

Predator Ridge FireSmart Community Plan

October 2016

A plan prepared by the Predator Ridge Community FireSmart Committee (PRCFC)
based on the recommendations made in the Predator Ridge Wildfire Hazard
Assessment Report (November 3, 2015)

*Working to protect
our community*

Predator Ridge Community FireSmart Committee

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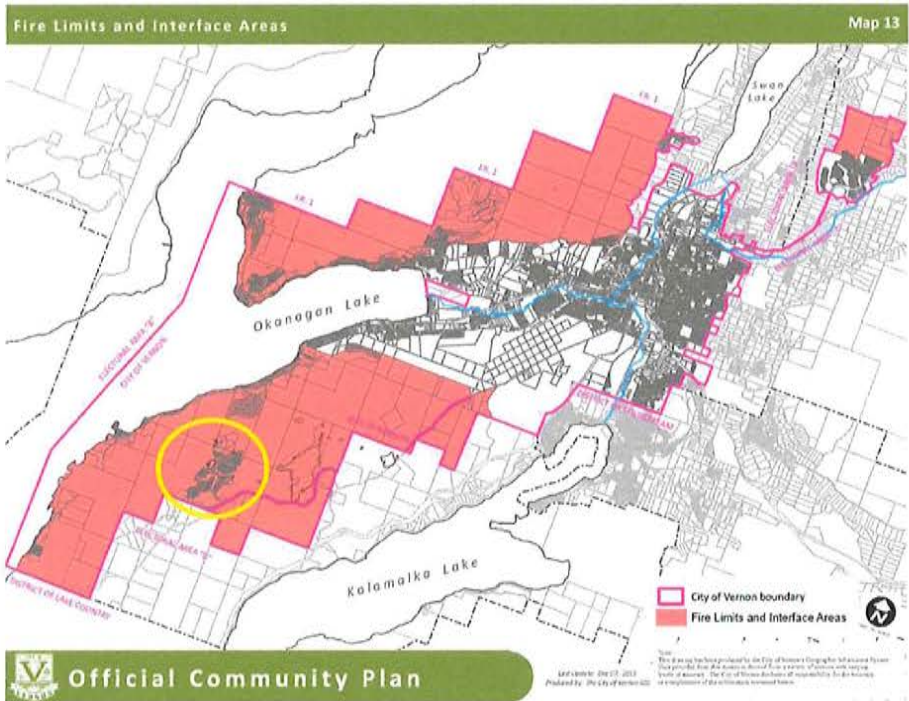
Introduction

The Predator Ridge community

Predator Ridge is a 36-hole golf resort community in the Okanagan Valley outside Vernon, British Columbia. The resort spans 1,200 acres and is home to an ever-growing community, which currently has over 600 residents. The Predator Ridge Neighbourhood Plan has a proposed build expected to reach between 1500 and 1700 units. The community encompasses the adjacent property Sparkling Hill Resort.

The topography of the area — which also comprises 14 km of walking trails — consists mainly of rolling hills and mountain slopes, the cover of which is a mix of untreated dense conifer forest, desert grasslands, irrigated golf course, landscaped gardens and a network of cart paths and roads.

The community is located in the zone marked in yellow, comprised in the Fire Limits and Interface Areas on the map below:



City of Vernon Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP)

According to the **Vernon Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) Final Report – July 2, 2014 (Project 1242-1)** prepared by Forsite Consultants Ltd. for the City of Vernon, the area in the southwest portion of the city, where Predator Ridge lies, is covered mainly with multi-aged Douglas fir and ponderosa pine forests, presenting extensive ladder fuels, mature and ailing conifers increasing the potential for very intense, fast moving crown fires, which can occur under regular summer weather conditions.

Further, the CWPP (p. 13) recommends priority areas, susceptible to be impacted by wildfire, to be addressed as a priority, in which the Wildfire Threat Rating is classified as “High and Extreme”. The report further suggests these areas should be considered a high priority where funding and programs align.

