



RESORT MUNICIPALITY OF WHISTLER

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STAFF REPORT TO COUNCIL

PRESENTED: January 24, 2023 **REPORT:** 23-013
FROM: Climate & Environment, Protective Services **FILE:** 8337
SUBJECT: 2023 WILDFIRE RISK REDUCTION GRANT FUNDING

RECOMMENDATION FROM THE CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

That the recommendation of the General Managers of Resort Experience and of Corporate and Community Services be endorsed.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

That Council endorse the Union of British Columbia Municipalities' (UBCM) 2023 Community Resiliency Investment (CRI) Program grant application, attached as Appendix A to this Administrative Report to Council No. 23-013 and, if successful, direct staff to provide overall grant management as per UBCM's grant requirements; and further

That Council authorize staff to enter into a contribution agreement with the Ministry of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities to manage the grant funding awarded through the Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Fund and direct staff to carry out the fuel thinning work as per the grant requirements.

PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of the report is to twofold. Firstly, the purpose is to obtain Council's endorsement for the Union of British Columbia Municipalities' (UBCM) 2023 Community Resiliency Investment (CRI) Program grant application. For the Resort Municipality of Whistler (RMOW) to be eligible for UBCM grant funding, a Council resolution indicating support for the grant application and direction to provide overall grant management is required to be submitted with the application. The second purpose is to authorize staff to enter into a contribution agreement with the Ministry of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities. A council resolution is required for the RMOW to receive the approved grant funding through the Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Fund (DMAF).

Information Report

Administrative Report (Decision or Direction)

DISCUSSION

Background

The RMOW's wildfire program consists of three main activity areas:

1. Fuel thinning work in Whistler's wildland urban interface (WUI) which aims to reduce the ability of a fire to spread from forest to community and vice versa,
2. The Whistler FireSmart Program (WFP) which aims to help educate, guide and support private property owners' wildfire hazard mitigation on their land, and
3. Broad fire safety public education which aims to inform Whistler residents and guests about fire safety and emergency preparedness.

On April 5, 2022, Council adopted the [Community Wildfire Resiliency Plan](#) (CWRP), which is the latest iteration of a master wildfire-planning document to guide all activities in the above three wildfire related areas over the next five plus years. Recommendation #6 of this CWRP is to "Stay up to date with local, provincial and federal funding sources that support wildfire risk reduction, emergency preparedness, and disaster mitigation work". The current report highlights two available grant funding opportunities as per CWRP recommendation, the UBCM CRI Program, and the Federal DMAF.

The CRI program is a provincial program intended to reduce the risk and impact of wildfire to communities in BC through community funding, support and priority fuel management activities. Whistler is classified as 'wildfire risk class two' with approximately \$19 billion in assets located within two kilometres of identified wildfire risks. Additionally, with over three million visitors annually, the community is exposed to greater likelihood of human caused ignitions.

The DMAF program was launched in 2018 by the Government of Canada by committing an investment of \$2 billion over 10 years in structural and natural infrastructure projects that increase the resilience of communities that are impacted by climate change related natural disasters.

Analysis

WFP Funding:

The WFP engages the community to educate, motivate, guide and support activities intended to reduce the potential impact of wildfire within the municipality. Building a strong understanding and appreciation of local wildfire threat and advocating FireSmart solutions are cornerstone to these efforts. Program activities include FireSmart outreach and presentations, conducting FireSmart assessments, organizing and leading FireSmart work days with homeowners, organizing and leading volunteer groups in the Adopt-a-trail campaign (treating forest around the valley trail system), deploying the FireSmart crew to deliver the FireSmart Community Chipper Service as well as reducing fuel load in dense juvenile municipal forest. Collectively, these activities are the key components designed to progressively move the community toward greater wildfire resilience.

The total annual budget for WFP is ~\$515,000. If successful, the UBCM CRI funding will cover \$200,000 of the cost of this program as outlined in the application attached as Appendix A.

As per Appendix A, the application includes funding for staff and other resources to support administration and operations. Program administration includes strategic planning, conducting assessments at the neighbourhood scale (FireSmart Canada Neighbourhood Recognition Program), at individual homes (Home Partners Program), and at identified critical infrastructure locations. It also

includes delivering public education (market booths, workshops for stakeholders, speaking at AGMs, onsite during neighbourhood FireSmart Work Days (FSWD)), presentations to municipal Council; working with internal GIS for mapping/tracking and internal permit application reviews. FireSmart crews also work to deliver the FireSmart Community Chipper Service weekly from spring to fall, support neighbourhood FSWDs and treat targeted municipal forests (also involving volunteer groups in our "Adopt-a-trail" campaign). Crews work seasonally, April through October.

The RMOW has received similar CRI grant funding for the last 5 years.

