



Media Release

THE CORPORATION OF THE CITY OF VERNON
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Smoke may be visible in Foothills area this week due to prescribed burn

UPDATE: Due to unforeseen circumstances, the prescribed burn planned for a City-owned parcel of land in the Foothills subdivision for Friday, April 16, has been postponed. The City of Vernon and Vernon Fire Rescue Services thanks residents for their patience and understanding, and will provide updates on this ongoing fuel mitigation work as they become available.

Vernon Fire Rescue Services (VFRS) would like to advise residents that wildland fuel management work is scheduled to take place in the Foothills area this week as part of an ongoing effort to reduce wildfire risks in the community.

On Friday, April 16, residents may see smoke from a prescribed burn on a 10-hectare parcel of City-owned land in the Foothills. The work will be conducted by a qualified contractor and will only take place if weather and fuel conditions are appropriate.

“We started the Foothills fuel management project in 2019,” said Fire Chief David Lind. “First, we cleaned up the site by removing debris and thinning out the trees and vegetation. In July 2020, small pile burning was conducted to deal with some of the woody fiber that had been generated from the thinning of overgrown areas, and now it’s time to conduct a prescribed burn to manage fine fuels and return to the area to a more natural state.”

Controlled burn projects require specific criteria to be met to maintain the safety of those doing the work and everyone else in the area – this includes the need to have the right weather conditions to reduce the impact of smoke on the region – so timing is of the essence.

The qualified contractor will carefully prepare, control and monitor the fire at all times and VFRS firefighters will be on site regularly and will remain in close contact with the contractor.

“I have full confidence in the team doing this work,” said Fire Chief Lind. “It will be done in compliance with all provincial and federal regulations and conducted in a safe, controlled and responsible manner.”

Only **one day** of burn activity is expected to take place, followed by two days of patrolling the area for hot spots, however, the schedule may be adjusted due to weather and site conditions. During the day, residents in the Foothills area will want to keep their windows closed to prevent smoke from getting inside their homes. The fire will be extinguished before the contractor leaves the site, when windows can be opened again.

For the latest information on current wildfire activity and burning restrictions in British Columbia, visit bcwildfire.ca. To report a wildfire or open burning violation, call **1-800-663-5555** or toll-free ***5555** on a cell phone. To report a local fire or emergency, please call **911**.

Below is a map where the prescribed burn will be taking place (within the blue dotted boundaries). A list of frequently asked questions is also available on the following page.



Frequently asked questions about prescribed burns

What is *prescribed fire*?

Prescribed fire is the planned and controlled application of fire to a specific land area and is one of the most ecologically appropriate and efficient means for achieving planned public safety and resource management objectives.

Why is this method being applied to the Foothills area?

The two parcels of City-owned land in the Foothills subdivision contain grassland ecosystems that have evolved with fire. Historically, fire was ignited by First Nations people and naturally occurring events such as lightning strikes. The result of frequent fire is healthy plant and animal communities. In the absence of fire, plants become less healthy and palatable to wildfire, and fuels build up, resulting in higher severity fire than managers would like. Such fires threaten human lives and property and lead to less healthy and resilient ecosystems.

How is prescribed fire being applied?

A team of fire experts, including members of Vernon Fire Rescue Services and a Fire Ecologist, have developed a written plan in consultation with the BC Wildfire Service that details under what conditions of weather and fuel moisture the burn can be safely carried out that will in turn enable them to meet their ecological objectives. Other components of the plan include sections on: smoke, firefighter and public safety, communications, traffic control, and public information.

What are some of the ecological effects of the prescribed burn?

A low intensity fire (short flame length) will consume dead leaves, needles and grass and top-kill shrubs and small deciduous trees. To *top-kill* a plant means to kill the portion that is above the ground; most plants have the majority of their living components below ground and are protected from heat. A spring burn when soil moisture is still high and soils are cool ensures that we won't do much damage to below-ground plant parts.

Local wildlife species will exhibit a range of actions in response to the burn. Large ungulates and predators like deer and coyotes will simply leave the area once the burn starts. Smaller mammals, amphibians and reptiles will burrow underground where they are protected from heat by moist, cold soil. Birds will also flee the area. Insects such as ticks and ground hornets are killed by the fire. In the aftermath of the fire, wildlife quickly return to the area and take advantage of new and healthier plant growth.

The Foothills burn unit contains a number of invasive weed species including woolly mullein and thistle. A low intensity fire will not have a negative or positive effect on these and other invasive species. Many of these species are highly adapted to survive disturbances such as fire. In the event of a high intensity fire that resulted in native plants being significantly damaged or killed, these species would have a competitive advantage and could occupy more of the site. A low intensity fire maintains local native plant health and vigor and an ability to outcompete non-native plants.

