

FIRESTORM 2003 – PROVINCIAL REVIEW

Public Meetings

Chase

Gary Filmon:

... your observations and your experiences on the fires that were experienced in this area this past summer. This process is one of going throughout all the fire affected areas in the interior of British Columbia. This is the eighth days of public meetings that we have held and it is intended to be an open and inclusive process. It's intended to be wide-ranging, to give you plenty of latitude to speak your mind on anything you wish to do with the fires. Obviously we want to focus on the events surrounding this summer's fires in the interior of British Columbia. We are not looking for scapegoats; we are not looking to point fingers. We are looking to review all of the things that were done this summer from a perspective of what things were done well and what things can be improved. We are all human beings and we know that nobody is perfect so regardless of how well things were done I am sure there are ways in which we can improve the situation of we face similar circumstances in the future. And that's the big issue – that all the information we have would indicate that we are early on in a dry cycle. Weather patterns seem to go in seven to ten year cycles. We are only three years into a dry cycle so it may well be that as bad as this summer was we will be facing circumstances just as bad sometime in the next few years. And so the government appointed me with a very short time frame. The mandate is that I should be reporting by the middle of February. I accepted that only on the basis that the government wants to have the information that comes forward from this set of hearings and this review and the government wants to take into consideration what things can and should be done to be changed for the next fire season and so they believe that they need to have the information as early as possible into the new year of 2004. And whether it is a financial issue or whether it's regulatory or legislative or process issues, they want to be able to make decisions and changes if they are warranted early on so that they are ready for the next season.

After the round of public hearing and it will be concluded next week with meetings in Cranbrook and Nelson, we will be having stakeholder meetings at which we will be inviting in the forest industry, the insurance industry, tourism industry, the wildlife people, various different government departments and agencies to bring their perspective to us as well. After that we will try and review all of this information and draw conclusions and make recommendations for the future. And as I said earlier, we certainly have to be concerned that this isn't an isolated incident, you only have to look at California more recently and know that we are into severe weather patterns all throughout our world today and those severe weather patterns could lead to many crises again and natural disasters in the future.

So, thank you very much for coming today. I will say that everything that is said is being recorded so it is part of the public record in addition to the process of review and conclusions and recommendations that will be part of my report. We will have as an appendix to the report all of the presentations that are made throughout the

province so that people can read them and know what has been said by everybody who appeared before the committee.

So, thank you very much and we will begin this morning with a presentation from Bruce Newton.

Okay, maybe Bruce will be here shortly. I think he was wanting to be just a little bit later so I will ask if Marilyn Ivey is here?

Marilyn Ivey:

GF Good morning and welcome.

MI Thank you. I will read this presentation and as I say you can follow and I'm sorry we don't have any maps or photos here. My concern is about the Pemberton Range area and the McGillivray Fire which was designated K20627 of August 2003. First, I would like to indicate that I have nothing but praise for the efforts of all the fire fighters and to express particular gratitude to those who were deployed to our area to protect our homes. We are also much indebted to those neighbours who defied the evacuation order and remained behind at considerable risk to themselves to pile fire guards. It is thanks to all their efforts that we did not suffer the losses of the people in Louis Creek, Barriere and Kelowna. However, the fact that remains that someone with authority over the McGillivray fire dropped the ball. The Pemberton Range is not an interface area. It is comprised of the predominantly grassland benches on the north side of the Thompson River, across from Pritchard and was first settled in 1866. It is presently home to about 25 families, most with small to medium-size ranches and several hundred head of livestock. In spite of Pemberton Range having existed for over 125 years, its residents became the forgotten or unknown people following the outbreak of the McGillivray fire.

According to the forest service Fire K20627 McGillivray was started by lightening at 4:19 a.m. the morning of August 16th, 2003. I have since spoken with two residents on the south side of the Thompson River, early risers, who saw the fire shortly after it broke out. Both these individuals called the Forest Service and were told we are aware of it and investigating, thank you for your call.

This photo – taken about 2:30 p.m. from my front porch shows the smoke plume from the fire at that time. The temperature was 34 degrees and the wind was gusting from the south west to 38 km per hour. At that time four water bombers were active. But after dropping their fire retardant they flew off in a south easterly direction, perhaps towards Kelowna, not west to the Kamloops tanker base.

As seen in this photo taken about 5:15 p.m., the fire had grown significantly in size but it was after 7:00 p.m. that water bombers again returned. News reports indicated the fire had grown in size during the afternoon from 100 hectares to 1000 hectares. The wind remained strong from the south west and Chase was placed on evacuation alert. That night the north eastern sky glowed blood red. According to the fire map issued August 18th, 2003 by the Protection Branch of the Ministry of Forests and that's on the next page – the fire was 2,209 hectares in size. Using the scale on that map and measuring a line from my home to the south west edge of the fire gives a distance of six kilometers.

Some communities had been placed on evacuation alert or order when they were twice that distance from an active fire yet we were not. And if you look, Mr. Filmon at the map on the next page you will see down towards the bottom there is a little yellow arrow which marks our position.

August 18th the high temperature was 35°C and the wind gusted to 35 km/hr. That day I heard a neighbour interviewed on the radio who commented that more attention was needed on the south west flank of the fire. because this area is notorious for its sudden strong and unpredictable wind shifts he said it was of paramount importance that the fire be guarded to prevent it from moving back to the south west over Whiskers Hill. I also later heard from a reliable source that both the Pritchard fire department and the RCMP echoed this concern.

August 19th fire centre bulletin 452 indicated the fire was estimated to be at 2258 hectares. A local radio station aired an interview with a Forestry official because their news room was being deluged with calls from concerned Pritchard residents who were worried about a visit from the monster. The Forestry official dismissed the concerns, indicating Pritchard residents were in no danger. There was no need for an evacuation alert. The subliminal message was loud and clear. Trust us, we know what we are doing, everything is under control.

That day the high temperature was 30°C with winds still from the south west gusting to 30.5 km/hr. No alert was issued.

Early August 20th my husband went to Armstrong to help our son and this photo is taken at 11:00 a.m. and you will notice the plumes of smoke rising. I was extremely anxious that morning and began gathering items on my evacuation list and putting them into my van. I watched closely my anemometer because the wind was capricious. It blew this way then that, not holding steady from any one direction.

At 11:49 a.m., fire centre bulletin 457 was issued. It said – McGillivray Niskonlith(?) Lake Fire is now estimated to be 2650 hectares in size and is 40% contained. 206 personnel, 33 pieces of heavy equipment and seven helicopters are currently working on the fire. Crews are continuing to build new control lines and reinforce existing ones. Structure protection and the safety of public and crews remain top priorities. Forest officials are expecting flare ups within the fire's interior throughout the day. Deep burning and smoldering will become visible around the fire's perimeter (and the italics are mine).

My husband phoned around 2:30 to say he and my son were leaving Armstrong. I asked him to come as soon as possible with a trailer and load up the livestock. Then, at three o'clock the wind swung steadily from the east as

can be seen from the anemometer in this photo. I knew then that the fire had exploded to the south west so I did not need to hear a radio announcement half an hour later that an evacuation alert had been issued for Pritchard residents. It was no surprise when less than an hour later a fireman arrived in my yard. He said 'lady get out of here it's time to go'. I told him my son and husband were coming to load the livestock but he told me it was too late, the road was closed; the fire was within a mile – just leave my gates open and go. I was to leave via the Kamloops/Shuswap Road to LaFarge.

This photo was taken just minutes before the firemen arrived and I have a nice big one – if you would like to pass that around anyone who would like to look at it – meanwhile, my husband who has a heart condition and an inoperative aortic aneurysm arrived at the end of the Pritchard Bridge – he could only stand and watch as flames roared in the direction of our home and vehicle after vehicle came across the bridge. He repeatedly mentioned to the police officers directing traffic that his wife was up in that fire zone and her van had not been among the evacuating vehicles. They could not tell him anything.

It was hours before we found each other and proceeded to the evacuation centre in Kamloops for processing. It was well after dark on our way back to our son's home that we drove back through Pritchard on the Trans Canada Highway and could see the flames raging on our bench land. We were both convinced that ours and our neighbours' homes were gone, along with all our animals.

At 11:43 a.m. on August 21st – this is the following day – fire centre bulletin 459 understated the McGillivray/Niskonlith fire is now estimated to be 5,631 hectares in size due to significant growth yesterday the fire is now estimated to be 20% contained. 243 personnel, 83 pieces of heavy equipment and eight helicopters are currently working the fire. The fire grew to the south yesterday and crews and equipment are continuing to construct new control lines and reinforce existing ones. Fire fighters are conducting structure protection in all areas where the fire is active (again the italics are mine).

