



**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 THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

**PRESENTED:** May 28, 2024 **REPORT:** 24-053  
**FROM:** Climate & Environment, Protective Services **FILE:** 7200-20  
& Whistler Fire Rescue  
**SUBJECT:** SPRING 2024 COMMUNITY WILDFIRE AND EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS  
UPDATE

### RECOMMENDATION FROM THE CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

**That** the recommendation of the General Manager of Climate Action, Planning and Development Services and the General Manager of Corporate Services and Public Safety be endorsed.

### RECOMMENDATION(S)

**That** the Committee of the Whole receive Information Report No. 24-053 regarding the Spring 2024 Community Wildfire and Emergency Preparedness Update.

### PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to update the Committee of the Whole on recent and planned activities in 2024 that support community wildfire and emergency preparedness.

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 resiliency to this 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 several 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).

Improved alignment of all wildfire related teams, in particular WFP, Whistler Fire Rescue Services (WFRS), Climate and Environment (C&E), and the Emergency Program is coordinated on various projects and connects through the Wildfire Coordination Working Group every month which ensures that co-benefits can be achieved. This includes collaboration on policy and workplan development as well as wildfire risk mitigation projects on both public and private lands.

## **Analysis**

### **2024 Highlights:**

The following section provides an overview of the RMOW's main advancements towards a continuous improvement in the community's wildfire defense posture in 2024. This section outlines activities and initiatives related to wildfire fuel thinning led by C&E; updates and plans underway with the WFP; as well as recent training and planning activities undertaken by both the Emergency Planning team and the WFRS.

### **Fuel Thinning:**

Strategic fuel thinning, also called vegetation management, lowers the risk and severity of wildfires while increasing the resilience of our surrounding forests. The Federal Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation grant<sup>1</sup> funding support enables the RMOW to manage vegetation and significantly reduce the wildfire risk in twelve areas within the Whistler Urban Interface that were identified as CWRP high-risk areas. The work in these 12 areas is underway and will be predominately completed by contractors until 2030. High priority fuel thinning areas planned for 2024 are: Emerald West neighborhood (underway), Brio and Brio Extension (planned for June - September), as well as areas along Highway (HWY 99) throughout the year. The WFP will be supporting some of the work along HWY 99 in 2024-2025.

In addition, a vegetation management monitoring plan was developed by Frontera Forest Solutions Inc. in 2022 and implemented in 2023 with the goal to evaluate the effects of various past and current fuel thinning practices on ecosystem health, wildlife habitat, and other forest area values, including long-term wildfire risk reduction efficacy. A detailed sampling approach has been followed for five representative fuel thinning treatment areas around Lost Lake, Callaghan, and Taluswood. Preliminary monitoring results from 2023 were presented to RMOW staff in 2024. These early results showed that in fuel treated areas, canopy base height was generally higher and coniferous crown closure lower than in untreated areas. In-stand temperatures and fuel moisture, however, was only minimally affected by the fuel thinning work. In fact, in select areas, data analysis revealed lower temperatures and higher fuel moisture in fuel treated areas pointing to increased wildfire resilience during extreme fire risk periods. An important 'take away' finding from these early results is that when running wildfire behaviour models for the treated and untreated areas, the treated areas exhibit considerably lower wildfire behaviour potential than the untreated areas.

The monitoring program will continue throughout 2024 and 2025 and results will be presented once available.

### **FireSmart:**

The WFP educates, guides and supports private property owners' wildfire hazard mitigation efforts on their land and treats identified priority municipal forest.

The main service delivery highlights for the WFP 2024 program include:

#### Assessments:

This continuing work includes producing Home Partners Program FireSmart assessments (HPP) for single family homes, neighbourhood FireSmart assessments, critical infrastructure assessments, and hosting information workshops for residents and businesses. FireSmart assessments identify exposure

---

<sup>1</sup> The Government of Canada launched the Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Fund (DMAF), committing \$2 billion over 10 years to invest in structural and natural infrastructure projects to increase the resilience of communities that are impacted by natural disasters triggered by climate change. The RMOW secured over \$10.1 million in grant funding to [significantly reduce wildfire risk](#) from the Federal Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Fund.

levels and susceptibility to ignition in fuels while providing prioritized actionable solutions to mitigate the hazards in both the environment and the vulnerable building components. In 2024, to date, 50 HPP assessments have been conducted.

