

From hazard assessment to action – FireSmart showcase at the Cache Percotte Forest

DURING THE SUMMER MONTHS, wildfire is a constant and dangerous threat to homes and properties within Alberta's forested area. Nearly 1800 wildfires burned through Alberta's forest protection area in 2008, some of which destroyed valuable structures and resources. By implementing FireSmart principles to structures and surrounding areas, stakeholders can greatly reduce the risk of property loss due to a raging wildfire.

After four years of work, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (SRD) recently completed the Cache Percotte FireSmart Structure Protection Showcase near Hinton. The main objective of the program was to create a secure water supply and permanent sprinkler system to minimize wildfire damages or losses to infrastructures at the historic camp.

"This project was definitely a joint effort," said Rod Houle, a wildfire prevention officer for SRD. "We could not have completed the program without the support and cooperation of the FireSmart unit, Foothills area staff and the Hinton Training Centre."

The spring camp was originally created in 1960 as a permanent school forest reservation. The first of five cabins was built with the help of the Junior Forest Rangers in 1968. Today, the camp is used by the Hinton



One of the cabins in the Cache Percotte forest

Training Centre, NAIT, Lakeland College and the University of Alberta forestry students. The camp also serves as a worksite and summer home for Junior Forest Rangers.

As part of the Wildland Urban Interface Plan for the Cache Percotte Forest, hazard and threat assessments were conducted to validate mitigation strategies for the camp. The results showed a high to extreme fire hazard level in and around the structures of the camp. Access to the structures was inadequate and emergency vehicles would not be able to access the single lane road. The camp also had no visible fire

suppression equipment and no municipal water supply. It was clear that something needed to be done.

"Before completing the project, the camp would have been extremely at risk if a wildfire were to burn through the area," said Houle. "Vegetation management and the addition of sprinklers and a secure water supply have greatly enhanced the structural protection of the area."

Work on the project began in 2005. Now fully functional, the sprinkler system consists of 47 strategically-placed sprinkler heads installed on the structures. Four water pumps (three gas-powered and one electric) were installed to draw water from three different sources – a nearby creek, a pond and two newly-installed 2500 gallon water storage tanks. The finished sprinkler system is actually three systems that can be operated individually or all together. Once the entire system is running, the engine houses will provide three hours of water to the structures.

"The completed project offers more than just structural protection," added Houle. "The camp is also a showcase that can be used to educate others about sprinkler systems and the importance of FireSmart principles."

Program managers are now developing ways to use the spring camp as an educational tool. There are now opportunities to showcase the project to many external audiences through courses and hosted events. 



For more information on FireSmart visit firesmart.alberta.ca