DMAF Funding:

The RMOW has been treating high priority wildland urban interface forests since 2007 in a strategic approach to reduce the risk of wildfire, improve response locations, and reduce the potential damage caused by a wildfire. Treatments have involved removing trees, lower branches ("ladder fuels"), and surface fuels from the forest floor to reduce fire ignition and spread potential. These techniques are critical in protecting urban infrastructure as well as protecting and enhancing the forest around Whistler including its biodiversity, wildlife habitat, cultural use, recreational use, and economic value. While the CWRP identifies this work as high priority action, the RMOW has limited financial resources and without external funding would be unable to internally fund the work nor address all areas of high and extreme wildfire risk within the wildland urban interface.

In 2022, the RMOW successfully applied for \$10,132,250 in grant funding from the Federal DMAF. To initiate receipt of this funding, RMOW staff requires a council resolution with an authorization to enter the funding agreement with the Ministry of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities. Receiving these funds will enable the RMOW to continue the fuel treatments and significantly reduce the wildfire risk in twelve areas within the WUI that were identified in the CWRP as high-risk areas. The work will be conducted over the next ten years and the DMAF funding allows the RMOW to increase the rate at which it can treat the areas around the resort that pose the greatest threat to infrastructure and lives.

If staff is authorized to enter a funding contribution agreement, the wildfire risk in twelve high risk areas within the WUI will be mitigated. Eight of the twelve areas are located on RMOW land, totalling 161 hectares of forest, and four of the twelve areas are located in the Cheakamus Community Forest (CCF), totalling 84 hectares of forest to be treated (see Table 1, and Figure 1 for more detail). Note that treatment timelines may be adjusted based on weather and fire ratings.