Although it was not posted to the Ministry of Forests website until August 24th, the map below shows the extent of the increase to the south west side of the fire and its encroachment on Pemberton Range.

Mid-day August 21st I heard a radio announcement indicating that no structures had been lost. In a phone call to the regional district office it was difficult to get confirmation of this. I also filed a rescue request with the SPCA. Our son was permitted to go in with them and was able to confirm that our house was indeed still standing. The animals had survived and the fire had been stopped just a quarter of a mile from our home. But the fire lines were very unstable. Four days later I heard a radio announcement indicating that some Pritchard residents had been permitted to return home. A phone inquiry

to the Regional District office stated unequivocally that the Pemberton Range area was still under evacuation order.

The next day I again phoned the Regional District office to be told the Pemberton Range residents had been permitted to return home the previous day.

We returned home through a charred and devastated landscape. Fire guards surrounded several homes; blackened trees and grass were visible within feet of some homes. And these next two photos show views to the north east and the north and you can see in the north photo that it is still very close to us and still burning.

A few days later the Pritchard fire chief stopped by. He hoped the fire trucks had not made too much of a mess of our lawn. Trucks from both Surrey and Chilliwack had been deployed to our yard and doused everything with foam. From the number of burned out embers some more than 2" across that littered the yard, it is obvious without those firemen the outcome would have been very different.

In summation it seems that Pemberton Range and its residents simply weren't on any radar screens. Many residents felt that had the south west flank of the fire been more adequately guarded and the concern expressed by knowledgeable local residents been taken into account the spread of the fire into the Pemberton Range grasslands could have been prevented. Perhaps even the most diligent fire suppression would not have stopped the progress of the fire to the south west, but an advance evacuation alert would have allowed people to be at their homes and to remove their precious possessions in an orderly manner, rather than coping with the stress of being told to get out now.

Suggestions to prevent unnecessary anxiety in a similar event would be evacuation alerts should be issued when a fire is within a certain distance – perhaps five kilometers from homes whether or not there is a hill between them and the fire, and regardless of wind direction. The knowledge and expertise of local residents should be treated with respect. Police or those directing traffic should be informed of other routes which evacuees may have taken and been directed. And the Thompson-Nicola Regional District should make sure that the information they issue regarding the evacuation alerts and orders and the rescinding of such is clear, consistent and easily understood.

GF Thank you very much Mrs. Ivey and it certainly has the looks of a very terribly frightening experience for you and your husband.

MI And all of us.

GF Thank you for putting it out so clearly and especially for the photographs and all the information. Some of the recommendations you have made echo those of others. The expertise and knowledge of local residents is certainly something that has been said to us before especially with respect to knowing where the roads are and the various different – whether it is equipment, whether it is a water source, or other things, obviously local knowledge is very, very important in all of these critical incidents.

The routes in and out is another issue that we have certainly heard and the need to have that absolutely well-known because in this case – one thing was that it was a blessing to have people from all over the country here – to have the RCMP detachments, people who come from all over the province – but that didn't mean that they knew where all of the routes were and so it was certainly an issue that people have raised. And the information with respect to evacuation alerts and orders and all of that – there seems to have been a great deal of confusion.

The one thing we can say is that as much as possible the risks that were taken here certainly appear to be less than risks that were taken in places like California where 30 people died because they didn't get out. They are different obviously thing that we have to be concerned about but similarly clear and concise orders in a time of crisis are absolutely important to everybody. So I thank you very much for this.

GF I wonder if Ted Bacigalupo is here.

I am sorry, I should have introduced my colleagues Don Leach and Jim Sproul who are here as part of the administration of the commission and taking notes and making observations that I might miss.

Thank you. And welcome, Ted.

Ted Bacigalupo:

Thank you very much and thank you for the opportunity to address this review panel on the firestorm of 2003. My name is Ted Bacigalupo. I am a CSRD director for electoral area C of the South Shuswap and that is the area east of Little Shuswap Lake and west of Salmon Arm up to the Cinamoosen(?) Narrows, and Skamekan(?) and part of Turtle Valley on the south. I am also a director on the executive committee of the Shuswap Emergency Management Program or Centre.

Now the CSRD has in place an emergency management plan that covers the area surrounding all of Shuswap Lake from east of Sicamous and west of Little Shuswap Lake and south to Falkland and parts of Mara Lake. And that was an initiative that was started, although I will add some of my comments – that SEMP plan was put together about three years together by a new coordinator of emergency, Tracy Winnock(?). I think she is here today.

Now I won't speak of everything I have put in my notes but I will take you down to the next paragraph after describing the electoral areas of SEMP which is covered by SEMP. I will speak briefly from the perspective of a CSRD director and a member of the CSRD, the SEMP executive committee and held a wild fire situation of 2003 and the manner with which it was handled impacted local government and this local area director and my ability to fulfill my obligations to the electorate.

The unpredictability of the 2003 wild fires created tension, anxiety, fear and anguish among the population of wide areas of the interior of B.C. The lack of timely and accurate information was a major contributing factor. Not knowing where the fires would spread to, how quickly, who would be at risk, who was in charge; what is being done to control the situation, how do we find out what is going on and when will we know if we should evacuate were frequently asked questions.

In the summer of 2003 the CSRD was faced with three interface wildfire situations. The first occurred just east of Sicamous in electoral area E; this was a forest fire which was contained very quickly. The SEMP EOC, that's the Emergency Operation Centre, was activated in Sicamous and deployed shortly thereafter when it was determined that this fire was under control and no longer had the potential to become a major interface fire.

The second was the Cedar Hills Fire and Falkland Area electoral area D. I believe there is another speaker here that represents that area, Rene Talbot who will speak to that from a very personal experience.

Now this fire started out as a forest fire and quickly developed into a fire of considerable significance and magnitude. It was apparent very early that no one appeared to be in charge. This then evolved into a situation in which

several agencies and ministries who had jurisdiction and direct responsibility which were not communicated in a pre-determined and organized fashion to all the parties which had a stake, a role and responsibility to protect the people and property in this emergency. This situation existed for about 48 to 72 hours. The CSRD activated its Emergency Operations Centre in Salmon Arm only to find that a parallel EOC was activated in Vernon by either the City of Vernon and/or NORD. This may have been due in part to the fact that a significant number of residents in the Cedar Hills Fire area carry out their socio-economic activity in the Vernon area even though they reside within a different political boundary, not NORD but the CSRD. Clear and precise communication among the involved parties namely the CSRD, NORD, Vernon, Provincial Emergency Program, the RCMP and Forestry were non-existent at the outset but slowly developed to the point where inter-agency responsibilities, jurisdictions and control became established. This process took between two to three days. By that time this fire had reached enormous proportions. What was evident and was obviously overlooked from the outset is the fact that a forest fire in a populated rural and agricultural area is already an interface fire involving people, structures, property and domestic animals. This fact was not appreciated by the Ministry of Forests who has the responsibility to determine when is, or does, a forest fire become an interface fire. While the lines of communication were still being established it became clear that the evacuation of the Cedar Hills fire area had to be implemented immediately.

Were it not for the initiative and expertise of the Falkland RCMP, various volunteer groups and individual volunteers who activated an evacuation procedure well within the first 24 to 48 hours there could have been tragic consequences while waiting for the system to establish an emergency plan that was obviously lacking, untimely and ineffective at that time.

In the case of the Okanagan Mountain Park fire in Kelowna it became evident very quickly that this fire was rapidly becoming an interface fire and quick action on the part of certain Kelowna jurisdictions had prepared themselves for that emergency.

The third fire in the Pritchard-Niskonlith – McGillivray Lake area and the TNRD immediately to the west of the village of Chase advanced quickly in a direction towards Chase and to the adjacent electoral area F – the North Shuswap in the CSRD. The threat to the electoral area F was real and imminent. The CSRD continued with its EOC operation making decisions based on SEMP and any available information from the Ministry of Forests, PEP, and other jurisdictions. At the time of this fire local government, some provincial ministries and other agencies had obviously gained considerable experience in the need to properly communicate the status of any situation to those jurisdictions that were affected and to those that may likely be affected. There were still obvious communication difficulties with inter-government, inter-agencies, the media and the public. A comprehensive evacuation plan was

put in place quickly and that was done by the CSRD to address the north Shuswap electoral area F by SEMP CSRD in conjunction with other agencies. The wild fires of the summer of 2003 were tragic, were it not for the dedication and expertise of countless numbers of individuals and groups of volunteers, professionals, businesses, government representatives and fire fighters and emergency personnel the summer of 2003 could have been much worse.

The experience of the summer of 2003 provides an opportunity to recognize the inefficiencies and deficiencies of our emergency response capabilities and our human limitations. I think it creates an opportunity for a review such as this to evaluate our approach, our ability to respond and identify the specific areas that require improvement in the event of a future emergency.

