

Clearwater and Area Community Wildfire Roundtable

Meeting Summary as of May 27, 2022

Meeting date: May 24, 2022, 9:00AM to 11:30AM

Location: Online

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

BC Wildfire Service (BCWS) - Hugh Murdoch, Richard Swift

Blackpool Volunteer Fire Department - Mike Savage

District of Clearwater – Mayor Merlin Blackwell, John Thomas, Mike Smith

EMBC - Trevor Pratt

Fraser Basin Council (subcontractors) – Mike Simpson (facilitator), Rob Purdy (recorder)

MOF, Thompson Rivers District - Marina Irwin

Simpcw First Nation (Simpcw) - Ron Lampreau Jr. (Acting Chief)

TNRD - Jamie Vieira, Kevin Skrepnek

Wells Gray Community Forest - George Brcko

1. Introductions, Agenda, Objectives

Mike Simpson welcomed everyone.

Opening remarks:

- Ron Lampreau Jr. stated that it is good that we are having this conversation in May rather than later when we may have an emergency situation with wildfires.
- Major Blackwell acknowledged the traditional territory of the Simpcw people.

Introductions were made. The agenda was approved as presented.

- John Thomas, Kevin Skrepnek and Hugh Murdock stated their need to leave by 10:00AM due to other commitments.

2. Previous Meeting Summary

The meeting summary from February 24, 2022, was approved and will be posted [here](#).

The following are updates on old action items that were completed; those that remain are at the end of this summary:

- The **static map** of past and proposed fuel management polygons for the CWPP area has been created and has been sent to Mike Simpson who has posted to www.wildfireroundtables.ca on the Clearwater page.

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

District of Clearwater

- Mayor Blackwell noted that the District of Clearwater has hosted recent meetings with community forests representatives. They are interested in moving forward with a new FireSmart Coordinator position. The Wells Gray Community Forest is in the initial stages of pursuing an Initial Attack truck like Simpcw’s. Clearwater already has a bush truck.

- Mayor Blackwell advised that Clearwater is carefully monitoring the North Thompson Watershed snowpack and water levels.
- Some citizens are very concerned about certain properties that pose a fire risk. Clearwater will be examining one or more mechanisms (such as the Unsightly Premises bylaw) to ensure that certain vacant properties do not pose a wildfire risk to the community. Council is also exploring a 'good neighbor' approach.
- Mayor Blackwell noted that the Fire Chief has authority to inspect and levy fines for noncompliance, and this bylaw has been utilized for four different properties, which were inspected with TNRD representation. This approach has resulted in positive outcomes regarding the safety of these properties.
- Mayor Blackwell noted that a multi-pronged approach to FireSmart is most effective.
- Mayor Blackwell pointed out that the Voyent Alert System does not cover the traveling public. Some areas in the Upper Clearwater do not have land lines, cell or radio coverage. Clearwater River bridges have washed out in the past.
- John Thomas added that the Official Community Plan is a good tool as bylaws flow from this plan, and zoning helps to set standards for properties.
- John stated that the Clearwater Emergency and Evacuation Plans are being updated.
- John also noted that there are some FireSmart programs under way.

Action: The District of Clearwater could follow up with Dave Pascall, BCWS, to discuss the potential for BCWS contracts for First Response/Initial Attack contracts.

- Mike Smith noted that the Fire Department has been working on Fuel Management Programs in Dunn Range/Dunn Lake Road areas. The structure protection unit trailer is nearing completion. Also, Structural Protection Training has been completed.
- Mike attended the FireSmart conference hosted in Kamloops two weeks ago.

Thompson-Nicola Regional District

- Kevin Skrepnek noted that the FireSmart conference in Kamloops was very impressive. The FireSmart program has built momentum, and FireSmart is increasing its effectiveness by building linkages.
- The TNRD regional EOC for atmospheric river flooding last fall is still activated. The province has also activated the Alert Ready system, which is expanding to include wildfire and flood emergencies.
- In Barriere, last week, we discussed a potential meeting in June to collaborate on an in-person tabletop session with Simpcw, Barriere, Clearwater and TNRD fire departments.
- We are currently updating contact lists on a community-by-community basis, so we have key contacts for any emergencies.
- Kevin noted that the TNRD bylaw with respect to the authority of the Fire Chief to issue tickets/fines to properties owners for noncompliance only applies to areas where communities have fire departments so for most of the TNRD this tool does not apply.
- Kevin supports the Homeowner Blitz approach to advancing FireSmart.
- Jamie Viera stated that the TNRD has identified the need to update bylaws and agreements pertaining to Emergency Response. Some municipalities pay into Emergency Services, and some don't, and those with services need to have their contracts updated to reflect the scope and capacity of services being provided.

