuse to obey evacuation orders, and this may likely increase in the future.	Identify those that don’t evacuate as “convergent volunteers” (defined by EMCR here)
Evacuation orders and enforcement	In a wildfire season like 2023, there is limited capacity by law enforcement (RCMP, Conservation Officer) to enforce evacuation orders. Local groups (i.e., Gun Lake Fire) can deliver the orders but don’t have authority or desire to enforce it.
Evacuation routes	Maintain evacuation routes, do training in advance
Communication, recognizing some areas are remote, no internet or cell phones, easing residents’ anxiety	Communicate early and have consistent messaging. Use community liaisons. Continue using community bulletins. Recognize that social media is a good tool in rural areas, but there are risks of misinformation. ACTION: what would communities like for communication? Send to Jen Young.
Past fuel management treatments aren’t available for wildfire suppression crews	BCWS/MOF need to make these past treatments, which have been submitted and are in their possession, available to suppression crews and others

There were numerous items that arose that are addressing some of the challenges noted, and are happening at a provincial scale:

- Premier’s expert panel – there are 14 people appointed, yet lots of interest to share input from 2023 wildfire season from this area
- Cooperative Community Wildfire Response – see text box below

BC Wildfire Service wants to determine the interest and capacity of rural communities in the BC Interior in the development of rural community wildfire fighting capabilities in areas **outside of structural fire protection (i.e., VFD) boundaries**. This is aimed primarily at identification of training and equipment requirements of rural communities outside of structural fire protection.

The **Cooperative Community Wildfire Response** Stream 2 project between Fraser Basin Council, BC Wildfire Service and BC Cattlemen’s Association, with Fraser Basin Council leading the engagement of rural communities. One area of focus is rural, non-Indigenous communities. The other priority group is Indigenous communities, which started in 2022.

3. Debriefing the Spring Field Tour, Alan Westhaver Presentation

Participants debriefed on the spring field tour that we undertook with Alan Westhaver, and the evening public presentation that Alan gave. Observations were as follows: once an evacuation alert was issued people really started to FireSmart their properties; needles and debris piles up in corners like Alan described; Blue Hill (west side) past fuel treatments looked good; utilizing stratas as “forced cooperation” in neighbourhoods could be a useful technique.

Mike reminded people that a narrated version of Alan’s presentation is available [here](#) to circulate to anyone as an educational tool.

4. Previous Meeting Summary

The meeting summary from Nov 24, 2022 was approved. The following key action item was discussed:

This discussion expanded into the **challenges of lawfully managing the vegetative debris created from UBCM funded programs FireSmart programs** that SLRD implements, notably:

- FireSmart activities create vegetation that must be dealt with, usually by burning in fall during good venting conditions.
- Some seasonal residents aren’t able to get to their properties in fall to burn debris
- The costs to haul material from the Upper Bridge River Valley to Lillooet is prohibitive, not to mention carbon-intensive which produces greenhouse gas emissions through trucking
- Options such as having a portable air curtain device, or creating temporary locations to accumulate debris and then burn in fall (“burn pits”) have come up against various hurdles, such as use of Crown land for such a purpose and eligibility of the funding
- There is a “chip app” that matches suppliers of vegetative debris with those that want it

Other options that people suggested included the following:

- Hügelskultur composting – Robin Andrus noted that she does this, it’s a method to compost material and use as a soil amendment. She has been receiving FireSmart debris from the Yalakom area, which has been a local win-win solution
- Jennifer described the City of Kamloops operations whereby they receive yard waste, then compost it at Cinnamon Ridge and sell it back to residents for gardens
- It was suggested that perhaps seeing if local area farms and agriculture operations would be interested in receiving material for composting
- Securing a special use permit from BC to enable burn pits
- Exploring economic development opportunities around compost creation

ACTION: Mike Fusca and Maude Lussier from SLRD to take the lead, create a subcommittee with District of Lillooet (Darren Oike), Lillooet Tribal Council (Darryl Adrian) and MOF (Alycia Fennings) to explore this issue further and devise solutions.

Status update on this action: SLRD has raised this within MOF; there are some facilities in Lillooet that use pellets, is there an economic opportunity to use this material, explore the Indigenous Bioeconomy Program for funding and support; could SLRD have large burn pits to dispose of this material.

