

# SILVERSTAR FIRE SMART PROJECT

***The following questions posed to the Mountain Resorts Branch by concerned Silver Star residents provides some insight into the FireSmart Program and the process at the resort. The responses were provided by Mr. Bill Hunter, Director, Mountain Resorts Branch.***

I've included Mike Waberski, representing SSPOA, on this email so that he is aware of our response to your questions/concerns, the nature of the wildfire risk reduction work within and outside of the Silver Star Controlled Recreation Area, and the planned debris pile burning at SilverStar which should commence soon in the coming weeks. As noted, we are actively working with Rider Ventures, the Regional District of North Okanagan and BC Wildfire Service to confirm timing of debris pile burning now that the open burning bans are coming off and appropriate burning conditions are anticipated.

Please see the attached fuel management mapping for the treatments at SilverStar.

The following responses to your detailed questions:

## **1. Concerns about lack of communication with residents especially regarding project timelines, funding, budget and key decision makers.**

### **1. Who is actually responsible for the project? Assuming there is a contract in place, which parties is the contract between?**

Mountain Resorts Branch of the Ministry of Tourism, Arts, Culture and Sport is responsible for the administration and delivery of the wildfire risk reduction (WRR) contract for the Provincial Government of BC. We are working in partnership with the BC Wildfire Service (and other provincial agencies).

We have a contract in place with Rider Ventures who are responsible for operational implementation of the WRR contract at SilverStar consistent with the terms of that contract and the approved Fuel Management Prescription. See attached.

### **2. Who is responsible for payment for the project? Assuming that a full project plan including cost was completed?**

Mountain Resorts Branch is responsible for payment.

The contract specifies the fuel treatment specifications and conditions to be met and references the Fuel Management Prescription (FMP) which was approved by BC Wildfire Service of the Ministry of Forests. See attached.

- 3. Why was the decision made to burn slash piles in such a vast area rather than chipping? I appreciate that chipping is far more expensive to do but surely it would have made sense in the current situation we find ourselves in with hotter and hotter summers and seemingly such slim windows for burning.**

The FMP prescribed the forest thinning, pruning, and piling and burning of debris. The Fuel Management Prescription was prepared by a Registered Professional Forester, Kyle Broom of Cabin Forestry, and approved by BCWS staff based on the forest conditions present within the treatment areas. The fuel management activities undertaken are intended to reduce forest fuels to more natural levels and mimic a fire-maintained forest ecosystem. Recognizing that our forests in BC mostly have wildfire as a regular natural element of disturbance, maintaining and lowering fuel levels and allowing for ecological health/regeneration, in absence of wildfires, we do this mechanically with fuel management treatments (thinning and pruning), piling and burning.

Here's some information on the nature of fuel management treatments:

[Different Techniques for Fuels Reduction \(youtube.com\)](#)

[Introduction to Wildland Fuel Management - YouTube](#)

Although I have not spoken to the prescribing forester about chipping as an option, I expect logistics and cost of chipping, chip transportation off site and finding a destination for the chips/debris were considerations. I know from my experience, it's extremely difficult to find a destination/facility to receive the debris and that chipping, loading, transporting debris has cost prohibitive in most cases.

That said, we will continue to consider and discuss the chipping option with prescribing foresters and BC Wildfire Service staff and will try to incorporate this option if the wildfire risk and consequence is high and piling and burning is prohibitive.

## **2. Concerns about the amount of fuel now left in the lower trails heading into summer.**

- 1. There are major concerns about the amount of burn piles scattered around the mountain. In our mind this "fuel" that has been left clearly presents a fire risk. Our anxiety levels over this are pretty high. It would seem at the moment we are in no better position having had trees removed. Perhaps you can clarify this point?**

Recognizing that any forest fuel left on site represents some risk, we feel that undertaking these treatments to remove the fuel following completion of the

treatment is critical to lowering the overall wildfire risk to SilverStar Resort and the community.

Due to the higher elevation, the snowpack at SilverStar limits the time period by which these fuel reduction activities can occur. Forest thinning, pruning and piling can only occur in snow free periods – June through October depending on weather. Burning is also limited to a short period following ‘wildfire season’. So, we have a very limited period in which we can undertake these wildfire risk/forest fuel reduction activities at SilverStar.

I appreciate the anxiety levels are high generally with respect to wildfire season in remote, rural areas and communities in forested landscapes. The fuel reduction treatments being carried out at SilverStar are intended to reduce the risk of catastrophic fires of high intensity which travel up into the tree crowns and can become uncontrollable. The forested areas were treated by thinning out the trees and removing lower layers of trees, ie. the understory, which removes the ‘fuel ladder’. This mitigates the risk of ground fires elevating into the crowns of the top layer of trees.

**2. Any factual data you could point residents to highlighting the reduced risk at this stage would be useful.**

I do not have data or studies which characterizes the risk of debris piles being left on site however I would suggest that with the removal of lower tree layers, there is a reduced risk of a crown fire (at the tops of the mature trees) which tends to be more prone to greater rates of fire spread and intensity (ie. catastrophic). I will ask our colleagues at BC Wildfire Service if they are aware of any evidence, data or studies.

