



**WATCH LAKE – NORTH GREEN LAKE  
VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT**



5771 Green Lake North Road  
70 Mile House, BC, V0K 2K1

[www.wlmgfiredept.org](http://www.wlmgfiredept.org)

*Spring Newsletter 2026*

Board of Directors and Fire Officers (to contact please email your request via [wlmgvfd@gmail.com](mailto:wlmgvfd@gmail.com))

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**Message from our new President**

Hello to our residents in the WL-NGL area.

The Watch Lake-North Green Lake Volunteer Fire Department is celebrating it's **55th Anniversary** this year! Let's look at how we got to where we are today.

**From Humble Beginnings...**



In 1971, the Watch Lake-North Green Lake Fire Department was formed with the acquisition of a 1946 International pumper truck from the Squamish Fire Department. Founding members of the fire department were Fire Chief Shorty Horn, Assistant Fire Chiefs Gordon Prentice and Howard Wormell. Thirteen residents of the area volunteered to serve as firefighters and with the donation of land by Shorty Horn for the building of Hall #1, the fire department was off and running.

On Thanksgiving of 1972, just prior to the first Annual Firemen's Ball, the department was called out on its first fire. With little experience among them, they quickly extinguished a brush fire and still made the Firemen's Ball on time. By 1973, enough funds were collected to purchase a portable water pump along North Green Lake Road. The fire department immediately joined the Justice Institute, out of Vancouver,



to acquire the necessary training to become qualified firefighters. As the fire department did not come under the jurisdiction of the Cariboo Regional District, they had to (and still do) maintain operation by collecting a nominal annual fee from each surrounding property owner.



**Hall #1 Shorty Horn Memorial Hall on Pioneer Road**

In 1975, with the full acceptance of the fire department by area residents, the original truck was retired and a more modern truck with a 350 gallon tank was acquired. A two-bay structure at the hall was completed with the assistance of the community in 1980.

In January 1983, the fire department purchased a 1970 International tanker truck with a 1,800 gallon water tank that was invaluable in fighting fires where water was not accessible. The fire department also joined the Central Cariboo Volunteer Firefighters Association, which was the parent organization for 11 surrounding volunteer fire departments. The purpose of the association was to assist each other with training and dealing with the legalities that come with being a fire department.

In 1991, Hall #2, now known as Sonny Johnson Memorial Fire Hall, was constructed. In 2009, the fire department received a Capital Grant of \$56,970 in matching funds to begin the reconstruction of the fire halls. Several residents paid their dues for a few years in advance to raise our portion of the matching capital grant. The plans for both Hall #1 and Hall #2 were to provide room for our newest truck and future larger replacement trucks. There were also expanded assembly and meeting areas in both halls to allow for year-round training sessions. This was the biggest community project this department has undertaken since the building of Hall #2 in 1991 and will certainly be the biggest for decades to come.



**Hall #2 Sonny Johnson Memorial Hall on Green Lake N. Rd**

### **...Come Great Things**



**Our newest purchase, E11, is located at Hall 1**

Today our fire department has 34 full and part-time firefighters. Hall #1, located at 6305 Pioneer Road to cover the Watch Lake area, has 3 bays and houses our “new to us” engine E11, two water tenders T11 and T12, and Fire Rescue truck FR11. There is also an emergency tank holding approximately 8,000 gallons of water.

Hall #2, located at 5771 North Green Lake Road covering the North Green Lake area, has 4 bays and currently houses E21, E22, T21, FR 21, an emergency transport vehicle (ETV) and a pump trailer which carries pumps, hoses, and other equipment to assist with fires. The pump trailer can fill the largest of the tenders in just over three minutes. This hall also features a 3,000 gallon reserve tank which is a reliable water supply for filling water tenders.

The fire department has undertaken other infrastructure projects, including the installation of dry hydrants at Access 14 and 20 on Green Lake and on 83 Mile Road to improve water access. Your fire department is well equipped and prepared to deal with structure and grass fires within our fire protection area. We have adequate access to water with our wells and dry hydrants. We also have excellent carrying capacity in the three tenders as well as our two one-ton vehicles each carrying 200 gallons of water for rapid attack of roadside and off-road fires.

