

WILDFIRE RESILIENCY PROJECT

Assessing Community Forest Capacity in BC

SUMMARY OF 2023–2024 NEEDS ASSESSMENT RESULTS



KEY FINDINGS

NEXT STEPS

RECOMMENDATIONS

British Columbia's community forests, also known as CFAs (Community Forest Agreement holders), are at the forefront of managing diverse values for rural communities, including wildfire risk reduction. Represented provincially by the BC Community Forest Association (BCCFA), these organizations have invested \$10.9 million of their own resources into wildfire-related initiatives over the past decade, while also managing additional funds from external sources. A significant factor in their success is the collaboration and engagement with local communities, the provincial government and First Nations. Notably, half of all community forests in BC are held by First Nations or in partnership with them, also making these forests a vital pathway toward reconciliation and the reintroduction of intentional fire management on the land.

In partnership with the BC Wildfire Service, from 2021 to 2024 the BCCFA's Wildfire Risk Reduction [Economic Recovery Initiative](#) resulted in job creation, stronger partnerships, and opportunities to balance wildfire risk reduction with other values, including forest health. However, it also demonstrated that CFAs need additional support for wildfire management to achieve their objectives.

In 2023-2024, BCCFA conducted the Wildfire Resiliency Project Needs Assessment to determine the objectives and capacities of CFAs for wildfire planning and related activities. The Needs Assessment included interviews with 27 CFAs and a survey with 8 CFAs — over half of the CFAs currently operating across BC, focusing on topics of wildfire planning, collaboration and partnerships, wildfire risk reduction (WRR) activities, capacity and funding requirements, climate change adaptation, and future management priorities. These data were combined with information from BCCFA [Indicators Reports](#) and [collaborative research](#) conducted with the University of British Columbia to complete the needs assessment.

KEY FINDINGS

PLANNING



54% of CFAs have wildfire plans in place.

31% of these have a wildfire plan that is specific to their tenure, while **20%** use Community Wildfire Preparedness

Plans (CWPPs), Community Wildfire Resiliency Plans (CWRPs), or other municipal plans, sometimes in addition to their own plans. **3%** have tactical plans (also called Wildland Urban Interface Wildfire Risk Reduction Plans) in place.

FUEL TREATMENTS



82% of CFAs have conducted fuel treatments to remove hazardous fuels, often including a combination of manual and mechanical treatments.

If long-term funding were in place and there were no barriers to implementing treatments, each CFA interviewed could treat an average of **131 ha per year** over the next three years. This would require an average of **\$560,000** in funding per CFA for each of the next three years. This equates to **\$19.6 million required annually** for all 35 of the Needs Assessment participants to conduct treatments.

PRESCRIBED AND CULTURAL BURNING



78% of CFAs have an interest in conducting prescribed or cultural burning.

31% of CFAs have already conducted prescribed or cultural burning.

CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION



93% of interviewed CFAs are interested in climate change adaptation.

74% have already been conducting climate-related work on their tenures.

COMMON BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

- Funding tied to fiscal years that inhibits successful project implementation, especially given the challenges of meeting fire weather and smoke management requirements for burning.
- Limited funding for comprehensive or landscape level wildfire management planning.
- A steep learning curve and limited capacity for prescribed and cultural fire projects.
- Onerous administrative processes and policies, including the development and approval of prescriptions.



CFAs are ready, willing, and well situated to conduct wildfire management activities on the land base around rural and remote communities. Those CFAs who have not yet implemented wildfire work on their tenures are eager to learn and engage.

“Resiliency is key — not just from a wildfire lens, but from a community lens. What tools can we provide to communities? How do we empower our communities? The best approach is decentralization. Capacity will be a key component. BCCFA can play a role in this because CFAs are community-based.”
— Stephan Martineau, SIFCo

NEXT STEPS

Based on the interviews conducted through this Needs Assessment and the collaboration between BCWS and the BCCFA, the vision for the future is a long-term, collaborative and proactive partnership that enhances wildfire management and sustainable forest stewardship in community forests through dialogue and continuous learning. The partnership will leverage the strengths and resources of BCWS and BCCFA to develop innovative solutions, build capacity, and promote best practices in wildfire prevention, preparation, response and recovery in community forests across British Columbia.

As seen with the Economic Recovery Initiative, community forests can successfully implement treatments and achieve wildfire risk reduction objectives when funding is provided, and managers are given autonomy to plan and implement treatments on their tenures. In supporting community forests to do this work, many benefits occur such as the creation of local jobs, enhanced opportunities for developing and strengthening partnerships, and consideration of other values including forest health and community resiliency.

As seen with the Economic Recovery Initiative, community forests can successfully implement treatments and achieve wildfire risk reduction objectives when funding is provided, and managers are given autonomy to plan and implement treatments on their tenures.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Maintaining a strong relationship between the BCCFA and BCWS is recommended for supporting community forests in their endeavours to complete wildfire risk reduction work and enhance resiliency in rural forests and communities in BC.

1. Funding

- Provide long term, flexible funding to CFAs for wildfire planning, operational treatments and pilot projects.
- Support CFAs to develop or upgrade wildfire plans specific to their tenures.
- Support implementation of pilot projects relating to wildfire and climate change initiatives.
- Support CFAs to conduct research, build databases, and develop plans relating to climate change.
- Fund and support innovation, research and extension.

2. Communications & engagement

- Develop and maintain consistent communications between BCWS and CFAs to promote more opportunities for collaboration.
- Ensure the inclusion of all regions of the province.
- Enhance outreach – provide case studies, information, and guidance to CFA managers.
- Facilitate the invitation and participation of CFAs in wildfire planning tables.

3. Support CFA capacity development

- Support the active participation of CFAs in all four phases of wildfire management (mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery) through provision of training and resources.
- Facilitate knowledge exchange workshops on a regional/sub-regional basis.
- Support the development of Youth Crews to conduct wildfire risk reduction work with CFAs.

4. Enhance prescribed and cultural fire opportunities

- Support relationship-building between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.
- Support CFA training, tactical planning, and knowledge exchange in implementing intentional fire on the land base.

5. Streamline administrative burdens

- Streamline administrative processes of funding and prescriptions to enhance efficiency.
- Limit/remove Natural Resource District or other proponent application of prescriptions or treatments on CFA tenures, support collaboration instead.

6. Policy-level considerations

- Advocate for CFA needs at the policy level, bringing local voices to the table in policy reform and development.



Mailing address: 101 – 3319 Radiant Way
Victoria, BC, Canada V9C 0N4 [e: info@bccfa.ca](mailto:info@bccfa.ca)



[@bccommunityforests](https://www.facebook.com/bccommunityforests)



[@BC_CFA](https://www.instagram.com/BC_CFA)



BC Wildfire
Service

This project compiled data from community forests across the province and was made possible with funding from BC Wildfire Service. Thank you to the 35 community forest managers and representatives who offered their time in sharing their invaluable insights and expertise.

To learn more about community forests and the BCCFA, visit bccfa.ca

