



WHISTLER

REPORT | ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT TO COUNCIL

PRESENTED: February 16, 2021
FROM: Resort Experience
SUBJECT: COVID-19 RESILIENCE INFRASTRUCTURE STREAM – WILDFIRE FUNDING APPLICATION (NESTERS HILL)

REPORT: 21-020
FILE: 8337

COMMENT/RECOMMENDATION FROM THE CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

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

RECOMMENDATION

That Council support the application for grant funding application for the Nesters Hill wildfire fuel reduction project through the Canada Infrastructure Program – COVID-19 Resilience Infrastructure Stream; and

That Council support the project and commit to fund any associated ineligible costs and cost overruns through the 2021 wildfire program budget.

REFERENCES

Appendix “A” – Map of Nesters Hill wildfire fuel thinning project

PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this Report is to provide Council with information regarding the Covid-19 Resilience Infrastructure Stream (CVRIS) program, the applicable wildfire fuel reduction project, and to request a Council resolution in support of the project application.

DISCUSSION

On December 1, 2020, the Canadian and British Columbian governments committed up to \$80.29 million towards the intake of Covid-19 Resilience Infrastructure Stream (CVRIS) to support cost-sharing of infrastructure projects in communities across the province. CVRIS is designed to target projects starting before September 30, 2021 and completing by December 31, 2021. CVRIS includes disaster mitigation projects such as wildfire fuel reduction as an eligible project and covers 100% of eligible costs. The RMO applied for the 14.8 hectare Nesters Hill wildfire fuel reduction project scheduled for spring/summer 2021. If the application is successful, the funding will provide up to \$452,330 for the Nesters Hill wildfire fuel reduction project. The final step of the application is to provide a Council resolution in support of the project as part of the requirements for submittal.

Council continues to focus on mitigating and adapting to climate change and reducing the risk of wildfire is a key strategy. To that end, staff planned and delivered a robust wildfire mitigation program over the last few years that encompasses:

- Fuel thinning projects in high priority forested areas (both wildland urban interface and intermix areas, and landscape level fuel breaks)
- The FireSmart program to support local residents on private lands, and treat forest understory in municipal forest land, and
- The inclusion of a Wildfire Development Permit Area (DPA) in the new Official Community Plan.

The [2019-2027 RMOW Wildfire Protection Program](#) identifies a series of high priority locations that would benefit from receiving wildfire fuel reduction treatments to lower the wildfire risk threat level. In 2019, the RMOW completed the Kadenwood site, and in 2020, completed the Spruce Grove/Lost Lake site. Two sites are scheduled for 2021: Nesters Hill (14.8 hectares) and Taluswood (11 hectares).

Staff chose to apply for the Nesters Hill project because all permits and prescriptions are in place and no other external funding opportunities have been secured for this project. CVRIS does not allow funding stacking as it provides 100% of eligible costs. The Nesters Hill treatment prescription was prepared in 2020 allowing the RMOW to respond by the January 28, 2021 deadline when the CVRIS funding program was announced in December. Staff is still waiting on the Taluswood permits and previously applied to the UBCM Community Resilience Investment program for funding to offset project costs therefore it was deemed to not be a good fit for CVRIS. The Cheakamus Lake Road wildfire project is significantly funded by the Forest Enhancement Society BC so similarly was not a good fit for CVRIS.

Background

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

The project is in alignment Council's climate action focus area as reducing wildfire risk in Whistler is a key strategy.

Official Community Plan

Community Vision

Whistler: A place where our community thrives, nature is protected and guests are inspired.

The wildfire program most aligns with the following vision statements and characteristics:

- We protect the land – the forests, the lakes, the rivers, and all that they sustain.
- Respect: We understand, respect and steward natural areas as the foundation of our community, our tourism-based economy and overall human health
- Climate: Greenhouse gas emissions are being systematically eliminated, all energy is derived from renewable sources and we are increasing our resilience to a changing climate.

Goals, Objectives and Policies

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

Objective 7.2.1 – Ensure municipal wildfire management programs reduce risk to natural areas and private properties.

Policy 7.2.1.6 – Continue to seek provincial support and funding for Whistler’s wildfire management programs.

Other Relevant Policies

BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS

RMOW staff engaged B.A. Blackwell & Associates to assist with preparing the application under the current contract in place to provide such assistance. Approximately 20 hours were spent on preparing the application. If the application is successful, the funding will provide up to \$452,330 for the Nesters Hill wildfire fuel reduction project. The RMOW already had budgeted in 2021 for the Nesters Hill project and if this funding application is successful, it will reduce the amount of RMOW funding required to deliver it. Ineligible costs will be covered through the already approved 2021 RMOW wildfire budget.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION

In 2020, staff consulted with the Lil’wat Nation, Squamish Nation, WORCA and BC Hydro regarding the project. First Nations had no issues with the project and staff will continue to work closely with WORCA to ensure that trails are not compromised. The general public was alerted to the project through ads in the Pique Newsmagazine, Whistler Today and whistler.ca. Staff will re-engage with these groups in 2021 as well as more directly with the residents along Treetop Lane/Nesters Road through letters and possibly hiring a community liaison as was done on the Spruce Grove project.

SUMMARY

The Nesters Hill project is the area scheduled for treatment according to the 2019-2027 RMOW Wildfire Protection Plan and if successful, the CVRIS funding will enable municipal funding to be redeployed to other wildfire protection projects identified within the protection plan, extending the ability to advance these critical works.

Respectfully submitted,

Heather Beresford
MANAGER, ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

for

Jessie Gresley-Jones
GENERAL MANAGER OF RESORT EXPERIENCE