

## Chiliwist Community CWPP Meeting

Okanogan Conservation District Office

04/10/2024 | 9:00am – 11:00am

In attendance: Will Knowlton (WADNR), Sam Halvorsen (WADNR), Blayne Harvey (WADNR), Brandon Troyer (WDFW), Tim Delph (USFS OK-Wen), Maurice Goodall (OCEM), Jake Townsend (WADNR), Whitney Machado (BLM), Eli Loftis (OCD), Dylan Streeter (OCD), Emmy Engle (OCD), Patti Cockfield (Chiliwist Resident), Stan Kvistad (Chiliwist Resident)

Chiliwist is the oldest Firewise USA® community in the county, dating back to 2013. Patti Cockfield shared maps of the community and a document that she wrote summarizing concerns of Chiliwist residents. She mentioned that residents in the Chiliwist were told they were fine during the Carlton Complex fire event but then they saw the fire heading their way. A lot has changed in the community since the 2014 fire. A major concern includes fewer access roads in and out of the area, with the roads that do exist, not being maintained and not easy to drive on. In the past, one of the best roads heading West was Three Devils but has since been gated. Routes that head towards HWY 20 are either not passable or rough to travel along. Additionally, Davis Canyon Road gets narrow at the end and could be a hazard during evacuation.

Further emphasizing that there were many DNR and USFS roads that were used for logging but now that logging is done those roads haven't been maintained. Other concerns include limitations in communications. There is a community map of homes, as well as a phone list with other information. The phone tree is divided into different areas of who will call who in an emergency. Internet options are limited, and the only thing that really works is cell with a booster, however, some places you still won't even get signal. They shared concerns about how people would be alerted if there is another fire, and that one idea is if there is an emergency to honk the car horn as you head down the road. Concluding with another point of needing a place where people can go to find real-time information for themselves such as details on where smoke from other fires may be coming from and more.

Another point was that the Okanogan County Alerts system is great to have, but that wasn't a resource back in 2014. Another issue when it comes to navigating the Chiliwist community includes issues with GPS; that GPS often provides inaccurate information

and leads people in the wrong direction, causing confusion. A point was made about evacuating and road signs. A new WADNR road sign at Landers Road is helpful to have and to indicate that it is in fact a public road.

There was a comment about the Oden Road Fire that had burnt before the Chiliwist fire in 2014. Remembering that when it comes to jurisdiction in the area, that was a problem because it's unclear on who can and should react to the fire event and while that is being sorted out the fire will continue to burn and burn. This was followed up with the comment that the response in the last few years has improved and has been quicker, WADNR commented that they went from ~12 to 22 engines, and now have more aircraft resources in the State, and that their staffing and capacity has been boosted since 2014/2015.

It was asked, what would you hope to see going into the future? The response was focused on roadway maintenance, ingress/egress, and ability to evacuate more than one way. Commenting that getting out the backway towards HWY 20 is doable, however there have been problems with homeowners on Landers Road who are gating roads and taking down road signs. It was stated that it would be preferred to go down the main Chiliwist road where there's light fuel loads, possibly making for safer evacuation. A community member asked if they would need permission to put signs up on WADNR trees and in the area. WADNR followed up to say that they would have to look into the property details further. A comment stated that Silver Nickel Logging did a great job on Cook Mt.

It was clarified that the Cougar Flat fire is what ran down and got the Chiliwist, later combining to the Complex fire. The community mentioned that they have a couple of smaller fire engines and equipment. There have been times when the residents were able to get fires out before DNR shows up. Also, if there are no other fires in the area, the Malott Fire District will come and assist the community as well.

The statement was made that it is likely that the 3 Devils Road will never be reopened, also stated that when the community was trying to get it opened back up, it cost the community tens of thousands of dollars. Knowing this, what can be done and what are the other options? It was expressed that if the two roads, WDFW's roadway near Cook Ponds and the Gebber's road could be fixed up and maintained that would be helpful to the ingress/egress issue. This, along with additional road signage. Not that road signs should list specific evacuation direction, but they should simply inform someone of where they are. Not just for the community but for the WADNR and fire fighters' safety as well.

It was asked if there could be safety zones developed, that this would probably look like an irrigated field that a willing landowner might allow them to use. It is believed that people would likely be open to this, but this would need to be confirmed, and then they could inform WADNR where those areas would be available. It was suggested to mark these areas as a rally point for community members, also, it was asked if there was a central area to place a reader board, so people don't have to travel to the bottom of the hill or into harm's way to get information.

It was asked if there were any other issues of concern or actions that they would like to see from the state or federal agencies here. It was mentioned that management and maintenance has been improving, at a time when it was bad, land managers weren't following up on private land logging to ensure an area was properly cleaned up. They also talked about the wildlife decline since the fire 10 years ago, the lack of vegetation was an obvious cause for this. A community member also commented that they had goats come to their property recently to issue a fuels reduction treatment and they did excellent at mowing down the vegetation which improved defensible space and made them feel a lot safer.

It was asked, what does a strong Chiliwist Community look like 5-10 years from now? What needs to be done to allow this to happen? To which the response was more personal education on defensible space practices, such as irrigating your area and shrubs, don't clutter your property with fuel hazards, especially close to the home, also adding gravel barriers around your home. The community mentioned that they have resources such as maps, a phone list, Facebook group, as well as a protocol of who calls who to have better coordination in emergency situations. It was mentioned that they feel better off than most communities in this way, and that being a Firewise USA® Certified community does make a difference. There was also disagreement in this from another community member, because while they were awarded for being a strong Firewise USA® community, the fire came through half a year later and burnt the area up.

Also, homeowner education on when to not fire up chainsaws, woodchippers, etc. and that a fire can easily get out of control because of that. Overall, the community felt that in 2014 that they were forgotten about. When responders tried to get to them, they were trapped from getting in from the Pateros end, and it was a struggle for anyone to get up there, the community ended up evacuating themselves. Since then, things have improved with active mitigation efforts across land managers, and increased emergency management efforts and resources.