

## Article # 2- How Can Fire Help Williams Lake?

For many of us, we may remember 2017 and the long drives as we evacuated Williams Lake, and the incredible smoke that smothered the town in 2018 or 2021.

These events were the result of intense wildfires which destroyed thousands of hectares of forest and habitat, burning homes and threatening community safety. While we don't know when the next fire-storm will occur, we can protect our communities and homes by taking preventive action to reduce the risk.

One tool that professionals use is 'prescribed fire to reduce the fuels before major wildfires.

Frequent low-severity 'cultural burning' has traditionally been used by Indigenous communities to reduce fuels on the land, keep forests healthy and maintain a diverse understory of important plants.

Today, 'prescribed fires' are once again seen as a critical tool, especially around communities to reduce the fuel available to wildfires. Knowing when to burn safely and how to control the fire requires extensive experience and planning to ensure the fire is contained and the smoke is dispersed.

Matching ground conditions, moisture levels, weather forecasts and smoke movement are all critical to determine when and how to responsibly burn. In 2021 the Stampede Grounds and Boitano Park were successfully burned to reduce fuels. This year, the area of grassland between Westridge and Williams



*Prescribed burn, Boitano Park, April 2021 (Peter Holub photo)*

A clear collapse of the Indigenous fire regime in the 1870s after devastating colonial impacts ... interrupted the *T'exelc* stewardship ... and by the 1920s largely eliminated fire from *Ne SEXTSINE*. Without frequent fire on the landscape, a dense, homogenous forest developed that is more likely to burn at uncharacteristic high severities today.

- *Kelsey Copes-Gerbitz, PhD  
2021*

Lake River Valley are planned for treatment, subject to suitable weather.

Using fire to fight forest fires is an important tool to reduce the risk to the community.

There will be future wildfires and smoke-taking action to control the level of fire intensity and smoke levels is key to protecting our community. As many say, we will have fires and smoke- we can choose when and how much smoke we want in our community.



*Prescribed burn, Stampede Park, April 2021 (Ken Day photo)*