



RESORT MUNICIPALITY OF WHISTLER

4325 Blackcomb Way TEL 604 932 5535
Whistler, BC Canada V8E 0X5 TF 1 866 932 5535
whistler.ca FAX 604 935 8109

STAFF REPORT TO COUNCIL

PRESENTED: January 24, 2023 **REPORT:** 23-006
FROM: Climate and Environment **FILE:** 8337
SUBJECT: COMMUNITY WILDFIRE RESILIENCY PLAN PROGRESS REPORT

RECOMMENDATION FROM THE CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

That the recommendation of the General Manager of Resort Experience be endorsed.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

That Council receive Information Report No. 23-006 regarding progress towards delivering on the Community Wildfire Resiliency Plan.

PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to update Council on progress towards delivering on the Community Wildfire Resiliency Plan, lessons learned in 2022, and to give an overview of planned activities in 2023.

Information Report Administrative Report (Decision or Direction)

DISCUSSION

Background

Wildfires are the largest climate change related risk and vulnerability for the Resort Municipality of Whistler (RMOW). Increasing the resiliency to this risk and ever-increasing threat has been an organizational priority since the development of Whistler's first Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) in 2005. The original CWPP was updated in 2011 followed by the development of a Wildfire Protection Strategy in 2017 which focused on resources and strategies to implement outstanding CWPP recommendations. Since the development of these plans, the RMOW has implemented a number of the recommendations including the creation of the Whistler FireSmart program (WFP), planning and completing wildfire fuel reduction projects throughout the Whistler Valley, and integrating a Wildfire Protection Development Permit Area in the Official Community Plan (OCP).

On April 5, 2022, Council adopted the [Community Wildfire Resiliency Plan](#) (CWRP), which is the next iteration of a master wildfire-planning document to guide wildfire related activities over the next five plus years. This CWRP assessed the RMOW's current wildfire risk and resiliency, and provides an action plan to proactively protect the community, infrastructure, and natural landscape within the RMOW from a potential wildfire event. The main goals of the CWRP are to increase the efficacy of fire suppression and emergency response, enhance FireSmart public education, - reduce potential impacts and losses to property and critical infrastructure from wildfire, and reduce wildfire behavior threat within the

community. It does so by focusing on Whistler's wildland urban interface (WUI) areas which is a one-kilometer buffer surrounding Whistler's Urban Development Containment Area (WUDCA). The CWRP provides 32 recommendations related to the seven FireSmart disciplines in this geographical focus area: education; community planning; increasing interagency cooperation; increasing cross training; enhancing emergency preparedness; and continuing strategic vegetation management.

This report provides updates on early learning and new approaches in the first year of the CWRP, as well as implementation progress updates on the 32 recommendations in the seven FireSmart disciplines as outlined in the CWRP.

2022 CWRP implementation – improved methodology and strategic approach

- **RMOW Wildfire Working Group:** Following the CWRP recommendation, the RMOW Wildfire Working Group was reinstated in 2022 with staff representatives from Whistler Fire Rescue Services (WFRS), WFP, Planning, Protective Services, Infrastructure Services, and Climate & Environment. The staff working group meets regularly to plan and coordinate the delivery of wildfire related actions as well as to update on progress towards implementing all recommendations in the CWRP. The municipal Wildfire Working Group is continuously reviewing the CWRP to prioritize recommendations, shared insights, align activities and review responsibilities and resource needs over the next five plus years.
- **Wildfire consultant:** Frontera Forest Solutions was hired in Q2, 2022 to assist in strategically and effectively advising the RMOW on delivering the vegetation management recommendations of the CWRP in a cost-effective manner. Frontera staff develop fuel thinning prescriptions that take all forest values and uses into consideration. In collaboration with the Climate and Environment department, a comprehensive strategic plan was developed outlining planned activities for the year 2022 while also undertaking advance planning for years 2023 and 2024. In addition, Frontera lends their expertise to facilitate strategic meetings and to advise on other recommendations related education, planning, and emergency management.
- **Monitoring:** Frontera developed a Fire and Fuels Monitoring Program with the purpose of assessing and understanding the effects of RMOW's wildfire fuel reduction treatments on long-term forest health and potential impacts on wildlife habitat. The monitoring plan will be implemented in 2023 with the main goal to determine the overall effects (positive and negative) of fuel reduction treatments in the RMOW, and to better understand how particular approaches can be improved in order to protect forest health, ensure long-term resilience, and improve wildlife habitat.
- **FireSmart:** WFP has been very successful in building interest, momentum and engagement with private homeowners. The result has been successful on the individual properties but collectively does not yet create complete continuous areas of FireSmart properties. WFP will continue to strategically direct hazard mitigation in high priority areas and build a more robust layer of neighbourhood protection that spans the intersection between forest and private properties in alignment with the ongoing priorities of broader fuel thinning activities across the community.
- **Improved coordination with other agencies, emergency and evacuation planning:** Since the 2011 CWPP, the RMOW has improved its interagency cooperation and training, plus its emergency and evacuation planning. Much of the CWRP focuses on prevention but it is imperative to have excellent coordination with other agencies and a solid emergency plan in the

