



Riparian Recovery – 2023 Wildfire Rebuilding Direction

OVERVIEW

The 2023 wildfires were among the most destructive in British Columbia's recorded history. The intensity of the 2023 wildfires had an unprecedented impact on waterfront homes and the associated riparian areas. Riparian areas play an important role in wildfire prevention, and the impacts from the 2021 Atmospheric River Event and 2023 drought highlighted the critical importance of riparian ecosystems for homeowners and local governments in terms of flood risk and drinking water protection.

In response to these climate disasters, and among a range of other provincial recovery actions, the Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship (WLRS) has developed a new tool, specifically to support the rebuilding of waterfront homes that are in riparian areas damaged by the 2023 wildfires. This tool, the **Riparian Recovery – 2023 Wildfire Rebuilding Direction** (2023 Riparian Direction), streamlines legal processes, reduces administrative burden on homeowners, provides tailored restoration direction for the unique situation of the high-intensity 2023 wildfires and provides new technical and financial support to help rebuild and achieve the riparian recovery.

This 2023 Riparian Direction below outlines the step-by-step process, provisions, and supports. Following this 2023 Riparian Direction ensures compliance with the provincial *Riparian Areas Protection Regulations*. Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) support for the 2023 Riparian Direction is documented in the attached Letter of Support, confirming that by following this direction a Federal Request for Review under the *Fisheries Act* is not required. This **2023 Riparian Direction** does not apply to, or override, other statutes such as the Water Sustainability Act, Lands Act, Heritage Conservation Act, Wildlife Act, or the Environmental Management Act.

PROVISIONS

- This **2023 Riparian Direction** is for rebuilding homes (not ancillary development) lost in the 2023 wildfires.
- For RAPR regulated communities, landowners can follow the standard RAPR process or this new, tailored **2023 Riparian Direction**.
- Steps 6, 8, and 10 are available to RAPR, and non-RAPR, regulated communities to support recovery, alignment with the Federal Fisheries Act, and other provincial environmental objectives.
- This applies to rebuilding homes on existing footprints, replacing what was lost with an equivalent.
- All works must occur in the dry and above the high-water mark.
- The province will work with RAPR regulated Local Governments on successful implementation.

PROCESS & SUPPORTS

- Step 1 Landowners must register with the province to receive the support of this **2023 Riparian Direction**. To register 2023RiparianDirection@gov.bc.ca or leave a voice recording at 778-405-6637.
- Step 2 Landowners will need to give permission for government staff and contractors involved in implementing this **2023 Riparian Direction** to enter onto their private property. Once landowners are registered in Step 1, you will receive a Private Lands Permissions form to be filled out and submitted back to 2023RiparianDirection@gov.bc.ca.
- Step 3 The province will provide landowners with a riparian set-back, using a landscape-level approach (not site by site), following the principles of the Riparian Area Protection Regulation ([Riparian Areas Protection Regulation \(RAPR\) - Province of British Columbia \(gov.bc.ca\)](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov2/legislation/regulations/2023RiparianAreasProtectionRegulation)). In addition, the province will work directly with DFO to ensure support for any redevelopment actions within 15 meters of the high-water mark. The province will cover the costs to get this high-level plan completed.
- Step 4 Landowners will be required to submit plans for the reconstruction of their homes to 2023RiparianDirection@gov.bc.ca demonstrating the replacement for what was lost and not expanding or changing the footprint.
- Step 5 Non-essential structures inside the riparian set-back (e.g. detached decks, sheds, and hot tubs) are required to be relocated. The province will work with each landowner to assess the relocation requirements and cover the costs of these assessments. The physical relocation costs will be the landowner's responsibility.
- Step 6 The province will provide a contractor to support landowners to complete a restoration prescription for their riparian set-back area. This contracted qualified environmental professional will collaborate with the homeowner or Local Government to also provide mitigation measures to be followed during construction.
- Step 7 The province will send confirmation to the Local Government indicating the property has met provincial requirements, and therefore the DFO conditions. Note: Local Governments continue to be responsible for any final decisions on Development Permits, as they hold the responsibility for meeting a larger suite of bylaws.
- Step 8 A Wildfire Riparian Restoration Fund will be made available for landowners to apply to. Details on the process for this fund are being finalized and will be provided to landowners as part of the restoration prescription (or sooner).
- Step 9 Landowners are responsible for implementing their restoration prescription.
- Step 10 The province will conduct post restoration monitoring to ensure the successful implementation of this **2023 Riparian Direction**, including planting survival.

DURATION:

- The **2023 Riparian Direction** is in place until December 2025 and will be reviewed for effectiveness.

Definitions SOURCE

“Home”: A structure designed or occupied as the living quarters of one or more households; usually equipped with cooking, bathing, toilet, and heating facilities, where necessary.

“High Water Mark”: Where the presence and action of annual flood waters area so common and usual and so long continued in all ordinary years, as to mark on the soil of the bed of the body of water a character distinct from that of its banks, in vegetation, as well as in the nature of the soil itself and includes areas that are seasonally inundated by floodwaters.

“Non-essential Development”: Development that is not required for the integrity of the home or for slope stability. Examples of non-essential development includes, but is not limited to, retaining walls, decks, hot tubs, boat houses, etc.

“Qualified Environmental Professional” (QEP): An individual that serves as a qualified environmental professional for the purposes of carrying out part of riparian assessment if

(a) the individual is registered under the [Professional Governance Act](#) as any of the following professionals:

- (i) an agrologist;
- (ii) an applied science technologist or certified technician;
- (iii) a registered professional biologist or registered biology technologist;
- (iv) a professional engineer or professional licensee engineering;
- (v) a professional forester or registered forest technologist;
- (vi) a professional geoscientist or professional licensee geoscience,