

Prince George and Area Community Wildfire Preparedness Roundtable

9:30am to 3:30pm – November 15, 2023

Prince George Civic Center

Meeting Summary

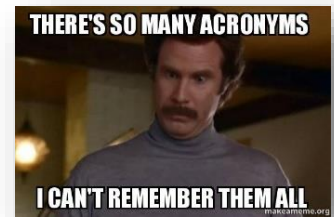
Purpose: Convene a proactive multi-party table to assist with wildfire preparedness.

Subject Scope: Wildfire risk reduction prescribed and cultural burning, FireSmart, training and capacity development, equipment, resource needs, emergency planning for wildfires, inter-agency cooperation.

Geographic Extent: To be determined in collaboration.

Attendance: Owen Price (FNESS), Tanya Spooner, (CPG), Jesse Labatiuk (CPG), Ken Otter (UNBC), Mitch Sorensen (BCWS), Anita deDreu (RDFFG), Colby Molcak (RDFFG), Bryant Kemble (FTVFD), Ernie Weber (MLIB), Mark Clark (FBCWA), Melissa Steidle (FBCWA), Mike McLachlan (BCTS), Jeremy Greenfield (BCTS) Amanda Reynolds (FNESS), Peter Goetz (BC Parks), Les Szerencsi (Canfor), Ron Ammundsen (PMVFD), Heather McRae (EMCR) Mike Pritchard (BCCA), Haley DeBianchi (MOF), Dan Scott (Carrier Lumber), Doug Jarvis (UNBC), Adam Ethier (LTFN) Josh Kelly (Sinclar), Mike Simpson (independent consultant), Patience Rakochy (FBC), Terry Robert (FBC), Kim Menounos (FBC), Tasha Peterson (FBC).

Note: For clarification, please see a list of abbreviations/acronyms at the end of this summary.



Meeting Objectives:

- Understand what's underway for inter-agency cooperation, cross-training and emergency planning and identify opportunities for collaboration and improvements,
- Provide update on development of Community Wildfire Plans for Prince George and Regional District of Fraser-Fort George
- Explore the concept of a creating a long-term, inclusive Prince George & Area Community Wildfire Preparedness Roundtable (discuss geographic area and membership),
- Develop relationships, improve communication, share information,
- Identify synergies on various initiatives,
- Determine next steps.

Note: Presentation slides will be provided with this summary – along with the maps that were on the wall

Mayor Yu provided opening remarks for the day. Reminding us that our forests are part of the bedrock of the region and long-term strategies such as those that will be developed from the conversations that will be taking place today are essential.

Mitch Sorensen - BC Wildfire Service provided a recap of the 2023 wildfire season:

- Unprecedented year.
- 18,496,051 hectares burned in Canada (the size of Washington State); the largest burn up until now was ~7 million hectares.

- 2.28 million hectares burned in the PG Fire Centre (PGFC) – almost 4x the provincial 10-year average.
 - 669 fires and counting in the PGFC
 - 4000 personnel suppressing fire at the peak of response in BC
 - International help came from all over Canada, the United States, Mexico, Australia, Brazil, South Africa, and Costa Rica
 - USA had a below average wildfire season
 - Prince George fire centre continues to support FireSmart community resiliency programs
 - There has been an interest in changing the *Wildfire Act* in order to address projects on non provincial land
 - The focus is on creating more resiliency across the forested landscape
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Tanya Spooner - Manager of Emergency Programs at City of Prince George, provided an update for the Provincial Emergency Task Force:

- Tanya was appointed to the Premier's Emergency Task Force, she's one of 14 members
 - The purpose is to advance provincial preparation and mitigation as well as recovery
 - The task force will deliver recommendations to government in early 2024 (February).
 - The task force is an all-hazards approach (wildfires, drought, heat, floods and other emergencies affecting the province) aimed at incorporating the value of local resources including local First Nations knowledge
 - Increased for the better - public perception on fire smart activities
 - The task force has met three times to date
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Kim Menounos – Regional Manager – Northern Interior – Fraser Basin Council

- Introduced a simultaneous project (currently underway): Collaborative Disaster Risk Reduction – Climate Adaptation - taking place across the Regional District of Fraser-Fort George.
 - There are seven applicants collaborating on this project, including all four municipalities in the District, the Lheidli T'enneh First Nation, and the McLeod Lake Indian Band.
 - This project will: a. systematically characterize clear-water flood, steep creek and landslide hazards and hazard exposure across the RDFFG in a format amenable to risk assessment; b. complete a regional risk assessment, delivered using approaches that will enable updates in the future; and c. provide recommendations to inform next steps of risk management decision making, including policy, regulation, emergency management, and mitigation planning in recognition of a changing climate.
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Mike Simpson – Independent (formerly with FBC and instrumental in the starting of the first 4 wildfire roundtables in the province)

- Provided history of the roundtables and the Fraser Basin Council's role in organizing and assisting the wildfire roundtables.
- The Fraser Basin Council remains impartial and works with all levels of government.
- The wildfire roundtables to date have been built on the concept of what worked well in Williams Lake between 2007 and 2012.
- The wildfire roundtables meet approximately quarterly but there is a promise to not meet during the wildfire season.

