



BRITISH COLUMBIA
FireSmartTM

Annual Report

2023

Table of Contents

Message From Committee Chair	3
2023 Program Highlights	4
Program Vision, Mission, and Strategy	6
BC FireSmart Committee Update	7
Major Program Update	8
Work Plan Review	12
Financials Highlights & Key Metrics	16
Looking Ahead	19

Message From Committee Chair

2023 was another remarkable year for FireSmart BC and it's with great pride that we share this annual report celebrating our successes.

The purpose of this annual report is to provide users, shareholders, partners, and investors with a high-level overview of what FireSmart BC accomplishes each year under the strategic guidance of the BC FireSmart Committee. The report provides transparency and open communication regarding FireSmart BC's work and quantifies what the agencies that make up the committee have accomplished through this partnership.

Many of the FireSmart BC established programs have continued to experience exponential growth in 2023. The FireSmart Plant Program ran a successful first public campaign and nurseries across BC participated in assisting residents in smart, fire-resistant plant choices. The FireSmart Professional network (Local FireSmart Representatives, Wildfire Mitigation Specialists, and FireSmart Coordinators) employed by First Nations, municipalities, and regional districts across BC has now grown to over 1,200 skilled people promoting and educating on wildfire resiliency.

The first annual FireSmart BC Wildfire Resiliency and Training Summit was an unbelievable success with over 700 attendees and speakers gathering for a historic five-day in-person event in Vancouver. Children across BC can now grow and learn with wildfire resiliency in education through the new kindergarten to grade 12 FireSmart BC Education Curriculum. Finally, I am incredibly proud that FireSmart BC had a comprehensive accessibility audit conducted by Left Turn, Right Turn LTD. to ensure that we are aware of and actively reducing barriers to access FireSmart materials and resources. Our journey to ensure that our vision of "a wildfire resilient province where everyone works, plays, and lives FireSmart" is truly accessible to everyone in BC is just beginning.

It is my distinct honour to represent the incredible FireSmart BC team in welcoming past, current, and future partners to see what we have accomplished in 2023 and it is my hope that this momentum built over the past six years continues to expand and grow into 2024.



Rachel Woodhurst,
FireSmart Program Lead | BC FireSmart Committee Chair

2023 Program Highlights

2023 was another successful and exciting year for FireSmart BC: one that saw the continued growth of a number of major programs, a sold-out first annual Summit, and increased public attention and awareness as a result of an impactful wildfire season.

1. Continued Growth of the FireSmart Plant Program

In 2023, [The FireSmart Plant Program](#) saw continued growth with over 50 garden centres participating and representation from nearly each fire centre region. The program also had its first standalone [digital campaign](#) which drove over 6000 viewers to the online landscaping hub. The digital [Landscaping Hub](#) was expanded upon with new simplified resources and a new [Plant Partner section](#) focused solely on training resources for participating Garden Centres/Nurseries.

2. Planned, Produced, and Executed Our Biggest Spring Campaign Yet

Our annual campaign, backed by our ongoing consumer research, focused on the core idea that wildfire resilience is a shared responsibility and that we can all be everyday heroes of prevention.

This province-wide, integrated mass-media campaign featured a fun and approachable message and [broadcast-quality creative](#) work to make an impact. The campaign also experienced significant grassroots pick-up, with LFR's throughout the province receiving their very own "cape-rons" to run local activations.

3. Held the Inaugural FireSmart BC Wildfire Resiliency and Training Summit

Held in Vancouver, the 2023 Wildfire Resiliency and Training Summit (formally known independently as the FireSmart BC Conference and the WUI Symposium) was a huge success, with over 625 attendees and 95 speakers including keynote speakers from Australia and California. Indigenous perspectives and voices were incorporated throughout the Summit. Additionally, two inaugural award ceremonies were included in the event itinerary (the Indigenous Wildland Firefighter Honour Ceremony and the Lynn Orstad Award).

4. **Exponential Growth of the Home Partners Program**

[The Home Partners Program](#) in 2023 saw continued widespread adoption by Local Governments and First Nations as well as continued increases in trained Wildfire Mitigation Specialists. The program has now built a considerable foundation and is meeting the increased assessment demand from homeowners. Furthermore, an impactful partnership with BCAA has helped integrate insurance companies into the offering.

