

# Similkameen Community Wildfire Roundtable

## Meeting Summary

Approved as of May 29, 2024



**Meeting date:** January 23, 2024, 10AM to 3PM

**Location:** Rockridge Canyon Retreat & Conference Centre, Princeton, BC

### **Welcome & Introductions**

Ed Atkinson, Manager of Protective Services, Town of Princeton, welcomed everyone and acknowledged the meeting is taking place on unceded territory of the Upper Similkameen Indian Band or the Sməlq'mix People. Ed provided some context and history about how this meeting came about. *[For the meeting record, it is acknowledged that the larger area of the Similkameen Valley being discussed is also unceded territory of the Lower Similkameen Indian Band or the Smalqmix People, both of which are part of the Syilx Nation, and northern areas of the Similkameen are shared territory with the Nlaka'pamux.]*

Mike Simpson, a facilitator and professional forester on contract to Fraser Basin Council (FBC), welcomed everyone and Mike acknowledged Dave Stringfellow, FireSmart Coordinator with the Town of Princeton for his work in helping organize the meeting and his enthusiasm to advance wildfire preparedness in the Similkameen.

The [Agenda](#) (Appendix 1) was reviewed and accepted as presented. Mike introduced the [meeting slides](#) and approach for the day, noting topics centering around wildfire preparedness. He gave an overview on the history, purpose and status of [community wildfire preparedness roundtables](#) that FBC has supported since 2019 in Williams Lake, Clearwater and Clinton and their surrounding areas. Fraser Basin Council is funded by BC Wildfire Service to support this work.

Bettina Johnson, Interior Regional Programs Coordinator for FBC, gave an overview of the [Fraser Basin Council](#) as a province-wide non-profit organization that often works impartially to convene multi-party discussions and actions on complex issues.

The **Meeting Objectives** were reviewed as follows:

- Understand what's underway for wildfire preparedness by different governments and organizations
- Explore the concept of a creating a long-term, inclusive Similkameen Community Wildfire Roundtable
- Develop relationships, improve communication, share information
- Identify synergies on various initiatives

Introductions were made around the room. See list of participants present (Appendix 2). It was noted that several people from other organizations are interested to attend but couldn't either due to conflicting schedules or illness.

### **What's underway for wildfire preparedness?**

Participants were offered the opportunity to present on the following questions:

*What's underway since the early 2022 workshop? What programs or opportunities do you offer?*

Weyerhaeuser – Julia Chappelle, Forestry Supervisor

- Julia gave a [presentation](#) on wildfire risk reduction work and the Coalmont wildfire risk reduction project, as a collaboration with variety of supporting organizations, noting projects completed under Forest Enhancement Society of BC (FESBC) funding

Discussion and questions were as follows:

- *Would wood be available for residents use?* No, access issue with steep slopes  
**\*Action – look at potential future opportunity for local usage of wood harvested from fuel treatment sites**
- *Why this area chosen?* Restricted areas to choose from as had to be in community forest, and good site for backburning due to slope on crest of hill between Tulameen and Coalmont

BC Wildfire Service, Penticton Fire Zone - Beau Michaud/Ben Sandy, Wildfire Technicians

- Beau shared a [presentation on the 2023 wildfire season](#) noting statistics on temperature, drought codes, lightning strikes, fire starts by region, total of hectares burned, etc. He presented information on the BCWS Fire Response Structure, and the ongoing regional work implementing the 7 FireSmart Principles (Education, Emergency Planning, Vegetation Management, Legislation, Development, Interagency Cooperations, Cross Training).

- Ben shared an update on Cultural and Prescribed Burns in Penticton Fire Zone, with a spring 2024 list of projects at various levels of completion, partnering with LSIB for multi-purpose building risk reduction burn and Little Chopaka project, with Penticton Indian Band (PIB) on Meadow Valley, with Westbank First Nation (WFN) on Medicine Creek, with PIB on Penticton Creek.

Discussion and questions were as follows:

- *What are the drivers for how to allocate resources in fire event?* Resource Strategic Wildfire Allocation Protocol (RSWAP) process (life safety, then critical values like infrastructure, water, sewer, economic and cultural assets)
- *What was your greatest challenge/success in 2023?* – Challenge: was a hard year on personnel, seeing fatigue on peoples faces and asking them to go out again, Success: the relationships we built and information-sharing early in the season really paid off in the fire season
- *How do you address sagebrush with prescribed burns?* Ben noted that the prescribed burn plan takes its direction from the land manager, with BCWS coming in after reviewing the prescription on what the land manager hopes to achieve.

