

# Clearwater and Area Community Wildfire Roundtable

## Approved meeting Summary as of Feb 27, 2024

**Meeting date:** November 2, 2023, 1:00PM to 4:00PM

**Location:** Dutch Lake Community Centre and online (hybrid)

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

- BC Hydro – Rhonda Kariz
- BC Parks – Tod Haughton
- BC Timber Sales – Tyson Leudtke
- BC Wildfire Service (BCWS) - Conlan Sprickerhoff
- Blackpool Volunteer Fire Department - Mike Savage, Rod Tulett, Dietrich Rempel
- District of Clearwater – Mayor Merlin Blackwell
- Fraser Basin Council – Alex de Chantal, Mike Simpson (subcontractor, facilitator, recorder)
- Interfor – Jim Magowan
- Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness – Andrew Morrison
- Ministry of Forests, Thompson Rivers District – Marina Irwin, Arron Straub
- TNRD – Kevin Skrepnek, Director Usoff Tsao, Mike Knauff, Sherri Madden

**1. Introductions, Agenda, Objectives**

Mike Simpson welcomed everyone unceded territory of Simpcw and the larger Secwepemc nation was acknowledged. A moment of silence took place to reflect on the loss of life during the wildfire season by those fighting wildfires. A round of introductions took place. The agenda was approved as presented.

**2. Debrief of the Wildfire Season and Lessons Learned**

Participants were encouraged to reflect on the 2023 wildfire season, not just in Clinton and 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
Supply chain delays persist post-COVID for equipment (hoses, pumps, parts)	Order equipment well in advance of wildfire season, or be prepared to adapt
Structure protection units (SPUs) are invaluable but need to be set up properly	Have SPU inspection done by BCWS before the wildfire season
We're limited by human resources and equipment availability in a season like 2023	Rely on local resources. Develop local capacity that are trained and have equipment.
Bush trucks are the only thing that can access certain areas	We need more bush trucks
Ferry access across North Thompson River is limiting – can only take a bush truck loaded with water; tenders have to cross empty.	Already addressed – water tank set up on other side to
BCWS and other crews are exhausted after a wildfire season like 2023 with 6-7 deployments	Realize people burn out. Trade out crews frequently and allow rest. Monitor staff.

<b>Reflection</b>	<b>Lesson Learned to Apply</b>
Interfor's Adams Lake sawmill survived the Bush Creek East wildfire as a result of forest fuel management and SPUs	Get serious about managing fuels around your infrastructure and setting up your SPU equipment
Managing people who stay and defend or require access passes can be resource-intensive and challenging	We need a better system to manage people who "stay and defend" or request access passes into evacuation order zones
Evacuation and egress routes can be confusing	Have clear evacuation and egress plans, have them clearly marked for residents who may need to use them
Good communication is invaluable	Where it worked well (i.e., Knutsford group at Ross Moore Lake wildfire) figure out how to duplicate that
Good communication is invaluable (part 2)	Do more table top exercises as was done in the Clearwater area in early May 2023
Good communication is invaluable (part 3)	Do fuel management around cell phone and radio towers and critical infrastructure
Good communication is invaluable (part 4)	Rely on social media to augment official channels, but also correct misinformation quickly. Positions of authority with trust have more weight than the average person.

### **3. Debrief of 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. It was noted that it was frustrating the low level of turnout, and perhaps to do a presentation in early fall instead in the future. It was also suggested to "go where the people are" rather than expecting them to show up at an event. It was noted that Peachland has a new bylaw preventing future cedar hedges from being planted.

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 February 14, 2023, was approved. Old action items were reviewed; those that remain are at the end of this summary.

### **5. Information Sharing – What's Underway, Who's Doing What**

#### **Blackpool Volunteer Fire Department**

- Mike Savage noted that Blackpool VFD partnered with Upper Clearwater Fire Brigade (UCFB) on various training and exercises, donated some equipment to them, and helped UCFB with a funding application to Wells Gray Community Forest for three 6000 gallon tanks. They also worked with Firefighters without Borders through the TNRD to get UCFB other equipment.
- With grant funding, Blackpool established another 6000 gallon tank in the South Roundtop area
- They enhanced the sprinkler protection program to get another 50 kits sold to residents

- They have reallocated their fire trucks (type 2, type 3), and are building a new bush truck, having sold their old one to Little Fort VFD
- As per the lesson learned in 2023, a 6000 gallon tank has been placed on a gravel pad constructed by Simpcw on the other side of the Little Fort ferry
- Since 2017 they have annexed areas previously without fire protection around Windpass Road and Dunn Lake
- They are working on a mutual aid agreement with Chu Chua VFD which then has to go to Simpcw First Nation for approval
- Triage assessment of neighbourhoods is mostly done, with binders created for assessments by property, and notes on how much equipment is needed per neighbourhood
- Since the last meeting, they've met with BC Parks to address the situation raised previously at North Thompson Provincial Park and Caroline Road. A plan is in place to do a minimal amount of work to reduce the fire hazard and improve access for a bush truck in spring 2024.
- March 30-31, 2024 there will be an Engine Training course in Barriere