Regardless, our intention is to remove those debris piles as soon as possible.

**3. You have indicated that with the current burning “schedule” the completion of the project could take several more years. This is surely unacceptable?**

We have not spoken or communicated with each other beyond the initial email correspondence in July/August. I’m unsure what ‘burning schedule’ you are referring to as I don’t think communicated anything to you in that regard. Please clarify.

Regardless, we do not want debris piles left behind for subsequent years which is why we are prioritizing pile burning at this time. In that regard, we’re in communication with the contractor regarding operational logistics/timing and the Regional District of North Okanagan regarding burning permits and BCWS regarding the open burning ban.

- 4. I also understand that you are exploring the option of chipping, but the piles have already been prepared for burning so I suspect would involve more work and expense to proceed with chipping instead. Who are the parties responsible for making that decision?**

We're not contemplating changing the treatment at this point which would likely delay the completion considerably or worse yet, leave us unable to complete the fuel reduction project.

- 5. Has a cost analysis been presented and who is fighting in our corner to try to achieve this?**

No cost analysis has been presented that I'm aware of given this treatment was previously approved by BCWS and is partially completed. We believe we are working to complete this fuel reduction work in the interest of keeping the SilverStar residents, their homes and the resort infrastructure safe and protected from a catastrophic wildfire. We acknowledge we have more work to do in this regard.

### **3. Impact on SilverStar tourism due to unsightly slash piles on lower hiking trails.**

- 1. The lower mountain trails are also an eyesore. The reaction of our summer visitors has been disbelief and concern which does nothing to promote our status of a world class destination.**

I acknowledge that many forest treatment, particularly incomplete fuel reduction treatments as you're referencing may not be visually pleasing to some folks particularly those who appreciate the natural forest appearance without signs of cutting/thinning. We appreciate that a shorter-term visual impact or visual quality reduction is a tradeoff for forest which is more resilient to catastrophic wildfire and the potential loss of the resort infrastructure, homes and threat to visitors and residents. This is why we're dedicating substantial resources to forest fuel reduction at SilverStar and currently focused on burying the debris piles.

### **4. Next steps for Silver Star FIRE SMART project.**

- 1. Whilst it is good to see the FIRE SMART project happening on Silver Star Road it is clear that we will be in exactly the same position with that project as slash piles are being prepared which we assume will be left just as they are up here on the mountain?**

Firesmart refers to fuel reduction/wildfire risk reduction activities on private land and near private residences/businesses. [FireSmart BC](#)

That's a different program than the Crown Land Wildfire Risk Reduction program we are working to deliver through Mountain Resorts Branch.

I believe the forest fuel/debris along Silver Star Road is being piled and burned also.

This project is being carried out by the Wildfire Risk Reduction project delivered through Ministry of Forests and Forest Enhancement Society of BC. It is specifically intended to safeguard road access for the SilverStar community including emergency egress should there be a wildfire event that requires evacuation and also reduce the risk of a wildfire start along the road. There are multiple treatment being planned which will create landscape level buffers between Vernon and SilverStar to prevent a catastrophic wildfire from running up the mountain towards SilverStar Mountain Resort.

**2. Which project will get priority when the burning window is available?**

We are working with our contractor, RDNO and BCWS to confirm that the debris piles within the SilverStar Controlled Recreation Area are addressed this fall. I suspect the other treatment areas along SilverStar Road will also be burnt once the burn ban is lifted, RDNO provides the necessary permits and venting conditions are appropriate.

**3. Will there be a full team rather than a skeleton crew?**

I expect the appropriate crews will be in place to light the piles, monitor the burn and manage this treatment safely. We will be doing this in communication with BCWS and the SilverStar Fire Department.

