



REGIONAL DISTRICT of Fraser-Fort George

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REPORT FOR CONSIDERATION

TO: Chair and Directors File No.: EP-FIR 1.4

FROM: Kenna Jonkman, MCIP, RPP, General Manager of Community and Development Services
Colby Molcak, Emergency Services Coordinator

DATE: July 4, 2025

SUBJECT: FireSmart Pilot Program for Cooperative Community Wildfire Response (CCWR) Organizations
SUMMARY: Purpose: For Information

Attachments:
1. RDFFG Board Letter and Response from Ministry of Forests regarding the CCWR Pilot Program

Previous Reports:
Item No. 6.2, January 2025 PSEMSC

RECOMMENDATION(S):

THAT the report dated July 4, 2025, regarding “FireSmart Pilot Program for Regional District Cooperative Community Wildfire Response Organizations” be received for information.

ENTITLEMENT	HOW VOTE COUNTED
All 1 Director/1 vote	Majority

ISSUE(S):

In January 2025, a report was provided to the Public Safety and Emergency Management Standing Committee regarding Union of BC Municipalities’ (UBCM) latest funding initiative, the FireSmart Cooperative Community Wildfire Response (CCWR) Pilot Program. This program allowed regional districts to apply for funding to outfit organized community groups, who reside in areas outside of fire protection, with the gear and training necessary to assist the BC Wildfire Service with mop-up operations on wildfires in and around their community. The Public Safety and Emergency Management Standing Committee requested that the Regional District engage with the Ministry regarding the changes.

This report provides an update on communication with the Ministry and additional engagement that has occurred.

RELEVANT POLICIES:

1. *Local Government Act:*
 - Fostering the current and future economic, social, and environmental wellbeing of its communities
2. *Emergency and Disaster Management Act:*
 - Establishes requirement for maintaining an emergency management program
 - Identifies local government responsibilities
3. Local Authority Emergency Management Regulation 380/95:
 - Establishes requirements to develop and implement emergency plans and other measures for the Electoral Areas of the Regional District under Bylaw No. 2162, 2006
 - Currently under revision (for release in 2024-2025)
4. Emergency Preparedness Service Establishment Bylaw No. 2162, 2006:
 - Establishes the service of emergency preparedness within each of the seven electoral areas

5. Emergency Management Program Administration Bylaw No. 2960, 2015:

- Provides for the administration and operations of the emergency preparedness service including the development, maintenance, and management of the Emergency Management Program

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES ALIGNMENT:

- | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Indigenous and Intergovernmental Partnerships | <input type="checkbox"/> Organizational Strength and Adaptability | <input type="checkbox"/> Quality Community Services | <input type="checkbox"/> Environmental Stewardship and Climate Action |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Awareness and Engagement | <input type="checkbox"/> Statutory or Routine Business | | |

SERVICE RELEVANCE:

The Emergency Preparedness Service provides the operational capability of the Emergency Management Program; established to fulfil the requirements of the Regional District under the *Emergency Disaster Management Act (EDMA)*.

The Emergency Management Program encompasses the strategic and operational development of the components of the emergency management plans to address the four pillars of emergency management: mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery. Emergency plans outline the authority and responsibility to act in emergencies and communicate the policies and procedures to be followed.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATION(S):

The FireSmart CCWR Pilot Program (subject to available funding) covers 100% of eligible activities to a maximum of \$10,000 per CCWR organization and no more than a maximum of \$70,000 may be available to the RDFFG. Eligible CCWR expenditures include three required wildfire training courses, two optional wildfire training courses and personal protective equipment (PPE) for each CCWR member.

OTHER CONSIDERATION(S):

At the January meeting, Administration indicated they would support the two community groups who participated in the CCWR program prior to Regional District involvement to maintain their status as CCWR organizations for the 2025 wildfire season but did not have the capacity in the 2025 workplan to establish new groups under this program. The Regional District submitted and was awarded two grants on behalf of the Miworth and Dunster community groups. Administration is currently working with these groups to carry out training and purchasing of personal protective equipment.

