

Salt Spring Island Community Wildfire Resiliency Plan At-a-Glance

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Salt Spring Island (SSI) Electoral Area is an island community with rural and urban areas. It is the largest Gulf Island by area and population size as well as the most populous Electoral Area in BC. Local Government functions are shared by Islands Trust and Capital Regional District (CRD). Access and egress are mainly through three ferry terminals. Coastal Douglas-fir ecosystems extend throughout the island and residents live near and amid the forest.

What is the history of fire on SSI?

The forests and grasslands of SSI were shaped by thousands of years of fire. Cultural burning was used extensively by indigenous peoples until 1874, when restricted by colonial governments. There have been only two significant fire responses since 1950, one in 1961 (467 hectares) and another in 2009 (5 hectares). Lightning accounts for a tiny percentage of ignitions. Aggressive fire suppression over the past century has altered ecosystems and led to increased fuel density.

Table 13. Fires by cause (1950-2020).

Decade	Lightning	Person	Unknown
1950s	2	46	0
1960s	2	36	0
1970s	0	12	0
1980s	2	18	0
1990s	3	22	0
2000s	1	58	10
2010s	0	84*	3
Total	10	383*	13

*14 recorded by BCWS between 2011 and 2020. SSIFR recorded 70 fires in this time period within the SSIFR District, all person caused

What is a Community Wildfire Resiliency Plan?

This plan examines wildfire risk in SSI and makes expert recommendations to help build FireSmart communities. Note that risk on privately owned lands could not be studied under the provincial grant funding terms.

What was done?

Wildfire experts conducted wildfire risk assessments on public lands, examining structures and the characteristics of forest vegetation. These assessments combined with the Provincial Strategic Threat Analysis to determine wildfire risk in each community.

What did we find?

Most public lands have a moderate wildfire risk. Risk on adjacent private lands is likely moderate as well. Isolated neighbourhoods are at higher risk than other areas.

What is moderate fire risk?

Moderate wildfire risk means that a forest can readily support wildfire of moderate intensity. The risk associated with fires of moderate intensity should not be underestimated. These fires can torch trees, send embers into nearby neighbourhoods, and challenge suppression, even if the most aggressive wildfire behaviour is unlikely.

Why moderate risk?

Risk is largely influenced by vegetation and weather. Vegetation on SSI is dominated by older conifer forests with relatively high fuel separation, and which require extreme fire weather conditions to support active crown fires. Hazardous weather is strongly moderated by the Pacific Ocean. However, infrequent “outflow” winds can create conditions more conducive to fire spread.

Is the risk changing?

