



REGIONAL ADAPTATION ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM | PROJECT SUMMARY

Increasing Wildfire Risk Sparks Preparedness Project in the Cariboo

THE CARIBOO REGION HAS experienced several significant wildfires in recent years and — with the warmer and drier summers associated with climate change — wildfires are expected to become more frequent and severe in the future. Cariboo ranchers have recently participated in a project to develop agriculture-specific tools to assess wildfire hazards and options for reducing wildfire impacts to ranches and grazing tenures.

“This is important work. The last few summers have been pretty dry, and there’s a lot more dead wood creating wildfire fuel out in the forest than there used to be,” says Clint Thompson, President of the Cariboo Cattlemen’s Association.

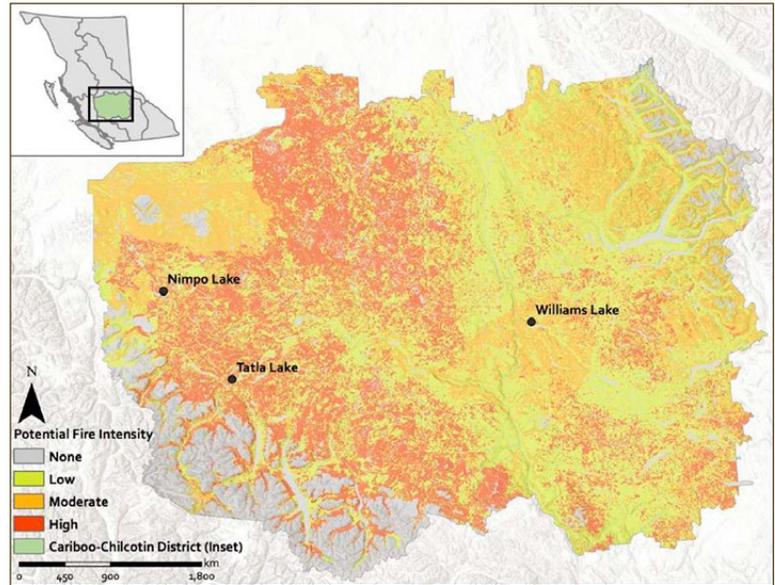
Through the 2014 Cariboo Adaptation Strategies planning process, producers clearly identified the need to mitigate risks associated with wildfire. The resulting project, a collaboration of the Cariboo Cattlemen’s Association and the BC Agriculture & Food Climate Action Initiative

PROJECT	<i>Wildfire Preparedness and Mitigation Planning and Resources</i>
LOCATION	<i>Cariboo</i>
COMPLETION	<i>2016</i>
PROJECT LEAD	<i>Cariboo Cattlemen’s Association</i>
FUNDING PARTNERS	<i>Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, BC Ministry of Agriculture, Beef Cattle Industry Development Fund</i>

(CAI), developed and piloted a planning tool for individual ranches.

Seven ranch visits were conducted across the region to identify the wildfire-related risks and issues faced at the ranch and range levels. The project team assessed values at risk, hazards and defensibility of each operation. The range assessment took into consideration values at risk and forest condition. Workshops were also held to gather information about risks and issues that are beyond the ranch scale and require collaborative solutions.

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While many participating ranches had already adopted FireSmart principles and practices, there are opportunities to improve ranch level preparedness.

“We have always thought that our operation’s distance from timber would keep us safe, but we have evergreen trees right up against the house that would be like fuses if embers came in on the wind” says Thompson, who participated in one of the workshops to gather input from producers. “I think that a lot of ranchers and rural homeowners would benefit from a professional fire safe visit to create awareness of just how vulnerable they might be.”

For many operations, the biggest threat comes from forest conditions on the range. High fuel loads on the landscape surrounding ranches can result in burning embers that can be blown up to two kilometres ahead of a wildfire. Managing the amount of deadfall and possible fuel close to fence lines poses another major challenge, particularly with respect to the removal of timber.

The assessments also found that many ranches don’t necessarily have the resources to protect themselves in a fire emergency, largely due to insufficient water holding capacity or sprinkler capability. One possible solution would be collective or individual purchase of sprinkler kits. Shared kits could be mobilized as needed (to protect multiple properties). While not suitable in all situations, sharing the

costs of the necessary equipment could assist some ranchers with protecting their priority assets.

The project findings and the piloted planning template are available on the CAI website: www.bcagclimateaction.ca

Projects like this are part of the work being delivered by the BC Agriculture & Food Climate Action Initiative. CAI develops tools and resources to assist BC farmers and ranchers with adapting to impacts of climate change. CAI’s Regional Adaptation Enhancement Program provides up to \$300,000 to implement priority projects identified in each regional adaptation strategy.

www.BCAGClimateAction.ca

The BC Agriculture & Food Climate Action Initiative (CAI) was launched in 2008 by the BC Agriculture Council to enable a proactive and pan-agriculture approach to climate change issues. CAI is currently supported by the BC Agricultural Research & Development Corporation and the Investment Agriculture Foundation of BC, with funding provided by the Governments of Canada and British Columbia through Growing Forward 2, a federal-provincial-territorial initiative.

Photo in this handout is courtesy of Allen Dobb.