5. **Launch of New and Improved FireSmart BC Education Program**

After almost a year of working collaboratively with a group of educators to design and develop a new, comprehensive education program, the [FireSmart BC Education](#)

Program Vision, Mission, and Strategy

In spring 2022, the BC FireSmart Committee (BCFSC) completed work on the FireSmart BC Strategic Plan 2022-2025. This document, which was the result of over a year of planning, consultation, research, and collaborative work, will be a foundational piece to guide the committee and program's activities in the years ahead. Among its contents are the program's vision, mission, and strategic goal. These key statements, which can be found below, are critical in contextualizing the overall direction of the BCFSC.

OUR VISION

A wildfire resilient province, where everyone works, plays and lives FireSmart.

OUR MISSION

Build wildfire resiliency and reduce the negative impacts of fire for everyone in the province through FireSmart.

OUR STRATEGIC GOAL

Everyone in the province is aware of FireSmart, understands their role, accepts responsibility and takes action to increase wildfire resiliency.

In addition to these guiding statements, the BCFSC's activities are framed within a set of themes that give direction to the strategy and allow us to identify priorities, build work plans, and set goals and objectives.

Our Strategic Themes



EVIDENCE

Integrate research and information management to support evidence-based decision making.



ACCESS

Recognize unique needs and capacities to facilitate equitable access and outcomes.



EDUCATION

Targeted education, training and communication that empowers and mobilizes.



COLLABORATION

Collaborate with partners to build capacity, trust, and public confidence.



STRUCTURE

Build an aligned, sustainable and inclusive organizational structure.



ENGAGEMENT

Engage with all levels of Indigenous and non-Indigenous governments to support and implement policy, planning and funding.

BC FireSmart Committee Update

The BCFSC in 2024 consists of eleven voting agencies (13 voting members) and one advisory agency. There are three standing committees that support the work of the larger committee. These standing committees operate under separate terms of references and, while they are not decision-making authorities, they guide significant FireSmart program areas and provide recommendations to the BCFSC on future actions and growth opportunities.

The 2023 standing committees were:

- Standing Committee on Research
 - » Chairs Helena Marken (BCWS) and Dean Colthorp (Langley FD)
- Standing Committee on First Nations Outreach
 - » Chair Amanda Reynolds (FNESS)
- Standing Committee on Strategic Direction
 - » Chair Gord Pratt (FESBC)

In 2023, an external party conducted a full review of the BCFSC structure and membership, and provided recommendations to BCWS regarding structure to accommodate consistent and sustainable growth. The recommendations are still being reviewed by upper-level decision makers.

Major Program Update

FireSmart Plant Program

The [FireSmart Plant Program](#) had continued success in 2023 with a growing roster of over 50 nurseries and garden centres across the province participating.

The program received an increased promotional budget to further drive awareness and consumer demand through the form of a digital campaign on Facebook and YouTube. This campaign garnered over 900,000 impressions and over 6,000 landing page views, greatly assisting with increased awareness about the program.

The [virtual Landscaping Hub](#) was improved and expanded upon with a new "[Landscaping Best Practices](#)" page that now includes specific resources on the popular topics of [fire-resistant Mulch](#) and [Privacy Hedge](#) options (two of the most common fire hazards on properties in British Columbia). Furthermore, in response to feedback from the 2022 season, a training video and [fully dedicated webpage](#) were created to support the "Plant Partners" including increased information on FireSmart landscaping and other core FireSmart principles.

In late 2023, FireSmart successfully connected with a grower and will continue searching for more grower network opportunities and large distributors in 2024 to target the source of plant suppliers.

For 2024, FireSmart BC aims to connect and collaborate with local FireSmart BC network champions to empower this program at a local scale and focus on systems and resourcing that ensure public information (such as plant tags) are correctly displayed.

FireSmart, in collaboration with FNESS, also plans to seek opportunities for First Nation community involvement and adaptation of this program to fit their needs.

