

Gregg Lake FireSmart Project – a community taking action

On September 4, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (ASRD) hosted a *FireSmart* community work bee at Gregg Lake. This event is the most recent of many community meetings that have led to a *FireSmart* plan being developed for the small subdivision. *FireSmart* promotes action from all partners, and community involvement is a key part of that. ASRD, the municipality, the provincial park bordering the area and, most importantly, Gregg Lake residents were all partners in developing the plan.

Initial meetings introduced residents to the potential wildfire threat to the community. Input from the community identified unique characteristics and local insight to areas of concern. ASRD listened to those concerns and integrated them into the plan.

Early on in the process, the residents of Gregg Lake requested a personal approach to community involvement and requested that ASRD come to the community and assess individual homes. Homeowners wanted to learn more about the risk to their properties and ASRD worked with them to provide the knowledge to place things into action.

At the request of Gregg Lake residents, a community *FireSmart* day followed. ASRD set up a *FireSmart* demonstration where a wildland firefighting crew cut, thinned, pruned and cleared the understory of trees to show residents what *FireSmart* might look like on their own property. Dennis Quintilio & Associates (DQ&A), who ASRD has contracted to draft the *FireSmart* plan, hosted a barbeque where the first outline of the *FireSmart* Plan was presented to residents. Community members then gave further input and the contractor integrated those ideas into the next draft of the plan.

Following the information session, property owners were given the opportunity to have wildfire prevention specialists from ASRD complete a *FireSmart* homeowner assessment. Homeowners were encouraged to take on realistic, incremental changes to make their homes and properties more *FireSmart*.

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As the project continued, Alberta Tourism Parks and Recreation identified an area where debris could be stored and burned during the following winter. Yellowhead County is also contributing to the partnership by providing communications and project support. All parties are working together for positive solutions to the wildfire threat reality posed to the community of Gregg Lake.

“We’re early on in the process but it has been really positive so far,” said Heather Hawkins, a wildfire information officer with ASRD. “Community support for the project is really dictating the strong momentum of this project.” 

To learn more about how your community can be involved in **FireSmart** go to: FireSmart.alberta.ca or contact Tracy Price, **FireSmart** community protection specialist at Alberta Sustainable Resource Development at (780)644-3298 or tracy.price@gov.ab.ca

FireSmart Action Items

The following are a few items that you can encourage your community to do at a minimal cost and a little bit of time

- Contact your utility company if trees or branches are not clear of power lines.
- Always keep a watchful eye on fire pits and, if utilized, burn barrels when they are in use. Make the attempt to avoid the use of burn barrels and instead take debris to a transfer site/landfill.
- Ensure your roof is free of needles and leaves and there are no overhanging trees or branches that can catch on fire.
- Make sure your chimney is up to code and has a spark arresting screen installed.
- Remove all long grass, shrubs, logs branches, twigs and needles within 10 metres of your home.
- Have a nearby water supply for emergencies.
- Store firewood a minimum of 10 metres from any structures.

FireSmart home owner assessment can be found at: www.srd.alberta.ca/ManagingPrograms/PreventingFightingWildfire/FireSmart/documents/Firesmart-HomeownersManual-ProtectYourHomeFromWildfire.pdf