



Regional Board Report

Information

Approved for Board Consideration

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brian Reardon".

Brian Reardon, CAO

To: Regional Board

From: David Komaika, Director of Engineering Services

Date: February 10, 2022

Subject: White Rock Lake Wildfire – Recovery Plan Update

Voting Entitlement: *All Directors - Unweighted Corporate Vote - Simple Majority - LGA 208*

Purpose: To update the Board on White Rock Lake Wildfire recovery and rebuilding.

Executive Summary:

In August 2021 the White Rock Lake Wildfire destroyed approximately 75 structures in the RDCO North Westside communities. A Resiliency and Recovery Centre within the RDCO was formed to support short-term and medium-term needs and establish longer term support frameworks.

In the aftermath of the fire, the RDCO's Resiliency and Recovery Centre coordinated and aided resident recovery needs with funding provided through non-profit organizations and Emergency Management BC (EMBC). This included case workers engaging one-on-one with property owners and residents by connecting them with insurance advocates, food hampers, and financial supports and assistance. The recovery team identified and responded to short-term needs of the community followed by reducing fees and guiding affected property owners through the rebuilding processes.

The draft Recovery Plan submitted to the Province on September 9th, 2021, noted that community assessments would be required before finalizing the plan. This was to ensure environmental and hazardous considerations were identified to inform the rebuilding framework. The Province and the RDCO retained Clarke Geoscience Ltd. (CGL) to conduct two separate – but connected - assessments which have since been completed:

1. MFLNRORD - Hazardous Condition Assessment – “Post-Wildfire Environmental and Hazardous Conditions Assessment” – Okanagan Indian Band (IR #1), the Regional District of North Okanagan and the Regional District of Central Okanagan; and
2. RDCO - Community Hazard Assessment – “Post-Wildfire Environmental and Hazardous Conditions Assessment” of the Killiney Beach and Estamont Area.

With the immediate recovery needs addressed and these assessments now complete, the Resiliency and Recovery Centre has shifted resources to rebuilding. The identified needs of residents, along with land use regulations and environmental and hazard assessments will continue to inform this process.

Next steps:

The needs of residents identified in the Recovery Plan, along with findings from Clarke Geoscience assessment, have informed the following actions:

- Request for support from EMBC to extend the recovery manager by three months
- Request for support from EMBC to extend the Environmental Planner, Building Inspector and planning administrative assistant by six months
- Request for support from EMBC to fund additional assessments as recommended within the Assessments completed by Clarke Geoscience
- Request for support from EMBC to facilitate public education and awareness campaign

Recommendation(s):

THAT the Regional Board receives the White Rock Lake Wildfire – Recovery Update report from the Director of Engineering Services dated February 10, 2022 for information.

Respectfully Submitted:



David Komaike, Director of Engineering Services

Prepared by: Travis Kendel, Manager of Engineering Services and Steve Schell, Resiliency & Recovery Manager

Attachment(s):

- White Rock Lake Recovery Plan
- Recovery Progress Report
- Post-wildfire Environmental and Hazardous Conditions Assessment (MFLNRORD Hazardous Condition Assessment)
- Post-wildfire Environmental and Hazardous Conditions Assessment of the North Westside Area (RDCO Community Hazard Assessment)
- Assessment Summary of recommended Mitigation Measures and Responsibility

Strategic Plan Alignment:

Priorities: Sustainable Communities, Environment

Values: Resiliency, Relationships

Background:

In August 2021 the White Rock Lake Wildfire destroyed approximately 75 structures in the RDCO North Westside communities. A Resiliency and Recovery Centre within the RDCO was formed to support short-term and medium-term needs and establish longer term support frameworks.

Resiliency and Recovery Centre

In the aftermath of the fire, the RDCO's Resiliency and Recovery Centre coordinated and aided resident recovery needs with funding provided through non-profit organizations and Emergency Management BC (EMBC). This included case workers engaging one-on-one with property owners and residents by connecting them with insurance advocates, food hampers, and financial supports and assistance. The recovery team identified and responded to short-term needs of the community followed by reducing fees and guiding affected property owners through the rebuilding processes.

