

Wood Debris Roadside Chipping Pilot Program

REPORT to LCC – July 10, 2025

2024: Application for CRD Support

In many comparable communities in the region, including Saturna, Kelowna, and Maple Ridge, roadside wood debris pick-up and chipping is organized by the local waste management department. Here on Salt Spring, several efforts have been coordinated to do wood debris chipping, either by the Salt Spring Island Fire Rescue or locally by PODS and neighbourhoods, with varying degrees of success.

Transition Salt Spring would like to organize a pilot program to pick up and chip wood debris in three PODS - about 60 homes - in 3 days with a local chipping company, the help of the POD leaders and extensive volunteer hours from the Transition Salt Spring team. Because of this volunteer time, the pilot will be inexpensive and incorporate a user fee from those submitting debris. With a more extensive program through the CRD, we will demonstrate a similar break-even model that could be implemented islandwide. We have designed a plan with the chipping company that will necessitate specific dimensions for modest piles of debris. They will leave chips at roadside for those participants who desire them and take the remainder to designated receivers.

Transition Salt Spring has a heightened focus on reducing fire risk as we approach a potentially lethal summer. We would like to give islanders an alternative to backyard burning of debris and a laissez faire approach to leaving debris around that is inflammable.

Wood chips are a useful byproduct of debris reduction as they provide essential material that many need in their gardens. Our program can greatly reduce the cost of obtaining chips for these gardeners, which gives them a financial incentive to participate.

There are many benefits to the community in our program including:

- financial incentive
- fire prevention
- ease of access to chips
- help with eliminating debris
- excess chips for local farms
- incentive to clean up property
- work for our local chipping company
- and a sense of supporting a better community.

Thank you for the Grant in Aid in 2024 for this Pilot program. We did surveys in 2024 that determined Spring was the best time for collection so completed the program in April/May of 2025.



2024/2025 Neighbourhood Wood Chipping Pilot

Our initial survey in several neighbourhoods determined that April/May was the best time for collection, that most people wanted to participate and that \$50 for a pile (4' x 4' x 10') was almost unanimously acceptable.

In Spring 2025, Transition Salt Spring organized three roadside pickup and chipping days with the help of a hired coordinator and a local chipping company.

Due to some mechanical problems with the chippers, we ended up doing five partial chipping days and chipped a total of 76 piles. The program broke even financially, despite variations from the model we originally budgeted.

Our customers were almost universally pleased with the service and expressed enthusiasm about participating in the future.

Outcomes and Learning from the Pilot

- Organizing this first-time pilot took quite a lot of education, promotion and oversight, more than we imagined. However, with the incorporation of learning gleaned from this experience, we feel the launch of an islandwide program would navigate these glitches more effectively.
- The partnership of the POD program and SSFR would really help with organization and promotion. The coordination of our pilot was labour intensive, as each pick-up needed to be individually organized and executed.
- Despite the recommendations from our survey, we feel we started too late. Many of the more organized neighbourhoods had already done their chipping. Starting earlier with publicized information about the program will allow neighbourhoods to prepare for working with us.
- Education about the standards needed to run this program efficiently, ie: size and stacking of piles, location of piles and pile content, needed to be more extensive before the chipping began. Non-compliant piles were the biggest detriment to successful organization.
- Our participants were appreciative that they didn't have to move their woody debris to another location and were provided an alternative to burning, which they largely opposed
- All potential participants approached about the Pilot were willing to pay for the service.

Recommendation for an Islandwide Wood Chipping Program

The purpose of the Pilot was to test the efficacy of an Islandwide program, ideally run by the CRD. As Salt Spring does not have an active Waste Management program across the island, it lacks the infrastructure that other communities in our region rely on to organize this kind of program. Ultimately, we highly recommend that the CRD create an internal initiative to manage wood debris pickup on Salt Spring for the following reasons:

- **Fire Fuel Reduction** - Wood debris is one of the greatest contributors to fire hazard and is imminently manageable.
- **Community Support** - Almost universally, our program found relief, enthusiasm and appreciation for this work. Although other communities don't require user fees, as their waste management service is covered by taxes, our participants were willing to cover the cost of the program.
- **Financial Benefits** - The program (as evidenced in the proposed Islandwide Budget) could break even for the CRD once established and is certainly worth the start-up costs that might be incurred for the benefits it delivers. The cost of a forest fire would be infinitely more expensive.
- **Community Cohesiveness** - Any program that fosters connection to our neighbours and to the island community is an intrinsic element of a successful future for Salt Spring.

Next Steps - An Interim Program

As a next step towards the establishment of an Islandwide CRD program, we recommend that the CRD support a subsequent pilot program that would incorporate some new elements based on learning from the TSS Pilot. These elements would be essential to a successful Islandwide Program.

- **Initial discussions with SSIFR about a FireSmart partnership.** Many of our participants were reimbursed for their user fees by FireSmart. It would be excellent to have a broader underwriting of this program by FireSmart to make it more affordable and less onerous for individual and neighbourhood reimbursements.
- **Discussion with the Emergency Preparedness Program about expanding the POD program** to include education about the necessity for a roadside chipping program for fire suppression. For instance, perhaps POD leaders could send communications to their members that allowed them to "Opt-in" for information about this essential Fire Reduction opportunity, with communications created by our program. We feel that, ultimately, a program like this and others that benefit POD members, will strengthen the POD system by expanding its usefulness as a source of important information.
- **The creation of an Interim Program** (independent of the CRD but underwritten by it), run by a Coordinator, with TSS available to provide guidance based on their experience with the Pilot program.