BC Wildfire Service, Merritt Fire Zone – Ken Padvaiskas/Jonas Joe, Wildfire Officers

- Ken gave a [presentation on wildfire risk reduction](#) in the Merritt fire zone, noting a lot of new staff coming on board, a main priority is stabilizing internal staffing. They are reaching out to fire departments, First Nations and industry to build stronger relationships.
- Jonas noted they have a forest fuel management working group, and FireSmart committees and programs, and are wanting to build capacity by having more locals trained to fight fires in initial attack crews.

Discussion and questions were as follows:

- *Opportunity for improved BCWS fire guard coordination with Indigenous communities.* A concern was noted by Mark Marton, USIB, manager of forestry and logging, around the importance of elders and knowledge keepers on the land exercising traditional use practices. There is concern of seeing fireguards put in that are damaging riparian wetlands and streams, and questions around communication of tactics used to prepare for large scale fire events.
- Kevin Parkinson, wildfire officer, BCWS, noted that liaison contracts are available for Indigenous communities, to be on site together and identify areas to put in fireguards, giving BCWS that local knowledge
- **\*Action - USIB and BCWS to meet to establish contracts for fire guard coordination/process respecting traditional use areas**
- A comment was shared by Bob Coyne, Regional District of Okanagan Similkameen (RDOS), Area H director, noting the *success of visibility of the BCWS ground training crews* that are very interactive, visible and active in training in the community – everybody in town knows who they are, and it helps community have a sense of calm and feeling safe with trusted crews

Ministry of Forests, Cascades Natural Resources District - Ryan de Visser, Stewardship Forester/Richard Chavez, A/Land and Resource Specialist

- Ryan [presented](#) on the Wildfire Risk Reduction program within and around Princeton in the Cascades district. He noted they are looking to connect and collaborate with municipalities and

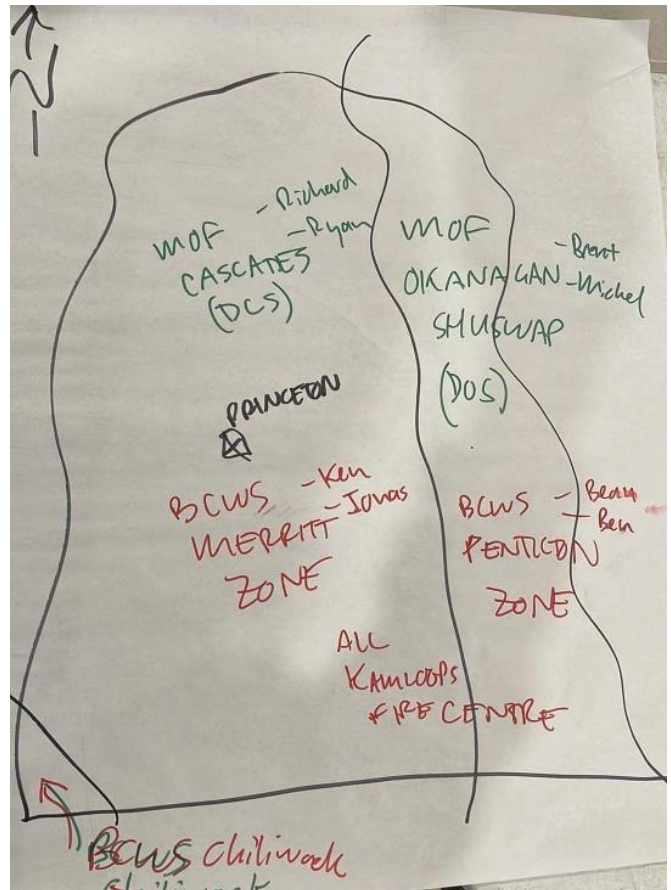
local First Nation communities to help prioritize where they focus the WUI WRR plans and subsequent stages, as well as collaborating on any cultural and prescribed fire opportunities.

