



Downton Lake Wildfire

Post Wildfire Natural Hazard Risk Assessment Townhall

Question and Answer

Following the Townhall event on April 4th, 2024, the Squamish Lillooet Regional District (SLRD), in partnership with the Province of British Columbia ("Province"), reviewed all questions submitted by Townhall participants that were unable to be answered in the time permitted for the Townhall. The questions have been themed and summarized to provide residents with the information requested of the Province.

The answers to these questions are specific to the impacts of the Casper Creek and Downton Lake Fires and should not be seen as guidance for future or other fire events.

Post Wildfire Natural Hazard Risk Assessment

Q. What is a Post-Wildfire Natural Hazard Risk Assessment?

- Wildfires, especially those of the size and scale of the Downton Lake and Casper Creek wildfires, have the potential to change the soil, vegetation, watercourses, and other natural features of the affected area.
- Post-Wildfire Natural Hazard Risk Assessments evaluate the potential risks for natural hazards resulting from wildfires. This may include hazards such as rockslides, debris flows, or flooding that may occur after a wildfire. If risks are identified recommendations for further assessment and/or mitigation are provided.
- Two (2) Post-Wildfire Natural Hazard Risk Assessments were commissioned by the Ministry of Forests ("Ministry") in response to the Downton Lake Fire (K71649) and Casper Creek Fire (K71535). Their purpose is to identify areas of increased risk within the SLRD to help guide recovery efforts and inform residents and property owners of potential hazards.
- All assessments are restricted to crown land. Further assessments or mitigation work on private lands are at the expense of property owners.



Q. How can I access the report?

- Reports can be access here: [Post-Wildfire Natural Hazards Hub - PUBLIC \(arcgis.com\)](https://pwnhr-bcgov03.hub.arcgis.com) (<https://pwnhr-bcgov03.hub.arcgis.com>).
 - Click on the **Assessments Explorer** tab and search for Fire number (K71649 - Downton Lake; K71535 - Casper Creek) to download report.
- The information in the Wildfire Story Map tab explains in plain language an assessment for a 2021 fire. We recommend reviewing this first to better understand the assessment you are reviewing. By reviewing the story map in conjunction with the detailed report for that example fire, a greater understanding of how to interpret the results of the report for the fire in your area may be achieved.

Q. What does this report mean for my property?

- Based on the findings of the assessment, property owners are encouraged to consider whether further assessments by qualified professionals are warranted for your property. Property owners are also encouraged to take any necessary mitigation measures to minimize risks to your property. Any further assessments or mitigation work will be at the expense of the property owner.
- Ignoring this information could potentially leave your property vulnerable to natural hazards identified in the assessment. Taking proactive steps based on the assessment's recommendations can help protect your property and mitigate risks to occupants.
- For properties on which a structure is planned to be rebuilt, it is important for the siting of the proposed new buildings within the lot to take into account the geomorphologic conditions specific to that lot. For example a qualified professional, upon undertaking a property-specific assessment may have useful advice to the property owner on where best on the lot to situate a dwelling to minimize exposure to risk.

Permit Implications

- To understand what impact this report may have on obtaining permits for demolition, building or development, please contact the Squamish Lillooet Regional Districts Permits Department at Bldgofficial@slrd.bc.ca.

Insurance Implications



- To understand what impact this report may have on your property insurance, please contact your insurance provider.
- As with all types of insurance, there is standard market for the most common situations, as well as “high risk” markets for non-standard situations. For those not able to obtain insurance within the standard market, there are many insurers with specialized knowledge who continue to offer comprehensive coverage packages.
- If a particular broker cannot place insurance with their underwriter, alternative insurance underwriters should be explored.
- The Insurance Bureau of Canada (IBC) can assist individuals having difficulties finding coverage by assessing their situation and providing options. Contact information for IBC is available at on their contact page here: <http://www.ibc.ca/bc/about-us/contact-us/>

Q. How does the Province use these reports?

- The Ministry of Forests uses these reports to guide the wildfire fighting rehabilitation efforts it undertakes on Crown Land. The reports may also be used to inform ecological restoration efforts on Crown Land.

Q. Who can I contact for more information?

- For further information about the assessment, residents and property owners can contact the Government of British Columbia at WildfireLandBasedRecovery@gov.bc.ca or the Squamish Lillooet Regional District at Recovery@slrd.bc.ca.

Safety and Environmental Concerns

Q. Is there an imminent risk to my property?

- The assessment does not indicate an imminent risk to properties but highlights potential areas where further assessments and/or mitigation work may be needed.

Q. What steps are the Province taking to rehabilitate the land?

- The Province undertakes rehabilitation of fireguards created by its teams during wildfire fighting efforts. This includes decommissioning of fireguard, seeding of guard to prevent invasive species and re-establishment of natural drainage prior to creation of fire guards. As part of this work, we re-establish the natural contours of the land base on crown land.