Now with that in mind I offer the following recommendations.

First a public meeting should be held in Falkland extending into the evening to provide an opportunity for the resident affected by the wild fires at that area to be heard. The situation that evolved there is a good example of a system that failed in several aspects from the outset and therefore is an ideal learning opportunity.

Two, the province should mandate all local governments to establish emergency management plans.

Three, emphasis should be placed on those local governments where there is a high risk of interface wild fires.

Four, the province to provide the necessary resources and assistance to establish these emergency plans.

Five, the appropriate provincial ministries and agencies review these emergency plans with local government to ensure that these plans are workable and are kept current.

Six, EOC locations should be predetermined based on existing emergency plans in areas where there are no emergency plans to ensure coverage by a plan in an emergency. Consideration of political boundaries, geographic, or natural boundaries which dictate the abilities and limitations of individual jurisdictions or authorities and based on available resources at the time of an emergency.

The Ministry of Forests should notify immediately appropriate agencies and local governments and particularly regional government that have electoral areas that represent rural and agricultural areas with significant populations which are at greater and more immediate risk in the event of a forest fire.

A forest fire in a populated rural area should be declared a potential interface fire right from outset, because of a rural population such a fire may already be an interface fire right from the start.

A clear line of jurisdiction and authority needs to be reestablished between all the jurisdictions and authorities from the outset based on emergency plans. In this age of electronic and satellite communication capability it simply means that a predetermined communication list and network has to be in place at all times.

Fire fighters reporting to the Ministry of Forests and those fire departments under the jurisdictions of local government each receive an adequate level of cross training so that each can be of maximum assistance to the other in a potential real interface fire situation and to maximize the skills and resources already in existence.

The dissemination of accurate and expedient communications between all the jurisdictions, the public and all forms of the media from the outset of a potential or actual emergency is critical. This will ensure awareness of the situation, allow for preparation and implementation of emergency measures, provide an opportunity to respond in a timely manner by those who have been delegated the responsibility to deal with an emergency and create awareness and assurance that those that may be affected by an emergency.

The disarray that was apparent in communicating the status and determining the facts from error should not be left to the discretion of the media or become the responsibility of the public to interpret as was often the case in the 2003 wild fire situations.

An effort should be made to deal with and reduce the volume of forest fuel now on the forest floor throughout vast tracts of British Columbia forests near or adjacent to populated areas. Some 2003 wild fires may be a direct result of the neglect to remove this fuel and may pose a continuing threat of future forest fires and interface wild fires. The forests today are being managed by man and are no longer under the influence of nature. The March 2003 report by Blackwell and Associates provides a clear assessment.

Public information meeting should be held by a team of individuals that are representative of all jurisdictions and who are in charge as soon as possible when an emergency is declared. Such was the case at the Celesta Hall in electoral area F mid-way during the Niskonlith-McGillivray Lake fires. Repeated public meetings be held to ensure accuracy, what to do and when to act.

In closing, a coordinated and collaborative and respectful approach is necessary in future so any crises or emergency can be prevented, minimized or dealt with effectively and expeditiously.

And that is my report. If you have any questions I will be glad to answer them.

GF Thank you very much, Ted. You haven't given me what CSRD means. I assume that is your regional district.

TB Columbia Shuswap Regional District. The area from just east of Little Shuswap Lake extending all the way to the Alberta border, surrounding and including Golden, Revelstoke, Sicamous, Salmon Arm and the number of electoral areas which I have described on page 1.

GF Thank you. And as a director you are an elected person?

TB Yes, I am.

GF A number of the things that you raise are issues that have been raised at many public meetings that we have had. There certainly does appear to be confusion amongst the different boundaries that are used by the different organizations. PEP has a set of boundaries I am told, the Ministry of Forests have a set of boundaries that don't coincide and the Regional Districts have their own boundaries that don't coincide with any of these boundaries. So we have obviously a challenge to deal with in that respect of knowing who is in charge depending on the location.

The recommendations that you have made with respect to a public meeting, we are trying to organize something to take care of the area that included Falkland and Cedar Hills. We have been there to see it, both from a helicopter a month or so ago and we drove through it today and it is a frightening scene there because it went across highway 97 and there was some very significant potential for harm obviously to properties and people.

The recommendation that you made with respect to training people, cross training people is certainly something that mirrors what others are saying. It's not a question that – both sides the structural fire fighters agree that they are not competent to deal with forest fires and the forest fire fighters agree that they are not competent to deal with structural fires in dwellings and buildings – and yet both of them in a time of emergency are literally faced with working in each others' territory so that seems like something that has to be address.

Communications – the accurate and expedient information not only between the people who are fighting the fires and dealing with all of the issues of evacuation and social services and whatever and the public, but amongst the agencies because you have so many different agencies with overlapping boundaries and jurisdictions. Obviously that is something that has been raised by a variety of people.

Prescribed burnings – I think that is what you are referring to when you say reduce the volume of forest fire fuel now on the floor – do you assume that there will be opposition to that in your area? It seems as though in many places we are going there is a whole group of people who say we don't want smoke in our area, we've got respiratory problems and that's an understandable thing – children with respiratory illnesses and things of that nature – and yet it seems as though one of the things that has to be done ultimately is prescribed burnings to reduce fuel loadings. So, how do we deal with that?

TB Well, if I may respond to that, electoral area C is probably the most urbanized rural area. We have a population of about 7,000 people and the health risk because of burning and smoke is a fact. I have been pressured to put some regulatory bylaws in place, but the jurisdictions for burning belong to a number of agencies, depending on what you are burning. So there will likely

be some opposition, but the reality is electoral area C has an assessment probably about 80% that of the District of Salmon Arm, with a population of about twice of what we have. So there is a lot of real property and people who need to be protected. So, you have to weigh the value of burning, removing forest fuel versus the risk of loss of assessment or life. So there will be some opposition, but there is a fifty page report that was put together that I referred to and it was put together for both provincial and federal agencies and it clearly speaks to the fact that in future if we don't eliminate the forest fuels we are going to have more wild fires simply because the fuel is there and the lightening strikes.

But I think it is something that needs to be addressed, whether it is by burning or removal. I am not sure how it should be done that would satisfy everyone, but the risk is there for future fires if it isn't deal with. I can speak partly to the 1998 Silver Creek, Salmon Valley fire and what concerned the electorate in my electoral area was that a wild fire knows no boundaries. That wild fire started off on the north end of Salmon Valley, it moved southward on the west side and it crossed over virtually kilometers by air and landed on the east side of the valley and burned north again towards Salmon Arm. And so, wild fires can spread miles, airborne, and that was the concern, representing a population of 7,000 people not knowing what is happening, what to tell people left me vulnerable and accountable and not knowing what to tell them.

On going onto different websites, TNRD website was very helpful later on, so was PEP but trying to get information from other sources that was accurate was sadly lacking and often the information on websites was a day old, or more. So you need to have – websites to me is only part of the answer because no everyone has computers and if there is a power failure or a line is burnt, what good are computers. Unless you have satellite service and even then the power is gone. So there has to be various ways of communicating the issues and problems to the public. Electronic means is not the only one – all the agencies that have responsibilities they are on wireless communication, satellite – they have the ability, but the homeowner doesn't. So I think 2003 I think put British Columbia on the world map and I think we have an obligation to show the world we can seal with emergencies and we had better have a new plan for next summer.

GF There's one other thing – getting to the point of where to hold a meeting – you have recommended Falkland. The people of Vernon are suggesting there – would it suffice if it were held in Vernon?

TB Well see we are getting right back to the very issue – why should the people in Falkland that were left out of the loop have to go to Vernon which is not their political representation. That was a problem from the outset. Have it in the heart of the community where the problem was most evident and wasn't addressed quickly. I think it would be inappropriate to ask the Falkland community and all those in the Cedar Hill area to travel to Vernon. I think they

have been left out of the loop. I think you need to reconnect with them. NORD and the City of Vernon may have different ideas, but the fire was not in their jurisdiction. That's my suggestion. I think – address it where it actually occurred.

GF Now, one other thing and that is you are suggesting here in a variety of different ways that there was chaos and nobody knew what was happening so that would say to me that there wasn't an up to date emergency plan in place. Is that true?

TB Well the CSRD does have its emergency plan in place which includes Falkland. But when other jurisdictions become involved, whose plan takes precedent? Who takes charge? And while you have competing agencies, I think someone needs to bow out and become supportive of the other. We do have a plan and we put that plan together about three years ago. Actually it is a model plan used by other agencies, but the plan is only as good as those that have to work with it. Which are other ministries and authorities?

