



MEMORANDUM

Date: January 9, 2025

Subject: Wildfire Preparedness Updates

Being wildfire ready in wildland-urban interface areas like ours is a year-round obligation, and the updates below are intended to raise awareness about efforts underway and actions that can be taken by all residents.

Water Infrastructure

Water main improvements in recent years have modernized critical areas of our water infrastructure to ensure ability to maintain proper flow and pressure, including in events of emergency. This included upgrading the line from 3” to 12” along Jewett – from Garfield Street down to the Bingen intertie – significantly improving fire flow capacity; this work was completed in 2021. Modernizing the line that originates from our water source at Buck Creek into town, a project referred to as Mainline Phases I and II, is also underway. Mainline Phase I was completed in 2024 and improved the section from the surface water treatment plant to the entry point to the distribution system. Mainline Phase IIA is planned for construction this year and will continue improvements from the intersection of Forester and Wallace (where the water from our two sources mix) to the top of Bald Mountain Corners. We will be constructing a new pressure zone for the north end of the city later this year, known as N. Main Pressure Zone, which will deliver improved flow and capacity to neighborhoods in the area within N. Main Ave and Loop Road, as well as the commercial district and school facilities nearby. In addition to federal and state grants, your water rates help to support the additional financing required for these critical improvements. Improvements to existing water reservoir storage are also identified and being prioritized for funding.

Fire Hydrants

Exercising and maintenance of fire hydrants within our water system – inside and outside of city limits – occurs on a regular basis and repairs and replacements are documented and corrected within in a timely manner.

City Fire Rating

A city's fire rating, also known as a Public Protection Classification (PPC) score, is a number on a scale of 1 to 10 that measures a community's ability to respond to fires:

- **Class 1:** Indicates excellent fire protection
- **Class 10:** Indicates that the area's fire protection doesn't meet minimum standards

The city's fire rating is currently Class 7. Factors that contribute to our PPC rating are centered around a performance scoring algorithm based on three key factors associated with structure fires only: 911 center capabilities and performance, fire department capabilities and performance, and water distribution infrastructure (fire hydrants) capabilities, maintenance and distribution.



Firefighter Response

In 2023 voters approved formation of the West Klickitat Regional Fire Authority, which effectively merged Klickitat Fire District #3 and the White Salmon Fire Department. That merger became effective on September 30, 2024, and the new authority is now in operation, with revenue from the approved levy funding those efforts. The governing commissioners of the authority meet on the third Thursday of each month at the White Salmon Fire Hall; those meetings are open to the public.

Evacuation and Access

The limited access points into and out of the city have been identified in existing hazard preparedness plans, and in recent years the city has worked to secure funding for known improvements that are needed. Though a full repaving of Dock Grade is identified, while that funding is still being pursued the city did receive state funding in 2024 to complete a chip seal of Dock Grade in 2025; that work is intended to improve the lifespan of the road and overall safety for motorists and pedestrians. Areas throughout town that have limited or severely impaired ingress and egress access are also prioritized, and include Oak Street from 1st to 4th Street, Waubish Street, Church Street, and Spring Street; this list is not exhaustive. The current planning work that is funded for development of a [Bluff Trail](#) is also intended to improve access for firefighters and general maintenance of defensible space along the bluff, long identified as a high-risk area in town.

City Fuel Break

Work [on Phase 1](#), encompassing the city's southern boundary along SR 14/Dock Grade and moving northerly above Skyline Hospital is nearly complete. Residual cleanup across from Heritage Plaza along SR 14 is expected.

Hazard Preparedness Planning

In November 2024 the city applied for funds from the state's Hazard Post-Mitigation Fund to support a wildfire ready coordinator within the administration. That limited-term position would work to complete the predevelopment needed to move many of the projects identified in the current FEMA Hazard Mitigation Plan and Community Wildfire Plans forward so that they are ready to finally pursue implementation funding. We expect notification from the state in Spring 2025 whether that grant will be awarded.

Fire Recovery Response

In 2024 the city established a dedicated reserve fund to ensure immediate cash reserves would be accessible during a wildfire emergency while anticipated state and federal emergency funding is being activated.

Reminders and Actions You Can Take:

Register for City and County Alerts

The city uses Voyent Alert both for regular city news and most critically for emergency communication. The app can be added to your iPhone or Android device by downloading "Voyent Alert!" from the app store. For residents that prefer a phone call or email, you can register a landline device or direct email address at voyent-alert.us/community/ Calls are made to landlines for critical alerts only, which would include any fire emergency situations. In addition, you should also register your mobile phone to receive alerts from the county system at

<https://www.smart911.com/smart911/ref/login.action?pa=klickitatco>



The Sheriff's office is the authority that will issue evacuation alerts, which will be released first via the county system but also be repeated in the city app.

Make A Home Inventory

It's a good idea to videotape your home and belongings to document what's in your home for insurance purposes. This can help streamline the claims process and is best done in a time when one is not constrained by panic. When making a video, make sure to record the entire home, including the garage and other buildings, explain what you are seeing in the video, open drawers and cupboards, and take a photo of each room after you are done recording. Store such footage on a cloud-based storage platform or external hard drive, so it's accessible in the future. The National Association of Insurance Commissioners also provides an app to create a digital inventory: content.naic.org/consumer/home-inventory

Consider Volunteering

Our fire response is a volunteer force and relies on community members to protect our town. The City of White Salmon is currently served by 39 dedicated volunteer firefighters who respond to all emergencies in SW Klickitat County, including the City of White Salmon. Specific goals have been set to increase that number in order to improve our response times and capacity to manage large incidents. All active firefighters are trained to respond to wildland fire incidents along with protecting homes and businesses from the ravages of fires and medical emergencies. In addition to responding to incidents, SW Fire and Rescue is proactive with prevention efforts with our residential, commercial and business community. We encourage our customers to become involved and consider volunteering. There are many opportunities to help deliver core services that do not include being a certified firefighter. Specifically, we are looking to add people to our fire prevention personnel core program. If you are interested in becoming part of the team call 509-493-2996.

Be a Prepared Neighbor

Especially in this digital age, we want to reinforce how important it is to take the time to connect with and know your neighbors. Identifying who on your block is:

- elderly and/or living alone;
- has pets;
- has mobility limitations;
- or is out of town on an extended trip during wildfire prone season

is valuable information to help each other in a time of evacuation. You can access helpful neighborhood contact and preparedness lists and tools online at www.whitesalmonwa.gov/fire

Insurance

Review your existing policy to be clear about what is covered; homeowners and renters insurance typically cover fire damage. But if you're renting, don't assume your landlord is responsible for all damages. Renters insurance usually covers your personal possessions, liability, and additional living expenses if your home is too damaged to live in. We are aware many homeowners in our area have experienced rate increases in recent years. A new law went into effect in 2024 that requires insurers to provide a clear explanation for increases in home or auto insurance premiums at the time of renewal. If a premium increase occurs when a policy is renewed, companies must provide a reasonable explanation

City of White Salmon
Office of City Hall



why, in writing, if a customer asks for one by mail or email, using terms that are understandable to an average policyholder.