Discussion and questions were as follows:

- *Residents concerned about untreated Crown lands.* Ryan was asked about whether the MoF works with smaller communities to get FireSmart done on Crown lands (people ask why should we FireSmart our property when crown land around us a mess?) He noted tactical plans are requirements for wildfire risk reduction program on crown lands. MOTI has jurisdictional authority on rights of way. Bringing to attention and addressing gaps is why roundtable meetings like this are so important.
- Comment from Brittany Seibert, Manager of Emergency Services, RDOS: we need to promote communication in our communities when talking about structural ignition, that we need to look at the immediate zones (ignition risks)

Ministry of Forests, Vernon - Brent Lipinksi, Land & Resource Specialist/Michel Woodman, Land & Resource Coordinator

- Brent [presented](#) on fuel treatment work being done in various areas in collaboration with local communities including PIB and OIB
- Prescribed burning is great, but also need for increased cultural burning (having First Nation communities out with their knowledge keepers to bring cultural practices back, working together, looking at treatment for different values)



Discussion and questions were as follows:

- Jen Young, Senior Wildfire Officer, BCWS Kamloops Fire Centre, commented on the *availability of support funds for implementing community fire prevention*, noting that if anyone knows a community, municipality or First Nation that hasn't applied, to reach out to BCWS for info and assistance with funding applications

Town of Princeton – Dave Stringfellow, FireSmart Coordinator

- Dave shared an overview on Princeton's FireSmart program, homeowner mitigation and mitigation on public property
- Public education work has included the opening of a FireSmart headquarters with storefront retail space in 2023, which is getting a lot of walk-in traffic
- Have done approx. 300 wildfire hazard assessments, issued \$50K worth of homeowner rebates
- Wanting to identify further opportunities to collaborate with neighbouring communities, First Nations, and others

- Interested in developing a structure protection pre-plan, to set expectations for Princeton for when structure protection group shows up

RDOS - Brittany Seibert, Manager of Emergency Services/Hayden Zahrawi, Wildfire Mitigation Specialist

- They have had some staff turnover and a lot of change, discussing how to share resources, and are organizing training
- Looking to streamline and provide more support at regional level, back to more strategic level alongside grassroots level, looking to get more community involvement and working with electoral areas, with series of meetings coming up in March

BC Parks - Stefanie Rothenburger, Land & Resource Coordinator

- Presented on fuel treatments within Manning Park, building on 2021's wildfire risk assessment, multiple critical infrastructure to protect, and multiple values to incorporate into planning
- Always open to chatting on different opportunities to partner on projects

USIB – Carley Brewer, Natural Resource Admin Coordinator/Mark Marton, Manager, Forestry/Logging

Discussion and questions were as follows:

- *Question to USIB in regard to meeting last year to talk about ditch burning* – is there an update on that? – Carley Brewer, natural resource admin coordinator, USIB, responded that there are conversations around fuel management specifically on-reserves and right of ways, and that it's an ongoing conversation
- Mark noted the importance of communication and connection, as the First Nations have direct ties and interest on what happens on the land base, and lots of sensitivities to consider, work is underway to expedite measures to bring land back up for traditional use – the land is tied to the Syilx communities

BCWS - Gord Parker, Structure Protection Specialist

- Gord noted that structure protection is more values protection than structure
- BCWS role is to assist communities to take pressure off local resources (managing provincial resources, working through community's incident command, providing free training to fire depts and fire societies, doing wildfire assessments identifying critical infrastructure) – these supports are available, just need to call BCWS
- By using FireSmart principles, we're seeing great success in province on structure saves when fire moves in
- Partnering with FP Innovations to assess water usage for sprinkler systems, have burn plots set out, testing different materials resistance to fire

Hedley/USIB FireSmart Community Board – Ken Hoyle, chair/secretary

- Ken shared on ongoing work in FireSmart in Hedley, have FireSmart seminar every spring with approx. 10% of population coming out,
- MoF has been excellent at providing resources on de-fuelling lands around Hedley
- Looking for a speaker that can speak to residents about surviving a wildfire
- Community not clear on how to deal with evacuation alerts and orders, hoping to get regional rep to speak to community about emergency management

- 20% of population has roof top sprinklers, but concern of draining water reservoir, so guidelines prepared
- Although cynicism with upper levels of government re: community protection, Hedley is recognized as a FireSmart community, and eventually community will recognize upper levels of government can be helpful

Discussion and questions were as follows:

- BCWS noted that the Ember mascot is a big draw and can be signed out from BCWS.
- Alan Westhaver was noted as a potential speaker, as a WUI fire protection expert and one of the founders of FireSmart. He did presentations in May 2023, one was recorded [here](#).

#### Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness

- The following key pieces of information for regional wildfire preparedness was read and displayed on-screen in the meeting, as shared via email by Trish Ryu, Regional Manager in advance of the meeting:

#### MEETINGS:

- 1) First Nations Partnership Tables: March 13, 14 2024 (Wed, Thurs).
- 2) Seasonal Hazard preparedness: April 16 & April 18, 2024 (Tues & Thurs); One date will be Kamloops & the other will be Penticton. Location dates to be confirmed as plans come together.

