

# **Williams Lake and Area Community Wildfire Roundtable**

## **Approved Summary as of Feb 20, 2024**

**Meeting date:** November 17, 2023, 9:00AM to 12:00PM

**Location:** Cariboo Regional District, Williams Lake and online

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

- Alkali Resource Management – Francis Johnson
- Cariboo Regional District – Irene Israel, Murry Daly, Roger Hollander, Director Melynda Neufeld, Director Maureen LeBourdais
- City of Williams Lake – Evan Dean, Morgan Freeman
- British Columbia Wildfire Service (BCWS) – Peter Holub, Tom Foley, Mike Gash, Josh Hutchinson
- Federation of BC Woodlot Associations – Mark Tamas
- Forsite Consultants – Lorena Tillotson
- Fraser Basin Council – Mike Simpson (contractor), Alex de Chantal, Jane Wellburn
- Interested individuals or consultants – Ken Day
- Ministry of Forests, Cariboo-Chilcotin District – Kerri Howse, Daniel Merth
- Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure – Mikayla Arkesteyn
- Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship – Becky Bings
- Stswecem'c Xget'tem First Nation – Ross Wilson
- Tolko Industries – Jenna Swanson
- University of British Columbia – Kelsey Copes-Gerbitz, Stephanie Ewen, Georgina Preston, Mike Stefanuk
- Williams Lake First Nation – John Walker, Willem Fasse
- 150 Mile Volunteer Fire Department – Ed Marshall

**1. Welcome, Introductions, Review Agenda and Objectives**

Mike Simpson, a facilitator and professional forester on contract to Fraser Basin Council, welcomed everyone and acknowledged unceded Secwepemc 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. Cariboo Regional District was thanked for hosting.

The agenda was reviewed and accepted as presented. 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 Williams Lake and Area and the surrounding area, but the whole province and think of lessons learned that we could apply here.

Feedback was as follows:

<b>Reflection</b>	<b>Lesson Learned to Apply</b>
Lots of successful wildfire suppression efforts where fuel management treatments were completed	Keep doing fuel management. Map past treatments so that BCWS suppression crews know where they are.

Reflection	Lesson Learned to Apply
Wildfire seasons are getting longer and more intense.	Continue fuel management and collaboration at this wildfire roundtable. Be prepared for wildfire season from April to October.
Public anxiety is increasing, yet private landowners aren't doing FireSmart.	Provide additional supports (i.e., more rebates, chipping programs, haul away material from driveways) to enable people to FireSmart their properties. Have programs to do this work for seniors and those unable to do the work.
Can only have funded FireSmart programs where a community wildfire resiliency plan (CWRP) exists.	Cariboo Regional District (CRD) needs to secure funding to get more CWRPs in place.
In relation to recent authorized pile burn flare up at Fox Mountain, the public and the media assumed this was a wildfire	<p>Educate the public about fuel management treatments, how they are authorized and monitored, and “bring them along” about the challenges we face and how it’s an attempt to make communities safer.</p> <p>Work with the media to encourage them to report a bigger picture than just the acute issue raised. Engage the practitioners with the media, not just scientists and politicians.</p>
In relation to recent authorized pile burn flare up at Fox Mountain, local fire departments may not have been aware of piles burning and their authorizations	More communication of where burn permits are issued and burning is taking place where this overlaps with fire department jurisdiction
There’s more interest in individuals, especially in rural communities outside of a fire department, in getting training and equipment to fight wildfire.	As this is advancing through BCWS’ Cooperative Community Wildfire Response (CCWR) initiative, this can lead to wins in public understanding of what we’re doing through better engagement.
We can integrate habitat and ecological values into fuel management treatments and accomplish multiple goals.	Continue looking for innovative solutions on how to do fuel management in old growth management areas (OGMAs), mule deer winter range (MDWR), wildlife habitat areas and other areas with habitat and ecological values.

**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: “my house is screwed;” need to have private landowners do FireSmart on their properties to make the investment in fuel management on Crown land nearby most effective; retreatments and planning for them is needed; small details can make a difference such as where embers collect like snowflakes; images of homes burnt where trees nearby were still alive means the focus needs to be on 1.5m around the home.

