



Southern Gulf Islands Community Wildfire Resiliency Plan At-a-Glance

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Southern Gulf Islands (SGI) Electoral Area are a group of distinct island communities. Major islands include Galiano Island, Mayne Island, Pender Islands (North and South), Saturna Island, and Piers Island. Local Government functions are shared by Islands Trust and Capital Regional District (CRD). Island access and egress is by aircraft, ferry, or boat. Southern Gulf Islands are heavily forested with Coastal Douglas-fir ecosystems and residents live near and amid the forest.

What is the history of fire in SGI?

The forests and grasslands of SGI were shaped by thousands of years of fire. Cultural burning was used extensively by indigenous peoples until 1874, when restricted by colonial governments. There has been only one significant sized fire since 1950, the 61-hectare Galiano fire in 2006. Lightning accounts for a small percentage of ignitions. Aggressive fire suppression over the past century has altered ecosystems and led to increased fuel density.

Table 13. Fires by cause (1950-2020). BCWS data.

Decade	Lightning	Person	Unknown
1950s			
1960s	10	29	0
1970s	4	24	0
1980s	1	15	0
1990s	9	17	1
2000s	2	36	5
2010s	2	17	5
Total	28	168	11

What is a Community Wildfire Resiliency Plan?

This plan examines wildfire risk in SGI and makes expert recommendations to help build FireSmart communities. Note that risk on privately owned lands could not be studied under the provincial grant funding terms.

What was done?

Wildfire experts conducted wildfire risk assessments on public lands, examining structures and the characteristics of forest vegetation. These assessments combined with the Provincial Strategic Threat Analysis to determine wildfire risk in each community.

What did we find?

Most public lands have a moderate wildfire risk. Risk on adjacent private lands is likely moderate as well. High risk areas with fuels upwind of communities or on steep slopes occurred most frequently on South Pender.

What is moderate fire risk?

Moderate wildfire risk means that a forest can readily support wildfire of moderate intensity. The risk associated with fires of moderate intensity should not be underestimated. These fires can torch trees, send embers into nearby neighbourhoods, and challenge suppression, even if the most aggressive wildfire behaviour is unlikely.

Why moderate risk?

Risk is largely influenced by vegetation and weather conditions. Vegetation on SGI is dominated by older forests with a relatively high fuel separation, and which require extreme fire weather conditions to support active crown fire. Hazardous weather is strongly moderated by the Pacific Ocean. However, infrequent “outflow” winds can create conditions more conducive to fire spread.

Is the risk changing?

