

Community Wildfire Protection Plan for North Cowichan

The Municipality recently completed a Community Wildfire Protection Plan for North Cowichan. The Plan, jointly funded by the Province and North Cowichan, identifies the risk of forest fire within North Cowichan's jurisdiction. According to the plan, over 58% of the total land base in North Cowichan at extreme or high risk of forest fires. To help lessen the risk of a wildfire occurring and reducing the impacts of a forest fire, the Community Wildfire Protection Plan makes a number of recommendations for our community. Listed below are these recommendations for your review and comments.

Comments will be received by the Municipality until March 20, 2007. The Plan is available at the Municipal Hall. For further information, contact North Cowichan's Forestry Department at 746-3100, or by email at frank@northcowichan.bc.ca.

The District of North Cowichan has made significant strides to reduce the threat of fire in the wildland urban interface. The four fire protection areas in the District, Southend, Chemainus, Crofton, and Maple Bay, provide fire protection and prevention. The protection services throughout the Valley have developed a high degree of cooperation between jurisdictions and the Ministry of Forests and Range.

Effective public education and community involvement encourages home and property owners to take their own preventative measures in interface fire risk areas. Government planning tools can be used to ensure preventative measures are taken in new development.

The danger of interface fire is inevitable. Despite determined efforts at fire prevention and protection, interface incidents throughout the province are becoming more common.

The following recommendations are aimed at reducing the risk of interface fire in North Cowichan:

Education and Community Involvement

1. Engage the public in forest wildfire interface issues through a public education program.
 - < Promote the CWPP through public forums such as National Forestry Week and as was done at the Cowichan Exhibition - Fall Fair 2006.
 - < Support neighbourhood "Forest Watch" patrols.
 - < Encourage property owners to establish and maintain Fuel Modification Zones around structures in high to extreme interface areas.
 - < Encourage residents in high and extreme fire hazard areas to landscape with fire resistant vegetation.
 - < Support composting by residents in the high and extreme fire hazard areas.
2. Conduct neighborhood information sessions in high and extreme interface hazard areas.
 - < Request involvement of fire protection personnel through the Protective Services Committee.
3. Engage First Nations through information sharing on the CWPP and public education on forest interface issues.

VEGETATION MANAGEMENT

Fuel Modification

4. Establish defined fire breaks along the edges of new subdivisions bordering areas with significant long term forests.
5. Encourage and cooperate with utility operations and cellular communication providers to reduce forest fuels in utility corridors and around communication towers to protect them from forest wildfires.
6. Support composting at both local and regional government levels for woody debris in high and extreme forest fire risk areas.
7. Support alternative methods for disposing of forest fuels through North Cowichan's Forestry Program.
8. Liaise with BC Parks to create effective fuel management for Provincial Parks within North Cowichan.

INFRASTRUCTURE:

Planning

9. Refer the CWPP to the Planning Department for inclusion in the next update of the Official Community Plan.
10. Refer the use of Development Permit Areas for areas in a high to extreme fire risk to North Cowichan's Planning Department for consideration.
11. Refer the use of Section 219 covenants of the Municipal Act to address interface fire protection measures to the Planning Department.
12. Refer subdivision applicants in the high and extreme fire hazard risk areas to the Forestry Department for their input.

Roles and Responsibility

13. Liaise with local governments, UBCM, and the Province to determine roles and responsibilities of the various levels of government.

ACCESS

14. Refer the Fire Smart minimum requirements for new roads and driveways to the Engineering Department for their consideration.
15. Encourage Fire Hall staff to continue familiarizing staff with the roads and infrastructure in their areas.
16. Aim for a maximum grade of 15% on North Cowichan Forestry roads.

FIREFIGHTING

17. Refer the acquisition of bush capable water trucks to the Protective Services Committee for consideration.

WATER SUPPLY FOR FIRE FIGHTING

18. Identify areas not serviced by fire hydrants in the high and extreme fire hazard risk areas, and locate other potential water sources for emergency use for forest fire fighting.