

# **Similkameen Community Wildfire Roundtable**

## **Approved Summary as of Oct 30, 2024**

**Meeting Date:** May 29, 2024, 10:00AM to 1:45PM

**Location:** Hedley Centre, Hedley

**Present (for at least a portion of the meeting; note some people have multiple roles):**

AgSafe BC – Ron Maciborski  
BC Parks – Brita Pedersson  
BC Wildfire Service (BCWS) Kamloops Fire Centre – Vanessa Purves, Colin Leese, Simon Lavelle  
BC Wildfire Service (BCWS) Merritt Fire Zone – Jonas Joe, Ken Padvaiskas  
BC Wildfire Service (BCWS) Penticton Fire Zone – regrets  
Eastgate Fire Protection Society – Roger Bean, Laurie Bean  
Forest Enhancement Society of BC – Chris McGourlick, Tyler Field, Travis Emsland  
Fraser Basin Council – Mike Simpson (contractor)  
Gorman Brothers – Matt Scott  
Hayes Creek Fire Department – Cindy Gamache  
Hedley FireSmart Committee – Ken Hoyle  
Local FireSmart Representatives – Gillian Welton  
Keremeos Fire Department – Jordy Bosscha  
Ministry of Forests, Cascades District – Ryan de Visser  
Ministry of Forests, Okanagan Similkameen District – Brent Lipinski, David Kirkup, Ian Collinson  
Princeton Stockbreeders Association – Linda Allison  
Regional District of Okanagan Similkameen – Hayden Zahwari  
Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association – Rob Grifone  
Town of Princeton – Ed Atkinson, Dave Stringfellow, Christine Nichols, Robert Banks  
Upper Similkameen Indian Band – Sandra Allan-Wagnitiz  
Weyerhaeuser – Norm Druck, Tenna MacLeod  
Willowbrook Fire Department – Tony Iannella

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

Mike Simpson, a facilitator and professional forester on contract to Fraser Basin Council, welcomed everyone and acknowledged the traditional, unceded and ancestral territory of the Upper Similkameen Indian Band or the Sməłq'mix People. Hedley Centre people and Ken Hoyle were thanked for hosting the meeting. A round of introductions took place. The agenda was accepted as presented.

### **2. Approval of previous summary/Status review of action items**

The meeting summary from the inaugural meeting held January 23, 2024 was approved and is now posted [here](#). Action items were reviewed; most are part of today's agenda. Mike noted that meeting summaries, any presentation material and the terms of reference will be posted online [here](#).

### 3. Terms of Reference

The draft terms of reference that were distributed in advance of the meeting were reviewed on screen. A few edits were made and were captured on-screen. The terms of reference were approved and are posted [here](#).

Discussion noted that it's hard to separate emergency response from preparedness; if at future meetings questions about emergency response arise, they can be discussed between individuals during coffee breaks, lunch or after the formal meeting ends.

### 4. Geographic Area

The geographic area of the Similkameen was confirmed as originally presented in January 2024. Willowbrook VFD is present as it's Fire Chief Tony Iannella wears multiple hats and is here representing Regional District of Okanagan Similkameen as well; there is no need to modify the geographic boundary.

A map of the area is included as an appendix to the terms of reference and is also [online](#).

### 5. Contact List

The contact list (shared via email, not posted online) was reviewed and a few additional organizations were added. If anyone has a blank cell for email next to their name, they need to give consent to Mike to share their email address.

