



BRITISH COLUMBIA
FireSmart[™]

Strategic Plan 2022-2025

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Executive Summary

Executive Summary

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.

OUR STRATEGIC THEMES



EVIDENCE



ACCESS



EDUCATION



COLLABORATION



STRUCTURE



ENGAGEMENT

FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES

- Apply a diversity, equity and inclusion lens to all of the work of FireSmart BC
- Communities (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) are the focus
- Knowledge sharing and exchange are critical
- Pursue continuous improvement
- Leverage the Seven FireSmart Disciplines as tools
- Advocate for FireSmart
- Align with FireSmart Canada



Introduction



Introduction

There can be little doubt that wildfires (and natural disasters of all kinds) are growing in frequency and severity. The impacts on people, wildlife, landscape and the environment are hard to underestimate. Research conducted for this strategic plan shows the people of the province believe wildfires are not going away.

While people consider the provincial government to be primarily responsible for prevention, mitigation, response and recovery from wildfires, they also agree there is a role for everyone in prevention and mitigation, and that there is value in the FireSmart BC program.

The BC Government in Budget 2022 acknowledged the need to further address the problem of wildfires in the province, with significant investments in both front-end prevention and mitigation efforts and supporting response and recovery efforts. Never before has the attention of the province – from Vanderhoof to Victoria – been as universally focused on finding and implementing solutions.

Now is FireSmart BC's time to deliver on its promise of building a more wildfire resilient province where everyone works, plays and lives FireSmart.

Climate Change/Environment



Affordable Housing



COVID-19



For British Columbians, climate change and the environment is the most important issue facing the province today*

**To ensure this strategy is evidence-informed and data-backed, and reflects the views of the people of the province, FireSmart BC conducted primary research via a public opinion survey and a partner perception audit. Copies of these reports can be found in the appendices to this document.*



Context



FireSmart in Canada

FireSmart in Canada dates back to 1990, when a committee was established by the Alberta Forest Service to address common concerns about wildfire in the wildland-urban interface.

The FireSmart brand was created in 1999, and by 2008, a national FireSmart program – what would become FireSmart Canada – was established. It was eventually brought into the Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre (CIFFC) in 2021.

The goals for FireSmart Canada are twofold: to improve communication with stakeholders; and to organize programs and assets into a logical, manageable structure based on three pillars – homeowners, neighbourhoods and communities.



FireSmart in British Columbia

FireSmart has been around in British Columbia since the late 1990s, but initially lacked coordination. The BC FireSmart Committee (BCFSC) ultimately came together in 2017 to coordinate and advance the goals of FireSmart in BC. It has since expanded its membership.

A number of important events have taken place in the five years the BCFSC has been in existence.

BC experienced two of its worst wildfire seasons in history during the summers of 2017 and 2018. If there was any doubt that the problem was getting worse – and very likely was linked to climate change impacts – the province experienced yet another devastating wildfire season in 2021, preceded by anomalous heat events and followed by “once-in-a-century” flooding.

Over the same period of time, a number of new members joined the Committee, and in parallel FireSmart Canada began the process of updating its national strategy.

And yet, the BCFSC has never had a guiding strategy or strategic plan; instead, the work has been guided by Terms of Reference and annual work plans.

Given this confluence of factors, there was agreement that a strategic plan is essential to priority setting, and to delivering on the FireSmart BC program’s commitment to wildfire resilience in the province.



What we set out to do

Develop a strategic plan and performance measures that will inform the BC FireSmart Committee's long-term strategy and annual plans and priorities.

What the goal was

An evidence-informed, data-backed and goal-driven strategic plan



Research & Engagement



The most important part of any successful strategy is people. So, we set out to engage as many partners, stakeholders and citizens as possible.

While it was important to test the strategy among public and key partners audiences, the process started by interviewing all BCFSC members** in order to start with a set of common understandings and assumptions.



What we heard from members

- Climate change as a backdrop is a given. Wildfire frequency/severity is likely to get worse before it gets better.
- Wildfire mitigation and preparedness are shared responsibilities of all British Columbians.
- In the hierarchy of values in active wildfire response and recovery, human life is valued over property and economic impacts.
- Communities (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) are and should remain the at the centre of the FireSmart Program.
- Public awareness and education are critical to success and they must go beyond awareness building, to change attitudes and prompt real action.
- There is a need to engage more/different stakeholders and partners to maximize impact.
- Better data collection and sharing is critical to success.



It is important for the strategy to be evidence-informed and data-backed, and that the voices of British Columbians on this critical issue be heard. Therefore, a comprehensive research program was conducted, including a survey of 1,000 British Columbians, and perception audit interviews with 40 informed stakeholders and partners.^{***}



What we heard from citizens

- Wildfires are seen as a big issue by almost everyone, and are expected to get worse, largely because of climate change.
- People think wildfires are a problem for governments (and the forest industry) to solve for them. However, the majority of people believe the impact of wildfires can be reduced if we all work together.
- There are significant regional differences in perception of the impacts from wildfires.
- FireSmart BC as a concept is something people can easily get behind, but FireSmart BC as a program has limited visibility.