#### GENERAL SUPPORT:

- 1) General support available via EMCR Central Main Office: 250 371-5240;  
[embc.ctladmin@gov.bc.ca](mailto:embc.ctladmin@gov.bc.ca)
- 2) PREOC is operational Monday-Friday 0830-1630
- 3) After Hours / Emergency Line: 1-800-663-3456

#### FUNDING:

- 1) [Community Emergency Preparedness Fund](#) via Union of BC Municipalities  
The following streams are available:
  - Disaster Risk Reduction-Climate Adaptation
    - Application Closing date: March 28, 2024
  - Emergency Operations Centers Equipment and Training
    - Application Closing date: February 23, 2024
  - Emergency Support Services Equipment and Training
    - Application Closing date: January 26, 2024
  - Public Notification and Evacuation Route Planning
    - Application Closing date: April 26, 2024

#### **Reflections**

*Do you see value? Do you want to form a Community Wildfire Roundtable for the Similkameen?*

It was agreed by consensus to form a community wildfire roundtable for the Similkameen. Discussion points are summarized as follows:

- As there are lots of committees, it's important to avoid duplicating efforts

- With size of the Regional District, there is some separation, so focusing on Similkameen on the more local level by having this roundtable established is a positive
- It can take many organizations working together to achieve a single project, and there is money available that is not being effectively utilized – its up to us to take those opportunities
- Important to engage MOTI, and increase work on cultural burns
- It’s important to MoF to build up those wildfire risk reduction programs, and get direction from community-level rather than direction from government

**Who’s missing?**

Mike Simpson asked the participants to consider organizations that are missing and should be invited to participate.

- MOTI, FNESS, all the First Nations within the valley, other improvement districts that have wider spans, (LSIB and Keremeos were invited but unable to attend)
- It was noted that one of the pillars of the FireSmart program is legislation, and so legislators are needed (local, community, chief and council, etc)

**Discussion around meeting timelines**

- Suggestion of not putting off until fall, and to have time to button up the ToR
- There is value in meeting before fire season, but cognizant that April and May are busy, while March is fiscal year-end
- Consider scheduling meetings to allow incorporation of projects in alignment with other groups or communities putting in annual operating plan for following year, allowing time to plan and implement
- Group landed on going with end of May meeting, contingent on wildfire season. Exact date to be set via scheduling poll about a month in advance.

**At next meeting:**

- Finalize terms of reference
- Finalize a contact list with key contacts for each agency
- Finalize a boundary for the CWR (do we include Willowbrook VFD to the east?)
- Suggestion of doing a partial field portion at next meeting
- Rockridge offered meeting space for rent, exploring managed/un-managed area’s

<b>Task</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Timing</b>
Convene Community Wildfire Roundtable in spring 2024. Draft agenda to include terms of reference development.	All – Mike to seek a date via scheduling poll at least a month in advance.	May 2024
Finalize a boundary for the CWR	All	May 2024
Finalize contact list for the Similkameen CWR with key contacts for each agency	Mike S.	May 2024
Create landing page on FBC website, add presentations, and meeting summary.	Mike S./Alex	Jan 2024

**Final Thoughts:** *appreciation was expressed for everyone in the room attending and participating.*

## Appendix 1 – Agenda

### Similkameen Community Wildfire Preparedness Roundtable

10:00AM to 3:00PM, Tuesday January 23, 2024

Rockridge Canyon Camp and Retreat, 2000 Willies Ranch Rd, Princeton, BC ([google map link](#))

Copper Room in Pinnacle Lodge; park at the Dorm Lodges

Agenda as of Jan 15, 2024

**Purpose:** Bring together all governments and organizations working towards wildfire preparedness in the Similkameen Valley for regular communication and coordination.

**Topics in scope:** wildfire risk reduction, prescribed and cultural burning, FireSmart, training and capacity development, equipment, emergency planning for wildfires, inter-agency cooperation

**Geographic area in scope:** Similkameen Valley

**Who should attend:** any order of government or organization with a role to play in preparing for or mitigating the risk of wildfire, including emergency preparedness staff or elected officials:

- Regional District of Okanagan Similkameen
- Town of Princeton
- Village of Keremeos
- Upper Similkameen Indian Band
- Lower Similkameen Indian Band
- Ministry of Forests
- BC Wildfire Service
- Volunteer fire departments and fire brigades
- Neighbourhood FireSmart Committees
- Forest tenure holders (community forest, woodlot licensees, major licensees, BCTS)
- Other organizations