GF Well, I will try and sort that out but by understanding is that it is a requirement of each regional district to have its own emergency plan and each place I have gone the Regional District has an emergency plan and they are the ones who take responsibility for it. So, it would certainly be my understanding that CSRD has the responsibility to have an updated plan – an up to date plan – to carry it out.

TB We do have that plan and it was activated – emergency social services were activated, but the plan is only as good as those other agencies who have to work with it as well.

GF Are you saying social services or PEP or other people didn't acknowledge your plan?

TB Oh, I am not saying their emergency social services which is part of the plan, that functioned quite well but when it became an issue of forestry – what role should forestry play – when do they bring us into the loop. That was the problem. And as I mentioned in here the RCMP acted with the volunteers to implement evacuation long before the rest of the world caught up to what was happening here.

GF Okay, thank you very much.

TB Okay. Thank you.

GF Is Bruce Newton Here? Would you come forward, please? Good morning.
Welcome.

Bruce Newton:

Thank you. And thank you for this opportunity. I will be brief. You each have copies of the statement to look at later.

To be able to assess what people say is heavily influenced by knowing their experiences, perspectives and biases so that you can judge a little better the basis of my comments, permit me to make three statements about who I am. I spent many years working at the executive level of a multi-national hi-tech corporation.

I have been a resident and landowner here for thirteen years and during the McGillivray fire I spent five days on horseback helping with many of my friends to round up cattle to save them from the McGillivray fire. In total the effort in which I played a small part rounded up 900 to 1,000 head which I might add with no losses, and then some of us evacuated. Because of my former corporate life I am a keen observer of communications within organizations. The small role I played during the fires allowed me both to observe, hear and experience first-hand some communication issues that I believe should be addressed before we face the next fire season.

I have as you might expect anecdotal examples of communications issues during the fire but rather than relate those to you, because judging from the reports I've heard you've been deluged with many; permit me to offer a suggestion or a solution to what based on my corporate background and my firsthand opportunity I observed as a problem. During the McGillivray fire there appeared to be some significantly missed opportunities to integrate local intelligence into the fire fighting decision making. In other words, there appeared to be no formal mechanism by local knowledge of the terrain and other issues could be appreciated or considered on a real-time basis in the formal assessment of the fire. This observation spanned what I will refer to as three phases. First, from the moment the McGillivray fire was merely a brush fire, second when it seemed stalled at the south western edge, and third, when it expanded and threatened Pritchard as well as the ranches and homes in the Pritchard and Pinnitan(?) area.

I am no fire specialist but I am assuming there is some form of triage in place to assess one fire against another. There were in the neighbourhood of 800 fires in the province when McGillivray erupted. I would suggest that local input would be critical to properly assess the fire and make management decisions about deploying resources. In each of these phases local people were trying to give input but unfortunately their primary access was to the fire fighting management at the scene. In many instances the information being offered were predictions or advice, but because of the management structure there was no formal way to input and no way to qualify ...

(tape over)

... eighties – Thomas Peters and Robert Waterman Junior wrote a book, *In Search of Excellence*. The book focused on successful companies and how

they got that way. Many of their assessments may now be dated but there was one that I believe still holds true today – they called it MBWA – Management By Walking Around – and what they said was that the successful companies had many things in common and one of those features was a management group who through whatever means were truly in touch with the people on the front lines. In those days MacDonald's was held up as an example of this when every executive was required to spend at least one week behind the counter reporting to the store manager to boot. Hewlett Packard called it management by wandering around, but they also added a twist, they clearly identified places where people could meet, share ideas, and where management could find them and join in.

I am not talking here about a spin doctor or a PR person, but I am suggesting to you that we need a good communicator, a good listener, and someone who is as effective talking up the chain of command as they are down the chain of command.

Gentlemen, allow me to make this recommendation. That when we have another major fire, and we all know that we will, that an individual be assigned the responsibility of gathering local information from local area residents. One person per fire who will immediately gather together the local ranchers, wood lot owners, etc., take their input and pass it on to the people who are determining and coordinating the planning and execution strategy. Clearly identify how, where, he/she can be accessed, provide even a physical location such as a vehicle or camper that local campers can easily access.

I believe such a person would contribute three things to the communications issue.

First, he/she would provide a valve and a credible access for the local people to be heard.

Second, there would no doubt be some valuable information that could be used, not to mention some very knowledgeable people who could provide resources. This person would be in a position to both quantify and qualify some of the input based on the individuals giving it. And,

Third, such a position would relieve the on-ground fire fighting management of having to respond or to pacify locals who were rightly or wrongly intervening.

Thank you for your time and attention. Any questions?

GF Thank you very much and I appreciate your different perspective on this Bruce, my colleague on the right who worked with me for twenty years knows that I used to practice management by walking around and you learn a lot of things by doing that. I think the difficult thing with this part is that the managers with 800 fires under way couldn't be walking around in 800 places. But there are variations of this and I think some of those management techs do advocate that one in particular. Putting the decisions as far down the chain

to the local level as you can, as long as people are competent to make those judgments and decisions; and when somebody is in charge of a fire presumably that person is competent to be able to make decisions about how to action it. So it could work and it could work I think with proper access to local knowledge that you are suggesting. So I think these are things that could – the whole issue of communications of course keeps coming up and it's up and down the chain, it's within all the agencies and departments because there were dozens of them involved in the relocation and then of course between the people in charge and the public, that's also a whole realm of communication that has to be looked at. But, clearly, when people – local people were aware of how close they were to the fire and then were given a one-hour notice to get out. It's pretty difficult to deal with and so those are all things we are going to have to look at.

When we had the major floods in Winnipeg, or at least in the Red River Valley South of Winnipeg, we had the great benefit of being able to watch the peak come down and give people twelve hours notice of evacuation. A much different situation to these wild fires where some of the things that had to do with weather conditions and turn of wind direction and all those kinds of things do make it difficult – but there's got to be some parameters that work better than perhaps just the one hour notice.

BN Well, one of the – if I just might add one more point – there was a lot of frustration in trying to channel information. I will give you one example that I had – I was based at the Wolfe Ranch a lot, which is across the river and was a focal point for the McGillivray fire at one point and it is right above there where it started. I can deal with that part too, because we were there when it first started. But there was a map from TNRD and the map was clearly wrong. There was a significant error on the map and to try and communicate that was impossible and yesterday I got a phone call saying, hey – you were right. You know? Those are the kinds of things that if there were a focal point, some person on the ground that could then go back to the management group. I think the other problem was that we found issues and concerns that we had and we'd go to the supervisor based at a staging area. Well, in his eyes we were probably bothering him. You know, there was a back burn going on and we wanted to stop it and we couldn't and it turned out it was the wrong place to do the back burn. The water truck was two miles away.

Those are the kinds of things that I thought if there were a focal point, one person responsible to feed back to the organization maybe would work. Thanks for your time.

GF Thank you. I'll just give you one anecdote – I was – early on in my time in office I was going to a particular location in the province and I was given a plan as to getting there and I said – what's this all about, it said I had to be there at a certain time so I could get the ferry across the narrows – there had been a bridge there for twelve years – the ferry hadn't existed for twelve

years, but whoever was preparing the plans didn't know that, so you know these things happen and you don't want them to happen in a time of crisis obviously.

Thank you.

BN Thanks for your time.

Glenn Lawson.

GF I just want to say before you start, firstly welcome and good morning and thank you. So far everybody who has appeared has given us a written presentation which puts you significantly ahead of all the other locations that we have been at. Thank you.

GL Well thanks for hearing our presentation. My name is Glenn Lawson. I am the Chair Person of the Pritchard Fire Protection Committee and Mark Corey is Chief of the Pritchard Volunteer Fire Department. So I will be reading our presentation but it is a joint effort.

This letter is intended to share with you the perspectives of ourselves and the Pritchard Volunteer fire department. I am just going to go through the points.

The first one is professionalism and cooperation – the professionalism of the different fire fighters, city based units, rural volunteer fire departments, and Forestry fire fighters were always evident during the course of battling this fire. The cooperation on the ground in the face of the fire was awesome and I really think that's a testament to everybody's commitment to save people, place and just learn to do what was required.

The response to the initial outbreak of fire – the McGillivray fire started some time Saturday morning August 16th. Members of our department visited the fire on Saturday afternoon. At this time the fire was still limited in scope and could have been extinguished without risk to personnel or equipment. Forestry did not attack the fire with adequate resources in a timely manner. Our crews were prohibited by the TNRD from acting outside of our fire protection area. No fire protection was provided to the residents of Niskonlith Lake.

