

Similkameen Community Wildfire Roundtable

Approved Summary as of April 22, 2025

Meeting Date: October 30, 2024, 10:00AM to 3:00PM

Location: Rockridge Canyon, Princeton, BC

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

AgSafe BC – Ron Maciborski

BC Hydro – Stefan Albrecher

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 – Ben Sandy

Eastgate Fire Protection Society – Roger Bean, Laurie Bean, Deborah Heller, Kelly Cook

Forest Enhancement Society of BC – Tyler Field

Fraser Basin Council – Alex de Chantal, Mike Simpson (contractor)

Hayes Creek Fire Department – Cindy Gamache

Hedley FireSmart Committee – Ken Hoyle, Gillian Welton

Lower Similkameen Indian Band – Justin Smith, Wayne “Hondo” Terbasket

Keremeos Fire Department – Jordy Bosscha

Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness – Trish Ryu, Jaylene de Vries, Raelyne Rumak

Ministry of Forests, Cascades District – Ryan de Visser, Craig Sine

Ministry of Forests, Okanagan Similkameen District – David Kirkup

Regional District of Okanagan Similkameen – Deborah Jones-Middleton, Director Bob Coyne

Town of Princeton – Ed Atkinson, Dave Stringfellow, Christine Nichols, Robert Banks, Mayor Spencer Coyne, Lyle Thomas

Upper Similkameen Indian Band – Sally Holmes, Saisha Wagnitiz, Mark Marton

Weyerhaeuser – Norm Druck, Tenna MacLeod

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 Sm̓əlq'míx People and the Lower Similkameen Indian Band. 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 May 29, 2024 was approved and is now posted [here](#). Action items were reviewed; most are part of today's agenda. Brita Pederssen advised Mike that she couldn't find much relevant information in iMapBC. Mike noted that meeting summaries, any presentation material and the terms of reference will be posted online [here](#).

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

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.

He spoke to the FireSmart program and the approach of risk reduction and loss prevention. In addition to protecting homes and people, we are also looking to prevent the loss of timber in our area.

Dave's team has been attending events in the region and providing education and outreach materials to the public. In 2023 the FireSmart program expanded to Area H in addition to the Princeton area. Great working relationship with the regional district.

235 home assessments this year, total of approximately 500 since the beginning of the program. Assessments are the biggest bang for the buck in the public education program. It's very personal and practical when our staff gets to meet on site with the homeowners.

Dave shared that his team of Wildfire Mitigation Specialists who come from the fire service are a big part of why the program is so well received. Very lucky that FireSmart BC is so well resourced in our province. Most effective use of funds is through the home assessments.

34 public events this season, sometimes their own event they're hosting or other community events that they're invited to attend. There to answer questions, hand out material, sign up people for home assessments. Ember the FireSmart mascot also spoke to kids at the library about the program. The advantage of having a big team is that they can attend so many events.

Chipping program was very successful this season, incredible amounts of fuel being removed from properties. This isn't just yard cleanup, this is tonnes and tonnes of fuel around people's homes. \$35,000 in rebates have been given out so far. Used to support communities without a FireSmart program yet. There are changes to the rebates program, public is now encouraged to look at the non-combustible zone immediately adjacent to their homes and then move out.

Mitigation work has been ongoing, hired crew to implement the program. They also have a seniors program where staff will come back from home assessment and make recommendations to help homeowners that need assistance. Folks can either do the rebate route, or they'll send out a crew for a few hours.

Fuel treatments on greenspace, defined as any public space that isn't crown land within municipal boundaries. They have been offering green waste pickup from the curb. Has been getting a lot of interest and uptake this year.

- Who are the crew doing the cleanup? Piece work contract hourly labourers. When work comes up we approach them, if they're available, we connect the two. They are looking for new crew members for next year for limbing piling, and burning.
- Where does the money come from? Provincial grants through UBCM.
- Want to thank Dave and his program, been a huge help in Eastgate
- Ed shared that the fire chiefs over past 5 years have been sharing resources with regional district, thanked the district for their support. Truck and trailer donated by regional district.

- Comment to Dave saying thank you for the messaging about values out. Tells homeowners to focus on non-combustible zone.
- Reminder that the greenspace program includes cemeteries, boulevards, etc. The program is quite flexible and municipalities and regional districts are eligible. New in 2024, lots of information of FireSmart BC website about what you can do in a greenspace without a prescription.
- Are insurance companies looking at FireSmart home assessments and reducing costs? There is work being done by insurance industry to focus on loss reduction and they're looking at where to spend that money. FireSmart BC would be the right approach and program is already up and running. In Colorado you can't get home insurance until you get a home assessment.
- BCAA and FireSmart BC program is now up and running. BCAA has allocated funding to a full time staff to work with FireSmart BC and look at how insurance and risk reduction world will integrate together. If homeowners get a home assessment you get \$100 discount, if you eliminate the risks and fuels on
- How about building permits, any restrictions? Within town of Princeton there are development permit areas are wildfire risk associated. They dictate what you can and can't build in terms of wildfire risk.
- Have you ever encountered a home owner who is hesitant for getting a home assessment because if a fire came through and they didn't complete the tasks on the assessment they may be punished. Home assessments are held by the homeowner only, and CIFFC does not give out that information and they are not held to freedom of information requests.

