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SIFCo

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE - JUNE 21, 2016

WILDFIRE protection plan released by Slocan Community Forest

WINLAW – The Slocan Integral Forestry Cooperative (SIFCo), the community forest based in the Slocan Valley in the Southern Interior of BC, has just released its wildfire protection plan for the Slocan Valley. “To effectively protect rural areas in BC we need a landscape-level approach rather than a piecemeal one in order to really make a difference Strategic Fuel Managed Zones are required so that we can create large defensible fuel breaks. These zones need to be strategically located. For the past few years we have been working on a plan to identify these zones and a methodology that can be replicated in other areas. As far as we are aware, we are the first tenure holder in the Province to create such a plan,” says Stephan Martineau, Manager of SIFCo.

SIFCo’s wildfire protection plan is multifaceted. It covers identification of major fire movement paths, placement of landscape-level strategic fuel-managed zones, a re-writing of stocking standards in Interface areas, a joint crown land and private land strategy, and a habitat restoration strategy. It also includes options for unconventional fiber utilization, a commercial ecosystem-based harvesting strategy, a reduction of hazardous fuel type in areas of high probability of wildfires closer to communities, and a tree species transition strategy. SIFCo began this approach back in 2008 with revised stocking standards in the Wildland-Urban Interface Zone to allow for more flexibility in the type and amount of trees being planted in that zone.

“With increasing climate change, we expect more fires in most of BC. We also expect the tree species mix in local, low-elevation forests to change. Given these and other changes, it is important to be proactive. We need open forests made up of fire-resistant conifers and deciduous trees, with low fuel loads in the Strategic Fuel Managed Zones. The quickest way to get there is to keep the suitable big trees already on the site.” says Tom Bradley, Forestry Supervisor of SIFCo.

To move forward with this landscape-level approach, SIFCo completed a tenure-wide fire behavior-modeling project in 2015, using the FlamMap5 fire model from the US Fire Sciences Program. The project goal was to identify the main fire travel paths in the Slocan Valley, considering topography, fuel types, and prevailing wind directions. This modeling highlighted areas where fuel management

would create a fire-break and enhance suppression opportunities, while significantly reducing the likelihood of a landscape-scale fire like the one experienced in Fort McMurray this spring. “If you know ahead of time where fires will most likely travel and you place your Strategic Fuel Managed Zones in those likely paths, you are using a pre-emptive approach, significantly increasing your chances of keeping communities safe, and preventing the size and intensity of a wildfire that is very challenging to contain,” Martineau explains.

“We are not talking standard harvesting.” adds Bradley. “We want lots of large trees in the Strategic Fuel Managed Zones, and we want those trees to have good odds of surviving a fire. We get there by reducing fuel loads, so that the next fire is low intensity. This helps protect the forest ecosystem, and is a perfect fit with climate change adaptation. Low fire intensity also means better suppression chances, which helps protect communities.”

SIFCo has been working successfully to protect municipalities in the Slocan Valley for the past six years . “We have been instrumental in bringing in over two million dollars to help protect the municipalities. Our local municipalities are now some of the best protected in BC, but unless we add in a landscape-level approach, our investments are at risks with possible out-of-control large fires. Looking at the big picture is crucial at this juncture if we want to take the next proactive step toward protecting rural BC,” says Martineau. “SIFCo took on a Community Forest within the watersheds we drink from because we believe no one would care as much or do a better job of management than those of us who live and work here. It is now clear that climate change adaptation and fire hazard management are central keys to achieving our ecosystem-based management goals.”

Government support is of utmost importance for SIFCo to meet its goals of implementing this multifaceted approach. “By including a commercial component to our strategy we reduce our dependence on funding, but funding is still a key component. What we need is a pilot project in the Interior of BC that would demonstrate how all the pieces can come together to make us safe and to start the high priority adaptation to climate change that we really need to do. SIFCo is ready to go.” concludes Martineau.

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