It is only through fundraising, donations and the extra provision of services (e.g. assisting BC Wildfire) that we can accomplish what we have. Our day-to-day operation is primarily funded by your annual fire dues. Over the decades, we have been able to keep these fire dues as low as possible, particularly when compared to the tax rates paid in other areas (see Page 5). With the ever-rising cost of fuel, insurance, services and equipment, we may have to soon make a moderate increase in the annual amount. This will be a topic of discussion at our Annual General Meeting to be announced at a later date.

Our community can be very proud of the fire department we have built in 55 years. We have managed to budget carefully to continually update the equipment and training necessary to meet government standards. As a volunteer fire department, we are always looking for dedicated men and women to join our team, meet great people and learn new skills. If you are interested and willing to spare a couple of hours every 10 days, please contact Fire Chief Andy Palaniak at 250-456-7460 or Deputy Chief Bob White at 250-456- 2344 for more information.

### **FireSmart**

After what seems to be a long but mild winter, spring marks the perfect time to take action around your home and community to build wildfire resilience. With the weather warming up, it's a great time to start crossing off some of those FireSmart tasks on your list. If you are not sure where to begin, start by pruning and cleaning debris on your property, removing leaves and pine needles from your roof and gutters, removing flammable items within 1.5 meters around your home, cleaning out the area under your deck and by burning safely. Check the [FireSmartBC](#) website for more information.



Grass fire along 83 Mile Road, 2024

To prevent wildfires, please take the time to learn how to burn safely. Before lighting a fire of any size, always check for any [BC Wildfire Service open fire prohibition](#) in the area. Remember, if you choose to conduct any open burning, you are responsible for what you burn. Anyone found in contravention of an open fire prohibition may be issued a ticket for \$1,150.00 and required to pay an administrative penalty of \$10,000.00 or if convicted in court, fined up to \$100,000.00 and/or sentenced for up to one year in jail. For your information, there's been 26 wildfires already in B.C., of which 10 were in the Cariboo Fire Centre region.

Finally, the board of directors and I want to wish you a safe and enjoyable spring and summer.

Gisele Polisenio – President of the WLNGLVFD

## **More Than a Siren: Connecting With Your Fire Department Online**

When the siren wails across our rural landscape, we all feel that immediate pull of concern for our neighbours. But in today's world, staying connected to your local fire department doesn't have to wait for an emergency. The **Watch Lake-North Green Lake Volunteer Fire Department's** Website ([www.wlmgfiredept.org](http://www.wlmgfiredept.org)) and **Facebook page** ([www.facebook.com/wlmgfiredept/](http://www.facebook.com/wlmgfiredept/)) are designed to be your primary tools for safety, service, and community.

Here is why every resident should bookmark our sites and follow our social media:

- **Real-Time Safety Lifeline:** During wildfires, storms, or road closures, our Facebook page acts as a real-time lifeline providing updates faster than traditional news.
- **Essential Self-Service:** Our website is a hub for practical needs. You can access [fire prevention resources](#) for your home and family.
- **Meet Your Neighbours:** We use social media to humanize our department. You'll see training highlights, and celebrations of our volunteers—the people who drop everything to answer the call.
- **Be Prepared, Not Surprised:** From [seasonal safety tips](#) to [emergency plan templates](#), these platforms empower you to protect your property before a fire ever starts.
- **Support & Join Us:** Whether you want to [donate to the fire department's needs](#), or are considering [becoming a volunteer](#) yourself, our digital pages are the best place to start your journey.

An informed community is a safer community. By engaging with us online, you aren't just following a page—you're strengthening the bond that keeps our rural area resilient.

### **Paying homage to Dr. Ernst (Ernie) Schmidt**



All good things must eventually end. Sadly, we report that hard-working director, Ernie Schmidt, moved out of our area earlier this year. He searched for property locally to suit his family's needs but ended up having to buy property out of our fire protection area and hence, could no longer be a director with us.

Ernie was the Independent VFD liaison who established strong connections with the other 9 IVFD's within the Cariboo Regional District. He was (and still is, we're sure) passionate about bringing Firesmart BC awareness, front and centre, to his community.

Although he and his family have moved, they are living not too far away, so we will likely still see him happily fly-fishing on our lakes later this year!

## How your fire department can impact your insurance rates

We are an "independent" fire department meaning that fire protection for your property is not paid through your annual rural taxes. We collect this fee once per year directly from each property owner. Although it requires a bit of work, the main benefit is that it costs owners much less than having it paid through taxes. The chart below compares what we pay compared to other Cariboo Regional District (CRD) fire protection districts.