5. 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 presented one slide that summarized all the various FireSmart initiatives underway. See file named *Nov 8 2023 Lillooet Roundtable SLRD.pdf* circulated with this summary, including hiring more staff to do FireSmart assessments and education and increasing the homeowner grant to up to \$6000 in some cases
- Maude noted that the community wildfire resiliency plans (CWRP) are completed for [Electoral Area A](#) and [Electoral Area B](#) and she’ll continue working with the Community FireSmart Resiliency Committees (CFRCs) on specific fuel treatments
- Maude is encouraging adoption of the FireSmart Canada Neighbourhood recognition program in various communities of the SLRD
- She is trying to start the Home Partners Program in the SLRD, this is more intensive than FireSmart assessments and could lead to insurance premium reductions

District of Lillooet

- Darren noted they are applying for community resilience investment program funds through UBCM, seeking \$186 000 for next year for a FireSmart coordinator, fuel management treatments on critical infrastructure, and to update their CWRP
- Want to do some prescribed burns in conjunction with fuel management treatments

Gun Lake Fire

- Al noted that they installed an “old school” siren on top of the firehall and it was put to use and worked very well as they have no cellular coverage

- After a very busy summer, they would like to focus on continued fuel management work for areas that didn't burn as well as recovery efforts
- Questions and discussion raised the risk of debris flows (Jenn Reid noted that geotechnical and hazard risk assessments are currently being completed by MOF, reports will be finished before Christmas and will be shared) and avalanches (Sal noted that MOTI is addressing avalanche risk assessment in areas burned)

Canadian Disaster Animal Response Team (CDART)

- Cheryl noted that they will do information meetings with District of Lillooet and Lillooet Tribal Council this coming winter for residents and members and can offer training. They work on all four pillars of disaster management.
- Cheryl noted that while it's easiest to work with on farm animals, with enough notice they can work with ranchers to address cattle on range or at least go and make sure they're fed and watered. EMCR also has resources to help with cattle movement, and MOF range staff can also assist in an emergency

Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness (EMCR)

- Terry noted that there is new provincial [Emergency and Disaster Management legislation](#) has received third reading and is waiting for royal assent. There are new financial guidelines for what is reimbursable and what is not.
- Terry noted that the BC government is looking for [public feedback on the new Emergency Management regulations](#) by December 31, 2023
- Nick added that there is a new funding opportunity for cultural navigator, communities can hire someone from their community and in case of an emergency evacuation those evacuated can be greeted by someone at an EOC that is a familiar face.

Ministry of Forests, Cascades District

- Jenn noted that the district has a wildfire risk reduction program, there are three staff available: Alycia Fennings (on leave), Gwenn Heatherington and Ryan de Visser. They are connecting in with Maude here locally.
- There is \$1.3M for area for the entire Cascades district (Princeton up to Lillooet) for fuel management. There are 156 hectares of prescriptions developed in SLRD Electoral Area A, some areas burned this past year. There are some prescribed and cultural burns proposed at East Lillooet, Lytton and Xwisten.
- Next year: 40-60 hectares of treatment per year is the goal for area treated, and 100-150 hectares for prescription.
- Try to prioritize the highest risk, working with others across jurisdictions to ensure work is collaborative. MOF is aware of the SLRD CWRPs for this area. Also, trying to partner with First Nations so it meets their needs as well. Focusing on multi-year projects to ensure funding is consistent and keeps folks working.
- Interest was expressed in how to get the fuel management work; Jenn noted that [SAFE certification](#) is a requirement for chainsaw/brushsaw work, but if people are interested contact [Gwenn Heatherington](#) and [Ryan de Visser](#).
- Numerous suggestions were made on how to make past treatments and proposed treatments available, such as interactive online maps.

Xwisten

- Bobo noted that they are part of the [Salish Fire Keepers Society](#) with other Interior nations and they'd like to see a lot of dead trees cleaned up to reduce fire hazard
- David noted that they are working on getting SAFE certification, and that they've been working with Sharon on FireSmart education and other activities. They have also assessed 98% of homes in their community

Lillooet Tribal Council

- Darryl noted that 2023 was a very busy season. They are expecting a post wildfire hazard assessment from recent fire. At the Shalath EOC they did get a cultural navigator.
- From training perspective, had 5 JIBC training sessions, has already completed S100 training sessions. Did structure defence planning training. Completed S100 yesterday. Lots of EOC and ESS training is ongoing. The new EOC management tool which is web based is exciting and looking forward to learning more about it.
- Cultural burning they have met with Landscape and FNESS to discuss plans. Connected with FireSmart BC a week ago about new innovative ways to local members on board, including youth, looking at social media posts to attract younger people.