- **New elements** would include:
 - Public education about the benefits of wood debris collection and chipping.
 - Publicity about the program, its timeline and requirements.
 - Early registration available for neighbourhoods to plan ahead and to allow for advance organization.

We have developed a budget for this Interim Program, which requires some expenditure beyond a break-even scenario. The budget for the Islandwide Program that would follow is break-even at the user fee price point we created, with a reduction of fees possible based on FireSmart, CRD or alternative funding sources.

ESTIMATED BUDGETS:

Following are three estimated budgets for the Wood Chipping Program going forward:

- **Interim Program with Public Education**
 - We recommend that the CRD fund this program which allows for extensive public education about the necessity of wood debris chipping and publicity about the Interim Program to facilitate registration.
 - In addition to a repeat of the GIA funding, this requires additional funding of \$10,000 to effectively support the Interim Program.
 - User fees are estimated at \$54 per pile.
 - With this interim program, the stage is set for an efficient, economical and well-attended island-wide Program.
- **Island-Wide User-Funded Program**
 - This budget reflects an island-wide program following the groundwork laid by the Interim Program.
 - User Fees are estimated at \$56 per pile.
- **Island-Wide Program with additional FireSmart Funding**
 - This budget assumes additional funding from FireSmart, which would be commensurate to the funding they are already providing to neighbourhoods for chipping but on a broader level.
 - FireSmart contribution is estimated at \$30,000.
 - User Fees in this model are reduced to \$36 per pile, which will engender greater participation.

Interim Program with Public Education		Parameters			
Budget for 3 Day Pilot		# days	3		
		Customers	60		
Locations: roadside, Users keep chips					
Rev & Exp for pilot program					
Cells in orange are formulae, do not type					
REVENUE					Projected
SSFD - Fire Smart Grant					\$0
Additional CRD Funding					\$10,000
CRD - GIA					\$3,000
Donations					\$0
Sponsorship Revenue					
			Subtotal REVENUE		\$13,000
EXPENSE	# days	Rate/day	# hours	Rate/hour	Projected
Coordinator and Media Guru			60	\$31	\$1,860
Website, Internet, Social Media, Press, Signs					\$7,500
Ad buys					\$300
TSS Organizing team			30	\$0	\$0
Admin Support					\$0
Chipper + 3 personnel (8 hour day x \$200/hr total)	3	\$1,600			\$4,800
Additional person (8 hours x \$30/hr)	0	\$240			\$0
POD Volunteer					\$0
Food/Bev for Drop-off Days					\$0
Registration database and Survey			10	\$31	\$310
PAID LABOUR					\$0
2 people x 3hrs x \$30 = \$180/day	0	\$180			\$0
					\$0
			Subtotal		\$14,770
			Contingency (10%)		\$1,477
			Total		\$16,247
			Surplus/-Deficit		-\$3,247
			Breakeven User Fee		\$54

Island-Wide User Funded Roadside Program		Parameters			
Dates: Budget per Year for On-going Program		# days	50		
Entire Island with Sign-ups on particular days		Customers	1500		
Locations: roadside		Contingency	5.00%		
Rev & Exp for island-wide program					
Cells in orange are formulae, do not type					
REVENUE					Projected
SSFD - Fire Smart Grant					\$0
Conservancy					\$0
CRD - GIA					\$0
Donations					\$0
Sponsorship Revenue					\$0
				Subtotal REVENUE	\$0
EXPENSE	# days	Rate/day	# hours	Rate/hour	Projected
Coordinator			150	\$31	\$4,650
Safety/Signs					\$150
Ad buys					\$400
TSS Organizing team			0	\$0	\$0
Admin Support			0	\$31	\$0
Chipper + 3 units (8 hour day x \$150/hr total)	50	\$1,200			\$60,000
Additional person (8 hours x \$30/hr)	50	\$240			\$12,000
POD Volunteer					\$0
Food/Bev for Drop-off Days					\$0
Registration database			10	\$31	\$310
PAID LABOUR (traffic control)					\$0
2 people x 3hrs x \$30 = \$180/day	10	\$180			\$1,800
					\$0
				Subtotal	\$79,310
				Contingency (5%)	\$3,966
				Total	\$83,276
				Surplus/-Deficit	-\$83,276
				Breakeven User Fee	\$56

Island-Wide Program with FireSmart Funding		Parameters			
Dates: Budget per Year for On-going Program		# days	50		
Entire Island with Sign-ups on particular days		Customers	1500		
Locations: roadside		Contingency	5.00%		
Rev & Exp for island-wide program					
Cells in orange are formulae, do not type					
REVENUE					Projected
SSFD - Fire Smart Funding - \$20/Customer					\$30,000
Conservancy					\$0
CRD - GIA					\$0
Donations					\$0
Sponsorship Revenue					\$0
				Subtotal REVENUE	\$30,000
EXPENSE	# days	Rate/day	# hours	Rate/hour	Projected
Coordinator			150	\$31	\$4,650
Safety/Signs					\$150
Ad buys					\$400
TSS Organizing team			0	\$0	\$0
Admin Support			0	\$31	\$0
Chipper + 3 units (8 hour day x \$150/hr total)	50	\$1,200			\$60,000
Additional person (8 hours x \$30/hr)	50	\$240			\$12,000
POD Volunteer					\$0
Food/Bev for Drop-off Days					\$0
Registration database			10	\$31	\$310
PAID LABOUR (traffic control)					\$0
2 people x 3hrs x \$30 = \$180/day	10	\$180			\$1,800
					\$0
				Subtotal	\$79,310
				Contingency (5%)	\$3,966
				Total	\$83,276
				Surplus/-Deficit	-\$53,276
				Breakeven User Fee	\$36