### Our Annual Fire Protection Fees Compared to CRD Jurisdictions (where payment is automatically paid via the annual rural taxes)

Fire protection area	Tax rate* (per \$1000 assessed value)	Per \$300,000 property	Per \$500,000 property	Per \$700,000 property
Watch Lake - North Green Lake	N/A	\$280 (\$250 if paid before Jan 1)	\$280 (\$250 if paid before Jan 1)	\$280 (\$250 if paid before Jan 1)
108 Mile Ranch	\$1.34	\$402.00	\$670.00	\$938.00
Forest Grove <sup>+</sup>	\$1.41 + \$30 flat parcel tax fee	\$453.00	\$735.00	\$1,017.00
Deka Lake	\$1.61	\$483.00	\$805.00	\$1,127.00
Lone Butte	\$1.92	\$576.00	\$960.00	\$1,344.00

\* Tax rates based on 2024 assessments. In some areas, the tax rates increased by 15% or more next year.

<sup>+</sup> As a result of replacing a Tender, Forest Grove fire protection taxes increased 27.5% for the 2025 tax year to \$1.50 per \$1,000.



Watch Lake Dump fire, June 2021.

Your fire department works closely with the Fire Underwriters Survey (FUS) of BC to help keep property insurance premiums affordable. **This is especially important if you have a mortgage (which requires you to have fire protection insurance) and/ or** are adding your property to an existing insurance policy coverage. Our fire department currently has an FUS rating of 3B. We are working on increasing that rating, which, depending upon your insurance company, could save you a substantial amount on your insurance premiums.

Properties outside of a fire protection area have the highest fire risk rating (FUS 5) meaning there is no fire protection or responding fire department. Those property owners may pay thousands of dollars more for insurance than those who pay fire dues and have fire protection.

If you haven't paid the annual fire dues (and thus are not a member), and report to your insurance company that you have a responding fire department, it is considered fraud and it may void your insurance. Further, if you have a fire, the callout fee for unpaid properties is \$2,000 per hour with a minimum callout rate of 2 hours, versus no callout fee for paid members.

It is a “win-win” situation to pay your annual fire protection dues. You will save money on your property /home insurance, and the money we receive from those dues helps us to stay in operation, purchase new equipment and work to improve the FUS rating for everyone!

### **E11, our new-to-us Engine**

Please welcome E11 to Fire Hall #1! Our old Volvo E11 was 31 years old and needed to be replaced due to Fire Underwriters Survey (FUS) requirements. The FUS mandates that we replace our engines at 20 years of age. For small rural fire departments like ours, we can apply for extensions to a maximum of 30 years.



Through some luck and connections, we discovered that the City of Langley was replacing a 25 year old engine. Fortunately for us, they understood the difficulty that rural fire departments like ours have financing vehicle replacements. As a result, we were able to acquire their old engine for a price that fit within our budget and satisfied their vehicle disposal requirements. While it’s relatively “old”, it will service us for another five years of FUS compliance and provide us more time to accumulate funds for a newer engine.

### **Air quality monitor installed at Fire Hall #2**



**Carter's parents Amber and James Vigh under the new air quality monitor at Hall #2**

In rural communities, the volunteer fire department is often the hub of the community and plays a central role in keeping people and property safe. The main role for our firefighters is obviously to minimize the risk of and damage from structure and interface fires. We believe our roles extend beyond this and the installation of an air quality monitor reflects our values to help keep both residents and visitors safe.

Our community has been hit hard by wildfires and wildfire smoke, and many of us clearly remember when Carter Vigh died tragically from asthma in nearby 100 Mile House in 2023. His death was related to poor air quality due to wildfire smoke. We are so very grateful to the BC Lung Association and the Vigh family for creating "Carter's Project" which has led to the distribution of monitors to communities most likely to be impacted by poor air quality, such as from wildfires.

Now that we have our own air quality monitor installed at Fire Hall #2, residents and visitors alike will be able to check local air quality conditions before venturing outside. Just beyond Hall #2 are several government campgrounds, private resorts and picnic/day use parks. In summer, these attract many visitors and our local population increases at least 5-fold. How wonderful to know that our local monitor will help keep people safe!

You can check the local air quality conditions online at the [“Purple Air”](#) website.

We are grateful to both the BC Lung Association and to the Vigh family for coming to our fire department on March 31st to install the monitor and to share stories afterward.