### **BC Parks**

- Tod noted that in Wells Gray Provincial Park, prescriptions for fuel management are being developed at Spahats Falls and several campgrounds. These areas don't meet wildfire risk reduction funding thresholds since they are not in a wildland-urban interface (WUI), and are therefore lower priority than residential areas. Prescriptions developed need to be reviewed by a professional biologist with respect to environmental values and the Parks Act.
- Old action – evacuation plans have been updated, they're not public documents, but they can be shared with this roundtable. **ACTION:** Tod to share Wells Gray evacuation plan with Mike and roundtable.
- Tod noted that there were significant fires in Wells Gray this past summer, with Murtle Lake canoe route closed in spring and then the western campground closed in summer.

### **District of Clearwater**

- Mayor Blackwell noted that they are constructing new chassis for two fire trucks, they are working on having backup generators for all well systems by spring 2024 (VFD building already has one)
- Recently the District of Clearwater received renewals of 30 year leases on two pieces of Crown land within the District, they will install water tanks to ensure sufficient water for firefighting
- Politically they are working to advocate for Telus and Mascon to improve cellular and internet services, respectively
- District has a new Chief Administrative Officer starting this week, James Thackray
- Fire Chief Mike Smith was initiating a fuel management project in DOCBC this week it is being done by Mac River Enterprises
- Question – Mike noted that he and George Brcko recently discussed biomass needs of the DOCBC owned biomass unit, Mayor Blackwell noted that it can be modified to take hog fuel not just high-quality chips. **ACTION:** George and Mayor Blackwell to discuss the possibility of modifying the material type for the biomass unit to take hog fuel

### Ministry of Forests – Thompson Rivers District

- Arron noted that he's on a temporary assignment that ends tomorrow, the regular Wildfire Risk Reduction staff are Julie Maxwell and Nicola McGrath
- Arron noted that at Blue River, the burn window was missed which resulted in piles being left longer than desired. There is currently a contractor in there grinding material which will be trucked to and stockpiled in Barriere, with final destination being the Kruger pulp mill in Kamloops to be used as hog fuel (not pulp production).
- Critical factors for grinding operations (rather than burning) are a large staging area and close proximity to Highway 5
- There are some other fuel management projects underway, including Candle Creek (working with Wells Gray Community Forest), Gill Creek and Little Fort

### BC Wildfire Service

- Conlan noted it was a challenging wildfire season but that the Clearwater area got lucky with no East winds on August 18 and no big lightning storms.
- They are recruiting already for next season, aiming to have crews start in late February
- In much of Clearwater, precipitation has not been sufficient to recharge water supplies. An El Nino winter is predicted which means warmer, drier and less snow, likely followed by an early melt
- BCWS has worked with Chu Chua to plan prescribed burns on their IR 2.
- There is new legislation coming to enable more prescribed and cultural burning, which enables BCWS working on IR land with less paperwork
- Simpcw's Initial Attack crew has worked well, looking to expand this and have more
- Most VFDs willingly go beyond their jurisdiction to suppress wildfires, and BCWS pays for this
- Conlan requested that anyone with heavy equipment sign up with BCWS early, contact him or Gwen Freeman at MOF Clearwater office. Just because you've signed up equipment doesn't mean it has to be used, if you're busy elsewhere that's fine

### BC Hydro

- Rhonda noted that the powerline through the entire North Thompson valley is a radical line, there are 7 substations (first one at Barriere), which means that if there is an outage anywhere on the line, it affects the entire North Thompson valley
- The powerlines are both something to protect from wildfire as well as a possible ignition source, therefore it's critical to have logging and fuel management treatments adjacent to the lines follow protocols, an arborist may be needed. Rhonda advised against having "leave strips" adjacent to powerlines, they always fall down.
- For Clearwater substation there are only 1-2 trees that could fall and hit the infrastructure, they are working with adjacent landowners to address this
- Distribution lines – there is a crew in Clearwater
- Transmission lines (lower voltage) – there is only a crew in Kamloops
- Activities adjacent to their powerlines are limited by access, some areas are helicopter only
- **ACTION:** if you're proposing works near hydro lines, connect with Rhonda as well as Julie and Nicola at MOF Thompson Rivers District

### Interfor

- Jim noted that they are in salvage mode in the Bush Creek East wildfire, therefore not operating much in the Clearwater area tree farm licence for the near future

- He noted they have an equipment cache of 5000 ft of hose and 3 pumps in Clearwater