HomePartners Program

The Home Partners Program (HPP) also experienced ongoing growth and upscaling across BC in 2023. The program is now available in a considerable number of First Nations, regional districts, and municipalities and is scaling to meet consumer demand. Large increases in the amounts of total trained Wildfire Mitigation Specialists, completed assessments, and certified homes all point to the exponential growth of Home Partners in BC. This program will continue to play a pivotal role in increasing provincial resiliency.

FireSmart Canada Neighbourhood Recognition Program

In 2023, we set out to make changes to the FCNRP in terms of the program build and portal functionality. This goal was set after it was noted in 2022 that the program had flaws with usability, portal design, and tangible impact for the neighbourhoods who were 'recognized'. In 2023, we set out to create a program that was broadened to enable inclusivity for all communities in British Columbia, recognizing that one size does not fit all and that improvements were necessary.

We evaluated our current program and focused on learning what barriers were being faced by users. An initial round of surveys was sent out; polling the audience of FCNRP participants about their thoughts on the program from a high level. We scheduled interviews with a variety of key stakeholders from different roles, backgrounds, and levels of involvement. 15 individuals were interviewed and [calls were recorded](#). [Notes](#) were taken and [summarised into key findings](#) to provide a roadmap for the next stage of development.

The development of the new portal will be most effective after the development of the FireSmart Digital App, which began construction in 2023. We concluded the remainder of the year by finalizing a foundation of research to build out the structure of the new program in the new year.

In 2024 we will begin developing the new tiered program, resources, and everything required for BC's new version of the FCNRP.

FireSmart BC Network

The FireSmart BC Network, made up of FireSmart BC Coordinators, Local FireSmart Representatives, and Wildfire Mitigation Specialists continues to grow across the entire province and is the best way of ensuring all programs' success at a local community level.

At the end of 2023, the network had grown by over 20% with 66 FireSmart Coordinators, 1066 Trained Local FireSmart Representatives (LFRs), and 192 Wildfire Mitigation Specialists.

FireSmart Coordinators, with the support of the Community Resiliency Investment Fund (CRI), continue to create and support regional and local FireSmart programs, working closely with First Nations and local governments.

The role of the FireSmart Coordinator will be a requirement for CRI in 2024, and the coordinator will have increased capacity to do more work with the other FireSmart positions added to CRI. This will continue to increase engagement across provincial, regional, and local teams.

Wildfire Mitigation Specialists (WMS) grew by over 80% this year with increasing demand for training across the entire province. 15 training sessions were completed and 63 trained WMS were added in 2023.

The Local FireSmart Representatives (LFR) Program also continued strong in 2023, with 186 additional representatives trained across BC to help support local and regional FireSmart programs. 4 virtual training workshops were delivered in 2023. We also established the [LFR of the month](#) as a way to highlight the great work these individuals are doing within their communities.

With the rollout of the updated FireSmart Canada Home Ignition Zone Assessment, FireSmart BC also created a new [Home Assessment](#) specifically for trained members of the network. This new assessment migrated away from the previous scoring system, taking a more systematic and proactive approach.

A successful in-person Summit session took place in the Spring of 2023. This was focused on FireSmart Coordinators, which was positively received and led the way to the creation of the [FireSmart Coordinator webpage](#), allowing users to easily find their local Coordinator.

In 2024, we will continue to focus on serving our network with consistent professional development opportunities, active support channels, and increased one-to-one relationships between them and the FireSmart BC and FNESS program leads.

The 2024 Summit is set to include a FireSmart Coordinator networking function specifically designed to be an in-person opportunity for this group to connect in a social setting and establish relationships with one another.

FireSmart Education Program

After almost a year of working collaboratively with a group of educators to design and develop a new, comprehensive education program, the [FireSmart BC Education Program](#) was launched in late spring 2023. Designed to introduce students in grades K-12 to FireSmart concepts, including how to make homes and communities more resilient to wildfire, the resources are interactive, inclusive, and purposefully aligned with the B.C. school curriculum.

Program information and materials live on a dedicated landing page. The free lesson plans are easy to teach and empower students to become champions of wildfire preparedness. Themes include lessons from First Peoples, ecosystem stewardship, and building strong communities.

