

A Call for Action on Wildfire Prevention in North Saanich

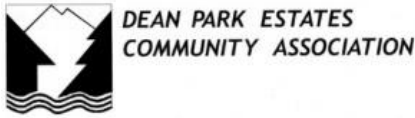
The wildfires that devastated huge swaths of the interior regions of British Columbia and Alberta are stark reminders of the need for North Saanich residents and the District of North Saanich Council and staff to work together to safeguard our neighbourhoods from potential wildfires in our municipality.

The Dean Park Estates Community Association (DPECA), North Saanich Residents Association (NSRA), and Property Responsibility on the Waterfront (PROW) are deeply committed to maintaining and protecting North Saanich and our fellow neighbours who reside on the Saanich Peninsula. These associations fully recognize that wildfire prevention and risk reduction is a district-wide matter. **This is why a proactive comprehensive wildfire prevention program (including FireSmart, management of our regional and provincial parks, industry buy-in, and partnering with local First Nations) for North Saanich would benefit all residents of the municipality.**



Current Western Canada Wildfire Reality

- In Canada, it is predicted that climate change will likely increase the annual area burned in some regions as well as impact fire severity and fire season length.
- There has been a series of increasingly catastrophic wildfire events in recent years including BC's interior regions (2017 and 2018); Fort McMurray, AB (2016); Slave Lake, AB (2011); and Kelowna, BC (2003).
- Extreme weather events such as "mega wildland fires" are predicted to increase as the climate changes and suppression will not be sufficient to protect communities or natural resource values. As Drs. Daniels, Gray and Burton (2017) stated in *2017 Megafires in BC – Urgent need to adapt and improve resilience to wildfire*, "the extreme wildfire season of 2017 is not an isolated event. It represents the new normal and is part of a global trend of increasing megafires with tremendous social, ecological and economic costs."
- Wildfires are becoming a larger community issue because of the "**wildland/urban interface (WUI) disaster sequence**" – whereby fire transitions into urban areas when multiple scattered homes located near the forest/urban boundary ignite, primarily from embers, becoming starting points for subsequent fires to spread towards the urban core. [A. Westhaver]



- Proactive land and resource management such as wildfire prevention and risk reduction education/awareness events coupled with forest fuel management and related prescribed burning activities are now being initiated by some communities to meet the challenges of climate change and the threats of wildland fires to their community.

Current North Saanich Wildfire Reality

Based on the 2011 *District of North Saanich Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP)*, 40% of the community lives in areas that are considered at “high or extreme risk” of forest wildfires (see below table). Many of these areas at risk are in the highly wooded regions of North Saanich and/or near the two regional and provincial parks (e.g., Horth Hill Regional Park and John Dean Provincial Park). It is inevitable that in the subsequent eight years, areas exposed to high/extreme fire rating in North Saanich have likely increased.

Fire Hazard Rating in the District of North Saanich^(*)

Fire Hazard Rating	Hectares	Percent of North Saanich land base	Areas Ranked High to Extreme
Extreme	352	8.70%	John Dean Provincial Park and surrounding area
High	1,264	31.40%	Horth Hill, Sumac Park and Cloake Hill, Ardmore and Residential Coastal Fringe
Moderate	2,398	59.60%	N/A
Low	11	0.30%	N/A

(*) From - *District of North Saanich community wildfire protection plan* (Strathcona Forestry Consulting, May 2011)

Call for Action to Address North Saanich Wildfire Reality

- **Proactive voluntary vegetation management for homes vulnerable to the fire front and ignition by embers. Examples of actions YOU can voluntarily do to reduce your home’s vulnerability** (See www.firesmartcanada.ca for more protection actions aimed at Zones 1A to 3):

Priority Zone
1A: 0-1.5
meters of home

- Remove surface fuel beds (e.g., dried residential lawns, bark mulch, wood chips, ornamental shrubs [cedars & junipers], and wood fences).
- Clean gutter debris and move vulnerable outbuildings.
- Eliminate firewood piles.
- Trim or eliminate large trees.

- **Education of homeowners within the ignition zone of the rural - urban forest interface.** Compliance with FireSmart guidelines has been shown to greatly increase the probability that homes can survive this wildfire event. [Westhaver, A. (2017). *Why some homes survived: Learning from the Fort McMurray wildland/urban interface fire disaster*. Toronto, ON: Institute for Catastrophic Loss Reduction]
- **Multi-level government approach to proactive forest wildfire prevention initiatives.** There is a need to work across various levels of government to address issues related to all of the various community developments, First Nations communities, and local, regional, and provincial forested parks.

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