#### Thompson-Nicola Regional District

- Kevin noted that TNRD Chief Administrative Officer Scott Hildebrand is one of 14 members of the Premier’s expert task force, and that training of rural residents is a key topic. Overall the task force has 9 issues to address and provide realistic recommendations to implement in 2024
- He noted that they’ve been advocating for fire brigades not recognized by the Office of the Fire Commissioner to access funding and develop capacity
- Kevin noted that Jeremy Denny recently left his position of Regional Fire Training Officer, this position will be replaced soon
- Daniel Funk was hired in spring 2023 with grant funding as FireSmart Coordinator and has done a lot of travelling around the TNRD doing FireSmart assessments and education
- TNRD is looking to hire two additional FireSmart coordinators for 2024
- TNRD hired Forsite Consultants Ltd. to complete one community wildfire resiliency plan (CWRP) for each Electoral Area. Open houses were held in October. The CWRPs will be complete in December, and that enables TNRD to apply for additional FireSmart funding.
- TNRD’s emergency operations centre (EOC) operated from their new dedicated space (3<sup>rd</sup> Floor of Kamloops office) from late April through September to address flooding and wildfires. Kevin noted that the EOC has some depth with many personnel able to complete various tasks.
- Kevin noted that the new provincial [Emergency and Disaster Management legislation](#) has received third reading. In his opinion, it is good intent and will set things up well for the long term but will be a lot of work in the short term, especially for regional districts.
- Kevin noted that the BC government is looking for [public feedback on the new Emergency Management regulations](#) by December 31, 2023
- Mike Knauff noted that he’s looking at evacuation plans and egress routes, focus on 5 of the 16 plans in the TNRD in the coming year. Clearwater is one of the priority areas, as well as Green Lake, Botanie Valley, Savona, Pritchard/Paul Lake. He’ll be reaching out to electoral area directors soon.

#### Fraser Basin Council

- Mike (contractor to Fraser Basin Council) said that he and Alex de Chantal, Regional Manager of Fraser Basin Council, are working with BCWS on an initiative called Cooperative Community Wildfire Response (CCWR) throughout the entire BC Interior.

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 Cattlemens’ 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.

## BC Timber Sales

- Tyson noted that they planned a broadcast burn in Blue River last year that they couldn't do due to the warm dry fall and lack of capacity at BCWS.
- They are working on Douglas-fir bark beetle and timber recovery at Birch Island
- Likely to be reduced timber harvesting volume in the Clearwater area as the Kamloops Business Area focuses on salvage of 2023 wildfires

## Emergency Management and Climate Readiness (EMCR)

- Andrew noted that their current focus is to help local governments and First Nations debrief the 2023 wildfires, as well as planning for fall storms and anticipated continued drought in 2024
- Trevor Pratt is on temporary assignment until spring 2024

## 6. Next Steps

Mike noted that Thompson Rivers University is launching a wildfire and emergency management institute and that in fall 2021 he met with Dr. Jill Harvey and Dr. Mike Flannigan to raise awareness of possible opportunities with the community wildfire roundtables. He recently saw Dr. Harvey and raised this opportunity again.

**Next meeting** – late February, Mike to seek a date via doodle poll about a month in advance. Suggested to invite Dr. Jill Harvey and/or Dr. Mike Flannigan from TRU to present their research and have them understand what research opportunities might exist through this roundtable.

The following action items were either carried over from previous meetings or created today:

Task or activity	Responsibility	Timeframe
Explore creating <b>development permit area</b> requirements for FireSmart principles and/or fuel management	Tyson Luedtke, James Thackery, Kevin Skrepnek	Long term, needs council approval
<b>Mapping</b> – since the <a href="#">Forsite Mapping Tool</a> is no longer used, what mechanism can there be to share proposed and completed fuel management treatments?	Nicola McGrath, Mike Aldred	Before next meeting
Coordinate about <b>evacuation plans</b> and <b>evacuation centres</b> from Wells Gray Park, Upper Clearwater Valley, share ideas and input, make sure everyone is on the same page	BC Parks staff, Steve Murray, TNRD and others	Ongoing
Get an updated map showing <b>Blackpool VFD</b> coverage	FBC	Before next meeting
Develop a <b>water bar inventory</b> for access and egress, build into emergency response plans, evacuation plans	Forestry Working group, Mike Smith	ongoing
Help <b>Upper Clearwater Fire Brigade</b> get consent to <b>access private property to fight wildfires</b> : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognizing privacy laws, can private property contact info in Upper Clearwater be shared?</li> <li>• Distribute waivers in tax notices?</li> <li>• Canada Post mailout?</li> </ul>	Kevin, Alsid	Ongoing

Task or activity	Responsibility	Timeframe
If possible, and recognizing liability, organize a <b>fire or vehicle extraction scenario practice response</b> to enable real-world experience for Upper Clearwater Brigade	Rod, Mike Smith, Steve Murray, Kevin	When possible
Are you <b>hosting an event</b> about FireSmart? Advise Conlan	VFDs, brigades	Ongoing
Talk to BC Wildfire Service prevention people if you need an <b>exemption to venting indices</b>	Those that have piles to burn	Ongoing