In addition, the CWPP report (p. 22) advocates FireSmart landscaping -- as detailed in the “FireSmart Interface Priority Zones” of the *FireSmart Manual*—and the provision for buffer zones ranging from 10 to 100 metres from the homes -- as a suitable means to increase the potential for survivability of homes in wildfire areas.

Introducing FireSmart to Predator Ridge

In early 2015, the Predator Ridge Emergency Preparedness Committee was formed by several homeowners in order for the growing community to address an Emergency Preparedness Plan and encourage cooperation between the land developer and resort owner (Wesbild) and homeowners.

Lawrie Skolrood, our local FireSmart Representative and Deputy Chief Fire Prevention and Education and Dean Wakefield, Captain Fire Prevention, Vernon Fire Rescue Services attended a Community Awareness meeting at Predator Ridge organized by the Predator Ridge Community Emergency Management Committee (PRCEMC) where they introduced the FireSmart program to the community and pointed out the risks associated with living in a Wildfire Urban Interface (WUI) area. They encouraged the community to consider taking steps towards becoming FireSmart and explained how low cost measures could be taken to protect or reduce potential damage to homes from wildfire. Homeowners in attendance were given copies of the *FireSmart Homeowner’s Manual*.

The PRCEPC encouraged volunteers to serve on a FireSmart committee and move this project forward for the community. Thus, on August 24, 2015, the Predator Ridge Community FireSmart Committee (PRCFC) was formed with eleven (11) members serving on its board. The committee reports periodically to the PRCEMC and both committees work together for the safety of the community as a whole.

In November and December, 2015, the PRCFSC met and set goals to become a FireSmart community. These goals were:

- To remind residents and all stakeholders (internal and external)¹ in our community of the risk of wildfire and to communicate the importance of adhering to FireSmart principles;
- To receive training pertaining to FireSmart principles and guidelines in order to conduct Wildfire Hazard Assessments for homeowners in the community;
- To organize events aimed at educating the community and encouraging its residents to become FireSmart;
- To seek ongoing funding to be able to carry out its mission.

Funding of up to \$10,000 has been received for 2016 from the Strategic Wildfire Prevention Initiative for the launch of our community actions and it is planned that further funding will be sought on an ongoing basis to cover future activities.

As part of the FireSmart Canada Recognition programme, the PRCFSC contacted its local FireSmart Representative to request a site visit and hazard assessment of the community. These were carried out by Lawrie Skolrood, Deputy Chief Fire Prevention and Education and Dean Wakefield, Captain Fire Prevention, Vernon Fire Rescue Services. The resulting *Predator Ridge Wildfire Hazard Assessment Report* (the "Report"), was presented on November 3, 2015 and lists a number of recommendations, which are detailed below.

Predator Ridge Wildfire Hazard Assessment Report recommendations

The Report and site visit resulted in a number of recommendations for consideration by the PRCFSC, which are as follows:

1. Education of residents as to FireSmart landscaping within the priority zone 1 (10 metres)
2. Modify current "No Disturb" covenants to incorporate good FireSmart practices
3. Clearing or treatment of vegetation surrounding homes, promoting a 3 metre fire free zone
4. Provide signage and develop a strict policy regarding the disposal of cigarettes on the golf course, walking paths and within the community of Predator Ridge
5. Neighbourhood clean-up of resident-owned areas, which have not yet been landscaped
6. Clean-up and treatment of common wildland areas within the community, utilizing a collaboration of resources between residents and Wesbild (the landowner)
7. Transition when possible to concrete deck flooring from wood. Wooden decks close to ground level to be screened to eliminate embers gathering underneath them
8. Move wooden fencing and wooden trellises to a safe distance from homes
9. General clean-up and proper organisation of Clubhouse kitchen smoking area and storage yard
10. During the renovation of the maintenance yard provide proper separation from wildland of fuel tanks, with a specific storage area for flammable and combustible liquids

¹ The Predator Ridge community includes a number of stakeholders. The group referred to as 'Internal stakeholders' includes Predator Ridge Resort (Wesbild) employees, staff and board members. External stakeholders are resort members, clients/guests, community partners, contractors, etc. The Predator Ridge Community FireSmart Committee (PRCFSC) is mainly concerned with the community's residents, but works in collaboration with members of the Predator Ridge Resort management team.