### 6. What's Underway, Who's Doing What, What Needs to be Done for Wildfire Preparedness

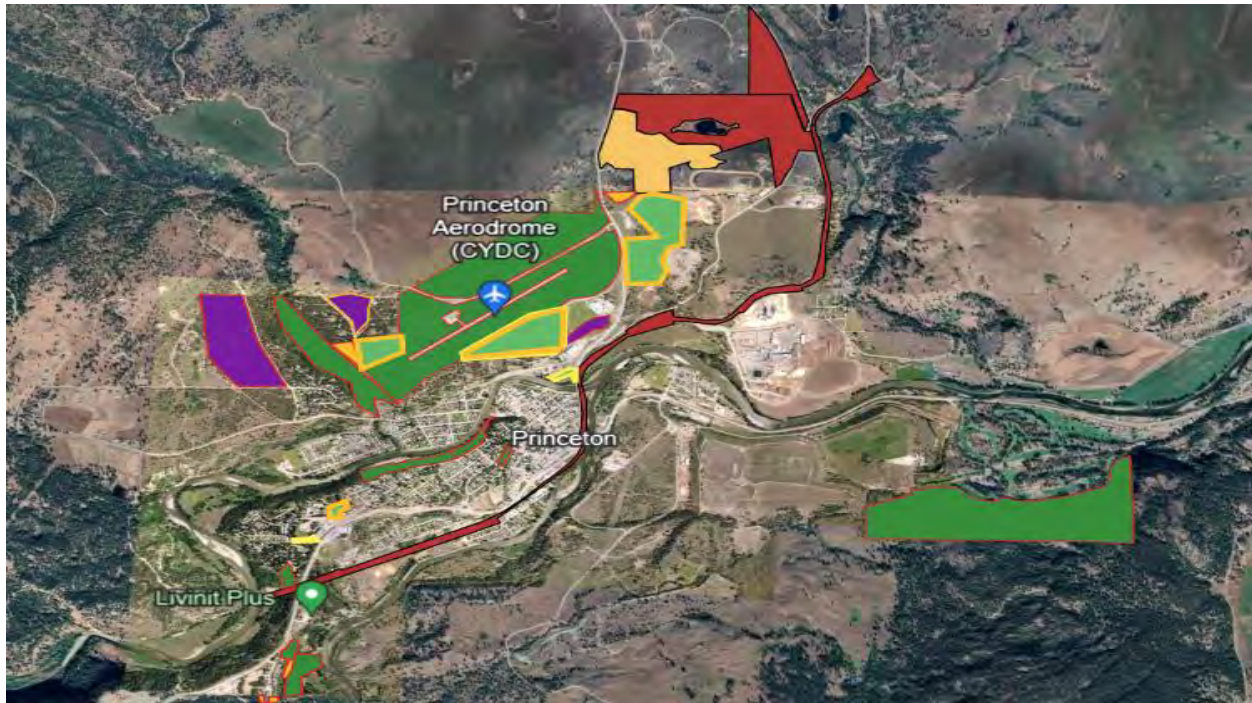
**Forest Enhancement Society of BC (FESBC)** – Chris McGourlick described the purposes of [FESBC](#), a Crown agency and what they fund on Crown land that complements other wildfire risk reduction activities funded by Union of BC Municipalities or Ministry of Forests Wildfire Risk Reduction programs. FESBC can fund a broad variety of applicants, not just local governments, or First Nations. There is an open [funding call](#) right now. See Chris's presentation [here](#). Contact for this area is Tyler Field, Operations Manager [tfield@fesbc.ca](mailto:tfield@fesbc.ca) or 250-287-0337.

**Town of Princeton** – Dave Stringfellow gave an overview of fuel management activities within their community wildfire resiliency plan (CWRP) which covers Town of Princeton plus an area where they provide fire protection.

See map below, colours are as follows:

- Purple – past treatments completed
- Dark green – identified in CWRP, not treated yet
- Yellow – 2023 treatments
- Red – 2024/25 planned treatments
- Light green/yellow outline – small treatment areas in town

Dave noted that a challenge exists in encouraging private landowners to treat fuels on their property that is not near their residence, but would benefit other jurisdictions (e.g., elementary school, other neighbourhoods).



**Hedley FireSmart Committee** – Ken Hoyle raised several ideas and opportunities:

*Auxiliary Fire Prevention Team*

Ken suggested there's interest from some community members in helping fire departments during an emergency/wildfire, but not necessarily an interest in becoming a structural firefighter, doing pushups or going to weekly training sessions.

Discussion ensued with several options and ideas generated:

