

Emergency Response Update – Wildfires and Covid-19



100 Mile House

Tuesday, October 12, 2021 – For Immediate Release

October 12, 2021 – A message from Mayor and Council

I hope everyone had a healthy and happy Thanksgiving, after a summer of challenges we faced with wildfires, smoke, and the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. They had an impact on all of us in some way, and the District of 100 Mile House is no exception.

Our staff worked tirelessly in the Emergency Operations Centre for most of the summer, putting in long hours under difficult conditions, with Covid protocols to follow, and constantly changing weather and fire behavior. Daily briefings from BC Wildfire Service were crucial in ensuring we were prepared in case the fire became an even greater and more immediate threat. The District has an Emergency Preparedness and Evacuation Plan, which thankfully was not needed to be actioned this summer for an evacuation.

On behalf of all of Council, I want to extend our sincere thanks to the fire fighters and support crews with the BC Wildfire Service, the RCMP, Search and Rescue, ESS, and all the many agencies who supported the wildfire effort and saw us through another difficult fire season. I also want to acknowledge the logging community for their tireless efforts assisting the Wildfire Service with the various incidents in our region this past summer – the loggers provide an invaluable support service during fire season.

There's no question, we fared better this time around, with no evacuation orders in town, but some of our CRD neighbours were not so lucky. Also, while small, there were several fires in the Community Forest, which we are just in the process of assessing for the volume of burned timber. Meantime, we can say with confidence that between the 2017 and the 2021 wildfire seasons, we have been preparing for future fire events by undertaking fuel mitigation projects, almost exclusively.

Thanks to funding from the Forest Enhancement Society of BC (FESBC), three projects were funded which helped reduce wildfire risk in a few priority interface areas near residential neighbourhoods. These projects consisted of harvesting, tree thinning, pruning and reduction of fuel loading around 100 Mile House, Horse Lake and Lone Butte. These and other projects are featured in a recent FESBC news item called: **120 Communities Throughout B.C. Reduce their Risk from Wildfire – Cariboo** <https://www.fesbc.ca/120-communities-throughout-b-c-reduce-their-risk-from-wildfire-cariboo/>. A link to 41 projects in the region includes our FESBC projects in 100 Mile House.

“The District of 100 Mile House and the consultants hired to coordinate and administer these projects have done a great job to achieve the desired end result on the ground,” says Ray Raatz,

Operations Manager, FESBC. "I have visited the treatment sites several times over the duration of the project and seen the effort and diligence of the crews and machine operators doing the work. This project has been innovative in maximizing the use of mechanical treatments, which reduces overall costs and allows more area to be treated. The success of this project is due to the collaborative efforts of all the parties involved, and support from the people of 100 Mile House and area."

These projects also contributed to fast actioning of the various wildfires that struck in the region in late June and early July. Community Forest Manager, Bill Hadden notes that "wildfire crews were on-site much sooner than they otherwise would have been, thanks to the road access provided by these forestry projects."

FESBC funding was also secured for planning, layout and prescriptions for wildfire treatments in the Woodlot up at the 99 Mile Recreation Area. Subsequently, the District accessed the Forest Employment Program to implement the prescriptions and undertake the wildfire fuel break adjacent to the 99 Mile trails and the railroad south of town. Not only were local forestry crews kept employed throughout this project, but 100 Mile House itself was the beneficiary of improved protection brought about by the treatments.

All these projects are nearing completion, with just the hand piled and machine piles left to burn this fall and winter. Burning is expected to begin in early October and may continue into the winter, pending safe and favourable burning conditions, including venting indexes. Google Earth images have recently been updated, and clearly show many of the treatment areas.

Now to Covid. Our local Covid cases have been spiking in the past few weeks. With that, it's time for us all to re-focus on overcoming this very real pandemic – and we all know how to do this: by following public health orders, making good decisions based on data, and doing our part to be safe, to stay safe, and to keep others safe. Now more than ever, we need to keep up our sanitation protocols, physical distancing, wearing a mask, and washing our hands. But above all - get vaccinated. We've come too far to get complacent now.

Let's keep supporting our local businesses, and also local clubs and organizations. Our sincere appreciation goes out to our healthcare and frontline workers. Finally, I want to thank residents for staying calm and for trusting the agencies and plans in place are there to help ensure everyone's safety – whether wildfire or Covid related.

This is our time to stay strong and stay committed to healthy behaviors that will bring our covid case rates back down.

We are stronger together.

Mayor Mitch Campsall