Mike noted the following from discussions during the afternoon field tour:

- Encourage FireSmart accreditation for contractors and enable them to advertise as being “FireSmart” contractors (context: roofer should know to put metal flashing above eaves)
- Use UBC property on Fox Mountain as a demonstration site, either with signage or a podcast to listen to as you tour the site

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 January 30, 2023, was approved. Old action items were reviewed; those that remain or new ones are at the end of this summary.

Mike showed on-screen the summary of a small group that met on May 19, 2023 to discuss stocking standards and doing fuel management in OGMA’s and MDWR. See file named *WL CWR small group OGMA MDWR stocking stds 19may23.pdf* circulated with this summary. Related to what was discussed at that meeting, Ken Day offered that “we need a standard for retention, not just regeneration.”

#### 5. Information Sharing – What’s Underway

Stswecem'c Xget'tem First Nation

- Ross noted that Georgina Preston and Mike Stefanuk could present the research work their doing for SXFN at a future meeting. Georgina noted that her Master’s degree research has installed 52 inventory plots in wildland urban interface (WUI) areas of both Dog Creek and Canoe Creek communities and she is looking to simulate MDWR and OGMA.
- Ross also suggested that on education, we focus on children, curriculum and schools

##### Sidebar discussion on Education and Public Awareness

- Kira Hoffman, PhD, post-doc at UBC does a lot of education for First Nations
- There are a number of educational materials at FireSmart BC’s website [here](#) including curriculum-friendly material for teachers for grades K-12
- Infographic of FireSmart BC’s recent survey on public awareness of wildfires and FireSmart is [here](#)

Woodlots BC and Woodlot Licence 1579

- Mark noted that the provincial body, Federation of BC Woodlot Associations (FBCWA), has recently received \$300 000 from BCWS to support development of plans and capacity within the woodlot community to address wildfire preparedness. This will support several wildfire committees as well as other initiatives.
- Gord Chipman (local to Williams Lake) is the FBCWA general manager, and there are three contracted staff people: Melissa Steidle in the North (PG and north), Tyler Hodgkinson in the South (Quesnel and south), and Ed Hughes and Mike Larock on the Coast.
- Locally, there were a number of fuel management prescriptions developed on woodlots in the Cariboo in 2018. Four of those had treatments completed, and Forest Enhancement Society of BC (FESBC) funding is being applied for to do remaining treatments at Mark’s WL 1579, Hugh Flinton’s WL 549, and the Cariboo Woodlot Education Society’s WL 552 at Bull Mountain
- Mark described the proposed treatment at his woodlot as being part of a larger landscape fuel break. Daniel Merth noted that they are working with BCTS on advancing this (see action items below).
- Kerri Howse added that Rod Blake WL 588 is also looking at implementing his fuel management prescription at Spokin Lake.

## Williams Lake First Nation

- John described a wide range of fuel management and ecological restoration works that WLFN has underway, either their own initiatives or as contractors for others such as Williams Lake Community Forest (WLCF), MOF or Alkali Resource Management.
- Using all material including biomass at Brunson
- Worked on 250 ha at WLCF thinning Douglas-fir
- Wanted to do a prescribed burn this fall, but paperwork wasn't completed in time
- Education needed of public – perception of logging is “old school” not selection removal; landowner interference at Fox Mountain led to prescription changes.
- Will be starting IFB 28 at Comer trailer park soon
- Badger project north of Hwy 97 from 150 mile to Prairie Rock and just in stage of getting prescription and burn plans together. Hopefully start to burn this spring.
- Closing in on 1000 hectares ready to burn. Didn't get any burning done this year. Have 240 hectares of burnt land that they could have been burned. Need to do better and make more progress. KEY POINT – we have a backlog of areas needing prescribed burn, need to figure out how to get this done and keep caught up.
- Comments and discussion:
  - Melynda suggested relying on her, Maureen and Steve (the CRD electoral area directors for E, F and D respectively) to help get word out about current treatments to help educate the public about what's underway. Good job on Dog Creek side of Hwy 20, looks great. Residents aren't discouraging it, support it, but just give us a heads up so we are aware of it in the neighbourhood.
  - Mike Gash expressed appreciation for Johnny Walker and WLFN and Esketemc. Have shown high level of tenacity and not giving up and doing work on the ground. They are living and breathing this work, so thank you to both Johnny and Francis.
  - Sometimes regulatory burdens get in the way, just the approvals to get burn piles. Piles were ready to be ground and sent to Williams Lake but got hung up on waste pile. They may get burned in next couple months, and they sat all summer and got close to getting burnt by a wildfire.
  - Regarding commercial treatment first and going in after with external funding, there are so many things you can do at operational level without funding needed. Did some commercial thinning. Those stewardship contracts are really important.
  - For treatments in high profile locations. Put up roadside signs it may stop the calls that come in. Tourists seeing fires result in many calls to 911.