- This is necessary to maintain natural water courses and to decrease potential for post fire debris flows from natural rain events. The Forest Investment Program is designed to identify areas for future reforestation following natural disturbances. Planting programs are implemented to encourage new growth of timber and non timber value trees.
- Wildfires are natural and necessary in maintaining healthy forests in B.C. For most low intensity wildfires, much of the land-based recovery occurs naturally. Certain areas that have been severely damaged by fire may benefit from human intervention and the development of a wildfire ecological recovery plan to help initiate and recover native ecosystems on crown land.
- Planning for recovery begins during the response phase by considering the potential social, economic and environmental impacts a wildfire may have on an area. Wildfire recovery planning has been initiated by the Ministry of Forests and will be developed in collaboration with local governments, First Nations and stakeholders to identify, maintain and restore a wildfire affected area.
- The Ministry of Forests is working closely with the Squamish Lillooet Regional District through Land-Based Recovery Tables to define areas of priority and plan rehabilitation activities on Crown Land based on that input. It must be noted that due to the lead time involved in planning a planting program, any reforestation proposed would occur in 2026 at the earliest.

Q. What steps are being taken to ensure environmental considerations are in mind for the process of salvage logging?

- All salvage harvesting is required to undergo the same approval process as it would for non-salvage harvesting. The proponent must take all values into consideration under their current forest stewardship plan and follow all legislative requirements.
- Professional services will be required to assess and prescribe operational plans for harvesting in areas of potential slope instability, as well as areas that have been previously identified as high risk to potential debris flow.
- Other specialists such as hydrologists would be utilized to prescribe the management objectives for any water values that may be present.
- In essence the process is very similar to modern harvesting of non-burned timber, although additional objectives such as hydrophobic soils and risk of debris flow will need to be factored in.



Q. What steps are being undertaken to ensure we have access to safe drinking water?

- Initial sampling and assessment of water quality at Gun Lake was performed in September 2023. This sampling event found evidence of some hydrocarbon fuel residents above suggested guidelines, prompting follow up sampling.
- This follow up sampling event was carried out in March 2024 to reassess fuel-related parameters as well as new impacts that may have become evident following the fall and winter precipitation runoff.
- The Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness provided funding to the Squamish-Lillooet Regional District for both the initial and follow up testing based on the initial exceedance, with the Ministry of Environment providing guidance and support.
- Water quality across all sites sampled in the follow up testing showed **no exceedances of guidelines for the protection of human health at this time.**

Permits and Rebuilding

Q. What permits are required to remove debris and rebuild our property?

- Households are required to comply with both local and provincial regulations as they remove debris and rebuild on property.
- To learn more about what permits are required, please contact your local government authority (bldgofficial@slrd.bc.ca) to understand what permits are required and at what stages of the development. Your local government authority will have the most up to date information and guidance on the required permits and any updates that have been made.
- Both the Province and the Regional District are committed to supporting expedited recovery processes. The Province encourages individuals to speak with both their Regional District and [Permit Connect BC](#) to better understand permit requirements and timelines.



Q. How will the Post Wildfire Natural Hazard Risk Assessment impact my ability to obtain permits for my property?

- Given that each property is unique and may have differing circumstances, please contact your local government authority (bldgofficial@slrd.bc.ca) to understand what permits may be required for your specific property.

Q. What does the updated guidance on riparian habitats mean for removing debris and rebuilding on my property?

- All wildfire clean-up activities are to follow the Environmental Management Act (EMA) and the [BC Guidance for Owners of Property Impacted by Wildfire Contaminants](#).
- Fast and effective cleanup of wildfire-caused contaminants is needed for environmental protection and riparian ecosystem recovery. Recognizing this, the Province issued new Supplemental Guidance for Wildfire Contaminant Clean-up in Riparian Areas for properties impacted by 2023 wildfires. To learn more about effective clean up and your requirements under local and provincial regulations, please see: [SLRD Clean up- Debris and Waste Management](#).
- Under the supplemental guidance, residents impacted by the 2023 Wildfires are not required to engage a Qualified Environmental Professional or apply for a Riparian Development Permit **for clean-up activities needed as a result of 2023 wildfires**.
- For the purpose of this guidance, “cleanup activities” within the riparian area (30m – 60 m from top of bank) **does not include:**
 - Removal of bedrock
 - Reconstruction of buildings
- Homeowners **are still required** to adhere to the Riparian Area Protection Regulation for the reconstruction of buildings.

Recovery Support

Q. What supports are available to property owners to remove debris and rebuild?

- After a disaster, the provincial government may declare the event eligible for Disaster Financial Assistance (DFA). Once declared, the DFA program may provide applicants



with financial assistance to restore uninsurable losses that are essential to your home, livelihood or community service.

- However, Disaster Financial Assistance is not available in instances for which insurance was reasonably and readily available as per the Compensation and Disaster Financial Assistance Regulation under the *Emergency Program Act*.
- The Insurance Bureau of Canada affirms that fire insurance is widely available throughout British Columbia. As such, private properties impacted by wildfire events are not eligible for Disaster Financial Assistance.
- Households who have experienced damage from the 2023 wildfires should contact their insurance provider for information about the claims process, removing debris and the steps necessary to rebuild.
- For households without insurance, there are supports through charitable organizations in addition to the supports provided by government, including Emergency Support Services (including for temporary lodging, food, clothing and incidentals).

Q. How do I find out more about the Downton Lake fire and burn operations?

- Wildfire investigations can be complex and may take weeks or even months to complete. The BC Wildfire Service works closely with other agencies to ensure high-quality results. Information about the cause of a wildfire will not be released until an investigation is complete.

Burn operations are coordinated by skilled and experienced firefighters and risk is mitigated with careful planning using fire weather information. Even though igniting unburned fuel adds more fire to the landscape, it allows BC Wildfire Service to control the spread of wildfire and protect critical values. Further information about wildfire response operations including planned ignitions can be found on the [BC Wildfire Service internet page](#).