A comprehensive marketing strategy and implementation plan have been developed, and early outreach has begun. For example, FireSmart BC participated as an exhibitor at the 2023 myPITA education conference where representatives distributed promotional materials and engaged with over 775 teachers and education staff across the province. Additionally, we established a dedicated working group to oversee FireSmart education, including managing education inbox inquiries. Since attending the conference and beginning our marketing efforts, we have received several requests for school visits. We have also tapped into Local FireSmart Representatives, FireSmart Coordinators, and other staff at the local level to assist with school outreach and program facilitation.

For 2024, the primary focus will be to continue to promote the program internally and externally. We will also collect feedback from internal and external audiences to ensure the materials are inclusive and easy to use. Focus will be given to non-traditional learning settings and schools in rural and remote areas to ensure the program is accessible to all.

Work Plan Review

The FireSmart BC Work Plan was created to guide the day-to-day activities of the FireSmart BC team as well as its agency partner. In addition to the major programs above, the work plan included some other notable key initiatives, which also experienced significant growth in 2023.

Internal Partner Education

Internal partners are a key part of FireSmart BC's success. In 2023, educating and connecting with these individuals was an important part of the communication strategy.

The quarterly webinars continued to be an effective communication method, taking place throughout the year and drawing over 100 registrants and 60+ live attendees each time. A variety of topics were presented with a specific focus on CRI and funding opportunities and general provincial programming updates. The sessions were recorded and made available on the FireSmart BC website for easy access and future reference.

Looking ahead to 2024, the webinars will be taking place at an increased frequency with relevant topics and speakers continually incorporated. The goal is to maintain active participation and continue to share important information in this way with the growing community.

Direct email communication also proved effective with 19 emails distributed to our internal audience on topics ranging from resource updates to event invitations. The audience averaged a 50% open rate and over 45% click rate on specific resources. This will continue to be a primary communication method for 2024, including the addition of a new support@firesmartbc.ca email inbox designed for ease of two-way communication with the internal FireSmart BC network.

Recognizing the current FireSmart BC forum is very underutilized, an improved version of this online forum will be implemented in 2024. Here, representatives and the larger FireSmart community can connect and work together to share ideas and resources. Currently, FireSmart BC is gathering feedback from key stakeholders within the network to advise on what the current needs are.

The FireSmart BC Wildfire Resiliency and Training Summit

For 2023, the first combination of both the FireSmart BC Conference and the Wildland-Urban Interface Symposium took place under a new name—The Wildfire Resiliency and Training Summit (WRTS). The summit was hosted in Vancouver, BC, in partnership with the BCWS Coastal Fire Centre.

The event was a great success, growing to nearly double the size of the 2022 event with over 625 attendees and 95 speakers including keynote speakers from Australia and California. Topics and content streams included Science/Research, Human/Wellness Community, and Operations with Indigenous perspectives and voices incorporated throughout.

Additionally, two inaugural award ceremonies took place (the Indigenous Wildland Firefighter Honour Ceremony and the [Lynn Orstad Award](#)).

Over 55% of attendees reported that networking was one of the primary reasons for attending the event and this was successfully achieved through the networking event that was hosted at the Polygon Gallery with an opportunity for both training and conference attendees to connect. The post-event survey reported that 95% of respondents rated the event as “Excellent” or “Good” and 97% would recommend attending the event to others. Over 85% of respondents reported that they plan to attend the event again in 2024.

Planning for the 2024 WRTS is well underway with a location secured in Prince George, BC, and the event theme confirmed: Recover, Rebuild, Prepare. The 2024 agenda will include Indigenous voices and perspectives throughout and will include high-profile speakers from across North America on a variety of subjects.

Major Annual Campaigns

In May 2023, FireSmart BC launched its annual awareness campaign targeted at homeowners throughout the province. The campaign was informed by consumer research conducted in the fall of 2021 and 2022, which revealed that, while FireSmart brand awareness was low, people felt that everyone had a role to play in wildfire resiliency.

