



Forest Enhancement
Society of British Columbia

Close to Completion: Wildfire Risk Mitigation Project in Cheakamus Community Forest

Press Release | May 8

WHISTLER, B.C.: The Cheakamus Community Forest (CCF), one of 50+ community managed forests in the province, is completing a fuel-thinning wildfire risk mitigation project as part of a landscape level fuel break on the southern slopes of Whistler Mountain. The project, along both sides of the Cheakamus Lake Forest Service Road, serves as the main access point into Cheakamus Lake and Garibaldi Provincial Park. The project is funded by the Forest Enhancement Society of B.C. (FESBC), the Resort Municipality of Whistler (RMOW), and all revenue generated from the sale of logs from the thinning are applied to reduce the cost of treatment. The purpose is to alter wildfire behavior by modifying forest densities and structure in this high priority, heavily used portion of the community forest to protect the south facing slopes of Whistler Mountain, the community of Whistler, and the western edge of Garibaldi Provincial Park.

Situated on more than 33,000 hectares surrounding Whistler, the CCF was established in April 2009 when the Lil'wat and Squamish First Nations and the RMOW jointly signed a 25-year tenure with the Ministry of Forests. Together, they oversee the management and operation of the forest through the Cheakamus Community Forest Society. The RMOW's multi-year Wildfire Protection Strategy focuses on landscape level and interface treatments plus infrastructure protection and community outreach under the FireSmart initiative. "We're adopting a multi-pronged approach and partnering with the CCF to deliver on the landscape scale fuel breaks," said Heather Beresford, RMOW Environmental Stewardship Manager and CCF Administrator. "We believe this is what is needed to complete such a momentous task with urgency, and one all community leaders fully support in the face of our rapidly changing climate."

In agreement with the proactive and urgent work is Tom Cole, Forestry Manager for CCF. "Whistler is a forest dependent community. We are just as dependent on our scenic forested landscapes to support tourism and our recreation-based economy as we are on timber production. Thick, persistent smoke in the region the two past summers has greatly changed the narrative in our community from 'why are we cutting trees?' to 'why are we not cutting more?'"

The Cheakamus Lake Landscape Fuel Break, once completed, will total 114 hectares with 40 hectares completed last winter in order to avoid disruptions to recreational users and park access. Both mechanical and manual thinning methods are implemented to alter wildfire behavior, reduce the probability of ignition and spread, and if a wildfire was to occur on the landscape, provide anchor points for suppression efforts while also allowing for a safer evacuation route for the public from the area.

"This collaborative project fulfills a number of our Society's purposes," said Dave Conly, FESBC Operations Manager. "The work will mitigate potential wildfire risk which provides enhanced levels of safety for residents and helps protect important local infrastructure. The project will also enhance wildlife habitat, create employment, protect ecological values, reduce wildfire smoke, and support the utilization of low value forests. We have developed a unique model with the Cheakamus Community Forest where the proceeds from log sales that come from these treatments are put back into the project. This is a great way to accomplish more treatments with less funding and leveraging funds is desirable to create the best value for the citizens of the province of B.C."



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Seeing the benefits of this collaboration is Lil'wat Nation Kúkwpi7 Skalúlmecw Chief Dean Nelson. "Creating employment for our people and working collaboratively is what we had envisioned when we entered into the CCF agreement with the RMOW and Squamish Nation. This partnership has shown a genuine commitment to relationship building and reconciliation," said Chief Nelson. "First Nations having jurisdiction over forests in our Territory is a step to others recognizing the role this land plays in our culture and traditional way of life. The forest fire fuels reduction work we engaged in this past winter provided Lílwat Forestry Ventures crews with employment during what is normally a slow time and has better prepared our crews for wildfire readiness in Lil'wat (Mount Currie)."

Project benefits are plentiful and there is great appreciation for the funding that has come from the provincial government through FESBC. "We are very appreciative to FESBC for this funding," said Cole. "We know this project aligns with the goals of both our organizations because it not only makes a difference for citizens locally but province-wide, too, and is helping us create positive economic impact, employment, and sustainability of one of our most significant natural resources: our forests."

For Interviews with Cheakamus Community Forest

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