Authorization to work outside the fire protection area. The fire spread quickly, engulfing the Niskonlith Lake and moving towards the Thompson River. On Saturday, August 16th, the fire crossed over to the south side of the Thompson River and the Trans Canada Highway just east of Hoffman's Bluff. The Pritchard fire department was paged out but prohibited by the TNRD – that's the Thompson-Nicola Regional District – from leaving our fire protection area. Fortunately some Pritchard volunteer fire department personnel, using personal vehicles with tanks, went to the site of the flare-up and were able to put it out. Without this initiative the south side of the Trans Canada Highway may have been lost.

The correct approach would have been to provide the Pritchard volunteer fire department authorization to operate out of its fire protection area sooner, either in advance of a state of emergency being declared, or to have the state of emergency declared sooner.

Just on that – Chase also responded to that which is out of their jurisdiction and because of that response it stopped at a small spot fire. It could have been a big disaster if these things hadn't happened and we are lucky because of Chase and Pritchard and some Forestry did dispatch two helicopters after the ground crews were there and it was just a lucky thing that it didn't spread south. We have a much heavier population base on that side.

Lack of organization and preparedness – the province's handling of the wild fire from the office of the Fire Commissioner down showed a serious lack of organization and preparedness. There was no protocol in place to direct the actions of local fire fighting organizations such as ours. Even when the state of emergency had been declared, the TNRD was still telling us that we were not able to leave our fire protection area. Heavy equipment was sitting idle waiting to be dispatched while the fire burned. Equipment that was deployed was withheld from fighting the fire while the fire burned. There did not appear to be any lack of equipment, just the leadership to direct it in the fire fighting effort. I think there are a lot of stories by a lot of individuals of skidders and cats just sitting on the side of the road, not at the front of the fire, you know – without any direction being paid for sitting.

The Pritchard Community evacuation process – the community of Pritchard was not given fair warning of the fire danger to the community. The process of evacuation notice to alert to order happened in a matter of minutes. Many people were forced to evacuate with little preparation regarding their personal belongings and livestock. This is a very serious matter. It appeared that either denial or optimism kept those people responsible for posting evacuation notices from warning the residents of Pritchard. A tremendous effort by the SPCA and volunteers helped to move the livestock out in record time. I think a lot of us owe our horses, our cattle, our animals to tremendous people who just came out of nowhere and saved our bacon.

Managing a fire or managing a budget – the efforts of fighting the McGillivray fire often appeared to be budget driven rather than results driven. There were not enough resources committed to the job to get it done and the fire out. During this fire the budget management was commented on by frontline fire fighters from out of the province. A few years ago Manitoba sent fire fighters to help B.C. fight forest fires. A friend of mine, associated with the Manitoba efforts at the time commented with disgust that B.C. personnel managed fires on a 9 to 5 schedule, pulling people off before the overtime kicked in, regardless of the state of the fire.

From personal experience, that's my experience, on the morning of August 20th I observed the fire coming down the south slope of the mountain on the north side of the Thompson River. I live in Pritchard on the south side of the river and I can look across the river and see that fire coming down the slope. I have an office in my home; I just stepped outside to see it early in the morning. There was a helicopter with a bucket working the fire. The fire front

was limited in scope and it appeared it could be contained. I was distressed that there was no concerted air attack with fire retardant. Because I am the chair person of the fire department I actually have access to who is running the fire and I had some numbers to call. So, I called the air ops branch director, Rod Cleaver, and asked him why there was no air attack. He indicated he was not allowed to direct any more resources to fight it. He suggested the operations section chief, Bruce Duncan be called. I called Bruce Duncan but he did not answer the phone. I then called incident commander Rick Carbino. When asked why there was no concerted air attack, Mr. Carbino referred to the helicopter on the scene. When asked why no bombers were being used, Mr. Carbino responded that if they were sent in now, it was 8:30 in the morning; they would be timed out by the afternoon. I pointed out the flying conditions were perfect, but in the afternoon the smoke would severely limit the effectiveness of an air attack. Mr. Carbino responded that they were going to stop the fire when it reached the flat at the bottom of the mountain. In the afternoon the fire hit the flat. No one stopped it, it ran as if it was on a lake of gasoline cutting off the Camshew Road and threatening the Pritchard development. This is but one incident that highlighted the mismanagement of this fire. Other stories of idle equipment never leaving the roadside while the fire burned in the area are common. Who was directing these resources?

This next section is directed specifically from us as a volunteer fire department participating in this fire and it is called fair compensation by the Fire Commissioner's office. With regard to the Pritchard fire department apparatus used when the state of emergency was declared the Fire Commissioner's office sent a fax to the Pritchard volunteer fire department asking that all available resources be committed to the regional fire department. They had set up two different regional fire departments – an interior one and I guess a Kootenay-based one. It also provided rates for the reimbursement of costs associated with equipment and personnel.

On August 25th after the fire was effectively over in our area the fire department received forms to be filled out for the reconciliation of fire fighter apparatus and payments. Forms were filled out after the fact and sent in. To date we have been informed that the fire fighters will be paid for their time, but the fire department may not be paid for the use of its apparatus. We believe this is dishonest and unfair. Volunteer fire departments work on very limited budgets. The apparatus used during the McGillivray fire saw years' worth of work in weeks, or days.

The fire came into the Pritchard fire protection area from an area fire protected by Forestry. The cost of fighting that fire is supposed to be borne by the province not the Pritchard fire department. When a fire leaves a Pritchard fire protection area and moves into Forestry lands we are responsible for paying for that fire. We are charged by Forestry for it.

In addition much of the equipment usage was outside the Pritchard fire protection area. We believe that the province must reimburse the Pritchard fire department according to the rate schedule sent out to the fire department at the beginning of the fire.

Fire fighter wages – several fire fighters – these are volunteers – took time off to fight the fire. They lost their pay in August. The Fire Commissioner's office did not agree to pay these men and women as set out at the beginning of the fire. Instead these people have been out of their pay until this, the last week of November. The cheque was received this week.

How many people will volunteer so generously the next time they are called upon? Probably all, but not because of the way they were treated in 2003.

Private Equipment – when the McGillivray fire threatened the community of Pritchard several individuals offered themselves and their equipment to help fight the fire. They included trucks with tanks and pumps of various sizes. This equipment was key to the success of the fire fighting efforts. For example, a private vehicle was refilling pumpers doing structure protection on the Camshew road while our tender was dispatched to another area. Another private truck with tank and pump quite literally saved the Pritchard development when the fire crossed the road below Camshew. They were able to fight the fire at this point and put it out. Many individuals used their private vehicle to do fire patrols 24/7. These are examples of how the private vehicle force helped to fight the fire.

These vehicles were not registered with Forestry but they were more effective than the pieces of registered equipment that were kept idle. The owners of these vehicles suffered damage and loss to some of their equipment. The Fire Commissioner's office should rightly offer fair settlement for use of these private vehicles. To date no compensation for mileage or equipment use has been offered by the Fire Commissioner's office.

I was doing a fire patrol with an individual and his dad had his big flat bed truck from the farm and he about a 2,000 gallon tank on the back of it that they were hauling water to service the pumpers and he lost the tank. Okay – the truck slid the back end into the ditch a bit, the tank went, buckled and split. Who is going to pay for that? Right now he is out of pocket, his gas, his equipment use and the loss of equipment. Right now we are getting the word that they are really reluctant to pay for equipment and they are reluctant to pay individuals for any of this – any compensation – and we think it is not fair.

So our recommendations:

1. State of emergency protocol. When a state of emergency is declared there should be a protocol in place that authorized local officers such as the fire chief of a volunteer fire department to act in a predetermined manner such as engaging equipment as required. When a fire threatens within our

fire protection area the chief has this authority. It would seem reasonable that this authority would be expanded not curtailed when a state of emergency is declared.

2. Fire Management. Fire fighting should be directed to one goal. To get the fire out as quickly as possible. The budget management approach often results in higher costs, financially, socially and economically.
3. Notice in communication. Nothing should take the fire fighting managers by such surprise that they cannot issue an evacuation order at least 24 hours prior to an evacuation notice. When managing a wild fire it is more responsible to be pessimistic and cautious than optimistic and wrong.
4. Compensation. The Fire Commissioner's office should provide fair compensation to fire departments and individuals in an expeditious manner.

And we agree with you, with the apparent changing climate wild fires may be more common in the future than in the past. It's important that lessons be learned from history. We have old history and now recent history. It's time to learn the lessons.

GF Thank you very much. I think you have made some excellent point that we are very interested in. I will say this, and it's why we are going into all these different areas, why we are holding ten days of meetings in separate locations is because everybody's experience is different. You would probably be interested to know that this is the first time that we have heard that there wasn't enough available. Everywhere else people are saying that there was too much money available and being spent on the wrong things. An interesting perspective, but it is fair to say that I haven't run into people with in the internal workings who were told not to spend money. In fact places all throughout have said that. So this is interesting for us to see because there are things there that we will have to look into.