The campaign used a mass-media approach, leveraging TV advertising, billboards, social and digital ads, while also testing new media, such as radio, to reach more remote communities. The above channels leveraged professional yet approachable creative communicating our key message: **Everyday Chores Make Everyday Heroes.**

All online messaging directed users to a [campaign landing page](#) that featured the campaign video assets and drove traffic to engage with our interactive FireSmart Begins at Home Guide and other key resources. The campaign was designed to reach all of BC, but specifically targeted high-risk class communities with varying levels of past program interaction.

The campaign was a major success, garnering positive feedback and grassroots uptake amongst our internal stakeholders and considerable reach and engagement with over 20 million impressions across the province.

Communications Tools

FireSmart BC's online "owned" channels (Social Media, Magazine, Podcast, Newsletter) all saw considerable increases in traffic and engagement in 2023. This can primarily be attributed to the very impactful 2023 wildfire season and attention it brought. However, the FireSmart team has also placed considerable emphasis on growing these channels and improving their quality and relevance.

Research

Building off of the momentum generated in 2022, the FireSmart BC Research program continued to fulfill the evidence theme from the strategic plan by prioritizing the planning, gathering, and actioning of key data to drive decision-making.

Ongoing field research in the WUI, as well as post-fire examinations, were two research initiatives that were notable in providing information on how we understand fire and structure loss. The Northwest Territories project was highly anticipated for 2023, however, the team was only able to complete phase 1 (set up, field preparations, and interviews) due to the wildfires in the north. Phase 2 is now planned for 2024 when conditions are optimal. Overall, lots of great work was completed in a variety of research areas that will inform future program decisions.

Partnerships

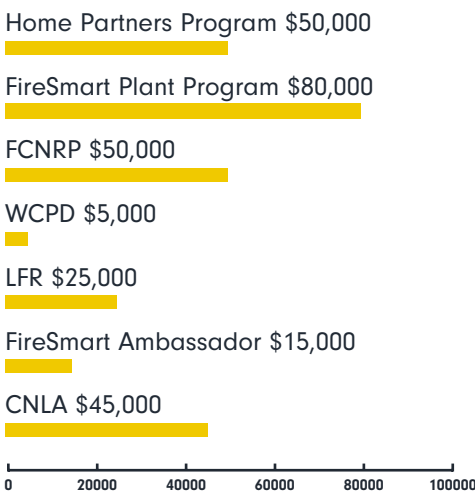
Partnerships (both internal and external) were a major theme and area of growth for FireSmart BC in 2023. An increased emphasis on internal collaboration with our partner agencies yielded new resources, roles, and reach across the province. From an expanded FireSmart team at FNESS, to a new Wildfire Emergency Checklist with EMCR, our internal partnerships continue to create synergies and increase province-wide resiliency.

Some notable external partnerships included a new three-year agreement with BCAA, ongoing collaboration with community based organizations, and continued conversations and collaboration with industry partners (landscaping, insurance, real estate, etc.).

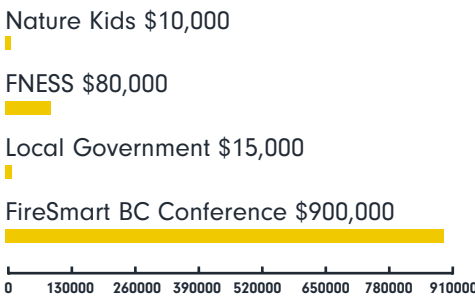
Financials Highlights & Key Metrics

The below numbers represent estimated expenditures for key program areas for the 2023-2024 fiscal year (April 1 2023 - March 31, 2024)