DECISION OPTIONS:

1. Approve recommendations.
 - The report will be received for information

COMMENTS:

This pilot program added new responsibilities, risks, and workload to regional districts without consultation. A letter from the RDFFG Board was sent to the Ministry of Forests to provide initial feedback on the delivery of this program. This letter and the Ministries response is attached to the report.

The Chair of the Board, Director Beckett, and RDFFG administration met with BC Wildfire Service representatives on May 7, 2025, to discuss the program and the letter the Regional District sent. In addition, all Regional Districts were invited to discuss the grant program with UBCM on June 12, 2025.

During both discussions, feedback provided by the Regional District included:

- Inadequate engagement and collaboration with the Regional District
- Regional District resources are limited

- Concerned with competing responsibilities during an emergency event
- Concerned that community groups are confused about how/who will request their activation and long-term activation reporting
- Historically, these groups have been managed by BC Wildfire Service and should fall back to their responsibility to manage as the Regional District does not have authority in field response
- The grant program should be changed to allow community groups to apply for funding directly
- If the Regional District is to be involved, remove the grant application process and directly provide funds
- If the Regional District is to be involved, increase funding for incremental staff costs to operate the program
- Update training courses to prevent misunderstanding of duties performed by CCWR groups. Currently CCWR groups take training that is not focused on their role and leads to unintended expectations
- Increased funding to each Electoral Area is needed

In addition, UBCM allowed Regional Districts to submit written responses to specific questions. The Regional District responded with the following:

- What could the future version of CCWR look like for RDs?

Answer: Future versions could look like what they did prior to this year where BCWFS is the lead in funding, collaborating, and coordinating CCWR's.

- Would allowing both RDs and eligible CCWR groups to apply directly for funding help?

Answer: Yes, allowing eligible CCWR groups to apply directly would be beneficial for several reasons. This would allow CCWR groups to apply directly for funding, removing the Regional District from the program. As you are aware, a Regional District has no jurisdiction in dispatching these groups and we have experienced this year that by including the Regional District in the grant program; it causes confusing for the community group who they "report" to and what will happen in the event they are actioned. BCWFS needs to be involved in the funding, training and education of these groups to ensure clarity on role expectations (response vs. clean up).

- What other grant program design changes would help?

Answer: Reduce process for Regional Districts, provide the money annually without a grant program. Additional grant processes add work to the resources needed by the Regional District to carry out emergency preparedness work. More funding is also going to be needed. This year, RDFFG applied for 2 grants, and the maximum of \$10,000 per Electoral Area did not fully fund on CCWR group. If there are multiple groups requesting funding, the grant program will not be sufficient and will put the Regional District in a position to navigate how to address multiple community interests. Regional Districts should not be in the position in determining which community should receive priority.

- Are there any ways the overall CCWR program (i.e. not just the funding) could be improved to support RDs?

Answer: BCWFS to appoint a representative to work with RDs to implement this program. This could be done through zones. At the very least, this should be a jointly deployed program. BCWFS needs to be an active participant to be able to give information on how/who/when these groups will be deployed. BCWFS should be the agency responsible for retaining training/membership information for these groups and Regional Districts only need to be situationally aware where these groups are and if/when BCWFS will activate/deploy them.

- Are there any ways the overall CCWR program (i.e., not just the funding) could be improved to support RDs?

Answer: The training required by CCWR's should be tailored to their intended purpose. We note that the courses outlined and required by BCWFS to be a response group provides training related to fire fighting/response. It is our understanding that this is not the intent of these groups; however, through conversation, that is what these groups want and think they will be called upon to do.

At the June 12, 2025, meeting, UBCM indicated that a small percentage of Regional District applied for funds this year and that significant changes to the FireSmart CCWR Pilot Program are expected for the 2026 wildfire season based on the feedback provided by regional districts across the province.

Respectfully submitted,

“Kenna Jonkman”

Kenna Jonkman, MCIP, RPP
General Manager of Community and Development Services

“Colby Molcak”

Colby Molcak
Emergency Services Coordinator

KJ:CM