

# 'Only you can prevent forest fires' ... with your smartphone

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Colin Ferster tests the app on his smartphone

An app that prevents forest fires by identifying hazardous areas and that was developed by researchers at the University of British Columbia is getting tested in the BC Okanagan this summer.

Wildfires are a yearly threat in the region. The 2003 Okanagan Mountain fire destroyed 25,000 ha of [forest](#) and 239 homes, and in July 2009, two fires in West Kelowna forced 12,500 residents out of their homes and destroyed three properties.

Designed by Faculty of Forestry PhD student Colin Ferster and professor Nicholas Coops, the app is designed for professionals and members of the public, such as homeowners.

Starting at the top of the trees and working down to the forest floor, the app contains images of potential fire hazards such as fallen wood, brush, or a thick carpet of needles on the forest floor. Once identified, users take pictures and upload the images, additional information and global positioning system (GPS) coordinates to a database.



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“One of the most effective ways to reduce wildfire hazard is to reduce the amount of fuel that is available to burn,” said Ferster. “By putting this tool in hands of many people, we can collect more information about the current status of the forest, and at the same time increase awareness and cooperation, which will help reduce the threat of wildfire in the community.”

With consistent and comparable measurements at their disposal, forest managers can make timely decisions on how to best minimize fire hazard.

A field trial of the [app](#) is currently underway at UBC’s Okanagan campus in Kelowna. To find out more about the project please visit:

[irsslaboratory.forestry.ubc.ca/Research/RemoteSensing.aspx](https://irsslaboratory.forestry.ubc.ca/Research/RemoteSensing.aspx)

Provided by University of British Columbia

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