



Forest Enhancement  
Society of British Columbia

## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Reducing Wildfire Risk Through a Holistic Approach**

**Quesnel, B.C.** – the City of Quesnel, a municipality situated between the Fraser River and Quesnel River in the Cariboo Regional District of B.C., has been a trailblazer in making forestry more sustainable by undertaking innovative projects with support from Forest Enhancement Society of BC (FESBC) funding.

After years of the mountain pine beetle devastating the forests surrounding the city, and the Plateau Fire Complex which consumed 545,150 hectares of forest, the City of Quesnel took the opportunity to learn from the crisis and formed the Forestry Initiatives Program to advocate for the practice of sustainable forestry including proactive wildfire risk reduction.

With FESBC funding, the City has now assessed over 1,000 hectares in the surrounding area near Quesnel as outlined in the Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP), prescribed and treated 230 hectares with crews conducting treatments by hand and with machines, and developed 200 hectares of additional “shelf-ready” prescriptions.

“The Forest Enhancement Society of BC is a proven partner in delivering projects on the ground that benefit communities, workers, and the health of our forests,” said Bruce Ralston, Minister of Forests. “We are building on this foundation with an additional investment of \$50 million for the Society to expand funding for projects that increase access to fibre, reduce emissions from slash pile burning and protect people from wildfire risk.”

The work put in by the City of Quesnel in wildfire mitigation has been extensive. The City thinks of wildfire mitigation in three buckets: private property, wildland urban interface, and the approach zone. On private property, it is important to teach citizens how to coexist with wildfire by hardening their homes and making them more defensible to wildfire through programs such as FireSmart. In the wildland urban interface, or the area of transition between unoccupied land and human development, there are 34 areas as identified in the CWPP for fuel reduction treatments. And finally, the approach (or landscape) zone where the focus is on working with project partners such as the Ministry of Forests, the forest industry, and others to scale up fuel management to a landscape-level scale.

This kind of collaboration and holistic approach is what has made the City’s wildfire risk reduction initiatives possible, and successful.

“The collaboration spearheaded by the City of Quesnel with organizations and local residents has been constructive to build relationships between various stakeholders and industry. The importance of this collaboration cannot be underestimated as fuel management projects are expensive and there are significant areas that require fuel reduction treatments,” noted Roland Jarret, RPF, Site Supervisor for the Fuel Management program with the City of Quesnel.

While collaboration is highlighted as one of the many reasons for the City’s success in wildfire risk reduction, another is the City’s primary objective of ecological resilience. The work isn’t easy, nor is it without its challenges. One of the hurdles faced by the City has been to provide up-to-date training for the use of innovative logging equipment. The City shared that the sector faces a lack of trained operators to carry out complex forest operations which is crucial because innovative harvesting equipment, commonly used in Europe and Eastern Canada, allows for lighter touch, zero-waste, and other more diverse silvicultural treatments more effectively than traditional harvesting methods.



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Former Quesnel Mayor Bob Simpson, who is now on the Forestry Worker Supports and Community Resiliency Council, highlighted how the City has not yet found someone to champion the training program, and that a lack of investment in training is a challenge for other communities throughout the province.

“You can talk about innovation, about making systemic changes, but to enable that to happen, you need to talk as early as you can about the human resource development aspect of any change – the available skilled labour force is small and will need to be grown and retooled through innovative training programs. For example, the necessary shift in forestry toward select harvesting with a lower environmental footprint while still extracting value will require us to have people trained almost to the level of a forestry tech running new, specialized equipment, as the equipment operators will have to decide, in the moment, which trees to cut, how, where, and when. But we don’t have this specialized workforce today,” said Simpson. “Everybody is talking about select harvesting with specialized equipment, but no one seems willing, as of yet, to build the necessary workforce.”

The City is working diligently to find solutions to transform the industry into one that plans and manages ecosystems for ecological resilience. They are also continuing to work in the local forests to reduce wildfire risks which is where the FESBC funding comes in.

“FESBC funding has been critical for the City to advance the treatments we have done and has allowed us to foster some excellent partnerships,” said Simpson.

With over \$1.7 million spent to date, FESBC funds have proven critical for the City of Quesnel to continue its grassroots wildfire risk reduction projects.

“Due to the long-term support from FESBC, the City of Quesnel has carried out extensive fuel management since 2018,” shared Erin Robinson, Forestry Initiatives Manager for the City of Quesnel. “Through our wildfire protection efforts, we have been able to advance innovative and ecologically sensitive logging operations that protect our community, strengthen our economy, and help the ecosystems we live within, get back to health.”

“We look forward to continuing our efforts with FESBC in the years to come,” noted Robinson. “By focusing on ecosystem restoration through innovative harvesting, enhanced fibre utilization, and creating meaningful employment in forestry through targeted local training.”

The City of Quesnel recently received an additional \$500,000 in new funding from FESBC and is excited to keep the innovative forestry initiatives moving forward.

“Quesnel’s Forestry Initiatives Program is unique and is aligned with the purposes of FESBC,” said Brian Watson, RPF, Operations Manager with FESBC. “It’s great to see the staff at the City breathing life into the CWPP and we look forward to seeing the next round of treatments that have been supported from our funding commitment.”

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About [FESBC](#): the purposes of FESBC are to advance environmental and resource stewardship of B.C.'s forests by: preventing and mitigating the impact of wildfires; improving damaged or low-value forests; improving habitat for wildlife; supporting the use of fibre from damaged and low-value forests; and treating forests to improve the management of greenhouse gases. As of March 2022, FESBC has supported 263 projects valued at \$238 million, in partnership with the governments of B.C. and Canada.

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