BC Wildfire Service

- Verne noted that BCWS is moving towards 365 days/year model, more year round staffing, and assisting with various natural resource issues and disasters. Staff is growing, increase of one more full time, plus two new staff in Lytton. Moving more to full time staff, so need facility upgrades. Also means we can put more resources to FireSmarting and prescribed burns and improving relationships with first nations. Lots of change.
- Jen noted that at the last meeting, we had conversations about how to evolve the BC Wildfire Act. Lots of engagement regarding how to evolve the cultural/prescribed burns. Previous Act was quite restrictive, also looking at regulations to be more enabling of cultural/prescribed fire. Another big change is that open burning and categories wording has been tightened up. It's now more structured since our last meeting. Last winter BCWS and WLRS and MOF undertook a process for government regarding prescribed burning. There are some big roadblocks around prescribed burning, looked at how do we go from project initiation to implementation of prescribed/cultural burns. Goal is to have shelf ready projects identified so when weather conditions allow burns can happen. You can reach out to Justin Waito in Kamloops Fire Centre for cultural/prescribed burns. For FireSmart questions go to Alyssa Christianson.
- For 2024 there have been some changes to FireSmart grant process. New allocation process has been updated, contact Alyssa for help with FireSmart grant applications.
- Justin Waito is the BCWS contact for cultural/prescribed burns.
- Verne clarified that there is still a Fire Warden program, Al Leighton noted he is a fire warden, but that not every fire centre around BC uses them. [*post-meeting note – a google search “BC wildfire service fire warden” did not turn up any results*].
- Community liaisons are critically important, not just during wildfires but potentially for all emergencies; we need compensation for them; these local people know the residents and area
- EMCR's Expense Authorization Form (EAF) can be used to pay for community liaisons during an emergency event

SLRD Emergency Program

- Andrew noted that SLRD is currently working on project of support hubs, publicly identified locations with Community Liaisons. Small groups aren't just fire, work on emergency health services, their support is broad not just focused on fire.
 - A big piece is asset mapping, to learn more about what/who is available.
- Mark noted that they are now transitioned from wildfires to recovery by engaging partners to support the community.
- Question – for the 2021 McKay Creek fire and rehabilitation plans, reach out to Darryl at LTC or Richard Chavez at MOF Cascades District

Gratitude was expressed for the cooperation between all organizations and governments this past year, and optimism that we'll apply the lessons learned discussed earlier to be even better prepared in 2024.

6. Funding Sources

Throughout the meeting, numerous funding sources were identified:

- EMCR's [Disaster Risk Reduction – climate adaptation](#), closes March 28, can address water conservation
- UBCM [CRI Program](#), open and ongoing, training for wildfire fighting – work with your local government, they apply for it
 - Quicker scenario – Mike and Alex are trying to expedite this through CCWR
- UBCM [CEPF for EOC training](#) for groups closes Feb 23
- UBCM [CEPF for equipment and training](#) closes Jan 26
- [Wawanesa's Community Wildfire Prevention Grants](#) \$15k, deadline Dec 15, 2023
- [Wildfire Community Preparedness Day](#) \$500, deadline January 31, 2024

7. Next Steps

Next meeting – early April, avoiding the next [Wildfire Training and Resiliency Summit](#) (April 20-24 in Prince George) and avoiding Easter. Agenda topics:

- Old action items
- Lessons learned – how are we getting prepared for 2024?
- Community liaisons and fire wardens

Task	Responsibility	Timing
Create a Vegetative Debris Disposal subcommittee with District of Lillooet (Darren Oike), Lillooet Tribal Council (Darryl Adrian) and MOF (Alycia Fennings) to devise solutions	Mike Fusca or Maude Lussier to initiate	Before spring meeting
Explore a data sharing mechanism such as Sharepoint	Mike Fusca, Maude Lussier	Before spring meeting
Investigate funding sources: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forest Enhancement Society of BC • UBCM Community Resiliency Investment Program 	Everyone	Ongoing