Forest Enhancement Society of BC (FESBC) – Tyler Field 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. Contact Tyler Field, Operations Manager tfield@fesbc.ca or 250-287-0337.

Woodlots BC – Tyler Hodgkinson works for Woodlots BC; woodlot licences are a type of tenure granted by Ministry of Forests for a defined area of Crown land for an individual or organization to manage the forests including harvesting timber. They have a new focus on wildfire risk reduction throughout the province. Have funding from BC Wildfire Service to do prescriptions for wildfire risk reduction (WRR) on woodlots. Has done 100 hectares of area so far. Where there are CWPP in place and where they overlap with woodlots they'll help them get ground treatments done.

- If anyone present today knows a woodlot licensee in Similkameen please connect them with Tyler southregion@woodlot.bc.ca

Coalmont FESBC project – Tenna MacLeod showed [pictures](#) and described the progress of implementing a multi-partner WRR project north of Coalmont in the Vermillion Forks Community Forest covering about 45 ha.

Hedley-USIB FireSmart Board – Jillian noted they are planning an event in Hedley in April 19th or 26th TBC working towards chipping event in May, looking for participants that can help guide Hedley in their FireSmart journey. Looking for ideas of activities that have worked in other communities.

BCWS Structure Protection Program – Simon Lavelle noted Eastgate fire was responded to this year with structure protection. Met with Hedley Fire Chief a few weeks ago to discuss community assessments

where structure protection specialist will attend. Gathering situational awareness, recourse planning, critical infrastructure lists. Helps BCWS with on the ground information in case of fire in the area. BCWS increasing capacity with structure protection trailers, more type 1 and type 2 for next year. There were 15 type 2 trailers, and 12 type 1 trailers ready for next season. Wildfire defence systems were deployed to three incidents this year, Slokan, Argenta, and Lillooet. This was a trial run, working on processes for entering evacuation areas. Their customer was Intact Insurance, these are first steps with WDS. BCWS revising training courses offered by structure protection program and new revised courses coming out in the Spring 2025.

- Where are type 2 trailers used? BCWS doesn't have crews yet but they are increasing capacities but they do hire contractors or fire departments. Type 2 is 20ft trailer 6 pumps can protect 20-30 structures. Type 1 is large 50ft semi trailer and 24 pumps can protect 100 structures. Gear is pupms, hoses, bladders, supplies.
- What is required to be a contractor for SPU crews? Two courses are provided by BCWS, S100/S185 and Structure Protection S115 courses.
- How does a regional district find out where BCWS has done this structure protection preplans? Is there a place to go to find out? Simon is the man to email to get that list, can reach out to him or Structure Protection Office spco@gov.bc.ca

BCWS Penticton Zone – Ben Sandy noted that they used night vision on helicopters this season. They were dropping water at night this year, big game changer. Plan is to maintain what they have or expand it. Based out of Penticton where top flight school is located with night vision capabilities. Been using interagency agreement with fire departments to help bolster initial attack response. Able to put local fire departments on standby and send to initial attack of fires and give their crews rest. Tried some fixed cameras to detect smoke in the Okanagan area. This reduced detection time and looking to expand that program. Used in three locations in Okanagan and up in Prince George. They are fixed to cell towers and partnered with Telus.

Working with local first nation communities on wildfire risk reduction. Shifting away from classic response and using new technologies. Night vision use overnight after lightning strikes has been very effective. This is a really big change and improves suppression techniques.

BCWS Merritt Zone – Ken Padvaikas spoke to Eastgate fire this season that didn't go as well as planned. Seeking feedback from Eastgate community and local first nations about how they did with communications and fire suppression. Looking to continue to improve and engage further with the public. Have 100 people on staff, but lose 30-40 people every year, attrition is a big challenge and they spend a lot of time on training. Looking to engage with folks over lunch. Prescribed fire is a new focus, started working with first nations in the spring, quite successful. Have to be pretty fluid with resourcing those projects in the spring balancing competing priorities.