- Jamie also mentioned that the TNRD bylaw that gives local the fire chief authority to inspect properties and levee ticketing/fines for noncompliance is also being updated.
- Jamie reported that a new FireSmart Position has been posted. The TNRD Board expectation is that this position will be primarily a Regional Fire Training Officer, and secondarily around FireSmart. Consultants normally do this training, but these funds will now be directed to the inhouse position which will be year-round, and this savings on consultants will fund half of the new position. TNRD staff proposed to the Board of Directors that the remaining funds are allocated from the Electoral Area Administrative Service tax base, which will ensure that areas outside Fire Protection Areas get more FireSmart Programming.
- The TNRD hopes to have the position filled in July. The role of the new position will also be to champion grant writing to pursue funds for seasonal staff to do FireSmart programing. The UBCM Guide shows many linkages for funding.
- Kevin noted that the TNRD is working with the Hefley Lake community to put together a community event to discuss TNRD initiatives, CRI opportunities and other provincial initiatives.

Blackpool Volunteer Fire Department

- Mike Savage advised that crew members are going around to each of the residents and residential sites in Blackpool and Little Fort doing FireSmart site visits and asking residents to address issues. They are developing a binder for all the assessments of each property so that inspections are documented. Some unsightly properties have been actioned with 4 more properties on the books.
- Mike stated that they have taken S100 training and wildfire Structural Protection training in partnership with the District of Clearwater. The Structural Protection training was set up through the Office of the Fire Commissioner (Tyler Hilland was the main contact for training and was assisted by Keith Green from Coldstream, and Kevin Warrenchuch).
- Blackpool is currently adding an addition onto the fire hall to accommodate equipment. Also, home sprinkler protection kits have been put together for the community.
- Mike also advised that the fire department has resolved an issue that arises when the Little Fort Ferry is not accessible and have set up a water tank on the far side of the river so that it can be utilized to rapidly load water for fire protection.
- Mike stated that they are getting prepared for flood season including sandbags.

Simpcw First Nation

- Ron Lampreau Jr. stated that Simpcw has a couple of CRI projects moving forward pertaining to fire breaks and critical infrastructure.
- Simpcw Resources is doing work on wildfire prevention including assessments for every home in the community including cleaning up garbage from homes.
- Simpcw has 300 sprinklers and a skidder for wildfires that is available all year.
- The Voyent Public Alert App is up and running for the community.
- Also, Structural Protection training is being made available to community members to help ensure they are more engaged and informed.
- Simpcw is currently finalizing the agreement with BCWS to provide First Response/Initial Attack crews. Simpcw is expanding to respond to more of the Clearwater Area with their 8 fire fighters that are able to respond in alternating shifts. Lower Clearwater Community Forest was very supportive last year and purchased the truck for Simpcw.

Wells Gray Community Forest

- George Brcko noted that the Community Forest returns profits to the community. They are exploring the feasibility of a truck with a 6-pack Initial Attack Crew. There may be a challenge to get the staff with proper certification. There may be potential for a volunteer approach, where volunteers are paid if there is a wildfire. The Community Forest and District of Clearwater could discuss this further.
- George suggested that collaborating across agencies on wildfire prevention will result in broader effectiveness.
- The Wells Gray Community Forest commissioned a [landscape fire management plan](#) and are currently moving forward on treating areas. They are concentrating harvesting in landscape fuel breaks to open those areas up. In areas where wood is difficult to access, they are looking at the potential for utilizing prescribed burns in the future.
- The community forest also wants to undertake public outreach of wildfire resources for the community and raise awareness of FireSmart.

Emergency Management BC

- Trevor Pratt reported that EMBC is currently focused on freshet, and that the North Thompson watershed is of particular concern at 142% of normal snowpack.
- EMBC is focusing on evacuation planning for communities. We are encouraging communities to have dialogue with surrounding communities who may be able to assist if there is a need for evacuation. This preparation will help in future evacuations.
- The province is updating and expanding the Emergency Support Service Program including the online Evacuee Registration and Assistance Tool (ERA). Evacuees can create their own profiles with their BC Services ID and get prepared for evacuation. The digital tool will enable electronic funds transfer in the case of evacuation. Having funds transferred directly to the evacuee will provide the evacuee with more options for accessing food and other essentials. We hope to launch and have online training in early June.
- The Alert Ready Emergency Alert System is used across Canada. EMBC is expanding this to include Wildfire and Flooding. The Voyent Alert System is prescription based which provides more flexibility in targeting more specific areas. Alert Ready is an additional tool to support these emergencies and is particularly effective for fast response where there is no time to notify by other means such as news releases or door knocking. There is a caveat that Alert Ready utilizes cell towers so due to overlap there is a chance that the alert will bleed over to unaffected areas. Radio and TV transmissions also limit the ability to target areas.
- Trevor noted that UBCM funding program announcements will be out soon.
- EMBC is currently hosting Freshet Coordination Calls and is also hosting a wildfire specific workshop.

BC Wildfire Service

- Hugh Murdoch noted that one of the services provided by BCWS crews includes supporting sand bagging efforts. If streams peak late in the season, then there could potentially be a conflict with wildfire response.
- Regarding the BC Wildfire Course, the 2 individuals are structural protection experts. BCWS now has 30 + people with structural protection expertise. This reflects the importance of the urban interface. Also, wildfire impacts to rural structures are an increasing concern especially as there are more rural properties.