- There was reluctance from local emergency response officials to create another structure.
- It was noted that as per the Office of the Fire Commissioner, people can join a **volunteer fire department** for roles other than firefighter – they just need to have training for roles they sign up for (e.g., traffic control).
- In **rural areas without a structural fire department**, BC Wildfire Service has initiated a project called **Cooperative Response** (formerly called Cooperative Community Wildfire Response), which enables organized community groups to get training and equipment to work under the direction of BC Wildfire Service and assist them with various tasks during wildfire suppression. For more information, see frequently asked questions [here](#).
  - Roger noted that Eastgate Fire Protection Society is an organization aiming to fulfill this role, as they are not a fire department.
  - Mike noted during his work on the Cooperative Response initiative last year, he mapped out areas of private land with and without structural fire protection. See file named *Similkameen fire protection vs none maps.pdf* circulated with this summary.
- The other option for people to assist, not during an emergency but more in prevention, is to serve as a **Fire Warden**. BCWS does still hire and utilize fire wardens, their role is to share information and talk to people about fire hazards and campfire bans if and when they are in place, monitor fire indices, local weather patterns and report back to BCWS. Justin noted that

most fire zones in Kamloops Fire Centre utilize fire wardens, they liaise with BCWS Zone officers as well as Ministry of Forests (MOF) natural resource officers.

#### *Fire Prevention Bylaw*

Ken asked whether there is a fire prevention bylaw that prevents people from creating fire hazards around their home, such as piling lumber next to a home. Mike sought clarification if this was the same as a bylaw to require people to FireSmart their homes; Ken said “kind of” but not entirely.

Answers provided and discussion included the following:

- Town of Princeton has a fire protection bylaw, discretion is up to the Fire Chief to determine what constitutes a fire hazard that can be addressed by the bylaw, it could be material stockpiled or a structure in a state of disrepair.
- Dave Stringfellow noted that the Local Assistant to the Fire Commissioner (LAFC) is enabled to determine fire hazards.
- Others noted that there is a lot of bureaucracy involved in writing up infractions of bylaws, and that’s not why they became firefighters

#### *Rooftop Sprinklers*

Ken asked whether the use of rooftop sprinklers is recommended or not.

Answers provided and discussion included the following:

- That depends on a lot of factors, including water capacity for structural fire departments to access. Worst case scenario is that everyone with a rooftop sprinkler turns it on during a wildfire and it draws down water supplies to an extent that it impacts firefighters’ access to water.
- Mike noted that in the documentary [The Test](#) about Logan Lake’s decades of FireSmart work leading up to the 2021 Tremont Creek wildfire, rooftop sprinklers were installed on homes but not hooked up – they were only hooked up by fire departments once an emergency was underway.

**Eastgate Fire Protection Society** – Laurie Bean noted that they are a mostly recreational community with 30 full time and 250 part time residents. They are not a fire department but offer training and communications with residents to support BCWS in the event of wildfire or other emergencies. They recently did a hose lay course with 20 people in attendance.

**Ministry of Forests, Cascades District** – Ryan de Visser noted that they have wildfire risk reduction projects underway at Eastgate, Monck Park (Nicola Lake), and the Princeton area.

**Insurance** – the topic of home insurance and related initiatives came up:

- BCAA – they are working with an outreach coordinator and offering \$100 off their home insurance for completing a [home partners program](#) assessment
- Home Partners Program – this program exists in RDOS and Princeton, and there is a plaque available for homes that complete the work
- Rapid mitigation crews – these are enabled during an emergency for first responders to FireSmart properties in the line of an imminent wildfire
- Wildfire Defense Systems (WDS) – a new [service](#) offered through Intact Insurance to protect their insured assets. Concerns were noted about how this is a private service not integrated into the BCWS incident command system.

## 7. Next Steps

### Resources available, funding calls

- Vanessa noted that any local government or First Nation can apply for [Union of BC Municipalities Community Resiliency Investment](#) (UBCM CRI) program funds at any time, but in October the 2025 intake will begin. There are changes coming for 2025 that aren't published yet, but if you have questions reach out to Vanessa
- Vanessa noted that First Nations can apply to both UBCM CRI as well as funds through [First Nations Emergency Services Society](#)
- Ron noted that [AgSafe BC](#) has lots of resources and tools online, and he showcased a simple ½ inch by 12 inch tube where farms can put key information for first responders (i.e., water sources, key property information)

### Upcoming events

- Jonas noted that there will be FireSmart information at upcoming Indigenous Day event on June 21 in Merritt
- Hayden noted that RDOS is hosting a FireSmart session in Olalla in conjunction with Keremeos FD on June 1
- Gillian suggested that libraries are always looking for people to put on programs
- Norm noted that a researcher from Natural Resources Canada, Christine Kuntzemann, is doing a presentation on fire refugia on May 30 at 1PM, his email was provided if you want to either join at the Weyerhaeuser boardroom or virtually via Teams. Norm's intent is to explore whether there would be value in Christine presenting to the larger roundtable in the fall.