In 2024, WFP has creatively incentivized homeowners to participate in HPP assessments through the roll-out of the FireSmart Contest. Contest entry is limited to owners of single-family homes within the municipality, and the first 20 to book and receive a HPP assessment are entered to win up to \$1,000 in wildfire mitigation work performed by WFP. The prize effectively captures both the need to provide education via the assessments themselves, and the need to mitigate hazards quickly and effectively on private land to increase community resiliency.

New for 2024, there is also FireSmart credit which is a one-time opportunity for single family homes to initiate the landscape work with the assessor immediately following the site review for an HPP. This credit provides immediate change in the landscape without the administrative or financial involvement. It is only available at the time of the assessment and requires a minimum of one owner to participate with the one WFP staff member for up to one hour. Credit provision occurs outside of the above-mentioned contest time frame.

#### FireSmart Community Chipper Service:

Homeowners prepare tidy piles of branches and stems near the street for WFP staff to chip and remove with a chipper and chip truck. The service runs weekly during wildfire season and upwards of 250 properties benefit from using the service annually. Already this year, 57 properties have scheduled chipper service pick-ups.

#### FireSmart Neighbourhood Workdays:

This includes organized groups of owners that work together with WFP staff who guide the activity in the landscape to take significant initial steps to reduce vegetation hazard levels. Participating ownership groups have varied in size from four to 60 participants. Education is delivered at the beginning of these projects about wildfire realities and FireSmart solutions. These projects improve communication and relationships between neighbours which often lead to further collaboration and increased involvement of more neighbours. The activity generally includes pruning low conifer branches and removing select identified juvenile conifers and ground fuels. The annual goal is to support 20 of these projects. Four have been supported to date with another 16 scheduled.

#### HWY 99 and Municipal Land Treatments:

WFP staff are scheduled to complete fuel thinning work along HWY 99 throughout the season. This includes the assessment and mitigation of wildfire hazards along primary neighbourhood access routes. Work is currently underway at Alta Lake Road and HWY 99. The fuel thinning prescription was developed by Frontera Forest Solutions Inc. in collaboration with the RMOW C&E and Planning, WFP, and WFRS representatives. In 2024 additional forest treatments are planned in Blueberry Hill, Whistler Cay, Glacier Drive, Nester's, and Nordic on municipal land.

#### FireSmart BC Plant Program:

Also new this year, WFP is onboarding Whistler's local garden centres to the FireSmart BC plant program which encourages communities to proactively mitigate wildfire risks by identifying and promoting fire-resistant plants and landscaping practices on private land. Selective and intentional planting choices establish wildfire resilient space around our built environment and are a cost-effective approach.

The WFP presented to local landscape business & arborists in April to review the current breadth of FireSmart BC's information on fire behaviour, wildfire mitigation best practices, home ignition zones, the Plant Program, the Landscape hub and incentivization for participation. Attendees will receive vehicle

decals with FireSmart branding outwardly demonstrating their attendance in the workshop and continuing to push the FireSmart brand to generate further engagement.

#### Community Engagement:

WFP engaged with the youth of Interact Club of Whistler and the Whistler Rotarians in April to present information on basic fire science, Canadian wildfire history, mitigation practices and the scope of WFP's work. Through education sessions, the WFP empowers all generations to actively participate in wildfire prevention and safety measures within their communities.

Future planned presentations include a workshop for builders/designers, realtors, and participation in the Whistler Children's Festival with BC Wildfire Service.

#### Adopt-a-Trail:

The Adopt-a-Trail campaign resumes with past participants joining WFP staff to clean up forest along the Valley Trail system. New to this year, several RMOW departments plan to participate in this campaign.

### **Emergency Planning**

In addition to the initiatives noted above, there has been a great deal of additional preparation, training and collaboration done to advance several aspects of the wildfire and emergency response posture of the community.

#### Whistler Fire Rescue Services:

##### Training:

During the first quarter of 2024, WFRS has completed training in the B.C. Wildfire Task Force Team Leader course, bringing the total number of members trained to 11. To compliment this training, cross training continues between WFRS, Whistler Blackcomb, BC Wildfire and Blackcomb Helicopters with the most recent practical exercise in the field held on May 1, 2024 on Blackcomb Mountain with 51 total personnel in attendance.

In January 2024, WFRS and RMOW Emergency Program staff engaged with Whistler Blackcomb senior staff and their emergency operations with a coordination meeting together followed by a tabletop exercise in March and a live practical exercise in May.