## University of BC Alex Fraser Research Forest

- Stephanie noted that they want to do a prescribed burn at Gavin Lake block next fall, it's a cedar stand. They also have a research project coming up with Suzanne Simard at Knife Creek block to reduce fuel risk in a stand with large Douglas-fir and dense understory.
- Research forest property at Fox Mountain now has a 40MW biomass power station, the challenge is it produces 3 phase power and they use 1 phase power on site, so they need funds to rectify this. They also have a tractor with chipper attachment.
- Received a grant to build a 1km wheelchair accessible trail, will be installing interpretive signage and encourage people to do fuel management in their own yard.
- Received another grant to take a grade 7 class on salmon trips to Scout Island.
- Have a new research director for the research forest, Dominik Roeser.

Sidebar discussion – relevant videos (consider posting on main page of [www.wildfireroundtables.ca](http://www.wildfireroundtables.ca))

- Patrick Cuthbert UBC – IDF stewardship video series starring WLFN:
  - Part 1 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q2NYeQDRRyI>
  - Part 2 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d-vNUshGHj8>
  - Part 3 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=172RXSdfyb4>
- Woodlots on the Frontline: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VwBS6D\\_XizI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VwBS6D_XizI)

#### Alkali Resource Management

- Francis noted that they have an adaptive management plan in the Felker-Chimney area, it has FESBC funding on three sites, lots of researchers involved (Becky Bings, Kristi Iverson, Travis Heckford, more)
- Working with Samantha Charlton on an Investment Agriculture Foundation of BC project at 70 Mile and 150 Mile
- It was a long wildfire fighting season that lasted from April to October, they run a crew (Initial Attack, 6 type 3 crews) with members from Esketemc, Toosey and other surrounding communities.
- Currently have about 60 people people working doing fuel management
- Limited capacity for prescribed burning, would like to do more. Have 2000 ha along Fraser River they would like to burn, working with Bob Grey, Lori Daniels UBC and BCWS on this.
- Also working with First Nations Emergency Services Society (FNESS) on cultural burning
- Finally received their Initial Attack truck yesterday from Vancouver Island, it has the same specifications as BCWS trucks

#### Cariboo Regional District

- Irene noted that CRD would like to apply for UBCM Community Resiliency Investment (CRI) funds for 2024 to secure a FireSmart coordinator and advance rebates and assessments.
- Irene needs help understanding where there are current community wildfire protection plans (CWPPs) or CWRPs in the Cariboo Region
- Roger Hollander noted that his is a new position to support the volunteer fire departments associated with the CRD. He also suggested to be patient with the public's uptake of FireSmart, he noted they still see homes without working smoke alarms.

#### Ministry of Forests – Cariboo-Chilcotin District

- Daniel noted that MOF will be actioning the following fuel management treatments from the current CWPP: IFB 59, WLFN is under contract to do 16 ha of hand-treatment works; also Tinmusket Forest Service Road (outside the area of this roundtable and CWPP); Ken Day is developing a prescription for the area of the WLCF near Highway 20; Forsite is contracted to look at Millar Road near Horsefly.
- Answering Ed's question, WLFN is contracted to look at Huston Road/Dugan Lake past 150 Mile

#### Finland Delegation

- Ken informed everyone that he, Stephanie and Mike were part of a delegation of 31 people from BC that went to Finland this fall to look at thinning and utilization of biomass and there will be lessons learned shared to apply to wildfire risk reduction and larger issues

## 6. Next Steps

**Next meeting** – February, Cariboo Fire Centre offered to host. Mike to seek a date via doodle poll about a month in advance.

