



Forest Enhancement
Society of British Columbia



Syilx Stewardship Project Collaborates to Reduce Wildfire Risk in Peachland

June 20, 2019

Peachland, B.C.: the Syilx Territory and the Thompson-Okanagan Region have historically been maintained by fire events, but active fire suppression tactics have led to vegetation ingrowth and extreme fuel loading throughout Syilx Territory, a territory covering approximately 69,000 square kilometres. Combined with climate change, fire suppression has led to longer, more intense, and more destructive wildfire seasons and a less resilient forest ecosystem. A collaborative project has local First Nations, industry, the Provincial government, and the Forest Enhancement Society of B.C. (FESBC) working together to develop solutions to benefit and protect all citizens, wildlife habitat, ecosystem functioning, and cultural values of the land.

“The Syilx territory is a diverse and beautiful landscape of deserts, lakes, forests, and endangered grasslands with the highest concentration of rare and threatened species in British Columbia,” said Cailyn Glasser, Biologist for Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA). “This project is the product of collaboration between local First Nations Penticton Indian Band and ONA, Gorman Brothers Ltd. (GBL), the Provincial government, and FESBC. Our objectives were to reduce wildfire risk, increase forest stand values, protect ecological values, and enhance cultural resource values.”

Recently, representatives from GBL, FESBC, the Syilx territory, ONA, and the Provincial government were on site for a field tour to see the work that has taken place.

“Our team at FESBC was pleased to see the work done at the site just above the community of Peachland,” said Dave Conly, Registered Professional Forester and Operations Manager for FESBC. “We believe that a more resilient forest ecosystem supports sustainable cultural, ecological, and social values, decreases threats to communities and infrastructure, and provides more natural resources including timber supply. This project successfully combined timber harvesting with cultural-ecological restoration objectives.”

Thinning the forest to more natural semi-open state was the prescription agreed upon by all partners. One logging contractor did the timber harvesting and fuel reduction treatments creating a very efficient project. The icing on the cake is that most of the post-harvest biomass was utilized (instead of being slash burned), which helps BC and Canada meet our climate change targets.

“There are many benefits to this project,” said Matt Scott, of Gorman Bros. “In terms of the work done, we were able to reduce the number of trees from 350 trees per hectare to 75 per hectare, recover 2,400 cubic metres of pulp fibre, and harvest 7,000 cubic metres of merchantable timber. This not only restores the forest ecosystem functions associated with low intensity stand maintaining fire regime, but also contributes to a fuel break to protect Summerland, Peachland, and rural development from wildfire risk.”

The project is a model of what is accomplished when forestry professionals, indigenous peoples, and stakeholders come together to protect and enhance the land. “We don’t want to stop logging,” said Xwestikn, an elder with Syilx Traditional Ecological Knowledge Team. “We want to do it right and this project is a good example of how we can do this right, together.”

Glasser agrees.



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“We are appreciative of this partnership,” said Glasser. “The opportunity to return the land back to a place where mule deer and other ungulate species can once again thrive, while also enhancing cultural resources through the restoration of reciprocal relationships between people and the landscape, is something we can all be proud of.”

For More Information on the Project:

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For More Information on additional Wildfire Risk Mitigation Projects Funded by FESBC:

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