#### Meeting objectives

- Understand what's underway for wildfire preparedness by different governments and organizations
- Explore the concept of a creating a long-term, inclusive Similkameen Community Wildfire Preparedness roundtable
- Develop relationships, improve communication, share information
- Identify synergies on various initiatives

Time	Topic	Who/format
9:30	Doors open, sign in, coffee on, peruse maps on wall	
10:00	Welcome	Town of Princeton
10:15	Review agenda, objectives, introductions around room	Mike Simpson
10:45	What's underway for wildfire preparedness? <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What's underway since the early 2022 workshop?</li><li>• What programs or opportunities do you offer?</li></ul> Questions and clarification to follow	Everyone – open floor
12:00	Lunch (provided)	
1:00	What's underway for wildfire preparedness? (continued)	Everyone – open floor
1:30	Reflections on what's underway, opportunities to work together, share resources, any duplication or gaps, opportunities	Everyone
2:00	Community Wildfire Preparedness Roundtable <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What it is, how it would operate</li><li>• Establishing a long-term table for wildfire preparedness</li><li>• Draft terms of reference</li></ul>	Mike Simpson
2:30	Next steps	Facilitated discussion
3:00	Adjourn	



## Appendix 2 – Participants

Ken	Hoyle	Chair/Secretary	Hedley/USIB FireSmart Community Board
Brent	Lipinski	Land and Resource Specialist	Ministry of Forests
Christine	Nichols	FireSmart WMS and Firefighter	FireSmart Town of Princeton & Area H and Erris Vol Fire Dept
Roger	Bean	Emergency Firefighter	Eastgate Fire Protection Society
Laurie	Bean	EFPS communications	Eastgate Fire Protection Society
Cindy	Gamache	Chief Hayes Creek Fire Department	Hayes Creek F/D
Robert	Banks	Fire Chief	Princeton Fire Department
Ryan	de Visser	Stewardship Forester	Ministry of Forests
Ken	Padvaiskas	Wildfire Officer	British Columbia Wildfire Service
Michel	Woodman	Land and Resource Coordinator - Wildfire Risk Reduction	MOF, Okanagan Shuswap Natural Resource District
Dave	Stringfellow	FireSmart Coordinator	Town of Princeton
Devin	Oakes	Princeton Sierras Unit Crew Supervisor	BC Wildfire Service
Mark	Marton	USIB Manager, Forestry   Logging	Upper Similkameen Indian Band
Kevin	Parkinson	Wildfire Officer	Penticton Fire Zone - BCWS
Ben	Sandy	Wildfire Technician	BC Wildfire Service
Beau	Michaud	Wildfire Technician	BCWS
Hayden	Zahrawi	Wildfire Mitigation Specialist	RDOS
Ed	Atkinson	Manger of Protective Services	Town of Princeton
Corinne	Stringfellow	Wildfire Mitigation Specialist, Fuel Treatment Team Lead	Town of Princeton
Jordy	Bosscha	Fire Chief	Keremeos Fire
Lyle	Thomas	Town of Princeton - CAO	Town of Princeton
Stefanie	Rothenburger	Land and Resource Coordinator	BC Parks
Spencer	Coyne	Mayor	Town of Princeton
Jennifer	Young	Senior Wildfire Officer Prevention	BCWS
Colin	Leese	A/Prevention Specialist	BCWS- Kamloops Fire Centre
George	Bush	Director, Area 'B' Cawston	RDOS
Tim	Roberts	Area G Director	RDOS
Brittany	Seibert	Manager, Emergency Services	Regional District of Okanagan Similkameen
Norman	Druck	Princeton Timberlands General Manager	Weyerhaeuser
Julia	Chapelle	Forestry Supervisor	Weyerhaeuser
Carley	Brewer	Natural Resources Admin Coordinator	Upper Similkameen Indian Band
Amy	Brewer	Natural Resource Field Tech	Upper Similkameen Indian Band

Deborah	Heller	President	Eastgate Fire Protection Society
Bob	Coyne	Area H Director	RDOS
Jonas	Joe	Wildfire Officer	BC Wildfire Service
Ron	Macc	Agriculture Liaison for RDOS	AgSafe BC
Richard	Chavez	A/Land and Resource Specialist	Ministry of Forests, Cascades District
Tony	Iannella	Fire Chief	Willowbrook VFD
Gord	Parker	Structure Protection Specialist	BCWS
Rhett	Nykiforuk	Private citizen	Rockridge Canyon
Mike	Simpson	Facilitator, forester	Contractor for Fraser Basin Council
Bettina	Johnson	Meeting support	Fraser Basin Council