The Resiliency and Recovery Centre within the RDCO then sought to resolve as many concerns as possible through sustainable solutions that were almost exclusively funded through non-profit and EMBC programs.

Common themes included:

- Concern regarding lack of insurance coverage to rebuild or repair
- Need for danger tree assessments and removal coordination and funding
- Request for short-term food allowances and longer-term accommodation support
- Coordination and funding support needed for debris and concrete disposal.
- Identification of post wildfire hazards and recommendations for mitigation
- Confirmation of the rebuilding process
- Relief on current year tax assessments, water and garbage fees
- Assistance understanding complicated insurance policies
- Need for mental health counselling

The draft Recovery Plan was submitted to the Province on September 9th, 2021, clearly identifying that community assessments would be required before finalizing the plan. The RDCO Recovery and Resiliency office continues to provide regular updates to Emergency Management BC as needs are identified and as recovery progresses. The Recovery Plan was presented to the Regional Board on September 24th, 2021, with future updates provided to the Board through the standing CAO report provided each Board meeting and progress reports as provided by the Recovery Manager.

As of January 31, 2022, nearly all short-term and medium-term unmet needs within the wildfire impacted communities have been addressed. Unmet needs relating to the new Debris Management program will be met through collaboration with the Canadian Red Cross, Emergency Management BC and the RDCO. This project will provide funding to those without sufficient insurance coverage to complete demolition and disposal activities, paving the way for the entire community to complete demolition and cleanup activities.

For longer term needs, all resolutions are being delivered through existing or recently established non-profit programs, such as the Canadian Red Cross, Central Okanagan Food Bank, and Mennonite Disaster Service. These include:

- Red Cross
 - Personalized individual and family support
 - Housing repair and reconstruction support
 - Interim housing assistance

- Central Okanagan Food Bank
 - Food hampers and support
- Mennonite Disaster Service volunteers
 - Repair and rebuild the homes
 - Danger tree removal and site clean up for rebuilding

Post-Wildfire Environmental and Hazardous Conditions Assessments

As identified in the draft Recovery Plan, environmental and hazardous assessments were needed to inform the rebuilding process. The Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development (MFLNRORD) retained Clarke Geoscience Ltd. (CGL) to complete a Post-Wildfire Environmental and Hazardous Conditions Assessment for priority areas within the Okanagan Basin that were affected by the White Rock Lake Wildfire, referred to within this Board report as the MFLNRORD Hazardous Condition Assessment. The areas included in this assessment lie within the jurisdictions of the Okanagan Indian Band (IR #1), the Regional District of North Okanagan and the Regional District of Central Okanagan.

In addition to MFLNRORD's contract with CGL, the RDCO with funding from EMBC, retained Clarke Geosciences Ltd. to complete a Post-Wildfire Environmental and Hazardous Conditions Assessment of the Killiney Beach and Estamont Areas for thirty-four (34) properties directly impacted by the 2021 White Rock Lake Wildfire, and which are near sensitive aquatic environments (i.e., streams, springs, and the foreshore of Okanagan Lake). This assessment is referred to within this Board report as the RDCO Community Hazard Assessment.

The objective of the RDCO Community Hazard Assessment was to document health and safety issues for selected damaged properties and to identify applicable Provincial and local government policies and regulations for recovery or rebuilding affected structures on these affected properties.

The assessment also comments on post-wildfire impacts to the general area since the anticipated effects extend beyond these properties.

Post-wildfire natural hazards are associated with hydrologic and geomorphologic processes including:

- Hydrologic Hazards – such as flooding, debris floods, and sediment-laden floods. These processes are associated with the loss of vegetation, and potential development of water repellent soils, due to wildfire within the contributing upslope catchment area.
- Geomorphic Hazards – such as landslides, debris flows, and soil erosion. Hillslope stability impacts are associated with the loss of vegetation, exposed mineral soils, and thermal expansion of rocks, due to wildfire.