11. Partnership with Ministry of Forests to modify the fuel in 70 metres of Crown land adjacent to Southwest of Predator Ridge property

Note: The recommendations from the Report have been re-ordered to reflect an order of priority and work flow to the Community Plan.

One additional action was added by the PRCFSC to the above 11 recommendations:

Ongoing FireSmart Training for PRCFSC members and homeowners

This action becomes part of our Community Plan in addition to the 11 recommendations made by the Report which are accepted in their entirety by the PRCFSC.

Bearing these recommendations in mind, the PRCFSC is taking measures to identify mitigation solutions relevant to the local community and implement concrete actions, which aim to address the Wildfire Hazard Assessment Report recommendations in stages.

Community impetus and a close call

Two distinct incidents during the spring and summer of 2016 helped focus minds and the attention of the community on the very real risk of wildfire facing Predator Ridge. One was Fort McMurray wildfire in May 2016, which highlighted the continued escalation of risk and cost to our communities from wildfires. Following the Kelowna (2003) and Slave Lake (2011) fires, the Fort McMurray fire and destruction of over 2,000 homes had a personal impact for many in our community.

The second incident took place on the afternoon of Saturday, 27 August 2016. Due to strong winds that day, a power line came down and ignited a fire in a forested area located near Kokanee Road in Vernon, approximately 2 km north of Predator Ridge. The fire grew very rapidly to approximately 10 hectares. Thanks to the availability of helicopters and air tankers from BC Wildfire and improved weather conditions, firefighters were able to control the fire and the worst was averted. If air support had not been so readily available, a far more serious outcome might have resulted.

For a growing number of residents at Predator Ridge, time has come to seriously consider the implications of living in a Wildfire Urban Interface (WUI) area and to ensure our community is doing all it can to mitigate the risks and protect our homes.

The PRCFSC Community Plan

The Community Plan is based on the 11 recommendations from the Report, dated November 3, 2015 as well as the additional action item determined by the PRCFSC.

1 - Ongoing FireSmart training

The first priority is to offer the FireSmart Canada Community Champion Workshop training to a core group of homeowners who will serve on the PRCFSC as the community grows.

Training could potentially be offered to any other homeowner not serving on the PRCFSC at their own expense, but it is intended current Champions will contribute to providing information and educating the rest community regarding FireSmart principles on an ongoing basis. Education and training is an integral part to the success of the FireSmart Program at Predator Ridge.

Action:

The 11 Members of the PRCFSC completed the Community Champion Workshop in February 2016 and one received training early October 2016. This is an important first step to the process to ensure these members serve as Community FireSmart Champions tasked with the organization, education, communication of a series of FireSmart events in the community.

2 - Education of residents as to FireSmart landscaping within the Priority Zone 1 (PZ1 – 10 metres)

The clean-up in the Priority Zone 1 should be an ongoing process every year for homeowners to ensure they clean up any new debris that will collect from year to year.

The *FireSmart Homeowner's Manual* sets out that clearing the first 10 metres of space around your home is the "First Priority" and is the most critical area to consider for fire protection.

Action:

A first "Neighbourhood FireSmart Day" was held on May 14, 2016 which gave residents a chance to see what a cleared Priority Zone 1 looks like compared to un-cleared zone. Some of the cleaned up debris was left on the lot for homeowners to have a visual reference as to the amount of debris they may accumulate with their own clean-up.