event of a wildfire. Specific deliverables designed to improve the community's wildfire protection posture have been identified and integrated into 2023 work plans.

Progress towards CWRP implementation in 2022

The following section provides an overview of the RMOW's main advancements towards implementing the 32 recommendations as outlined in the 2022 CWRP. Aligned with the seven FireSmart Canada disciplines¹, the highlights listed below align with the six key strategies of the 2022 CWRP. A comprehensive list of all actions, their current status and progress can be found in Appendix A.

1. **Education:** Educate residents and visitors to the RMOW about FireSmart principles and wildfire prevention, resulting in behavior change and action on properties.
 - A strategic communications plan is under development that aligns messaging and fire related communications from WFRS, Climate & Environment, Emergency Planning, and WFP.
 - The Climate & Environment new focus area in 2022 related to the wildfire mitigation work was to address concerns and increase education around fuel thinning projects.
 - WFP assessed 43 identified municipal critical infrastructure areas and work plans have been developed to mitigate landscape hazards at each.
 - WFP started developing a potential homeowner rebate program to be issued in 2023.

2. **Legislation and Community Planning:** Adapt legislation and community plans as they relate to wildfire preparedness in the RMOW
 - Grant funding of \$10,132,250 was received from the Federal Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Fund. A council resolution will be required for the contribution agreement to be finalized and the grants to be received. Council Report No. 23-013 is included in the January 24 Regular Council package providing more detail. Pending council approval of the contribution agreement, this long-term secured funding will enable the RMOW to significantly reduce the wildfire risk in twelve areas within the WUI that were identified as CWRP high-risk areas. The work will be conducted over the next ten years. Table 1 lists the planned treatment areas within the RMOW and the Cheakamus Community Forest (CCF), respectively, in addition to the year that work is scheduled to begin. Note that treatment timelines may be adjusted based on weather and fire ratings. Figure 1 shows a map of these planned treatment areas.
 - Planning is underway to link wildfire considerations to the RMOW GIS platform including the Whistler WUI, historic wildfire fuel thinning areas and FireSmart assessed neighborhoods. The goal is to track and share properties and municipal infrastructure that have implemented proactive wildfire protection initiatives.
 - Early action is underway to adopt a policy to notify property owners and to take actions to mitigate fire hazard on private land, especially on large undeveloped parcels with a high wildfire risk.
 - WFRS and Protective Services updated the *Fire & Life Safety Bylaw 2201, 2019* with improvements to Wildfire requirements related to industrial activity in line with the Wildfire Act. Council adopted the amendment bylaw on December 20, 2022.

¹ Education, Legislation and Planning, Development Considerations, Interagency Cooperation, Cross-Training, Emergency Planning and Vegetation Management

- The Wildfire Working Group is analyzing information related to high-risk residential areas and exploring new ways to provide targeted risk reduction, education and outreach.

Table 1: High Priority fuel thinning sites that will be funded through the Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Fund

TREATMENT AREA	Hectares	Year planned
RMOW sites		
Rainbow 2	19	Completed in 2022
Kadenwood Gondola	4	2022 - 2023
Riverside	7.2	2023 - 2024
Brio	22	2024 - 2025
Highway 99 Egress	49	2024 - 2026
Alta Lake Road north	35	2025 - 2026
Emerald West	24	2025 - 2028
Blueberry Hill	24	2029 - 2030
Cheakamus Community Forest sites		
Rainbow 1	61	2023 -2025
Stone/CCF6	12	2025 - 2026
16 Mile Creek fuel break	42	2024 - 2027
Sproatt	56	2027 - 2029

