

Wildfires and Fuel Mitigation

By Mayor Boot

Last weekend another fire dragon roared and breathed life into the Skaha Creek fire southwest of Penticton.

In the days leading up to the start of this wildland fire we were enjoying cooler, yet pleasant temperatures and sunshine under less smoke-filled skies.

I began the August 23 mayor's report with: "Perhaps this change in weather signals the beginning of the end of the 2021 wildfire season and the hundreds of British Columbians who have been under evacuation alert or order can experience some relief from this traumatic experience." While the Skaha Creek fire is a new blaze and is closer to home, thanks to almost 3,000 brave men and women—many from out-of-province or out-of-country—control and suppression of wildfire activity in other areas has resulted in evacuation orders and alerts being rescinded.

But fighting the fires, while immediate and emergent, is only part of the story...and the part that gets the most media coverage.

It takes planning a mitigation strategy, lots of money and time and—most importantly—community commitment to avoid a catastrophic fire event. While total prevention would be ideal, one cannot control weather events such as record low precipitation, record high temperatures and lightning strikes. (And no amount of work is going to eliminate human stupidity.)

That said, Logan Lake is a perfect example of what can be done. The entire population (2016 Census shows just over 1,200) was completely evacuated in mid-August when the Tremont Creek fire moved west and posed a threat to residents. The convergence of the BC Wildfire service and structure firefighters from around the province helped save the community.

The story behind the story is notable. Logan Lake was named Canada's first FireSmart community in 2013. As Mayor Robin Smith stated, her community started working on a wildfire prevention program many years ago, "before it (the FireSmart program) was invented". Sprinklers are set up on the roofs of many homes year-round in the District to provide a mist over the home in case of a wildfire.

Over the last several years the Summerland Fire Department has done much to mitigate the potential for a wildland fire in the District, including:

- Fuel modification work on 20 hectares in the Deer Ridge area, 19 hectares in the Pierre Drive/Pollock area and approximately 15 hectares of municipal lands in the Canyon View and Snow Avenue areas.
- Since 2010, the Summerland fire department has delivered 1371 FireSmart information packages, door to door to residential properties in either high or extreme wildfire hazard zones. This includes 722 packages delivered in 2019.

- Two Summerland neighbourhoods (Deer Ridge and Cartwright Road North) have done the work to receive FireSmart Canada certification.
- A Community Wildfire Protection Plan is in place and work (funding-dependent) is continuing to complete all items identified in the Plan.
- Recently, the District received grant funding to create fuel management prescriptions on ten parcels of municipal and Crown land totalling 214 hectares. Once these prescriptions have been developed the District will apply for further funding to have the prescribed work carried out. An additional 194 hectares of land have been identified for future prescription and treatment.

The District, with funding assistance from the provincial government, is working diligently to protect the community from wildfire. However, it is community effort that ultimately builds both a defence against wildfire and the resilience to bounce back should we go through a threat similar to that Logan Lake faced in August.

FireSmart your property, especially if your home is in or near a forested area, and ensure you and your household are prepared for an emergency. You can find information on FireSmart and emergency preparedness on the District's website (<https://www.summerland.ca>). You can also contact the Summerland Fire Department to conduct a FireSmart assessment of your property. Call 250-494-7211 or email sfd@summerland.ca to schedule an assessment.

Stay safe.