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

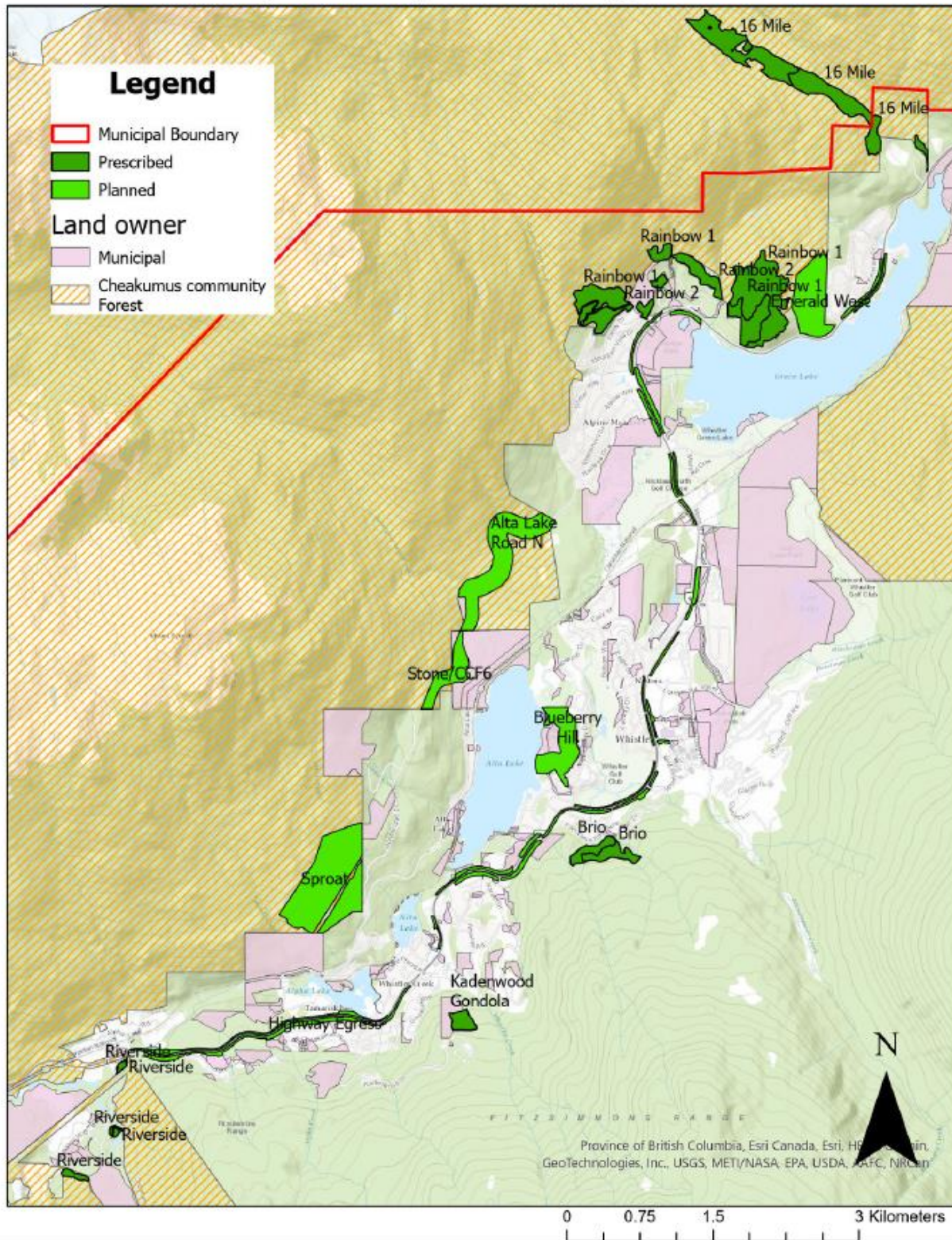


Figure 1: Map of planned fuel thinning treatment areas as per DMAF funding application

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Relevant Council Authority/Previous Decisions

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

FireSmart fuel management on private lands will continue to complement the ongoing work and municipal wildfire protection expenditures on Provincial Crown lands within the municipality. These actions are consistent with the Community Wildfire Resiliency Plan, Big Moves Climate Action Implementation Plan (CAIP) and the updated Official Community Plan. The 2021 and 2022 FireSmart Grant Administrative Reports No 20-100 and No 21-125 were presented and approved on October 6, 2020 and November 2, 2021, respectively.

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

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

Community Vision and Official Community Plan

The Official Community Plan (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.

Municipal initiatives designed to increase wildfire protection and resiliency for the community are well aligned with many of the strategic objectives of the OCP including in particular:

4.1. Goal Land use and development are effectively managed to maintain Whistler’s unique sense of place, protect Whistler’s natural environment, provide a high quality of life for residents and provide exceptional experiences for our visitors.

7.2. Goal Natural areas are proactively managed for and resilient to climate change.

8.7. Goal Ensure Whistler is a safe and secure resort community.

BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS

The total annual 2023 budget for WFP is \$515,000. If successful, the UBCM CRI funding will cover \$200,000 of associated program costs as detailed in Appendix A.

The total project cost for treatment of the twelve high priority areas as per DMAF funding application is estimated to be \$16,055,801 distributed from year 2022 until 2030. Four of the twelve sites are located on the CCF resulting in project costs of \$6,183,215. The remaining sites are located on RMOW land resulting in project costs of \$9,872,586.

If staff receives authorization to enter the agreement, DMAF funding will cover 100 per cent of the \$6,183,215 costs on the CCF and 40 per cent of \$9,872,586 costs on RMOW land, i.e. \$3,949,035 (See Table 2).

The RMOW continues to plan for some taxpayer-funded wildfire mitigation in its Five Year Financial Plan but will clearly benefit from the additional funding from its provincial and federal partners. This DMAF funding would allow the RMOW to significantly increase the rate at which it can treat these twelve high priority areas around the resort that pose the greatest threat to infrastructure and lives.

Table 2: DMAF Funding details for treatment on CCF and RMOW sites

TREATMENT AREA	Project cost	Per Cent Funded by DMAF	DMAF Funding
CCF sites	\$ 6,183,215	100 %	\$ 6,183,215
RMOW sites	\$ 9,872,586	40 %	\$ 3,949,035
TOTAL	\$16,055,801		\$10,132,250

LÍŁWAT NATION & SQUAMISH NATION CONSIDERATIONS

The RMOW is committed to working with the LÍŁwat 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.

The LÍŁwat Nation and Squamish Nation are partners with the RMOW in the Cheakamus Community Forest so have significant input in that respect, additionally every Crown land wildfire fuel-thinning project is referred to the Squamish Nation and the LÍŁwat Nation for comment.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Level of community engagement commitment for this project:

Inform Consult Involve Collaborate Empower

Ongoing community engagement is led by the FireSmart Supervisor. The FireSmart program team will continue to work closely with homeowners through program delivery and will provide information to Whistler residents on how to FireSmart their property, assist them with understanding options, prioritizing work, fuel removal, engaging arborists and connecting with Parks and other land managers, as needed.

The Whistler community was informed about the successful DMAF funding via a media release by the Ministry of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities which followed the public DMAF grant funding announcement on November 10, 2022. Community engagement on wildfire fuel thinning projects is ongoing and specific to each site.

REFERENCES

Appendix A – 2023 CRI Program Grant Application

SUMMARY

The RMOW has been actively working to reduce the risk of wildfire in the community for over 15 years. The wildfire program provides significant FireSmart and fuel thinning investments as key components of wildfire loss reduction for the community. Securing outside funding for these programs is crucial in realizing wildfire risk reduction priorities as per 2022 CWRP while reducing municipal budget impacts. As such, the purpose of this report is to obtain Council's endorsement for the 2023 CRI grant application as well as authorization to enter into an agreement to receive the federal DMAF funding.

SIGN-OFFS

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