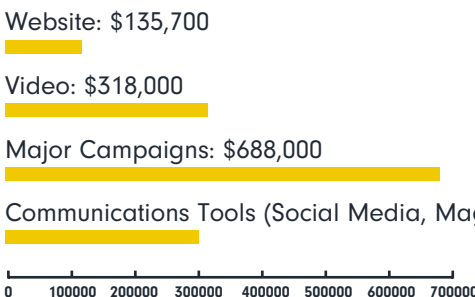
Programs



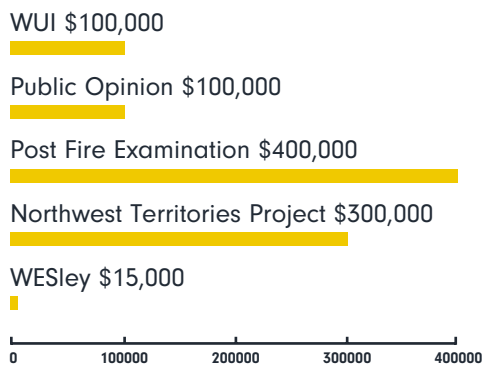
Partnerships & Events



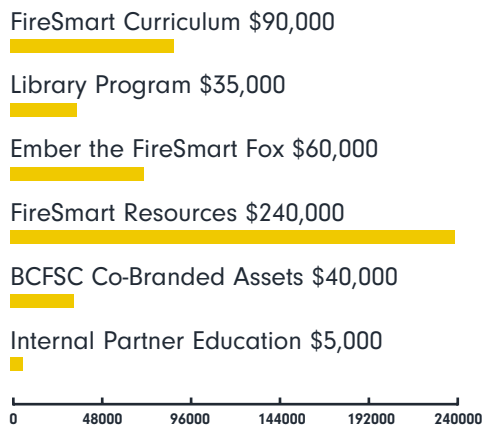
Communications



Research



Education



2023 Key Metrics

The below numbers represent key tracked metrics for the 2023 calendar year.

BRAND AWARENESS (As Per Jan 2024 Public Perceptions Survey)			
	Results	Yearly % Change	Absolute Change
Baseline Brand Awareness	55%	17%	8%
Aware, not familiar	26%	4%	1%
Aware, somewhat familiar	22%	16%	3%
Aware, very familiar	7%	133%	4%

FIRESMART PROGRAMS (as of December 31, 2023)			
	Results	Yearly % Change	Absolute Change
Recognized Neighbourhoods	205	0%	0
FireSmart Coordinators (Total Number)	66	65%	26
HPP - Communities and First Nations	75	60%	28
HPP - WMS Total	192	134%	110
HPP - Annual Assessments Delivered	1874	141%	1,096
HPP - Homes Certified	21	163%	13
Plant Program Partners	50	47%	16
LFRs Trained (2023)	253	23%	48
Total LFRs	1066	16%	146
Total FireSmart Network (LFS, WMS, FSC FCNRP)	1529	23%	282

SOCIAL MEDIA (as of December 31, 2023)			
	Results	Yearly % Change	Absolute Change
Twitter Followers	3,246	40%	931
Instagram Followers	1,730	43%	523
Facebook Followers	5,705	20%	938
Facebook Fans	2,711	18%	408
Total organic impressions	940,200	-21%	- 260,260
Total organic engagements	24,596	14%	3,054

WEBSITE (as of December 31, 2023)			
	Results	Yearly % Change	Absolute Change
Total Sessions (hits)	197,000	58%	72,597
Unique Pageviews	351,000	67%	141,366
Magazine Articles	15	0.0%	0
Email subscribers	3,901	36%	1,029

PODCAST (as of December 31, 2023)			
	Results	Yearly % Change	Absolute Change
Total Downloads	3,203	34%	811
Downloads/Episode	133	-3%	-4
Number of episodes released	14	8%	1

Looking Ahead

In summary, 2023 was an impactful year of ongoing growth for the FireSmart BC program. The program has grown considerably on the back of its foundational strategic plan and a unified and effective BC FireSmart committee. Additionally, ongoing growth of the FireSmart BC internal team and province-wide FireSmart network has further increased our capacity to effectively deliver the program for all British Columbians.

The year ahead will build on this momentum with the continued expansion of our various programs and campaigns. We will also focus on establishing and solidifying our various partnerships, both internal and external, to ensure we continue to expand our footprint across the province. We will also place an increased emphasis on ensuring our program and communications are accessible and equitable for all individuals in the province.

2023's impactful wildfire season and early forecasts for this year highlight the critical need for wildfire preparedness in all corners of the province. The realities of our climate emergency will bring with it increasingly severe wildfire seasons, but the program focuses above have been put in place to help harden our defences. We will continue to work on FireSmart education and awareness, empowering homeowners and communities so that they can take action to improve their wildfire resiliency.

Thank you again for playing your part in building a FireSmart BC. We look forward to continuing to serve you.