- These roundtables provide a means to coordinate fire smart education and activities as well raising public awareness, and most importantly getting agencies across a region/area working together.
 - They served to coordinate activities at all levels of government and industry, reduce duplication and close gaps.
 - Also provide opportunities to leverage and maximize resources.
 - A map of the existing wildfire roundtables has been provided with these notes.
 - The roundtables are being funded by the BC Wildfire Service and FBC is in the process of establishing another four tables over this next year.
 - The round tables have flexibility in scale and scope and provide a means to raise collective awareness and messages back to government.
 - True purpose is to advance wildfire preparedness and help implement the plans that are in place and plans that need to be developed in our area and across our region.
 - The Fraser Basin Council's role for this Wildfire roundtable, should there be one, is to organise, facilitate and support. We will do our best to identify leveraging opportunities, spot potential synergies, connect people opportunities and ideas as well as communicate information an emerging science. The FBC maintains a [community wildfire roundtable web page](#) for this purpose, with a separate page for each roundtable.
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Jesse Labatiuk – City of Prince George, Environmental Specialist

- Provided background information on the City of Prince George's ex- community forest licence and the history of the City's community wildfire protection plan. (The City of PG no longer holds a community forest tenure but maintains a CWPP).
 - 2005 CWPP was developed largely in response to the 2003 wildfire season.
 - This plan identified the level of wildfire risk around Prince George and provided treatment recommendations.
 - Treatment recommendations were carried out until approximately 2013.
 - In 2009 a landscape scale fire behavior model was carried out to address gaps pertaining to landscape level fire events.
 - In 2018 the CWPP was updated to address changing environmental conditions an increased development in the interface around Prince George.
 - Work on the 2018 CWPP recommendations has been ongoing since 2019.
 - Current projects include one 9.7-hectare area in Park Ridge Creek park (Malaspina wildfire fuel mitigation project)
 - a funding application has been submitted for a 17.1-hectare project adjacent to critical infrastructure (Broddy wildfire fuel management project)
 - Future projects include an application for a structural protection unit in 2024 and to continue building that protection unit through 2025 applications; future applications also include addressing FireSmart education and awareness as well as further mitigation projects.
 - The City will also pursue a CWRP in 2024.
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Colby Molcak – RDFFG - Emergency Services Coordinator

- Provided A brief introduction to the type of government that regional districts are. Specifically, the Regional District of Fraser-Fort George:
 - Approximately 16,000 residents (in the electoral areas – outside of all city and village proper)

- Seven electoral areas and four municipalities
 - Approximately 50,000 square kilometres stretching from north of Mackenzie to South of Valemount
 - Provide services such as land use planning, bylaw enforcement, waste management, fire rescue, and emergency event management.
 - Previous FireSmart and wildfire prevention work includes:
 - 2019 the regional district partnered with the city of Prince George on an application to the CRI.
 - Funding from that grant supported a temporary seasonal FireSmart Educator.
 - In 2022 the regional district applied to CRI for phase two of a regional district FireSmart program that was focused on education and engagement in the electoral areas; the funding supported a temporary part time FireSmart Educator who hosted community events, conducted home reviews, and school events in collaboration with the BC wildfire service.
 - A number of 2023 FireSmart activities attended between Prince George, McBride and Valemount.
 - Community groups within the regional district have also spearheaded their own initiatives to provide incentives for residents willing to complete FireSmart reviews of their property.
 - 2023 CRI application has been submitted and proved. The funding will support a fire smart educator position for 2024.
 - The regional district also plans for the funding to include establishing a CWRP for each electoral area beginning in 2024, as well as a public education campaign throughout 2024.
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Question/Discussion Period – some highlights:

