

Here for You

Firebreak Rehabilitation and Trail Restoration Q&A

Q: How were firebreak areas created?

A: As firefighters worked to protect homes during the wildfire, firebreaks were created throughout the community. These firebreaks, also sometimes called dozer guards, established large open areas between private properties and the forested areas to help prevent a fire from being carried toward a permanent structure. Approximately 502 ha of firebreaks were created. Firefighting efforts also had a significant impact on many of the trails in the community. Some trails were damaged or partially destroyed.

Q: Is the rehabilitation of firebreak areas a priority for the RMWB?

A: Yes. The forested areas and green spaces in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo are valuable to its residents, to the wildlife in the region, and to the environment. Substantial efforts will be made to rehabilitate the green spaces damaged during the May 2016 wildfire. The Wood Buffalo Recovery Task Force (RTF) has been working with its partners within the Municipality's Parks Department as well as the Government of Alberta on plans to address any drainage issues, rehabilitate the firebreak areas and restore the trails.

Q: What exactly does firebreak rehabilitation and trail restoration involve?

A: Firebreak rehabilitation work will include grading and adding topsoil and grass seed in the first 30 metres beyond the end of residential property lines. Approximately 30 per cent of firebreak areas beyond the first 30 metres will receive the same treatment while remaining firebreak areas will regenerate naturally. Rehabilitation work will also include the restoration of trails damaged or destroyed during the wildfire. All trails will be restored to their previous condition. Some trails that were damaged or destroyed from the wildfire and are near homes will be moved closer to the tree line, where possible. This project will implement FireSmart guidelines, which identify tree species and spacing. Grass in the firebreak areas will be maintained and added to the Municipality's mowing and maintenance program.

Q: Where will work take place in 2017?

A: Firebreak rehabilitation has begun in the areas of Walnut and Fireweed Crescents and on the north side of the Birchwood Trails, including Eagle Ridge and Timberlea. Work in these areas is expected to be completed before winter 2017.

Q: Where will work take place in 2018?

A: Firebreak rehabilitation and trail restoration will begin in 2018 in the areas of Parsons Creek, Stone Creek, Abasand, Anzac, Dickinsfield and Thickwood.

Q: How was the decision made to prioritize these areas?

A: Priority has been given to high-use areas including the Birchwood Trails and Walnut and Fireweed Crescents. In Abasand, it is important to wait until much of the high-volume construction is complete before undertaking firebreak rehabilitation and trail restoration.

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Q: This is the first time I'm hearing about this project. What has the Municipality done to communicate it to residents?

A: The RTF has held seven Here for You information sessions from February to July 2017 specifically focused on the firebreak rehabilitation and trail restoration projects. These sessions were advertised through email, radio, social media and notices on mailboxes.

Some feedback from the Here for You sessions has been used to shape the scope of the firebreak and trail restoration projects. For example, some of the trails that were damaged or destroyed will be moved further away from homes and closer to the tree line. Planting some trees in the firebreak areas using FireSmart principles is another suggestion that was supported by a large number of residents and may be incorporated into this project.

Q: How will the project be funded?

A: This work will move forward through the Municipality's capital budget. Funding for these projects has been requested as part of the Government of Alberta's Disaster Recovery Program. Capital funding for this project was approved in November, 2016.

Q: Why has it taken so long for work to begin on firebreak rehabilitation and trail restoration?

A: Feedback received from residents during the public engagement sessions held this spring was included in the overall scope of work for the project when the RFP was posted in June 2017.

This project ensures our greenspaces are built back better than they were before, incorporating FireSmart guidelines and resident feedback.

We believe in balancing good policy decisions with community-driven ideas in a fiscally responsible way as well as balancing considerations for public safety with recommendations from the public.

Q: Will I be able to access my backyard from the trails while this project is under way?

A: No. Pedestrian access to the trails and firebreak areas will be prohibited for the duration of project construction. Vehicular access to private property via municipal lands is prohibited at all times.

Q: I store my boat/camper/trailer/off-highway vehicle (OHV) in my yard. If I can't access my yard I have nowhere to store this equipment. What should I do?

A: Vehicular access to the rear of your property via municipal lands is prohibited at all times therefore other storage arrangements must be explored. Municipal maintenance vehicles will be permitted access to the firebreak area for maintenance and inspections only.

Q: How will you prevent OHV use in the greenspaces?

A: Off-highway vehicle (OHV) use is not allowed on public property within the boundaries of the Urban Service Area of Fort McMurray.

Signs and fencing will be in place to address any illegal OHV use in the rehabilitated areas.

Residents are asked to report those riding illegally to RCMP by calling 780-788-4000.



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Q: What is an OHV?

A: An OHV, or off-highway vehicle, is any motorized vehicle that is taken off road. This includes cars, trucks, quads, side-by-sides and snowmobiles.

Q: Can I use the greenspace while work is under way?

A: No. OHV access is prohibited at all times. Other recreational access, including pedestrian and cyclist access, to the greenspace will be prohibited while work is under way. This is for the safety of residents while heavy equipment is operating in the region.

Prohibiting access also promotes the healthy regeneration of the area once topsoil and grass seed have been added.

Any damages to the greenspace caused by recreational use **will not** be repaired by the Municipality.

Q: Will I be able to use the greenspace once the project is complete?

A: Residents will be asked to stay on marked paths and trails once the project is complete to allow the grass seed to take root. This includes keeping pets on the paths and trails as well.

Q: Is hazardous tree removal still under way?

A: The Municipality's hazardous tree removal project is ongoing with work in the communities of Wood Buffalo, Grayling Terrace, Abasand, Waterways and Beacon Hill. Residents are also being asked to report any potentially hazardous trees near their property or near trails/roads by emailing recovery@rmwb.ca or calling the PULSE Line at 780-743-7000.

Q: What is being done to deal with the burnt trees in Abasand and Beacon Hill?

A: Plans are underway for the burnt tree harvesting project, which will remove burnt trees within the damaged neighbourhoods of Beacon Hill and Abasand. The burnt trees being removed pose a risk of falling down and limiting the natural regrowth of the area.

This is a FireSmart project and will promote the healthy, unobstructed re-growth of a less fire-prone forest. Work is tentatively set for Winter 2017.

Q: Will there be more FireSmart work like what was done on Thickwood Boulevard and Confederation Way earlier this year?

A: Yes. Other FireSmart work will commence in October 2017 in Thickwood. This work includes fuel reduction projects such as the removal of dead standing trees and thinning/pruning of remaining trees.

If you have further questions you are encouraged to email recovery@rmwb.ca or call the PULSE Line at 780-743-7000.