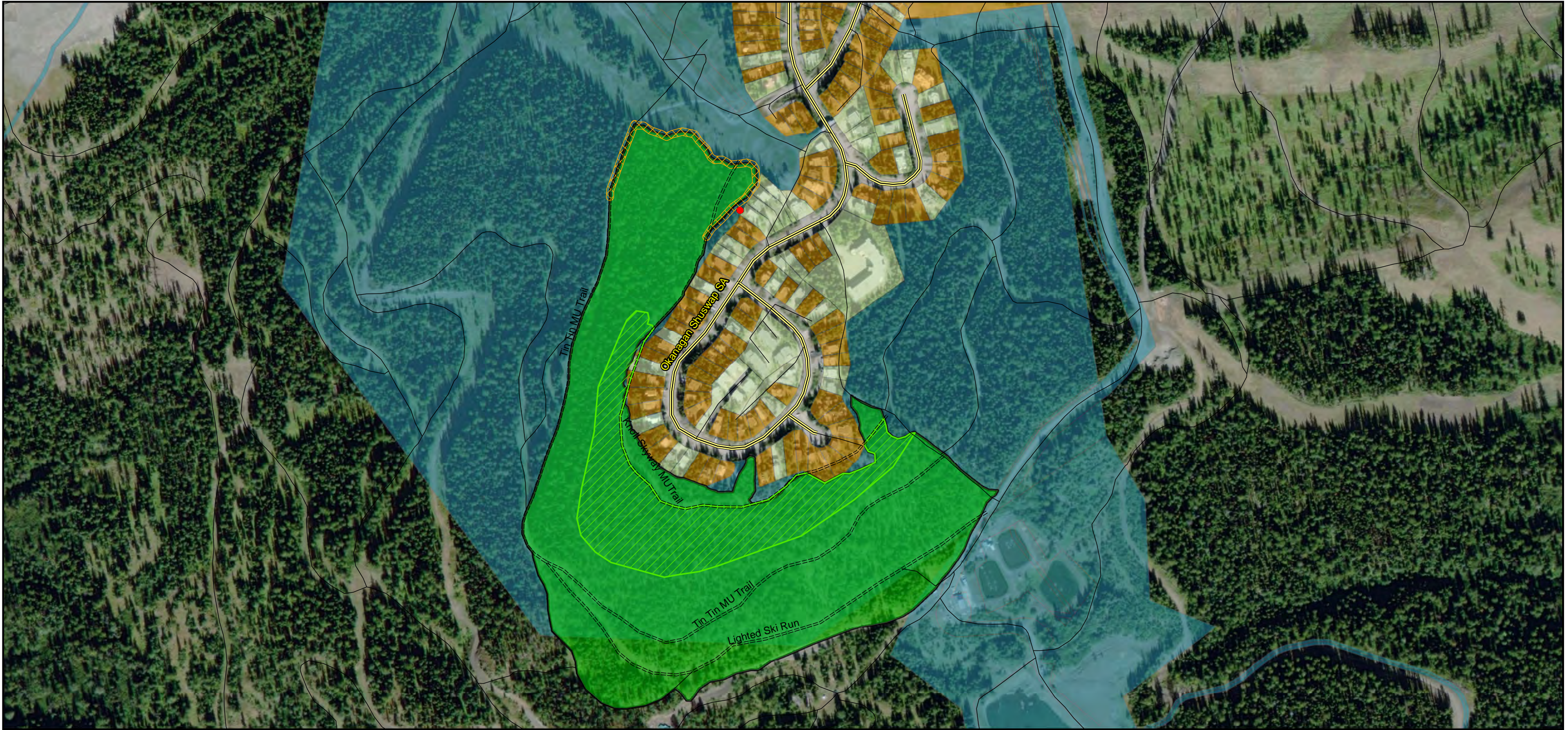
Again, I am sorry for the delay in providing you with a full response to your inquiry and concerns. We'll certainly be bringing these considerations forward as we work to manage and reduce the wildfire risk at SilverStar Mountain Resort in the future.

Thank you,  
Bill



**Bill Hunter, Director**  
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SILVER STAR - WRR GS21MRB306



**Legend**

- Gas Line
- ==== Existing Trail
- Transport Line**
  - Road
  - - - Trail
  - == BC MoT HIGHWAYS

- Ski Run Buffer
- Steep Slope
- MFZ
- RRZ
- RMZ
- Treatment Unit Boundary

**Internal Treatment Unit Boundary**

- TU-01

**Parcel Map Polygons**

- Crown Provincial
- Private
- Unknown

Area Summary Table				
Treatment Unit	Treatment Type	Debris Management	Date	Area (ha)
TU-01	TFB UT P HTR	SFR DDAC CDAR PB	8/21/2020	20.2
Net Area				20.2
Project Boundary				20.2

Treatment Type Key: HTR = Hazard tree removal, TFB = Thin from below, UT = Understory Thin, TFB = Thin from below, UT = Understory Thin, P= Prune  
Debris Management Key: SFR = Surface Fuel Removal, PB= Pile and Burn, DDAC = Drag debris and chip, CDAR = Chip debris and remove, PRB = Prescribed Burn, CDAD = Chip debris and disperse

1:5,000

50 25 0 50 100 Meters

Projection: NAD\_1983\_PCS\_Albers

Local Government Name: FLNRORD  
Operational Consultant: Cabin Resource Management  
GIS Consulted: Chris Sutton  
Created On: 8/24/2020



# Silver Star Mountain Resort Wildfire Risk Reduction Project



## Treatment Type

- General Fuel Management
  - Prescribed Burn
  - Ski Lifts
  - Buildings
  - Paved Roads
  - Trails
  - TRIM - Gravel Road
  - Transmission Line
- ## Stream Order
- 1
  - 2
  - Marsh/swamp
  - Provincial Park
  - Controlled Recreation Area (CRA)
  - Private Land



Date: 2020-08-21  
User Name: csteinke  
Coord. Sys: NAD 1983 BC Environment Albers