- Why is uptake low for FireSmart Home assessments?
 - Regional district by law officers conduct these assessments and people don't necessarily want by law officers examining their home. There's a fear that discrepancies or infractions might get picked up that are not part of a FireSmart assessment.
 - There is now however a self-assessment available on line for FireSmart
 - Comment made that fire smart trucks (used for travel to homes for assessments) look different from other vehicles in the Nicola Thompson area.
- Challenges with FireSmart activities is that people are not always engaging, money usually provides incentive, such as insurance rebates.
- There is a perception of FireSmart activities being a massive undertaking and that individuals don't have the ability to complete the activities, it becomes so overwhelming they just don't get started.
- Messaging needs to be around tackling one action at a time.
- Social capital (response) – The City is working with service providers to address communications with organizations such as First Nations health authority BC housing etc.
- Comment made that often people don't see the point if they are surrounded by forests that are not being managed for forest fires.
- Note: [Wildfire Resiliency and Training Summit](#) in April of 2024 being held in Prince George. Registration opens in January.
- Note: Alan Westhaver [video](#) on the FBC Community Wildfire Roundtable Website – excellent resource for the public

- Discussed the need to start with the children just like we have done with things like recycling
 - Logan Lake - example of a good job of fire smarting a community noted that a number of the high school students were involved in the work and that the community worked together.
 - There is a need for a community champion in order to get things going
 - Quote of the day “if something is worth doing, it is worth doing poorly”; at least something is getting done, get a start even if it isn’t perfect.
 - Need to take advantage of wetter years and develop programs for the youth.
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Breakout Session used to address the following questions:

Q1 – What wildfire preparedness ‘work’ is underway in your jurisdiction? (Include plans, grant writing, fuel reduction activities, resource acquisition, training etc).

Q2a - What are your needs based on your jurisdiction /organization to advance wildfire preparedness?

Q2b – What resources do you have available for use across the region, including knowledge?

Q3 - How do you currently partner with other Local authorities, Indigenous governing bodies or outside agencies to develop or implement a regional wildfire preparedness plan?

Q4 - How do you currently access predictive technologies? If there were greater access to these technologies how would this impact your preparedness plans?

Q5a – Where do you see the biggest challenges?

Q5b - Where do you see the opportunities?

The larger group was divided into five smaller groups to tackle these questions. Each group's notes are summarized on separate pages.

The following captures the key topics and needs that were identified.

- There needs to be a larger scale uptake of FireSmart education.
- We cannot let perfection get in the way of progress.
- High degree of planning and coordination required across all agencies and organizations to address such things as:
 - FireSmart activities
 - Public Education (program development)
 - Funding opportunities
 - Differing land jurisdictions
 - Industry participation
 - Overcome misinformation
 - Agreements between organisations and agencies
 - Resources (of all kinds including equipment, mapping and technological, people etc.)
- Large need for capacity - especially human resources and longer-term funding
- Need a northern focused approach especially around research and results.

Discussion – Desire to convene a wildfire roundtable for the Prince George Community and Area:

Where to focus the roundtable?

- Start smaller and can build.
- Mackenzie and Hixon are separate fire centres (follow Vanderhoof zone on the west)

- Community roundtable can serve as a FireSmart committee for the future PG CWRP
- No objections to creating the roundtable.
- Next meeting will be in April.
- Discussion - who else needs to be at the table?
 - MOTI
 - Tourism
 - FireSmart Educator (RDFFG)
 - Health Emergency Management BC (Mary Charters)
 - Utilities (Hydro, Rail, Fortis)
 - Recreation Sites and Trails BC
 - BC Mining Association
 - BC Ambulance
 - Climate Scientist (UNBC)
 - Telecommunications
 - BC Energy Regulator
 - Services Canada

Everyone can send Patience any additional thoughts, ideas, contacts.

We will approve summary and review a Terms of Reference (TOR) at the April meeting. Patience will work on acquiring additional members as per list above to bring more individuals to the table.

Adjourned 3:09pm

List of acronyms and abbreviations used in the summary above (in the order used):

FNESS – First Nations Emergency Services Society
 CPG – The City of Prince George
 UNBC – University of Northern British Columbia
 BCWS – BC Wildfire Service
 RDFFG – Regional District of Fraser-Fort George
 FTVFD – Ferdale Tabor Volunteer Fire Department
 MLIB – McLeod Lake Indian Band
 FBCWA – Federation of BC Woodlot Associations
 BCTS – BC Timber Sales
 PMVFD – Pilot Mountain Volunteer Fire Department
 EMCR – Emergency Management and Climate Readiness
 BCCA – BC Cattlemen’s Association
 MOF – Ministry of Forests
 LTFN – Lheidli T’enneh First Nation
 FBC – Fraser Basin Council
 PGFC – Prince George Fire Centre
 CWPP – Community Wildfire Protection Plan
 CWRP - Community Wildfire Resiliency Plan
 CRI – Community Resiliency Investment (a UBCM (Union of BC Municipalities) funding stream)
 MOTI – Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure
 TOR – Terms of Reference