As familiarity with FireSmart BC increases, so too does engagement in terms of interest, confidence, and seeking information – and ultimately FireSmart action.



+90%

of British Columbians believe the issue of wildfires is either an important issue or the most important issue facing BC

Over 8 in 10 British Columbians believe the provincial government holds the greatest responsibility to prevent and fight wildfires



Once aware of FireSmart BC, more than 8 in 10 say it is valuable to the province



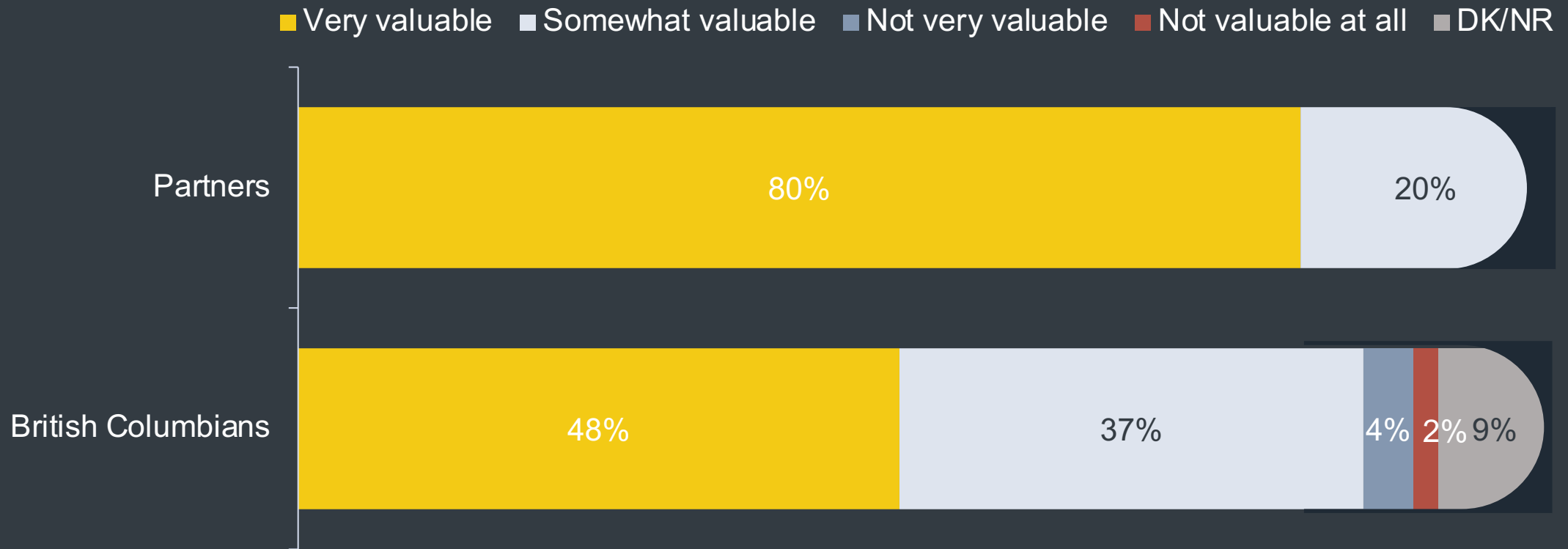
What we heard from partners

- FireSmart BC is considered a valuable initiative for the province and its citizens.
- Partners were optimistic that the average British Columbian is likely to adopt FireSmart BC initiatives, though some questioned the relevance of the program for “everyone” in BC.
- FireSmart BC is seen to be performing well on three important initiatives: training local fire departments and making an online guide available to homeowners about FireSmarting their homes and a landscaping guide on how to manage their landscaping.
- Where FireSmart BC needs to focus is on incentivizing homeowners including provision of free property assessments and providing clearly marked tags identifying fire resistant plants at garden centres.
- The message about resilience in the vision and individual responsibility in the strategic goal were well received.
- Partners encouraged FireSmart BC to consider more community level actions in the future.



Value of FireSmart BC

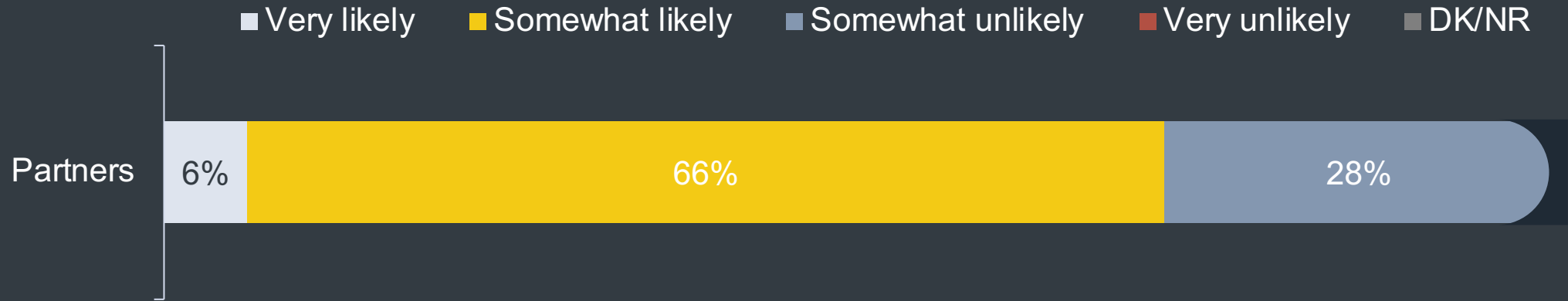
Based on your knowledge, experience, or the definition we have provided, how valuable would you say FireSmart BC is to the province and its citizens?