The other thing is with respect to the authority and ability for you to do the right thing even though it is outside a line on the map is coming through loud and clear over and over again. That people who are first on the scene, the people who are first on the scene, the people who are most familiar with the circumstances and the local knowledge are the people who have the most to offer. And so I thank you very much for making those observations and the limits that were placed on you in terms of your ability to go and address fires and action them quickly are things that we've got to come to grips with.

The evacuation process has been raised here before, has been raised in many other locations and it is something that we are going to have to again take a very close look at.

The whole issue of unfairness – of money being available for people who came from other jurisdictions but the people who did the same thing, used their equipment and all of that and local couldn't be paid – it's again another

thing, that the inequities and the unfairness have to be dealt with because part of it, and I am familiar with the Disaster Financial Assistance Act – the federal act – part of it is restrictions there. I mean we had these things in spades throughout the flood where local municipal jurisdictions couldn't be paid for the use of their equipment; whereas any equipment piece of equipment that came in from outside was eligible to be paid for. Doing exactly the same thing, side by side, one could be compensated but the other couldn't and so I don't know if we ever satisfactorily worked that out, but here it is coming through again and so I think it has got to be something that we deal with in the report.

Thank you very much.

GL Thank you.

Okay, we have Linda Echlin. Welcome. Good morning.

Linda Echlin

I work for a local logging contractor and our equipment was asked to participate in the fire very quickly. We got a call at seven o'clock in the morning that the McGillivray fire broke out. We had equipment already on the Strawberry Hill fire. Our logging crews were working up in the 5400 Road, which is up on Cicero, up on Adams Lake. They were working early shift, they had gone to work at one o'clock in the morning so that we could continue logging, when we got notified that we needed to shut down immediately and take our equipment to the fire zones.

I knew at this point in time that our crews were prepared to go out to work only until about 11:00 o'clock in the morning, and they did not have food, water, etc., to be continuing to go out for the balance of the day. I called ahead and contacted a local grocery store and asked them to get meat and cheese and stuff prepared so when I came into town I could gather up food and take it out to the fire line. My daughters assisted with this.

We went out to the bottom of McGillivray Lake Road. We made sure that all of the people that were there had food and water to go out. We loaded up the coolers and sent them off because they were going to be going out for overnight. The following morning about five o'clock I spoke to the wife of one of the people who were directly involved in dispatching the equipment on the fire lines and she said that she had been called by her husband to make more sandwiches, etc., and take them to the fire lines, that the firemen had been out overnight and needed supplies. The roads at this point being blocked because of the evacuation, so only authorized personnel were allowed to go in. As I was working for a contractor I was able to go into the fire areas.

At five o'clock in the morning I gathered as much food and water, etc., that I had at my residence and took it out to the fire some of the people had not received anything since they had gone out onto the lines. I went back to Chase, picked up the sandwiches, etc., that this fellow's wife had prepared and my husband and this lady continued to prepare sandwiches all day, as I drove back and forth to the fire lines distributing food and water.

I contacted the fire centre that was being set up in Chase and asked whether or not I could get supplies from them and I was told no. I continued to purchase supplies, etc., out of my pocket, making sure that the First Aid Stations had water and food and refilled all of the coolers. Any time I went to the bush I had food and water with me and to distribute to anybody along the way. I was continually being called on the radio requesting more food and water.

At first I thought when I was told 'no' to food, that it was only because they hadn't been set up yet. I knew that the meals were being prepared at the Legion in the community hall for fire fighters. I had asked for more food again

and was told that I could have sixty sandwiches – which I was very grateful for – but I was quite concerned when I was told that obviously in the length of time it took me to drive from Chase and distribute sixty sandwiches, I had obviously not taken them to the fire lines because otherwise where did they go, because there wasn't that many people out there. Well, I have no idea where this lady decided that there was not that many people on the fire lines.

I had called in to the Provincial Emergency Program and I spoke to a fellow there and he advised me that they did not supply food and water to these people. The people that I was supplying water and food to were not only fire fighters from out of province, the fire fighters who were structural fire fighters and to the contractors and to their workers. One of the ladies informed me that she would try to have pizza prepared. – can you consider driving up a skid trail in a pickup truck trying to deliver pizza to people who were fighting fires? I was able to scoop from the Legion some lunches and took them up to some of the people that were out here from New Brunswick that were fighting fires. They had not received anything to that point from the time they were dispatched to the fire lines to when I got up there. Subsequent to that I was told that I shouldn't have fed those people because they had no right to that food, because there would be food provided to them at a later time. Well, when you are out on a back burn and you've got no water and no food, I think that's pretty awful to turn around and say to somebody.

I continuously pestered the personnel at the Fire Centre in Chase asking for food. I was getting called as I was driving up the road by people on mobile radios saying could you please dispatch some food to us. We are starving. We have no water. We've got to move crews. Can you get something to us as soon as possible? I did not realize until afterwards that there is a difference between the people who are “professional fire fighters” and support personnel to those who are the contractors that are actually out there on the fire lines that know this area and work regularly in this area. I would ask that something be in place for the safety issue of these people so that they can go in, do a job, and if they need more food and water – yes, when they go to work in the morning they should be prepared for a day's job which is what I was told by the person in Chase at the Village Office who was in charge of the Provincial Emergency Program – that these contractors should be prepared when they go to work in the morning to do a day's job. But, when you go to work and your vehicle is stationed at one point and you get deployed on a piece of equipment that ends you up on the other side of the fire, you cannot pack with you enough food to do an eight to twelve hour job.

A lot of the swampers that are out there that are working with plasky – a piss can on their back – where the heck do they carry lunch with them, to have something every time that they need something? Some of the people that I spoke with hadn't had food and water for twenty-four hours out there on the fire lines and the only thing they got was what I was taking them. And I can't see any reason why when you call down and ask for sandwiches to be

prepared that you have to be told – well I’m sorry, we don’t have any money, it’s not part of our budget and it’s not our responsibility to feed contractors. These people are all working equally to try to save our areas.

Thank you.

GF Thank you very much. That’s something I’ve heard before and so I appreciate very much your information on this.

LE Thank you.

GF Thank you.

Do we have Bob Gibbs here?

Bob Gibbs:

We certainly do, sir.

GF Good morning. Welcome.

BG Good morning. I don't have a long formal presentation. I have followed your programs for the last few days, or meetings and so therefore I dispensed with the long drawn out presentation and I have a few highlights that some of my cohorts and I figured it was valuable to present to you.

My name is Bob Gibbs and I am a councilor with the Village of Chase. I worked with the Ministry of Forests for thirty-six years and in all of those thirty-six years I was involved with fire. I am a property owner in Chase as well as the North Shore of Shuswap Lake. From a Village point of view I just want to pass on that the information flow that we had at the village office from the Ministry of Forests was excellent. Every day there was an update; all the different parties were involved at the village office to sit in on these meetings. I know there were areas where things were pretty thin, but at the same time there was an opportunity to question and there was an opportunity to get answers.

My second point – the Fire Commission office – I am not sure whether it is lack of knowledge or whether it was poor information or whether it was an over keen individual, but the evacuation alerts for the Village of Chase and the North Shore traumatized many people by being notified in the middle of the night to be ready in one hour to leave. It's easy to say the next day that these were unnecessary because it proved to be unnecessary, but at the time it was done I guess saner minds prevailed and from a safety point of view it was done. But it was very poorly done from a general public point of view.

Number three, personnel – I think the fire line people were very knowledgeable about fire, they were very unknowledgeable about surrounding areas, there were many, many points proved where by the lack of knowledge had a very, very strong effect on what took place. There was I think a need for more people, B.C. people to be utilized. I know of a few acquaintances who were sitting around who weren't on the lists – very, very experienced but through the B.C. system I guess I could say, these people have been kind of written off as fire fighters and therefore they are not on the list to be called on. Many of them did get called after the fact this year and we were very pleased to do that. It seemed that certification is a very, very strong issue, rather than use of experience when you compare someone that has worked on fires for ten years versus an army officer that gets three days training. It doesn't just fit.

I know of some B.C. crews that were sitting in the north, idle, at the time that they were bringing unit crews in from Manitoba. And I worked at the fire office down here for a couple of weeks and the particular team that was brought in

from Ontario were certainly not necessarily qualified for doing what they were doing. I was in the logistics end of it and it was pretty sad.

Number four, you have heard and I've heard it today – quite a few references to pre-burning, to under-burning, to reduce hazard. I have done a lot of that work myself over the years, primarily for habitat rather than fire protection. It's very easy to say that this is a good thing, but it's not so easy to do. If you want to pre-burn an area for hazard abatement you have to have a proper window and you have to take the safety precautions – smoke is just one small part of the whole program. But I think there is definitely a need, not necessarily for pre-burning, but definitely for interface work to get a message out to the people. I know on the North Shore of Shuswap Lake there are just thousands of residents there that are waiting for a major disaster because they are not prepared. And I don't think they are aware of the fact that they aren't prepared. They just haven't been told. There is a lot of work to do on that avenue.

