



Forest Enhancement
Society of British Columbia

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
January 31, 2023

A B.C. Community Co-operative Takes on Wildfire Prevention and Climate Change

Procter, B.C. – A blazing wildfire in 2003 that prompted an evacuation alert, and grew to nearly 8,000 hectares, was a wake-up call for many Harrop-Procter residents. The community, located in the West Kootenay region of southeastern British Columbia, was clearly at risk and there was much work to be done to protect homes and watersheds. However, focusing narrowly on wildfire risk reduction work was not sufficient for the residents. With climate change conversations moving to the forefront of public consciousness, the Harrop Procter Community Co-operative (HPCC) developed an approach that is present-mindful, and future-focused, not only with its wildfire risk reduction activities but in how it manages and sustains the forested landbase.

The Forest Enhancement Society of BC (FESBC) has funded a handful of projects in the community forest that have a climate adaptation theme. For over ten years, HPCC has been conducting fuel treatments in areas adjacent to the communities of Harrop and Procter. The Community Co-operative is developing a 12 km east-west network of low-elevation fuel breaks as well as two high-elevation landscape-level fuel breaks between watersheds.

“The Forest Enhancement Society of BC is a proven partner in delivering projects on the ground that benefit communities, workers, and the health of our forests,” said Bruce Ralston, Minister of Forests. “We are building on this foundation with an additional investment of \$50 million for the Society to expand funding for projects that increase access to fibre, reduce emissions from slash pile burning and protect people from wildfire risk.”

The FESBC-funded components of HPCC’s work are integral to the fuel break between Harrop and Procter, as they connect to fuel breaks on the east and west sides. One project is in a 140-hectare forest stand that had been high-graded in the 1970s – meaning that previous harvesting activities removed only the most valuable timber and left the rest in the woods. The old high-grading removed Douglas-fir and larch, leaving small diameter, low-quality hemlock and damaged cedar, creating a very high fuel hazard and a forest maladapted to climate change. Informed by the 2016 Community Wildfire Protection Plan for the Regional District of Central Kootenay Area E, fuel prescriptions were developed, and multiple treatments have been completed in priority areas.

Using both manual and mechanical treatment techniques, these dense forests have been thinned, and fuel loads have been abated. Deciduous growth is being encouraged, and Ponderosa pine has been planted at low densities to diversify the forest and help adapt to a changing climate.

“HPCC has been an excellent FESBC partner, delivering excellent value and achieving all of the FESBC goals by removing fuels from the forest in critical areas and going the extra mile to reduce burning from these operations. We could not be happier for the community and the people who work hard to manage the forest,” said Brian Watson, RPF, Operations Manager with FESBC.

The HPCC is a community-owned not-for-profit with over 200 members and has a long history of managing local watersheds to address community concerns and values. HPCC has now been managing the 11,300-hectare Community Forest since 2000.



Jennifer Gunter, Executive Director of the BC Community Forest Association applauded the contributions the HPCC has been making since its inception.

“As one of the original community forest pilots in B.C., Harrop-Procter is a leader in the community forest movement. Their dynamic and innovative work in climate change adaptive management with a focus on reducing wildfire hazard over the past 10+ years provides an important and practical example of how to integrate climate science and risk assessment into tangible forest management decision-making. Their willingness to engage and share their experiences are a motivation to the community forest network provincially, nationally, and internationally,” said Gunter.

Forest management in Harrop-Procter is focused on watershed protection as well as wildfire risk reduction and climate change adaptation. What started as a collective effort in the early 1990s to protect the watersheds from logging has evolved into a community organization taking responsibility for active forest management. Harrop-Procter’s ecosystem-based approach makes extensive use of partial cutting techniques and complex reserve designs to maintain natural ecosystem functions while diversifying forest composition and structure.

The majority of the forests in Harrop-Procter are approximately 100 years old, having originated from large fires in the early 20th century. After many subsequent decades of fire suppression, wildfire has returned to the landscape. A 2003 wildfire burned several valleys south and west of the community forest. Then in 2017, another lightning-caused wildfire started in Harrop Creek, and the community was again put on evacuation alert. Half of the headwaters of Harrop Creek were burned in 2017 and water quality has since been impacted.

“Our forests are complex and dynamic ecosystems. We manage simultaneously for many values. We are extracting timber, and that is a primary economic factor in our work, but the starting point in our community forest is to protect the watersheds that everyone in Harrop and Procter drinks out of. Our focus is protecting our watersheds,” said Erik Leslie, RPF, HPCC’s Forest Manager. “Our ecosystem-based approach integrates wildfire risk reduction, protection of sensitive sites, and climate change adaptation.”

HPCC has developed an applied climate change adaptation project designed to use the community forest as a case study of how to integrate climate science into tangible forest management decision-making. The project includes a detailed assessment of the risks of wildfire and drought to homes, water, biodiversity, and timber. It also includes an operations strategy that describes specific climate resilience and realignment practices, including identification of priority reserve areas, location of strategic landscape-level fuel breaks, descriptions of partial cutting techniques, and the development of fire- and climate-adapted stocking standards.

As part of its community outreach activities, HPCC has developed a series of educational videos about wildfire risk reduction and climate change. The videos provide insights and perspectives from ecologists, forest managers, BC Wildfire Service personnel, and local residents: [Climate Change and New Approaches to Wildfire Risk Reduction - YouTube](#).

HPCC has been a leader in the West Kootenays as it manages a wildfire risk reduction program year after year aimed at completing the risk reduction goals from HPCC’s landscape-level plans.

“The work we are doing in Harrop-Procter is not a simple point-in-time intervention” explains Erik Leslie. “The fuel treatments are part of a larger strategy and a broader community conversation about climate change and ecosystem resilience. We, as a community forest, are trying to do our part and FESBC funding is helping us move the needle in the right direction.”



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For an interview with Harrop Procter Community Co-operative

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About [FESBC](#): the purposes of FESBC are to advance environmental and resource stewardship of B.C.'s forests by: preventing and mitigating the impact of wildfires; improving damaged or low-value forests; improving habitat for wildlife; supporting the use of fibre from damaged and low-value forests; and treating forests to improve the management of greenhouse gases. As of March 2022, FESBC has supported 263 projects valued at \$238 million, in partnership with the governments of B.C. and Canada.

FESBC would like to gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the
Province of British Columbia through the Ministry of Forests.

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