### Opportunities for Collaboration

- Both districts of Ministry of Forests (Cascades, Okanagan Shuswap) have at least one year of proposed fuel management/WRR treatments identified. If anyone wants the detailed maps of where these are located, email Ryan de Visser (Cascades) or Brent Lipinski (Okanagan Shuswap)
- Consolidated map – it was suggested there would be value to have a consolidated map of past, current and proposed fuel management treatments to enable cooperation and collaboration, prevent duplication and address any gaps between the different jurisdictions and plans that exist. Brita Pedersson offered to create a map in iMapBC webmap, with Dave Stringfellow and Norm Druck offering to create a map in their geographic information system platforms.

**Next meeting** – fall, exact date TBD based on a doodle poll Mike will initiate about a month in advance. It was agreed to encourage in-person participation but have a virtual option for participants. Rock Ridge Canyon Retreat will be explored for a fall meeting.

### Suggested ways for participants to prepare for next meeting:

- Think of lessons learned from the 2024 wildfire season, what can be done locally to be better prepared for 2025
- Share updates on what is happening around different communities
- Share updated on evacuation plans, encourage preparations for evacuation

Draft agenda topics:

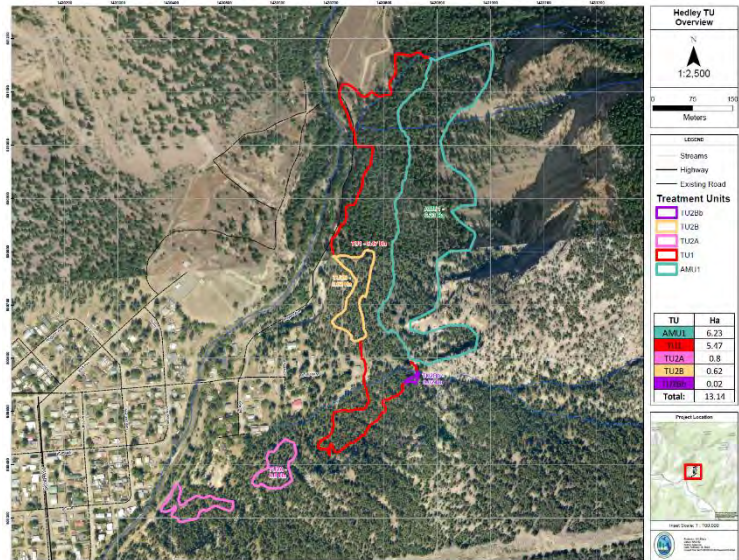
- Debrief of wildfire season; lessons learned and how to prepare for next year
- Updates, information sharing of what’s underway, new opportunities for collaboration
- Focus on two key areas: structures/homes, and forests/landscape
- Possible research presentation – Norm Druck to help arrange

Action Items:

Task or activity	Responsibility	Timeframe
<b>Mapping</b> – develop a consolidated map of past, present and proposed fuel management/WRR treatments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use iMapBC; or</li> <li>• Merge shape files and create a map</li> <li>• Share with Mike Simpson to post online or email</li> </ul>	Brita Petterson, Dave Stringfellow, Norm Druck	Before next meeting
<b>Mapping from WUI WRR (formerly called tactical) plans</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reach out to Brent Lipinski or Ryan de Visser for maps, locations, details of what MOF is coordinating</li> </ul>	Everyone	
<b>Contact list</b> – advise Mike Simpson <a href="mailto:mf_simpson@outlook.com">mf_simpson@outlook.com</a> of any updates to the contact list. If your email is blank, let Mike know if you consent to share your email with this roundtable.	Everyone	Ongoing, but before next meeting

## 8. Field Trip

After the meeting, most participants walked immediately east of Hedley to see wildfire risk reduction treatments done on the edge of the community (yellow polygon on map below). Brent Lipinski of Ministry of Forests, Okanagan Shuswap District, described the treatment completed, one area several years ago and the yellow polygon treated this past winter (mostly hand treatment, \$8500/ha implementation cost, no merchantable volume removed, material piled and burned on site).



Discussion noted the challenges with venting indices and burning material, and future opportunities to chip/grind/masticate and re-distribute on site. Brent noted that best management practices for this have been developed and will be shared soon.