- BCWS will have more capacity on a year-round basis and will increasingly be building capacity for 'All Hazard' response. For examples, Big Bar Landslide and the Atmospheric River Event both involved BCWS.
- Government is investing more into BCWS than in the past. For numerous reasons BCWS, like other employers, are having challenges recruiting staff. For example, recent recruit camps have 200 to 300 new personal, yet there are 350 spaces. Also, Alberta and Ontario are experiencing similar recruiting challenges.
- It is nice to see that there is over \$1 million in projects moving forward in the region including lots of work in the North Thompson Clearwater Area.
- Richard Swift is based in Clearwater and noted that BCWS is looking for opportunities to engage crews and the community for training that can also involve BC Parks and TNRD. BCWS is happy to be involved with FireSmart endeavors.
- Richard also noted that BCWS is looking for opportunities to assist with FireSmart initiatives particularly outside the community of Clearwater.
- BCWS is communicating and relationship building with Simpcw and Chu Chua. We are working on getting crews together for cross training and synergies for the upcoming season and exploring how we can help one another.
- BCWS is also working with the District of Clearwater on the Splash Park location.
- The FCFS Funding through CRI will likely have the same \$50,000 to \$150,000 limit. The funding intake will expand to 15 months but will be restricted to one application.

MOF – District of Thompson Rivers (DTR)

- Marina Irwin reported that she is representing Wildfire Risk Reduction (WRR) for the District and that DTR has few resources for wildfire risk reduction for the time being due to staffing challenges.
- DTR is looking to hire a Wildfire Risk Reduction Officer soon to continue to support their programs.
- In Blue River some members of the public have expressed concerns regarding brush piles. There is the perception that these piles are a wildfire risk. DTR is communicating that the piles need to be cured and creating the piles helps to reduce fuel load that is otherwise dispersed throughout the landscape. Machine chipping for every site is expensive and takes away from the overall budget.

Action: Marina can reach out to George Brcko as the Wells Gray Community Forest would be open to assisting with managing Clearwater area contracts if desired.

May 11/12 FireSmart BC Conference

Key Take-Aways

Mike Simpson reported on the highlights:

- Mostly educational – educating people about need to do fuel management treatments.
- Remove the barriers for people to do FireSmart – make it easy.
- Wildfires don't spread through communities – the community burns without the wildfire, it's a community conflagration of structures: COMMUNITY BURNS WITHOUT THE WILDFIRE. WUI is a structure ignition problem not a wildfire control problem. Key is 30m home ignition zone. This was a key finding for how Lytton burned down in a [report](#) by Dr. Jack Cohen and Alan Westhaver.
- Funding:

- Comprehensive list of funding sources is at www.firesmartbc.ca/funding.
- Future CRI funding streams may have capacity funding for staffing at regional districts.
- CSRD developed a program from scratch for rural areas in 2019.
- CRI for municipalities, rural areas (RDs) need to work with MoF with WRR funds.
- Prescribed fire, putting fire back on the land – happening through MoF/BCWS, BC Parks, and we need to do it in conjunction with cultural burning.
- Home Partners Program – a more formal, rigorous home assessment process that can lead to insurance premium reductions; local FireSmart representatives (LFRs) can do home assessments but Home Partners Program is recognized nationally.

Discussion: Local FireSmart representatives in Clearwater offer a two-day course and assist with FireSmart assessments and go through the assessment with the homeowner. For the Home Partners Program there is a 4-day course that is more in-depth. For large parcels (e.g. 160 acres), BCWS would like be able to visit the property.

Action: Mike noted that regarding the CRI funding, there is an October intake, and that Mike is available to assist with application writing to get the application ready for submission.

4. Next Steps

Mike Simpson asked the round table about planning for a September meeting with Alan Westhaver that potentially could include a field component to conduct a FireSmart assessment to a home visit a home or parcel. Mike will take the lead in lining this up. Ideas include:

- Bring in a wildfire specialist
- Involve Simpcw
- Involve the Community Forest
- Consider a field tour and evening public presentation

Action items.

Task or activity	Responsibility	Timeframe
Explore creating development permit area requirements for FireSmart principles and/or fuel management	Tyson Luedtke, John Thomas, Kevin Skrepnek	Long term, needs council approval
Utilize the Kamloops TSA mapping website to upload fuel management polygons (past and present) from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Wells Gray CF Landscape Fire Plan ▪ Wells Gray Park Fire Plan ▪ DoC and area CWPP 	Marina Irwin	Ongoing
Develop a FireSmart coordinator program, with funding from either CRI Program or WGCF or Social Development Ministry or using students George update: Not sure if this is possible at this point. Main goal should be fostering the FireSmart Program in Clearwater.	John Thomas, George, others (Mike Simpson can support) and Clearwater Forestry Working Group	Ongoing

Task or activity	Responsibility	Timeframe
Coordinate about evacuation plans from Wells Gray Park, Upper Clearwater Valley, share ideas and input	BC Parks staff, Steve Murray, TNRD and others	Ongoing
Get an updated map showing Blackpool VFD coverage	FBC	Before next meeting
<p>Develop a water bar inventory for access and egress, build into emergency response plans</p> <p>Action – George will get together with Mike Smith. The idea is to look at the roads and make sure that those that are important for fire response are flagged.</p>	Forestry Working group	ongoing