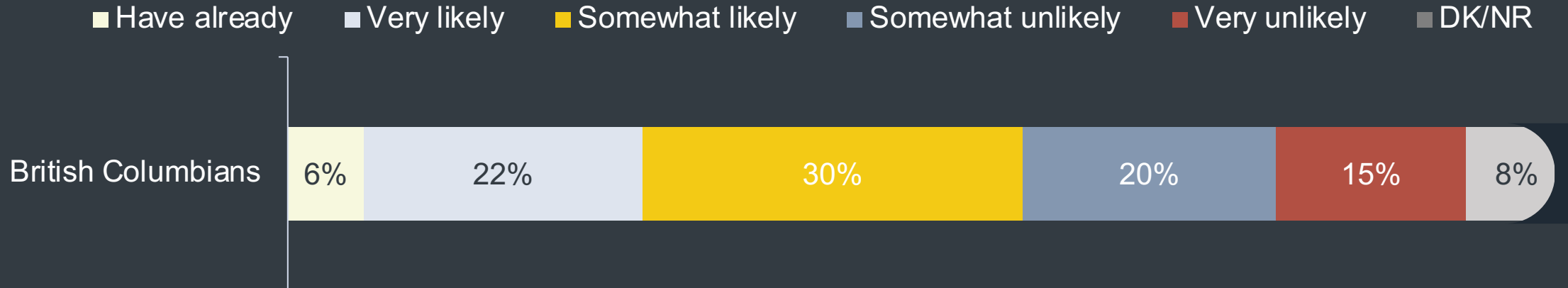


Likelihood to FireSmart

How likely do you think the average British Columbian is to adopt the initiatives and FireSmart their home/property?



How likely are you to seek out information and guidance to help you protect your home and/or property from wildfires in the next year?





Vision, Mission, Strategy



OUR VISION

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

The vision for FireSmart BC is the future we want to create. Resiliency from wildfires is central, as is buy-in from all corners of the province.



OUR MISSION

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

**“What do we do?” and “who do we do it for?”
are guiding questions for our mission.**



OUR STRATEGIC GOAL

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

An overarching strategic goal ensures we align our choices about how we deploy resources to execute the mission and drive toward the vision.



Everything we do is framed within a set of themes that give direction to the strategy, 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.



Principles



FireSmart BC is guided by common assumptions and operating principles that together provide a framework within which we operate, and which gives the work we do its foundation and its purpose.

FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES

- Communities (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) are the focus
- Apply a diversity, equity and inclusion lens to all of the work of FireSmart BC
- Knowledge sharing and exchange are critical
- Pursue continuous improvement
- Leverage the Seven FireSmart Disciplines as tools
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Recommendations



A number of factors – including higher interest and awareness from the general public, increased funding, and renewed political commitment to the program by the provincial government – set the stage for FireSmart BC to put its newly-developed strategy into action. Now is the time for FireSmart BC to take advantage of the growing credibility of its brand, and engagement with partners, to immediately implement the following actions, and by doing so, make the vision real.



Recommendations

1

Map the strategy against the existing 2022 Work Plan and revise/update where necessary.

For strategic themes where tactical work plans exist (e.g. communication and collaboration), map against strategy and revise/update where necessary.

2

For strategic themes where current plans are limited, develop tactical implementation plans.

ENGAGEMENT: develop an advocacy plan to coordinate efforts among all governments, Indigenous and non-Indigenous.

ACCESS: Audit existing programs and processes to identify priority opportunities to improve access.

EVIDENCE: Set priorities for research, data collection and information management.

STRUCTURE:

- Building from summary recommendations at BCFSC strategy workshop, explore options and alternative organizational structures for consideration.
- Include capability to manage increased community activation and incentivization activities.
- Assess alternatives and determine the path forward for the BCFSC Standing Committee on Strategic Direction.



Recommendations

3

Engage with BC Wildfire Service for purposes of aligning strategy with new Ministry structure and feeding into the BCWS's 2021-26 Strategic Plan.

4

Share strategy development process and output with FireSmart colleagues across Canada.

Engage with FireSmart Canada (CIFFC) to present FireSmart BC strategy, and align with CIFFC strategic plan and the CCFM's development of a pan-Canadian Wildland Fire Prevention and Mitigation Strategy.

5

Schedule and budget for annual public opinion research (and less frequent partner perception audits) to test progress of strategy against 2021 baseline, as well as to identify new or evolving questions and issues.