- At Eastgate fire this year, SPU showed up first then evacuated community. This was new, is this a change? Weren't able to control fire in first 48 hours, so got SPU in there right away to setup protection of the community.
- How did you engage with Upper Similkameen First Nation? When fires started we contacted the band and engagement amped up. BCWS asked what was in the area that was of concern, then an Australian crew came in as incident command manager. Heard where values were from bands. Great engagement from band's perspective

BCWS Kamloops Fire Centre – Vanessa Purves noted Updated on Community Resilience funding from UBCM, already spoke about greenspace program. 2025 intake opened October 1st. Municipalities, first

nations, and regional districts can apply anytime. There is a new stream of funding for FireSmart Pilot Project Community Response, RDs can apply for training PPE to outfit local fire fighting crews. Brand new program and rolled out in the last month.

Ministry of Forests, Cascades District (west side, Merritt office) – Ryan de Visser noted he and Craig Sine have a couple projects ongoing in this area. They have a project near Eastgate for fuel treatment and prescribed burning. Consultation will start next year, with operations likely in 2026. Princeton was toured this summer, looking at prescribed burning in the area. Working on a large project in mapping to look at treatment areas from the past to plan where to focus in the future.

Ministry of Forests, Okanagan-Shuswap District (east side, Vernon office) – David Kirkup noted Update provided on Apex and Keremeos area, no projects going on currently. If there are WRR projects going on in Okanagan district please let him know. Shared information about a research project looking at chippers and the depth of chips distributed and any effects on wildfire spread

Lower Similkameen Indian Band – Justin noted that they are working to have their own initial attack crews and standing up a fire department.

Upper Similkameen Indian Band – Mark Marton noted that it's really important that different agencies engage with us directly and immediately. Need to be involved right away, many values on the land around cultural sensitivities on the land that others may not be aware of. Want to be kept in the know. Working hard to reach our partners about the work that is being done when there is an active fire. We really value being included with firefighting partners. They are working on a FireSmart application; Dave Stringfellow offered his assistance with grant applications.

Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness – Trish noted that since they're still in the interregnum period, swearing in should be next week, they are in a holding pattern.

AgSafe BC – 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). They also help ranchers and farmers in doing a risk assessment for their properties. He noted that on Nov 1 WCB regulations are changing when it comes to first aid regulations. Their focus is on agriculture workers and their safety.

BC Hydro – Stefan noted that they have just one main power line parallel along highway 5A. Power lines are often used as fuel breaks, let him know if there are any adjacent fuel treatments or concerns.

Recent video – Norm Druck shared the link and participants watched a video about salvage logging post-wildfire, noting that projects on the landscape require a lot of collaboration with diverse groups working together. See the video here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PKEs5g8JzS0>

BC Parks – Brita Pedersson shared the following with Mike in advance of the meeting:

- The only active BC Parks project in the area for this fall/winter is completing the remaining pile burning at Manning Provincial Park's staff accommodation project that was implemented last winter. We are moving towards planning for next year's WRR annual operating plan, so we will be connecting with any relevant folks on potential projects in the area.

4. Climate, Topography or Fuels? Top-down vs. bottom-up controls on fire refugia in Western forests

Christine Kuntzemann, originally from the Princeton area and now working for Natural Resources Canada in Edmonton, gave a presentation about how weather and climate (top-down), topography, and fuels (bottom-up) affect the likelihood of wildfire refugia (areas that don't burn) in Western forests, with a focus on the Okanagan. She noted that the strongest control over predicted fire refugia is proportion of conifer, but that this can be overwhelmed by extreme climate such as the June 2021 heat dome. Christine's presentation slides are available [here](#).

See the link to the interactive predicted fire refugia probability tool in Google Earth Engine [here](#).

5. Next Steps

Resources available, funding calls

- [Union of BC Municipalities Community Resiliency Investment](#) (UBCM CRI) program
- There is funding available for new [FireSmart Canada](#) communities, opens up on Friday Nov. 1st.

Upcoming events

- Hedley FireSmart Day April 19 or 26

Next meeting – Late April or early May 2025, 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 as a venue, unless a field trip brings us farther away.

Topics and/or field trip opportunities:

- Look at a spring prescribed burn
- Look at where wildfire tested a fuel treatment (field trip or presentation by BCWS)
- Apex ski resort – pruning only fuel treatment (high elevation, fall field tour)

Action Items:

Task or activity	Responsibility	Timeframe
Mapping – develop a consolidated map of past, present and proposed fuel management/WRR treatments <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Merge shape files and create a map• Share with Mike Simpson to post online or email	Dave Stringfellow, Norm Druck	Ongoing
Mapping from WUI WRR (formerly called tactical) plans <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reach out to Brent Lipinski or Ryan de Visser for maps, locations, details of what MOF is coordinating	Everyone	
Contact list – advise Mike Simpson mf_simpson@outlook.com 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
Reflect on Christine's presentation, play around with the interactive predicted fire refugia probability tool in Google Earth Engine here and think about what we can do in our WUI WRR plans, CWRPs and/or the larger landscape	Everyone	Before next meeting