In that line I am not sure how many areas actually burned in these major fires this year that would have – that there could have been any work done on a pre-burn or a hazard — area. It was pretty interesting watching the pictures on TV of thousands and thousands of dollars spent on air tanker action on those trestles. If you've ever had any experience putting out fires of creosoted timbers when there is a fuel loading underneath it of many, many feet deep. It's just ludicrous.

That brings me to the expenditure and I guess it's pretty easy to point fingers, but the out-of-province crews that come in, they don't have any interest in B.C., they are there for one thing, and it was very obvious in what I observed – they are there for logging as many hours as possible in a fourteen day period. I was told that some of these people come over here – if they get four or five fires they don't have to work all winter. And it's very obvious they don't really care whether they put the fire out so long as they get their 16 – 18 hours a day and go home.

They have no accountability to the fire centre. I know the fire centre in Kamloops did an excellent job of trying to keep track of what was happening in this particular fire, but this is only one of many and some of the edicts that come down the line to the Ontario crews were shelved immediately because it didn't fit into their line of thinking so therefore they carried on in their own vein. Money was no object in the day-to-day activities.

We used to have what we called a ten a.m. concept years ago, whereby any fire that was reported would be extinguished or controlled by ten o'clock that day. That, I'm not sure whether it even exists any more but in the particular case of the McGillivray fire had that been in existence, it would have not been a major fire. The use of the Mars on that first day or something similar which wouldn't even be heard of because of such a major expense for first hours of

the fire would have taken care of the situation rather than an air show a week later. Because they were futile after the fire had gone over the hill.

I recall at one time in the Peace River using the 10 a.m. concept. We had seven cats on the fire at daybreak and one was only needed to do the job. But that's far easier than chasing your tail for weeks. I believe that the 10 a.m. concept had it been in place for the Salmon Arm disaster a few years ago, that fire sat on the top of the hill for – I'm not sure how many days, but several days before it decided to take a run. There again it should have been hit and hit hard in the first days.

I am not going to belabor things any further, I appreciate the opportunity to pass on a few of our thoughts, my thoughts particularly but I have had some help and thanks again.

GF Thank you very much, Bob. You have raised some issues that resonate with the things that have been said over and over again. But certainly the certification issue with respect to people who have experience, I guess we are looking for a plan or a model and some folks have come forward with the suggestion that this is akin to the way in which the military have the reserves, who from time to time get updated but basically are there and in time of a requirement for military people in great numbers. There are thousands of reservists out there who have had the training in the past and who periodically update the training and they are known to everybody so they are immediately on a list that can be phoned and so on. There is obviously within British Columbia thousands of people who have that kind of experience that could be accessed. It is difficult to talk in terms of having thousands more people on staff, but if you've got that resource sitting out there where they can be accessed on short notice and they do have the skills that you need, then it might be a whole lot more practical than having an airlift of thousands of people from outside the province. It's a good concept.

I certainly wasn't suggesting that smoke was the only issue for pre-burning, under burning and all of that. There is – one of the significant issues is the hazard and the risk. It's one of the reasons why it hasn't been undertaken, especially by volunteers or private people because they can't get insurance coverage for it. So there is a significant risk involved too. But again it is the conditions and the controls and everything else that need to be there in order to make it a viable alternative. So, thank you for that.

BG Thank you.

GF Is Kathy August here? Not yet? Okay, she was scheduled for later.

GF So, is Rene Talbot here? Good morning. Welcome.

Rene Talbot:

Good morning. My name is Rene Talbot; I am a director with the CSRD, Columbia Shuswap Regional District. I represent the area of Falkland. I also live there. When our fire started I was out of town. I was up in Seymour Arm. I got the call at 8:30 in the morning that we had a fire so I started heading home. It's about a three hour drive. I turned on the radio to get some information and one of the worst things that happened during our fire was the media. The misinformation they put on the radio was absolutely terrible. Falkland had more or less burned down, Armstrong was being evacuated, and I didn't even know which way to go to get home. I ran into a road check just out of Chase here and the girl advised me that I could get through to Falkland but I couldn't go anywhere from there.

I arrived back home – I am also an auxiliary constable with the Falkland detachment. When I got home I went to the detachment. I ran home and got into my uniform and assisted wherever possible ...

(tape 2)

... I thought I'd speak from here today.

GF You are doing fine.

RT EOC did a good job. We – I'm a director on the SEMP board, the information started to flow from the EOC in Kamloops. Things after that first twenty-four hours seemed to get a lot better. Now, working with the RCMP I was involved in the evacuation. The fire commissioner's office – they need some new people because the ones in there don't do their job. When it takes 24 hours, an evacuation order was issued, they missed the centre of – you have a road that stretches out like so – they evacuate this part, this part, but forget the middle. They are informed by the RCMP that they can't evacuate the people on both sides and leave the middle there. Twenty-four hours later they finally get a response. These are people's lives that are at stake. Twenty-four hours is ridiculous. I heard on the news in Kelowna, the same thing came out in eight hours. Well, these things have to be improved. Like I say people's lives and their property are at stake. About four or five days after the fire I was up on the top of Kelly Mane where the fire had gone up on top of the mountain. Something had come up in regard to the RCMP.

I spent the whole evening up there and the next morning, the fire crews – the next shift was coming in. All the department heads, whether it was the fellow in charge of roads, or the fellow in charge of safety going into the area where the trees were unsafe, they all showed up and introduced themselves to me. One fellow – this side of the road has been checked, it's safe to walk in there. His boss comes along – oh no, this area hasn't been checked. You can't go in there. They don't even communicate between themselves. They have a very valuable resource out there when there are forest fires – they're called loggers and forestry companies. They don't even talk to them. They hire their

equipment – they put them in the bush. These people know where the roads are that Forestry does not. They bring in people from another province to fight these fires; they do not know anything about the mountains, or the terrain or the logging roads that exist. It's like the loggers and the forestry people in the area don't exist.

We had a fire in Salmon Arm about eight years ago. I don't think Forestry learned one thing from it. The forest fires this summer, they were everywhere and they made ten times the mistakes they made in Salmon Arm. So do they ever learn? The biggest thing the Forestry is in a small town – they don't want to talk to you – they don't want to give you any information. The only information that helped me was working with the RCMP and our EOC set-up in Kamloops.

We are going to have forest fires every summer and the way the fuel is in the forests these days they are going to get worse and worse. When is Forestry going to catch up? They don't seem to have any idea on learning from their experiences. They continually, one fire season after the other make the same mistakes over and over. The biggest thing is, all these different agencies come in, they set up – I'll give you an example of total chaos. They shut our highway down. It's a major highway and they shut it down. They had flaggers on both ends and in a couple of spots they had RCMP cruisers to assist. In the places where they did not, people would not stop for them. They did not know exactly what they were supposed to do. At one point they started taking drivers licences. If you want to go in, you give us your drivers licence. Then they went home, with the drivers licences. I mean, most of the things that were set up did not work.

In Falkland there are only three things that worked well. Our EOC, our local fire department, and the RCMP, of which there were two and worked in the neighbourhood in the first couple of days thirty hours straight through. That's a long time for two people. Their police station became the main information centre in Falkland, because you could not get any proper information from the radio or TV.

I thank you for the opportunity to speak and I hope that the provincial government will listen to some of your recommendations. It's about time that Forestry had a more active role in these forest fires and got involved with the loggers, the forest companies and the people who live in those areas and not ignore them. I would also acknowledge our MLA, George Abbott. If there was information that I needed to know, he got it to me. But he is probably the only elected politician in Victoria that was helpful.

Thank you.

GF Thank you Rene. Just on that last point. Certainly in terms of communications you shouldn't have to go through an MLA to get information obviously and that

- is something that in many of the fires it's very evident that there was almost a concerted effort to deny the media the information they needed in order to give accurate information, and that resulted in inaccurate information getting out there. And if a local MLA can have information then there is no reason why the media can't have that information and give it to you on an accurate basis.
- RT Well, if you compare the Falkland fire to the Kelowna fire and the information part, those Forestry guys, they were on the TV just about 24 hours a day. In Falkland you never heard from them.
- GF Well as I read through a couple of hundred pages of press scans it is pretty obvious that things changed and by the time they got to Kelowna, they figured out that they needed to use the media every day and periodically every day during the day to get out all of the updated information, but that wasn't done in the early part for sure.
- RT In a lot of the fires it was not done and a lot of the fires were before Kelowna. I guess in Falkland we need a TV station to get more information.
- GF You know I am meeting in the course of this a number of media people who were here the whole time. They were in Barriere, they were in McLure, they were in Osoyoos, they were – but they didn't have the information flow until they got to Kelowna – so something happened.
- RT Well, like I say the media did not do a good job in our fire at the beginning and probably the two biggest ones what the Forestry not willing to give any information and the Fire Commissioner's office taking twenty-four hours to rectify their mistake is totally unacceptable because people's lives will be at stake.
- GF Yes, it's not good.
- RT I'm just glad that we had our local RCMP. Thank you.
- GF Thank you, Rene.