The WFRS paid on call members have been busy completing Fire Officer Level 1 Training which will enhance their knowledge, skills and abilities when managing fire incidents. The Fire Officer training includes training on frontline leadership including dealing with difficult situations and emergency scene management which entails fire ground tactics, accountability, and action planning.

The 2023 paid on call recruit class will be completing their Wildland Firefighter Level 1 training in the coming months. This will provide these new members of WFRS with the necessary training for wildfire firefighting that is designed for structural firefighters.

In addition to all the internal training occurring at the fire department, WFRS and Whistler Blackcomb hosted basic wildfire training to non-fire department staff of the RMOW, Whistler Blackcomb, Squamish Nation and Líl'wat Nation on May 15 and 16, 2024. This two-day program provided personnel with the basic wildfire course S-100 and the Entrapment Avoidance S-185 course. The course consists of one-day classroom theory and one-day practical exercises in the field. The course took place at Base II (18-Below). The initial course had an overwhelming response for interest with over 70 applications to attend. As a result, subsequent courses will be offered over the remainder of the year.

### Wildfire Defense Plan:

The development of the Whistler Wildfire Defense Plan (WDP) was started in 2023 with completion January 2024. The development of this plan is an important initiative led by WFRS towards implementing innovative approaches and increased emergency planning related coordination. The plan includes assessment of 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.

Staff had the opportunity to utilize the WDP tactical sheets and GIS mapping during the Spring Creek evacuation exercise on April 18, 2024, and during the cross training practical exercise with BC Wildfire and Whistler Blackcomb on May 1, 2024. These defence plan documents proved extremely beneficial in planning and deploying resources to critical infrastructure locations and identifying available water resource locations for responders.

During the first two quarters of 2024, staff have been busy actioning recommendations from the Wildfire Defence Plan. In particular, the recommendations for wildfire equipment improvements for WFRS in preparation for the 2024 wildfire season. In mid-May, all three of the department's wildland trucks were now outfitted with a 1,600-gallon portable water tank, high pressure four stage portable fire pump, and over 5,000 ft of wildfire firefighting hose on each truck in addition to various hand tools and firefighting supplies.

### Equipment Upgrades:

To support the equipment upgrades by WFRS, the RMOW Waste Transfer Station took on the responsibility of completing upgrades to their firefighting water supply on site with the addition of a 40,000 L water tank. This portable water tank can be relocated throughout the community if needed and is outfitted with hose connection ports for quick filling and discharge. Collaboration of a number of municipal departments resulted in the completion of this project prior to the 2024 wildfire season.

### Fire Danger Signs:

Work is underway to update the community fire danger rating signs. Currently when fire danger ratings change (often several times per week) staff are required to drive out to the three danger rating sign locations to update. The new signs would allow for remote access to update danger ratings, eliminating the need for staff to drive out to each location to update. The signs will have solar capabilities, as well as back up battery power and include a message board for public education messages.

### Recruitment and staffing:

Finally, in January Council approved the staffing of Fire Hall No. 3 in Spring Creek (Hall No. 3). The staffing process is well underway with new firefighters hired and undergoing recruit training throughout the month of May. Hall No. 3 will be staffed with two full-time firefighters working seven days a week between the hours of 6:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. starting on June 11, 2024.

### Emergency Program:

Recent accomplishments include a full evacuation exercise held on April 18, 2024, that simulated the evacuation of the Spring Creek neighbourhood with an established Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) and reception centre, use of Whistler Alert, and door knockers giving evacuation notifications. All exercise objectives were met and areas for improvement identified. An after-action review of the exercise identified a list of action items that will improve EOC capabilities. Some key learnings from the recent evacuation exercise included:

1. EOC training has strongly benefited staff in their ability to establish an EOC, enact evacuation alerts and orders, operate a reception centre, notify the public and meet the requirements of the new emergency management legislation. Confidence and familiarity increased throughout the process.
2. Social media messaging and efforts to counter misinformation must be robust and active early in a response.
3. Whistler Alert worked well to send out messaging to the public. However, the exercise serves as a reminder that Whistler Alert subscribers must keep their contact information up to date. Work is underway to streamline these processes.
4. Radio communications between different agencies requires a plan to make best use of available frequencies and training to make communications effective. An updated radio plan is now under development.