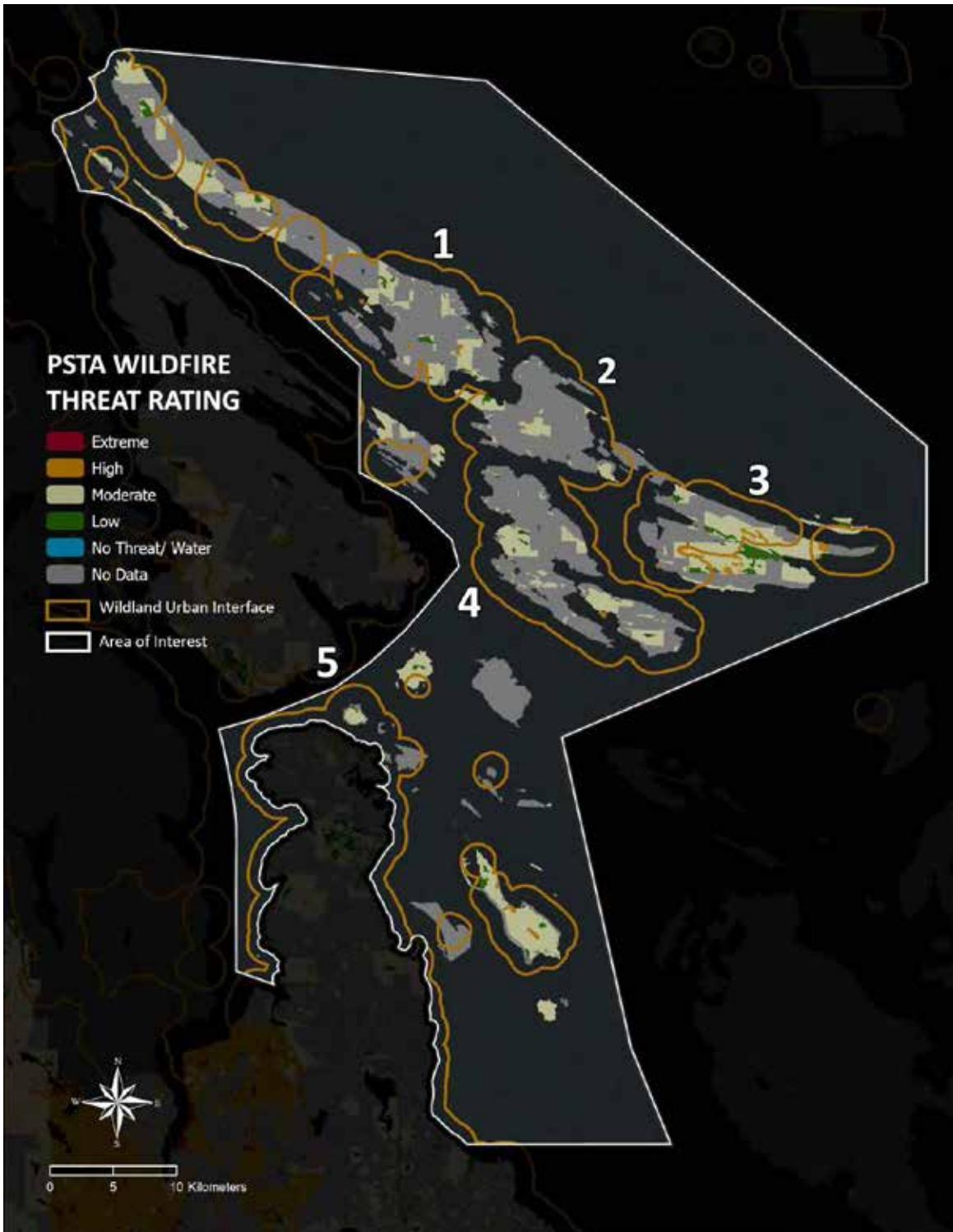
Climate change is altering temperatures and precipitation patterns in SGI. Hotter, drier summer conditions are likely to result in an overall increase in wildfire frequency and intensity.

Who leads fire response?

Fire response is led by local fire departments with help from the BC Wildfire Service. Each major community has a trained and equipped volunteer fire department. A BC Wildfire Service base is in Cobble Hill and crews arrive primarily by helicopter.

What should I do?

Taking action to FireSmart your property will dramatically decrease the risk of wildfire damaging your home. The best part is, it’s surprisingly easy to do. Find out more at <https://www.crd.bc.ca/service/fire-and-emergency-programs/fire-protection/firesmart>



Page 73: Figure 16. Wildfire threat ratings from Provincial Strategic Threat Analysis (PSTA)

A Resilient Community

What is CRD doing now to prepare?

The CRD operates several local fire departments, the Southern Gulf Islands Emergency Program, and a FireSmart program. CRD FireSmart helps communities prepare by offering residential firesmart assessments, homeowner rebates, free woody debris disposal, and educational events in each community. It also provides cross-training for local first responders to ensure they are prepared for wildfire.

What could the CRD do in the future?

Wildfire risk can be reduced through proactive management. The Islands Trust and CRD have important roles in preparing SGI. The plan includes 33 initiatives for the CRD to consider.

Category	Objective	Initiatives
Education	Promote FireSmart as a strategy for wildfire preparedness and demonstrate the Region's commitment to wildfire resiliency in the community	6
Legislation and Planning	Ensure Regional District by-laws and policies support wildfire resiliency	6
Development Considerations	Consider FireSmart design principles in planning and development bylaws	5
Interagency Cooperation	Ensuring wildfire response is effective	2
Cross Training	Ensuring emergency responders have a variety of training and experience	4
Emergency Planning	Enhance emergency response capacity	4
Vegetation Management	Modify fuel environments to reduce risk around infrastructure and communities	3
Renewing the Plan and Building Resiliency	Incorporate wildfire resiliency into strategic decisions	3



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