The PRCFSC members promoted this event by way of an advertisement in the local newspaper, City of Vernon website, community email announcements, bulletin boards and postings on mailboxes in the community. The City of Vernon Fire Department attended the event to answer any questions from residents.

Homeowners were led through the cleaned and un-cleaned areas and educated as to what clean-up had taken place and education material was handed out including the Home Owner

FireSmart Manual. Poster boards with before and after pictures of the area were displayed for homeowners to view and ask questions to the PRCFSC Members.

This initial event was very successful with approximately 120 homeowners attending. An educational event of this type will be repeated on an annual basis to ensure community awareness regarding FireSmart continues and grows.

3 - Clear or treat vegetation next to homes promoting 3 metre fire free zone

As we live in a community that is landscaped and maintained by the land developer, Wesbild, the PRCFSC must encourage and seek the support of Wesbild with current and future landscaping in order to adhere to the FireSmart Guide to Landscaping, FireSmart Practices and Vernon CWPP recommendations.

A primary principle that we have adopted as a FireSmart committee is that ***if a home does not ignite, it cannot burn.***

While all home yards at Predator Ridge are landscaped and yards contain irrigation systems, there are a number of identified risks in the first 3 metres around homes that require particular attention in the majority of homes:

- Widespread use of bark mulch immediately around homes and front wooden porches
- Landscaping practices that incorporate common use of coniferous trees and shrubs close to walls and windows
- Widespread use of tall grasses in landscaping
- Common use of wooden cedar front porches and rear decks on older homes (more than 3 years) many of which are not enclosed
- Occasional use of wooden privacy screens in close proximity to homes or on rear decks

It is well recognized by the committee that such landscaping choices may provide a “pathway” for fire to migrate up to and ignite the home itself as well as providing potential “Achilles’ heels” to otherwise sound construction practices in place in the community that are in line with FireSmart building recommendations. Following much recent research with respect to why homes do or do not ignite during WUI fires and the prominent role that embers play in causing home fires, the PRCFSC places critical importance as part of our Community Plan in raising awareness and prompting action to support the creation of fire free zones within the first 3 metres:

- With the resort owner in respect to landscaping choices for new and future developments and in particular encouraging the switch from bark mulch use to decorated stone or rock
- With homeowners to encourage the switch away from existing landscaping choices

Action:

This is communicated to all home owners as part of our annual Neighbourhood FireSmart Day as well as during individual home risk assessments.

To support education and awareness around the criticality of landscaping as part of good FireSmart practices, the PRCFSC has invited Alan Westhaver to Predator Ridge to present his learnings from studying the Kelowna, Slave Lake and Fort McMurray fires and their aftermaths on behalf of the Institute for Catastrophic Loss Reduction (ICLR). This will take place in October 2016.

4 - Modify current “No Disturb” covenants to incorporate good FireSmart practices

As we live in a community that is landscaped and maintained by the land developer, Wesbild, the PRCFSC must encourage and seek the support of Wesbild with current and future landscaping in order to adhere to the FireSmart Guide to Landscaping, FireSmart Practices and Vernon CWPP recommendations.

Predator Ridge is a community that is now 25 years old. Since its inception and until recently, focus has been placed on maintaining an environment that protects and encourages a diverse wildlife footprint. In order to enable this, the community developers put in place a number of “No Disturb” covenants against many individual lots in the community. These covenants do not align with FireSmart recommendations or practices.

Action:

Further to the PRCFSC investigating the provisions set out in covenants and no-disturb/buffer zone areas registered against a number of lots in the community, the committee is looking at ways to manage older covenants that are registered on title, in line with FireSmart best practice. Incorporation of FireSmart recommendations into covenants put in place in new subdivisions.

The PRCFSC also aims to promote best FireSmart landscaping practices, namely in choosing vegetation, plants and ground cover materials which adhere with FireSmart guidelines and are environmentally sound (i.e. finding a balance between xeriscaping ground cover and being FireSmart).

