

March 25, 2024

Since 2022, the BC Wildfire Service has been exploring cooperative community wildfire response opportunities with rural and remote communities in B.C., including First Nations. We know that these communities are disproportionately impacted by wildfires, and we recognize the value of local knowledge and the desire to grow capacity, not only in response but also in prevention, preparation and recovery. Following is a summary of the work that has been done to this point specifically with rural, non-Indigenous communities, as well as some information about what we're planning to implement for the 2024 wildfire season.

2023 and early 2024

In partnership with the BC Wildfire Service, Fraser Basin Council engaged community members in rural areas of B.C. outside of structural fire protection and electoral area directors to understand how communities would like to be involved in wildfire response.

The feedback received was summarized as follows:

- Local community members welcome this initiative, are interested in being involved and want the opportunity to use their local knowledge.
- Local communities want to see increased cooperation between agencies and local organizations in wildfire response efforts. They identified a need to build relationships and limit organizations operating independently from one another.
- This initiative provides a good alternative for areas too small to financially support a volunteer fire department.
- Some regional districts are considering similar initiatives to encourage rural residents to be prepared for all natural disasters, not just wildfires.
- There is a variety of community groups wanting to be involved. Some are self-organized, trained and equipped, some require formal training and equipment, and others fall in-between.
- Identified the potential for recruitment and retention challenges, referencing similar challenges faced by rural structural fire departments.
- Would like to see inclusion of a paid community liaison position.

This feedback has been instrumental in guiding the exploration of ways to improve cooperative response efforts between the BC Wildfire Service and local communities. As a starting point, we have focused efforts on finding a solution for communities outside of fire protection boundaries, at high risk of being impacted by a wildfire.

Spring 2024

To ensure this initiative is done safely and correctly for everyone involved, small-scale cooperative models need to be trialled before the initiative is expanded. In the spring of 2024, we will connect with the Fraser Basin Council's pre-identified members of organized response societies for a limited offering of basic wildfire training. This training will provide the minimum training requirements for the BC Wildfire Service to hire individuals in coordination with their society as Emergency Fire Fighters. There is no ongoing plan to offer this training; however, basic wildfire suppression training isn't exclusive to the BC Wildfire Service.

The training will be facilitated by experienced contract trainers and will include:

- **S-100:** This course provides basic fire suppression training for contract crews. It is delivered over two full days, one day covering theory in the classroom and one day of practical exercises in the field, including a physically demanding component.
- **S-185:** This course will develop a basic knowledge of fire entrapment avoidance and safe work procedures.
- **ICS-100:** This course will familiarize participants with the incident command structure that the BC Wildfire Services follows with all partner agencies.
- **FireSmart Wildfire Risk Reduction:** This course will introduce the key concepts and risk reduction strategies to minimize the negative impact of wildfires in B.C.

Trainees will need to arrive at training sessions with their own personal protective equipment. The Fraser Basin Council will send a list of requirements to response societies who have already been identified for training very soon.

This training does not guarantee employment, nor does it require trainees to join local wildfire response efforts. Participation in local wildfire response will be voluntary upon BC Wildfire Service request and led by a BC Wildfire Service supervisor.

Participation in basic wildfire training and/or the activation of organized response societies for wildfire response does not exempt individuals from complying with evacuation orders.

We understand there is significant interest in participating, however, wildfire suppression is a dangerous activity currently done by highly trained fire fighters. The safety of the public and our staff has been and remains our topmost priority as we look at cooperative response opportunities for 2024 and beyond.

Moving Forward

The Fraser Basin Council will follow up with pre-identified society members to confirm interest.

We would like societies to stay in touch through a designated representative with their local BC Wildfire Service fire zone or fire centre should the need for a cooperative

response arise. Please note, the BC Wildfire Service will not be deploying societies outside of their community.

In the meantime, there are a number of other ways people can support their communities or get involved in emergency response:

- Monitor and report. Report signs of wildfire to 1-800-663-5555 or *5555 on a cellphone. Wildfire reports can also be made on the BC Wildfire Service mobile app.
- Become an Emergency Support Services (ESS) [volunteer](#). Contact your local authority or ESS team for training opportunities.
- Visit the BC Wildfire Service [website](#) for firefighting and heavy equipment contract opportunities.
- Consider joining the BC Wildfire Service. The Province is opening the door for more wildland firefighters with in-depth knowledge of local terrain to join the service.
- Learn more about how you can [FireSmart](#) your home and community.
- Connect with your local government regarding other funding opportunities and to stay connected as more become available and a longer-term model for cooperative response takes form.
- Join your local volunteer fire department or emergency services organization.

More information can be found on Climate Ready BC website at <https://climatereadybc.gov.bc.ca/pages/wildfires>

More information will be released Spring 2024.