

## Recent wildfires show benefit of mitigation

It has been another intensive wildfire season with thousands of fires in both BC and Alberta burning more than a million hectares of forest.

The Jasper wildfire was unlike anything anyone had ever seen with a wall of flames 300 metres high descending upon the townsite, projecting burning pine cones and debris. Of the town's 1,113 buildings, 358 were destroyed. But the fact that 70% of the town was saved is a testament not only to the commitment of the firefighters but also to the FireSmart program put in place to help protect the community. The losses would have been much greater without years of preventative wildfire mitigation.

Similarly, mitigation work conducted by the Penticton Indian Band (PIB) helped firefighters contain and prevent the spread of the recent wildfire above West Bench. Sixteen homes were evacuated but ultimately only two sheds were lost.

As a community surrounded by wildland, the District of Summerland has also been undertaking fuel modifications in interface areas to help fortify the town in the event of a wildfire. Projects to date include:

- 2006-2007: Little Giant's Head Mountain, 5ha
- 2012: Canyon View and Sunset Place, 15ha
- 2015: Sunset Place, 4.3ha
- 2016-2017: Deer Ridge, 9ha
- 2018: Garnet Valley, prescribed burn in partnership with Penticton Indian Band
- 2021: Canyon View, 9.3ha
- 2023-2024: Trappers area, 47.5ha
- 2024: Giant's Head Mountain, 26.5ha
- 2024: Trappers, 5ha

Mitigation work is guided by a Community Wildfire Protection Plan developed by the Summerland Fire Department in collaboration with the BC Wildfire Service and Registered Professional Foresters. Written in 2006 and updated in 2020, the plan identifies the most vulnerable areas of Summerland and recommends actions to reduce the accumulation of materials that can feed a fire. This could involve thinning, spacing and pruning trees as well removing needles and rotted wood from the forest floor. Prescribed burns can also help rid the forest of dead leaves, tree limbs and other debris.

The District of Summerland is committed to securing funding for wildfire mitigation and has obtained \$875,000 in grants over the past five years, primarily through the Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM) and the Forest Enhancement Society of British Columbia (FESBC).

FESBC also recently awarded the District an additional \$495,000 for mitigation work on Crown lands around Summerland.

Combustible materials can also be found on private properties. Several high-risk neighbourhoods (Deer Ridge, Cartwright Road North, Sumac Ridge) have become national FireSmart Recognized Neighbourhoods after their residents took collective action to reduce their vulnerability to wildfire.

Other neighbourhoods are also encouraged to pursue FireSmart Canada certification. Even if not located near a forested area, homes and other structures are at risk of igniting due to wind-driven embers. It is therefore important for all homeowners to protect their properties by clearing brush one metre from around buildings, on roofs and in gutters.

By taking proactive steps to protect our properties, we can all play a part in keeping Summerland safe.

For a FireSmart home assessment, Summerland residents can e-mail: [firesmart@summerland.ca](mailto:firesmart@summerland.ca)

For a checklist of steps to prepare and protect yourself from wildfire, visit: [firesmartbc.ca](http://firesmartbc.ca)

*Doug Holmes is mayor of Summerland*