5 - Provide signage and develop a strict policy regarding the disposal of cigarettes on the golf course, walking paths and within the Predator Ridge community

Predator Ridge is a resort community with a mix of residential homeowners and a successful golf course. It deals with a large volume of visitors and tourists throughout the year which increases the risk of careless disposal of cigarettes. This risk exacerbates the fire risk that needs to be highlighted.

Action:

Predator Ridge Resort (Wesbild) agreed to supply additional signage in 2016 to be posted throughout the community to bring awareness to all visitors and residents of the no-smoking policy throughout the summer months and/or during high temperatures.

Follow up:

The PRCFSC recognizes that this will always be an issue given the resort aspect of the community. They continue to educate the residents and ask for assistance from Wesbild to enforce the no-smoking policy.

Sparkling Hill Resort located adjacent to Predator Ridge will be encouraged to participate in the placement of no-smoking signs and no-smoking ban as their hiking trails lead into the surrounding trails.

6 - Neighbourhood clean-up of resident-owned areas, which have not yet been landscaped

The Report refers the areas owned by residents and which have not yet been landscaped.

It makes reference to the abundance of down and dead fuel throughout the community with 100% of the areas not having been treated to date due to the "No Disturb" covenant that has been in place since the inception of the development. The Report refers to a noticeable percentage of the trees in the common areas and community boundaries that are suffering from disease and/or lack of foliage.

It also reports a finding of mixed wood and shrubs with light to moderate surface and ladder fuels at 100% in all areas as well as 65% of these areas contained coniferous, shrubs with moderate to heavy surface and ladder fuels.

Follow up:

Once Priority Zone 1 is better managed on a consistent basis, the PRCFSC will organize clean-up events specifically for Priority Zones 2 and 3 in due course.

7 - Clean-up and treatment of common wildland areas within the community utilizing a collaboration of resources between residents and Wesbild (the land owner)

The PRCFSC will identify areas of common wildland for clean-up extending out to 100 metres from homes in collaboration with the land owner (Wesbild) and bearing in mind no disturb covenants in place. A clean-up plan will be determined with the land owner over time to address these areas once significant progress has been made on the clean-up of homeowner lots and PZ1.

Follow up:

The PRCFSC will organize at least one yearly FireSmart community activity focusing on the clearing of these areas. As a start, emphasis will be placed on PZ1; PZ2 and then PZ3 being addressed subsequently, through an ongoing process.

8 - Transition when possible to concrete decking from wood. Wooden decks close to ground level to be screened to eliminate embers gathering underneath them.

Predator Ridge land owner, Wesbild, has already transitioned to building concrete decks or non-flammable decking materials in the newer subdivisions which commenced in the summer of 2015 instead of the previously installed wooden decks.

Using hazard assessments as a communication tool, homeowners will be made aware that risk is increased with the presence of wooden decking and encouraged to transition when possible to concrete deck flooring. They will also be encouraged to screen wooden decks close to ground level to eliminate embers from gathering underneath them.

Action:

This is communicated to all home owners as part of our annual Neighbourhood FireSmart Day as well as during individual home risk assessments.

9 - Move wooden fencing and wooden trellises to a safe distance from homes

The community has some combustible split rail wood fencing and wooden trellises situated close to homes which elevates the risk of structure ignition.

Using hazard assessments as a communication tool, homeowners will be informed of the increased risk of wooden trellises and wooden structures (beam surrounds, spa decking, etc.) situated close to their homes.

Action:

This is communicated to all home owners as part of our annual Neighbourhood FireSmart Day as well as during individual home risk assessments.

10 - Partnering with Ministry of Forest to modify the fuel in 70 metres of Crown land adjacent to Southwest of Predator Ridge property

The community borders both private and Crown lands to the southwest that contain untreated forest and significant elevation gain which could rapidly bring fires from below. Prevailing winds from the southwest increase the risk of fire spread from this area, where Ellison Provincial Park – including its campground and hiking and biking trails – is located.