Draft agenda (in addition to the regular stuff – old action items, information sharing):

- Georgina Preston and Mike Stefanuk research presentation
- New Emergency and Disaster Management Act
- Maps – Tom Foley
- BCTS approach – Nathan
- American stewardship contracts – Ross to arrange Judah Melton to present virtually?
- Tactical plans – what’s in them locally, how do they work in conjunction with CWPP/CWRPs

Task or activity	Responsibility	Timeframe
<b>CWPP recommendations</b> – review before next meeting, discuss which ones are top priority, and update them for progress	Everyone	Ongoing
<b>Maps of past and proposed fuel treatments:</b> Figure out a better system to share past and proposed treatments with three audiences: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Those of us planning and implementing fuel treatments (and maybe also commercial thinning or juvenile spacing?)</li> <li>• BCWS suppression crews so they can access it during wildfire season</li> <li>• The general public and/or lay person so they know what’s been done or what’s planned in a format that is easily shareable</li> </ul>	Tom Foley	Before next meeting
<b>Communications and utilizing CRD</b> Rely on local CRD Electoral Area directors (Steve Forseth, Melynda Neufeld, Maureen LeBourdais) as well as CRD communications staff Gerald Pinchbeck to help communicate with residents about fuel management operations specifically, leading to better understanding of wildfire risk	Everyone	Ongoing – develop more specifics at future meeting
<b>BCTS and Timber Sales to achieve fuel management</b> – learn from Jonathan Merkin, BCTS about what’s been done in Vernon, Kootenays – ideally initiatives that build fuel management into the timber sale, and don’t require WRR or FESBC funding	Nathan Davis	Dec 1 and at next meeting
<b>BCTS and Gas Pipeline/W1579 area landscape fuel break</b> – explore options and a wider approach for the area to achieve wildfire resiliency	Jason Ward, Nathan Davis, Daniel Merth, Mark Tamas	Ongoing
<b>Stewardship Contracts</b> – learn about the American approach and how it could be applied here	Ross to reach out to Judah to present virtually	Next meeting?
BCWS to explore creating a short 5min educational <b>video of Kelsey’s research</b>	Matt Lees, Kelsey Copes-Gerbitz	Ongoing
<b>FireSmart</b> – review what’s worked in other locations (USA as well as BC), consider ways of not making it overwhelming for people, drive-around tour	Everyone	Ongoing
Reach out to major <b>industrial enterprises</b> whose properties adjoin areas for proposed treatment within the Williams Lake Community Wildfire Plan area	Mike Simpson – more to add	Ongoing

<b>Task or activity</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>
Recruit sub-committee to carry forward <b>re-treatment</b> allocations, assessments, and priority planning. Matt noted had discussions with DCC to hire consultants to look at previously treated areas.	Peter Holub to initiate with Gord, DCC and zone reps	Ongoing, delayed due to 2023 wildfire season
Follow up on request from CRD for <b>fire risk data on private property</b> , engage CRD Planning Manager, BCWS HQ	Matt, Irene	ASAP
<b>Route signage, egress and evacuation planning</b> – CRD and City to work together to secure funding for updating evacuation plans.	Irene Israel, Evan Dean	Ongoing, delayed from 2020
<b>CWPPS or CWRPs in the Cariboo Regional District</b> Help Irene understand where active plans exist so CRD can secure funding. Email <a href="mailto:iisrael@cariboord.ca">iisrael@cariboord.ca</a>	Everyone	Before next meeting
<b>Funding sources</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Rangeland Advantage IAFBC <a href="#">here</a></li> <li>▪ FESBC <a href="#">funding window</a> – new funds announced</li> <li>▪ UBCM’s <a href="#">Community Resiliency Investment Program</a></li> <li>▪ NRCan</li> </ul>	Anyone interested	Ongoing