Map of RMOW, DMAF funding locations

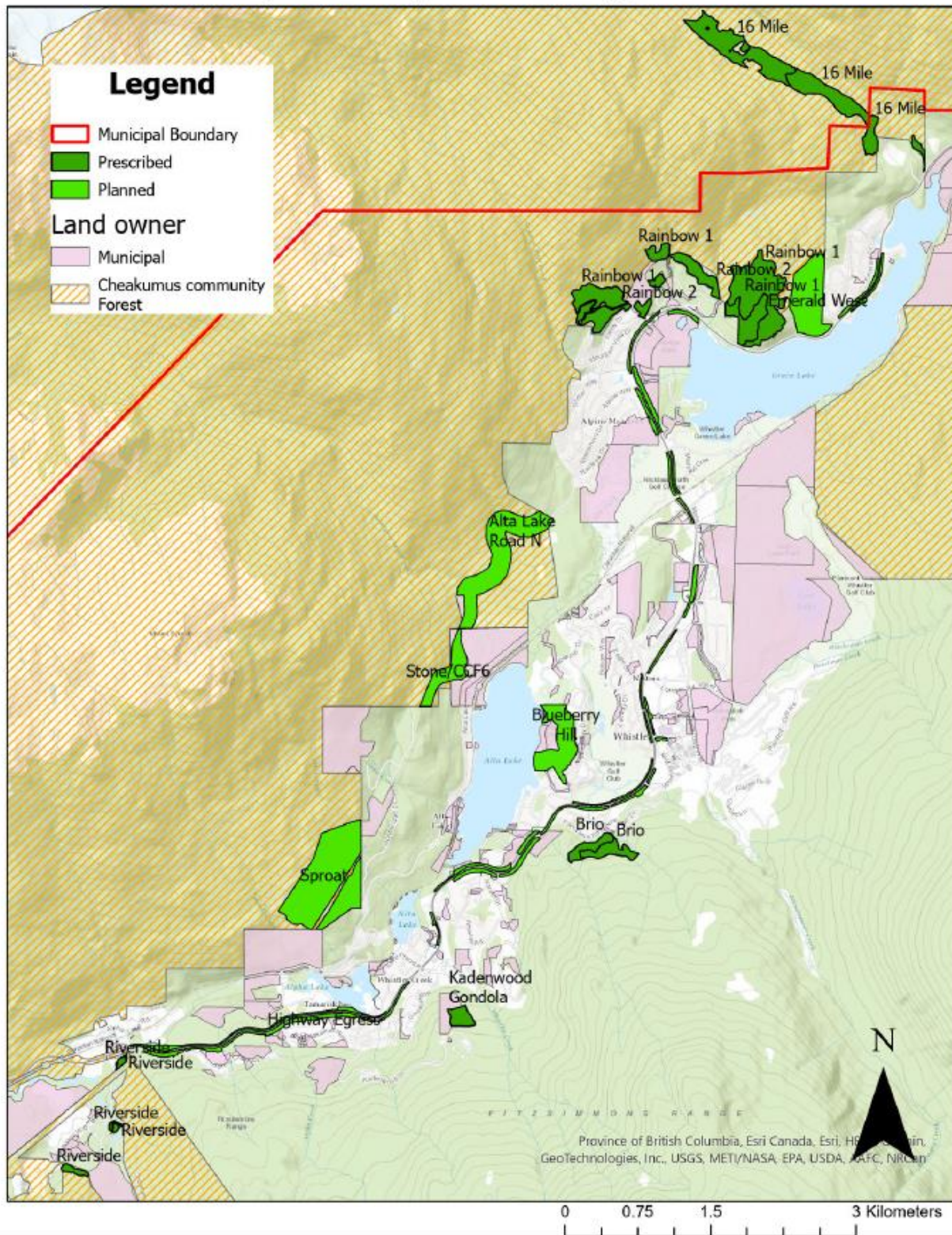


Figure 1: Map of planned fuel thinning treatment areas as per DMAF funding application

3. **Interagency Cooperation:** Increase interagency cooperation within the RMOW and between external stakeholders, and integrate planning for all wildfire resiliency measures throughout the municipality.
 - The RMOW Wildfire Working Group was reinstated after adoption of the CWRP and has met regularly since May 2022.
 - Staff have continued collaboration with the CCF to manage fuel on the landscape and integrate harvest planning with other fuel management tracking. The secured DMAF funding will enable high-risk area treatment within the CCF such as for example the 16 Mile Forest Service Road (FSR). Fuel thinning treatment of these areas will not be possible without the DMAF funding source.
 - Frontera hosted a Sea to Sky Interagency Fire and Fuels (SIFT) meeting in Q2 2022 with participants from the CCF, Mountain Resort Branch (MRB), SLRD, local BC Wildfire representatives, Lílwat Nation, and Squamish Nation.
 - Continued participation by RMOW representatives in the SLRD Community FireSmart Resiliency Committee (CFRC) to improve interagency efforts and Sea-to-Sky wide coordination on wildfire related work.