There is no fire break present within this forested area that could potentially prevent or slow a wildfire from reaching the community.

The PRCFSC will contact a representative of the Ministry of Forests and request assistance to modify fuel in the 70 metre zone adjacent to Predator Ridge.

Action:

Contact has been made with the local Ministry of Forests representative and discussions are ongoing as to the potential for crown land clean up in areas adjacent to Predator Ridge.

11 - General clean-up and properly organize the clubhouse kitchen smoking area and storage yard

The PRCFSC will encourage the resort owner, Wesbild, to clean-up and organize a separate designated smoking area for its staff separate from the storage yard.

12 - During the renovation of the maintenance yard provide proper separation from wildland for the fuel tanks with a specific storage area for flammable and combustible liquids

The PRCFSC will encourage the resort owner, Wesbild, to clean-up the maintenance yard and rectify the items set out in the Hazard Assessment Report as soon as possible.

If the current maintenance yard is scheduled to be moved to another location in the future, Wesbild should ensure that there is a proper separation from wildland with a specific storage area for flammable and combustible liquid.

FireSmart standards incorporated into the Predator Ridge Community Plan

As part of the community's desire to achieve and maintain national recognition as a FireSmart community, the following standards are agreed by the PRCFSC as an integral part of the Community Plan:

- Sponsor a local FireSmart Board that maintains the FireSmart community program and recognition status.
- Continue to work with the Local FireSmart Representative or enlist the assistance of a WUI specialist to complete a FireSmart Community Plan which identifies agreed-upon achievable local solutions.
- Invest a minimum of \$2.00 annually per capita in its local FireSmart Events and activities (work done by municipal employees or volunteers, using municipal or other equipment, can be included, as can provincial/territorial grants dedicated to that purpose)
- Hold a FireSmart event (e.g. FireSmart Day) each year that is dedicated to a local FireSmart project.
- Submit an application form or annual renewal application form with supporting information to FireSmart Canada. This application or renewal process documents continuing participation in the FireSmart Communities Program with respect to the above criteria.

Conclusion

As residents of the Predator Ridge community, we are in agreement that we are privileged to live in such a wonderful surrounding. As members of the FireSmart Committee, we are aware that the privilege of living in a Wildfire Urban Interface area comes at a cost. The August wildfire was a reminder of the risk which threatens our community. Our goal is that every homeowner is aware that steps can be taken to reduce the risk of losing our homes and that we all have a responsibility to be proactive. Our wish as a committee is to ensure that we provide our neighbours with the tools – information, communication, education - to be proactive.

Though we have conducted over 50 hazard assessments during our first year of being in existence as a committee, this is very much the beginning of our process to become a fully developed and mature FireSmart community. We are aware that there is much work to do to encourage our neighbours to be FireSmart. We plan to do this through newsletters, workshops and ongoing activities.

The Predator Ridge Community FireSmart Committee has reviewed and accepts all the recommendations as set out in the *Predator Ridge Wildfire Hazard Assessment Report*. We will also follow the agreed standards to achieve and maintain national recognition as a recognised FireSmart community. In short, we seek FireSmart Canada Recognition status as a step to help us on the path towards becoming a safer interface community.

Supporting documents, key contacts and resources

FireSmart Homeowner's Manual – Protect your Home from Wildfire/B.C. Edition, 2009.

FireSmart Guide to Landscaping – Partners in Protection (www.firesmartcanada.ca)

Vernon Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) Final Report – July 2, 2014 (Project 1242-1)
prepared by Forsite Consultants Ltd., Salmon Arm for City of Vernon

Predator Ridge Community Resident Emergency Handbook – First Edition, 2015

Predator Ridge Wildfire Hazard Assessment Report completed November 3, 2015

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City of Vernon SWPI Application #574 for Predator Ridge Community FireSmart Initiative, 2015 – January
4, 2016