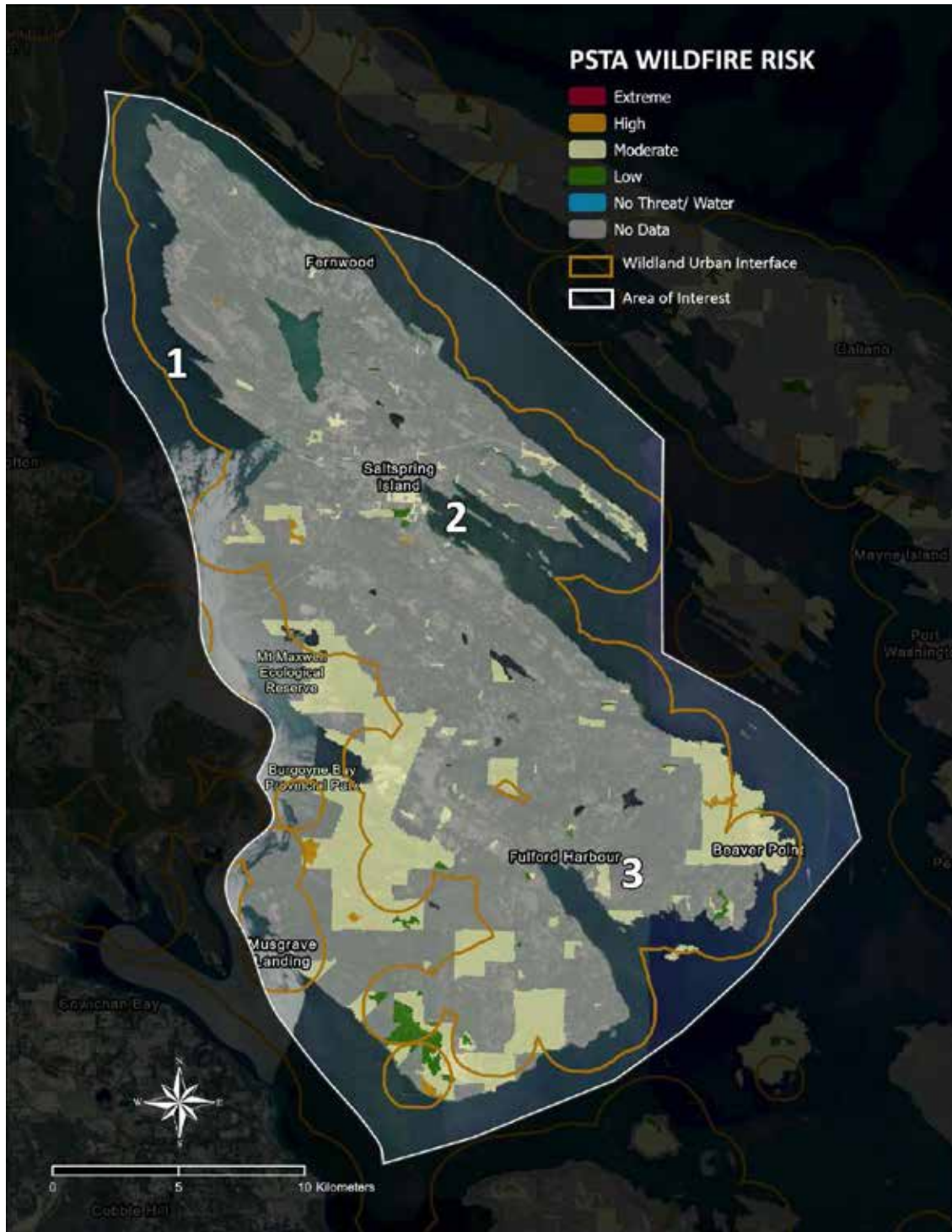
Climate change is altering temperatures and precipitation patterns in SSI. Hotter, drier summer conditions are likely to result in an overall increase in wildfire frequency and intensity.

Who leads fire response?

Fire response in most areas is led by Salt Spring Island Fire Rescue with help from the BC Wildfire Service. A BC Wildfire Service base is in Cobble Hill and crews arrive primarily by helicopter.

What should I do?

Taking action to FireSmart your property will dramatically decrease the risk of wildfire damaging your home. The best part is, it’s surprisingly easy to do. Find out more at <https://www.crd.bc.ca/service/fire-and-emergency-programs/fire-protection/firesmart>



Page 64: Figure 15. Wildfire threat ratings from Provincial Strategic Threat Analysis (PSTA)

A Resilient Community

What is CRD doing now to prepare?

The CRD operates the Salt Spring Island Emergency Program and partners with Salt Spring Island Fire Rescue to deliver a FireSmart program. Salt Spring Island FireSmart helps communities prepare by offering residential firesmart assessments, homeowner rebates, free woody debris disposal, and educational events. It also facilitates cross-training for local first responders to ensure they are prepared for wildfire.

What could the CRD do in the future?

Wildfire risk can be reduced through proactive management. The Islands Trust and CRD have important roles in preparing SSI. The plan includes 32 initiatives for the CRD to consider.

Category	Objective	Initiatives
Education	Promote FireSmart as a strategy for wildfire preparedness and demonstrate the Region's commitment to wildfire resiliency in the community	6
Legislation and Planning	Ensure Regional District by-laws and policies support wildfire resiliency	6
Development Considerations	Consider FireSmart design principles in planning and development bylaws	4
Interagency Cooperation	Ensuring wildfire response is effective	2
Cross Training	Ensuring emergency responders have a variety of training and experience	4
Emergency Planning	Enhance emergency response capacity	4
Vegetation Management	Modify fuel environments to reduce risk around infrastructure and communities	3
Renewing the Plan and Building Resiliency	Incorporate wildfire resiliency into strategic decisions	3



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