4. **Training:** Increase cross-training between members of WFRS, BC Wildfire Service (BCWS), WFP, RMOW Staff, Whistler/Blackcomb staff and external emergency management personnel.
 - WFRS applied for the Union of British Columbia Municipalities' (UBCM) Community Emergency Preparedness (CEPF) grant funding to provide the WSP-115 Structure Protection Wildfire training for members to increase the number of members certified in the use and deployment of the Structure Protection Unit during wildfire events.
 - Wildfire Mitigation Specialist (WMS) training was delivered to WFP staff in 2022 and another session is scheduled for 2023.
 - Whistler residents were engaged via Whistler specific FireSmart videos produced by FireSmartBC and Shaw in 2021:
 - i. FireSmart Canada Neighbourhood Recognition Program (FCNRP) vs Home Partners Program (HPP) | FireSmart BC (<https://firesmartbc.ca/resource/fcnrp-vs-hpp/>);
 - ii. Wildfire Mitigation Specialist (WMS) vs Local FireSmart Representative (LFR) | FireSmart BC (<https://firesmartbc.ca/resource/wildfire-mitigation-specialist-wms-vs-local-firesmart-representative-lfr/>);
 - iii. FireSmart Building & Development: Whistler | FireSmart BC (<https://firesmartbc.ca/resource/firesmart-building-development-whistler/>);
 - iv. FireSmart Whistler – Wildfire Mitigation Program for Home Owners – YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qaFrmxXsih8>).

5. **Emergency Planning:** Enhance emergency preparedness within the municipality; focusing on major access/egress corridors and neighbourhood level protection.
 - Budget was approved for the development of a Whistler Wildfire Defense Plan in 2023. The development of this plan is an important initiative led by WFRS towards implementing new approaches and increased emergency planning related coordination. The plan will include assessment the community's general wildfire defense posture, a review of water supply and delivery systems, a structure defense strategy, an evaluation to identify whether the WFRS wildfire/structure protection equipment is adequate to protect an entire interface neighbourhood during a wildfire event, and an assessment of the feasibility of a rooftop sprinkler program and secondary first-responder vehicle access throughout RMOW neighbourhoods.

JANUARY 24, 2023

- \$20,000 in budget approved to improve wildfire public education and potential updates to the community fire danger rating signs.
 - \$30,000 in funding was received from the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (MOTI) for WFP to mitigate the wildfire risk along Hwy 99.
 - Preliminary work has been initiated to evaluate the need for additional road upgrades and/or thinning projects along the Flank trail and Green Lake Loop to provide safe and reliable vehicle access for fire crews.
6. **Vegetation Management:** Continue strategic vegetation management efforts at the community level, while ensuring that multiple forest values continue to be managed for. These principles can be applied to address forest resiliency at the landscape level.
- A new 2023-2025 FireSmart Strategic Plan has been completed in draft, with a focus on sequentially treating high priority neighbourhoods or zones in coordination with other vegetation management approaches.
 - High priority fuel treatment areas completed in 2022 included Taluswood and Rainbow 2 (see Fig. 1). Kadenwood Gondola was also partially completed (incomplete due to extreme fire rating conditions until late October). In 2023 the following high priority sites are scheduled to be treated: Riverside, Rainbow 1 (remaining areas on CCF land), and the remaining Kadenwood Gondola (refer to Table 1 and Fig 1 for details).
 - Planning for the 16 Mile Creek fuel break treatment area is underway to provide strategic low-hazard anchor points throughout the RMOW and CCF.
 - A vegetation management monitoring plan was developed by Frontera in 2022 with the goal to evaluate the effects of various past and current fuel thinning practices on ecosystem health, wildlife habitat, and other forest and natural area values, including long-term wildfire risk reduction potential. The program will be implemented in spring 2023. A detailed sampling approach has been designed for five representative fuel thinning treatment areas around Lost Lake, Callahan, and Taluswood.
 - Assessment of various vegetation management approaches has been completed and is being used for strategic coordination between all vegetation management contractors and WFP.
 - Frontera has designed tools and a revised approach to RMOW fuel management prescription development that will ensure prescription templates more explicitly incorporate consideration of other forest and natural area values.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Relevant Council Authority/Previous Decisions

Council approved the previous Community Wildfire Protection Plans in 2005 and 2011 and the CWRP in 2022.