The revised RMOW Operational Evacuation Plan is complete and was tested during the exercise. It meets current requirements of the new *Emergency and Disaster Management Act* and provide guidance to EOC staff for population reduction, tactical evacuations, and strategic evacuations, where the RMOW takes the lead role in managing. An evacuation plan template was provided to the Hotels Association for use by their members along with an orientation session by Emergency Program staff to help them be better prepared to assist their guests during an evacuation.

Additional emergency plans have been updated to meet the requirements of the new *Emergency and Disaster Management Act*, including a guide for declaring a state of local emergency. Plans for future actions include enhanced public education for emergencies and evacuations.

Upcoming work for the remainder of the year includes:

1. An update of the evacuation guide brochure and increased emphasis on Whistler Alert.
2. Staff emergency preparedness training which is scheduled for June. This training will help staff and their families to be more resilient by being prepared for emergencies and evacuations. This can help improve staff availability during emergencies.
3. Improvements to our Emergency Operations Centre funded by a UBCM grant. This includes technological upgrades, new communications capabilities, new vests, and storage improvements.
4. Further updates to other emergency plans.

### Summary

Efforts to continue to increase capacity and preparedness with further training, public education and a variety of exercises will continue to build our resilience. These efforts include coordination, preparation and focus that our team (and community partners) are highly engaged in to support the RMOW on emergency preparedness as we approach the summer season.

---

## **POLICY CONSIDERATIONS**

### **Relevant Council Authority/Previous Decisions**

[On April 5, 2022](#), Council adopted [Report No. 22-052: Community Wildfire Resiliency Plan](#).

On December 5, 2023 the Committee of the Whole (COTW) received an update on the [Community](#)

[Wildfire Resiliency Plan Progress Report No. 23-119.](#)

On [December 5, 2023](#), Council adopted [Report No. 23-120: 2024-25 Union of British Columbia Municipalities Community Resiliency Investment FireSmart Community Funding Stream Grant Allocation.](#)

On [December 19, 2023](#), the COTW received [Report No. 23-130: Community Wildfire Defense Plan.](#)

### **2023-2026 Strategic Plan**

The 2023-2026 Strategic Plan outlines the high-level direction of the RMOW to help shape community progress during this term of Council. The Strategic Plan contains four priority areas with various associated initiatives that support them. This section identifies how this report links to the Strategic Plan.

#### **Strategic Priorities**

Housing

*Expedite the delivery of and longer-term planning for employee housing*

Climate Action

*Mobilize municipal resources toward the implementation of the Big Moves Climate Action Plan*

Community Engagement

*Strive to connect locals to each other and to the RMOW*

Smart Tourism

*Preserve and protect Whistler's unique culture, natural assets and infrastructure*

Not Applicable

*Aligns with core municipal work that falls outside the strategic priorities but improves, maintains, updates and/or protects existing and essential community infrastructure or programs*

### **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.

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:

**8.7. 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**

This report provides an information update only, there is no associated budget impact associated with the report's recommended resolution. Staff will continue to actively seek outside funding and partnerships that reduce future municipal budget requests.

The staff-level Wildfire Internal Coordination Group will also continue to strategically prioritize and phase projects for ongoing consideration, through the regular annual 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.

Staff invited the Squamish Nation and Lílwat Nation to participate in the basic wildfire firefighting training course held on May 15-16, 2024, in collaboration with Whistler Blackcomb staff. Squamish Nation had one member complete the training and were grateful for the invitation to participate.

---

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Level of community engagement commitment for this project:

Inform     Consult     Involve     Collaborate     Empower

Implementation of community wildfire and emergency preparedness initiatives 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 educate, empower and collaborate with residents.

---

## SUMMARY

Wildfires have been identified as the highest climate change related risk and vulnerability for Whistler. The RMOW has been actively working to reduce the associated risk of wildfire in the community for well over 15 years. This report provides a progress update from WFP, WFRS, C&E staff and the Emergency Program to showcase the fact that co-benefits can be achieved and leveraged through various wildfire risk mitigation initiatives and collaborations.

---

## SIGN-OFFS

### Written by:

Luisa Burhenne,  
Manager of Climate and Environment

Scott Rogers,  
FireSmart Supervisor

Bob Manson,  
Emergency Program Coordinator

Lindsay DeBou,  
Manager of Protective Services

Thomas Doherty,  
Fire Chief

### Reviewed by:

Dale Mikkelsen,  
General Manager of Climate Action, Planning  
and Development

Ted Battiston,  
General Manager of Corporate Services and  
Public Safety

Virginia Cullen,  
Chief Administrative Officer