The above-listed hazards are governed by climate, which is variable and difficult to predict. Wildfire-related impacts will be the greatest within the first 5 years. Within the short-term, hydrologic and geomorphic hazards are most likely to be associated with spring snow melt rates, rain on snow events, and short-duration high-intensity rainfall events.

Post-wildfire impacts in the Killiney Beach area are most likely to be associated with changes in hydrology on small tributary streams originating from the slopes above the subdivision. The assessment has interpreted that many streams above the subdivision lose water by infiltration into pervious sand and gravel deposits that are generally situated upslope of the subdivision. When passing through the subdivision, the resultant stream flows are much smaller and, as a result, are sometimes diverted and contained within ditches, pipes, and culverts. These downstream conveyances are therefore vulnerable to post-wildfire increases in runoff.

Post-wildfire impacts in the Estamont area are likely to be associated with changes in hydrology affecting small streams that flow into the area and include localized effects of high severity burn on soil stability. In the Estamont area, properties below Westside Road are located within a zone of groundwater emergence. Increased discharge from spring sources and increased groundwater levels may negatively impact slope stability in these zones.

When initiating rebuilding, property owners with structures damaged in the wildfire will need to navigate a rebuilding process that meets current local government bylaws and provincial regulations. Individual Property Reports included in the hazard conditions assessment identify risk mitigation measures and, in some cases, identify the need for additional review or assessment work prior to rebuilding.

Overall, the report indicates that a significant portion of assessed properties will require further assessment prior to obtaining an Environmental / Hazardous Conditions Development Permit or Building Permit.

The Transition to Rebuilding:

With the immediate recovery supports provided and these assessments now complete, the Resiliency and Recovery Centre has shifted resources to rebuilding. The identified needs of residents, along with land use regulations and environmental and hazard assessments will continue to inform this process.

The RDCO and property owners will be challenged where burned structures were previously approved under different regulations and will no longer meet the current bylaws and environmental standards. For these properties, the process will require additional assessment work, and in some cases, variances to provincial and local government regulations and bylaws may be requested. The RDCO will assist property owners with navigating the regulatory approval process.

Next Steps:

On January 27th the RDCO, Okanagan Indian Band (OKIB) and provincial ministries met to identify next steps following the conclusion of the initial hazard assessment findings. From that meeting, the RDCO observed that provincial ministries are engaged and preparing resources to proactively address risks, collaborate with regional governments, act and maintain public infrastructure and safety.

Resident needs identified by the Recovery Plan and recommendations from the Clarke Geoscience Assessments have informed the following actions:

- Request for support from EMBC to fund additional assessments as recommended by Clarke Geoscience Ltd.
- Request for support from EMBC to facilitate a public education and awareness campaign
- Request for support from EMBC to extend the recovery manager by three months
- Request for support from EMBC to extend the Environmental Planner, Building Inspector and planning Administrative Assistant by six months

Mid-term and long-term actions are also important and will be actioned once immediate term risks have been addressed. These include:

- Long-term erosion protection
- Refined mapping
- Additional assessments

Considerations:

Organizational/External:

- Community Services currently has three months of resources available (until March 2022) to support the rebuilding process
- Ongoing hazard mitigation and risk associated within transportation corridors is being addressed through MOTI
- Potential upslope hazards will be further reviewed through both the provincial and local government permitting process. Additional mitigation recommendations and/or conditions may be required as part of the rebuilding requirements
- Collaboration between Provincial Ministries, local governments and OKIB will continue to identify and review mitigation options for identified and potential upslope hazards on provincial lands upslope of the communities of Estamont and Killiney Beach

Financial:

- Dependant upon approval or denial of pending EMBC funding requests

Considerations not applicable:

Alternate Recommendation
Legal/Statutory Authority