Corporate Plan

The RMOW Corporate Plan is updated annually and articulates strategic direction for the organization. This section identifies how this report links to the plan.

Council Focus Areas

Wildfire risk mitigation is a key climate adaptation identified in the Big Moves Climate Action Strategy.

Community Balance

*Effectively **balance resort and community needs** through deliberate planning, partnerships and investment*

Climate Action

*Provide leadership to **accelerate climate action and environmental performance** across the community*

Housing

*Advance strategic and innovative initiatives to enable and **deliver additional employee housing***

Pandemic Recovery

*Leadership and support for **community and tourism recovery and sustainability** – priority focuses are where recovery needs intersect with other Council focus areas*

Not Applicable

Corporate Goals

Community character and mountain culture is reflected in municipal initiatives

Municipal decision-making supports the effective stewardship of natural assets and ecological function

Corporate policies and operations ensure continuous excellence in infrastructure, facility and program management

A high level of accountability, transparency and community engagement is maintained

Corporate financial health is optimized to ensure long-term community success

A vibrant local economy and safe, resilient resort community is effectively reinforced by organizational activities

Pandemic recovery

Community Vision and Official Community Plan

The OCP is the RMOW's most important guiding document that sets the community vision and long-term community direction. This section identifies how this report applies to the OCP.

OCP Chapter 7, Goal 7.2 directs that natural areas are proactively managed for resiliency to climate change. The first objective is focused on updating the community wildfire planning and continuing to deliver the wildfire risk reduction and FireSmart programs. Implementation of the 2022 CWRP is the key to meeting the OCP policy goal and objectives.

BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS

The CWRP has been developed with the goal to be pragmatic, but scalable, understanding that the municipal budget is finite. Staff understand that the wildfire program incurs significant, ongoing expense and will make strategic decisions that maximize outcomes in a cost efficient manner. Staff will also continue to actively seek outside funding and partnerships that can reduce the municipal budget requests. The staff Wildfire Working Group will prioritize projects, and budget requests will be managed through the regular budgeting process.

LÍLWAT NATION & SQUAMISH NATION CONSIDERATIONS

The RMOW is committed to working with the Lílwat People, known in their language as *L'il'wat7úl* and the Squamish People, known in their language as the *Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw* to: create an enduring relationship; establish collaborative processes for Crown land planning; achieve mutual objectives; and enable participation in Whistler's resort economy. This section identifies areas where RMOW activities intersect with these relationships.

There are no specific considerations to include in this report, although recommendations regarding wildfire risk management and vegetation management cover activities on Crown land that may be of interest to the Squamish Nation and the Lílwat Nation. The Squamish Nation and Lílwat Nation are partners with the RMOW in the CCF so have significant input in that respect but every Crown land wildfire fuel-thinning project is referred for comment. Typically, a preliminary archaeological review is requested and completed.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Level of community engagement commitment for this project:

Inform Consult Involve Collaborate Empower

Implementation of CWRP recommendations requires adjustment of the level of community engagement depending on the project or initiative. For example, wildfire fuel thinning projects generally consult nearby residents, while FireSmart programs aim to collaborate with and empower residents.

REFERENCES

Appendix A – Community Wildfire Resiliency Plan Progress

SUMMARY

Wildfires have been identified as the highest climate change related risk and vulnerability for Whistler. The RMOW has been actively working to reduce that risk of wildfire in the community for over 15 years. This report provides a progress update on implementation of the recently adopted Community Wildfire Resiliency Plan (CWRP) and highlights actions taken on recommendations related to the seven FireSmart disciplines.

SIGN-OFFS

Written by:

Luisa Burhenne,
Manager of Climate and Environment

Scott Rogers,
FireSmart Supervisor

Lindsay DeBou,
Manager of Protective Services

Thomas Doherty,
Fire Chief

Reviewed by:

Jessie Gresley-Jones,
General Manager of Resort Experience

Ted Battiston,
General Manager of Corporate and Community
Services

Virginia Cullen,
Chief Administrative Officer