

Dear Mayor and Council,

June 5, 2023

I am very concerned about the poor quality of some of the RMOW's FireSmart thinning projects.

When it's done properly—with FireSmart AND ecological outcomes in mind—I support FireSmart thinning for two main reasons: 1) effective FireSmart treatment will theoretically make a wildfire to be easier to control and 2) thinning can help speed up the forest's development of old-growth characteristics (the vast majority of Whistler's valley bottom old growth has already been destroyed, so working to help create old-growth habitat helps address the biodiversity crisis, which is intrinsically tied to the climate change crisis).

I have seen FireSmart thinning locations in Whistler done well but I have also seen some seemingly very poor work. What prompts me to write this letter is the thinning most recently done in the Whistler Interpretive Forest in the Discovery Loop location, which is right at the corner of Hwy 99.

Here are my concerns:

- It looks like no care was taken to keep the forest floor intact. The area is not large, but it looks like practically every square inch was churned up by a machine. When the forest floor is churned up:
  - o vegetation and invertebrates are killed needlessly (nature is destroyed);
  - o this needless killing impedes the forest's development of old-growth characteristics;
  - o significant amounts of carbon are released; and
  - o it will now be easier for invasive species to take hold.
- It also looks like the pruning was done haphazardly, with no thought as to what to leave behind so the habitat isn't totally destroyed for species that depend on lower tree branches.

Here are my questions:

- Are FireSmart AND ecological outcomes in mind when the RMOW hires a FireSmart company/consultant?
- Who wrote the prescription for this FireSmart project at the Discovery Loop?
- Is this the same company/consultant who will be doing FireSmarting in other locations in Whistler?
- Is the prescription peer reviewed by a forest ecologist?
  - o i.e. not a firefighter whose main concern is fire and not a logger whose main concern is cutting trees.
- What oversight is there to ensure the prescription is followed?
- If the prescription is not followed, what are the repercussions for the FireSmart crew?
- How are FireSmart crews paid, by hectare or by the time it takes to thin an area properly?
- Does the wood taken out during thinning contribute to the AAC?

Here are my comments:

- Might it be possible to put FireSmart on hold until it can be done in a way that has FireSmart AND ecological outcomes in mind?
- Might it be possible to mandate that thinning be done by hand? The best example of thinning I have seen is on the Ascent trail, which was all done by hand. If one aspect of reconciliation is providing jobs for First Nations, wouldn't this be a wonderful way to hire First Nation crews while FireSmarting AND protecting nature?
- If thinning by hand is not always an option, might it be possible to train machine operators so they minimally disturb the forest floor and take greater pride in their work? Maybe it needs to be mandated that only small machines are to be used, if any?
- Can you provide a mechanism to ensure the public can see that the RMOW maintains control of the project once the work is initiated by the FireSmart contractor?

Thanks for considering this letter, here's to improving the FireSmart program! Please see photos below.

Sincerely,

Kristina Swerhun, 4815 Glacier Lane

Photos taken June 4, 2023 of the Discovery Loop in the Whistler Interpretive Forest (except where noted)



Above: What is left of the celebrated 'Nurse Stump' after treatment in 2023. There is no moss left anywhere on the forest floor.

Right: What the same 'Nurse Stump' looked like in 2017 before the panels were replaced. You can see two Western Hemlocks growing out of the stump and moss on the forest floor to the right of the sign.

Note that the panels have been updated since this photo was taken, obviously the 'Nurse Stump' sign can no longer go in this location.

Red circle marks the location of same stump; red arrow marks location of same tree.



The rest of the photos are all taken on June 4, 2023







Note that the pruning is also done poorly, I understand cuts should be flush with the tree. And when thinking of desired ecological outcomes, some lower branches should be left to provide essential habitat.