Is Vi Dubyna here?

Vi Dubyna:

I don't need a microphone.

GF I don't either, but it's easier to do it this way.

VD I just want to make an observation. I live next to a hay barn. My house is about fifty feet away from it and it might be a good idea that when people build hay barns they've got 2, 3, 600 acres or however many acres they have, that it not be put next to a building. The barn is twenty feet from another house on the other side. This year we had almost no rain in the valley – we were lacking in rain so the hay was really dry, so I was actually beside 100' x 10' x 40' of really volatile material. It's also built within cigarette flicking distance of the road. It's a well-traveled road and as people do flick their cigarettes out the window that would also hit the hay – it also might be a good idea that these hay barns not be put that close to the highway.

And that's just an observation that I have – it has nothing to do with – I'm sorry, it has nothing to do with what you are – that's why I took my name off the list and I guess he didn't realize it was off.

GF Well, I think we are going to look at a whole range of issues including how we can self-protect in terms of some common sense issues about building materials or having things that are very flammable in a situation that could catch fire. To a forest fire that is raging at several kilometers an hour and 1200 degrees, when it comes upon a house that is built with cedar shakes and cedar siding and wood chips all around, to the fire that's fuel.

So there are some issues that we are going to have to look at.

VD Okay, thank you for listening.

GF Thank you.

Is Pete Senechal here? Okay, great, we'll hold you back then, Pete.
Is Jim Newhart here? Good morning. Welcome.

Jim Newhart:

Good morning. Jim Newhart, I am from Lee(?) Creek which is on the north shore of the Shuswap Lake. My concern, dealing with the McGillivray fire was that shortly after – and regrettably I don't have dates exactly – but shortly after the McGillivray fire started and started to move easterly, northerly and easterly, an evacuation notice was given for a large area east of that fire down to the Adams River Bridge, but there was no notice of any kind given at that time, at the time of the evacuation on the West Side of Squilax Anglemont(?) Road was given to the people on the North Shore. In fact it was several days before we were given the initial information. It was several days after that that we were given an alert. And there was no way out of the North Shore at that time because there was a fire up at Seymour Arm too. There was no way out of that area except across that bridge. If there was a hazard to the west end of the bridge we will call it – some level of hazard existed on – it's like a hundred feet long – some level of hazard existed on the east end of that same bridge. It just had to be. In fact by the time the alert was passed out and given for the north shore, the hazard had significantly decreased; in fact it probably didn't exist anymore. If one checks the thermal maps from the date that was given there was no movement of that fire in a northerly easterly direction. It did move north and in fact went all the way up to Sun Peaks, or close to it. But that was in virtually the opposite direction, in fact the control around Niskonlith and directly north of Niskonlith was in fact over and there wasn't any hazard from that fire – any greater hazard than there had been before. The posting of those informations was obviously – somebody somewhere was seriously lacking in knowledge of the area – did they not know that we only had one way out of there and probably at the time of the fire there was like 10,000 people over there, all going to have to use that bridge if it was evacuated. But the notices were seriously out of shape in terms of what they should have been.

That's my comments.

GF It's a valid comment. We have learned in other instances that direction for alerts and evacuation orders was coming from sixty kilometers or even a couple of hundred kilometers away and without the local knowledge – I mean something like not knowing about a bridge and things of this nature could be a tragic error and so this whole business of having the absolute best of local information when critical instructions are being given is something that is going to have to be dealt with.

JN Another point that is probably noteworthy is just off the end of that bridge, actually a kilometer or so off of it, but close to it, is the regional boundary. I personally suspect that there was some information problem between Thompson-Nicola and CSRD about when the notice should be given, but I don't know that as a fact. I do know that the notices were not appropriate.

GF Okay, thank you very much, Jim.

Now, are there other people who would like to come forward?

We have a gentleman who is a resident here and is a dangerous snag faller.

Snag Faller

?? I signed up for 2:15 and I was hoping that I wouldn't be doubling what everybody was speaking about. So I am a little unprepared, taking notes as I go on making sure things get brought up that I see haven't been brought up. So, I might still keep my 2:15 – if I notice some items have not been brought up.

GF We may not be here at 2:15 so that is why I am asking you to step forward now.

?? Okay I am here to give you the perspective of a fire fighter that fought on the McGillivray Lake Fire.

GF Could we have your name, please?

?? I really don't want to do that. If Forestry is not showing up to these meetings to offer the correct information of what happened on these fires then I don't believe it is in my best interests to get myself blackballed.

GF Okay. Your comments are on record.

?? That's fine.

GF It's being recorded and we will just have to make a judgment call.

?? Because I have some criticism of how Forestry operates and because I work in this district and work through Forestry, it's kind of thin ice I am walking on.

The first point that I had – we were going to interface fires. We can't start fighting the monster at 10:00 o'clock in the morning. The monster is asleep at five o'clock in the morning when we can be effective, when it is cool, when we can move in to the face of the fire and attack it. At 10:00 o'clock we should be taking a defensive stand on the fire at that point, not trying to aggressively put it out. So with that, the fire was not attacked, it was defended. This caused a huge loss of timber.

This – I have no way to confirm this, but on a Thursday morning there was a horrible discussion at the Chase Arena where WCB came in and Forestry and some discussion went on – I don't know what it was – and from that day forward the strategy of the fire changed.

Traditionally in B.C. fire fighting we tight line a fire – it's called tight lining – where you run a piece of equipment close to the fire, the forest fire fighters back burn that narrow strip back to the fire in order to straighten the line so they are not fighting a long zigzagging face, and so they have a shorter area to cover on the face of the fire. And then the suppression crews come through

behind the back burn and drive the fire back into the black where it won't be able to go anywhere.

That activity was stopped. All equipment was pulled off the hill. ALL of the equipment was pulled off the hill. There were just skidders left. The fire guards that were left in place were not properly looked after. There was brush pushed up into them and the fire fighting crews had to climb and crawl through all of this stuff to get to the fire in order to chase the back burns that were lit back into it. They didn't have any escalators left to rake the guards, to pull that material out of the way so the fire fighters could effectively go in and push the fire back.

The back burns that were lit in some cases were kilometers from the face of the fire and this is where of that strategy of not tight lining the fire came in. one very specific incident and this is an area that I worked was Amphitheatre Lake. They had begun tight lining the backside of Amphitheatre Lake to stop this fire before it came over the hill and got to the lake. It is a Forestry recreation area and it is habitat for a lot of wild life with swamps and fish, the flatfish there. It's a nice area.

They were working on that and after this meeting with the WCB on Thursday all the crews were pulled back to the main cat guards – the Coquihala Highway to McGillivray Lake was where they pulled back to. They tried to light that back burn for three consecutive days but it didn't want to burn. The forest didn't want to burn there and they continually tried to light it instead of going up and tight lining the fire and stopping it. The result of that is burned swamps and loss of incredible value of timber. There are some beautiful fir trees that got wasted in there. Of the highest value in the world, our Shuswap fir is rated triple grade A in tensile strength and it's all gone to waste and our community is at a loss for that too – as well as the environment that was back burned, prescribed back burns. The back burns were set badly, sometimes they were set on the wrong side of the fire guard. I spent a day myself putting out a swamp that was between a road and a cat guard and the fire was coming from the other side. I don't know why it got lit or what, but it became a complicated problem because in a swamp, the dock is like 2-1/2' deep so when it burns out the trees become really unstable.

Leadership out there was really lacking. Working in the forest sector if you are on a big job there is a bush boss. There is somebody who is in charge of his crew who can get rid of people who are not helping the effort – people who are there collecting pay cheques. Thieving and other activities just went rampant. There was nobody there to control the personnel that were hired through Forestry to work on the fire. They were hired through Forestry, sent out to the field with no direction or leadership. There was a lot of sitting around.

To back up a little bit, the day after the WCB and Forestry had their discussion, the Friday we were sent to staging which is an area where we were to meet at ten o'clock in the morning to get our direction for the day. And, at that time we sat there for a couple of hours, waiting for Forestry to come up. When they arrived up on the hill, the equipment was told to disappear and to go to sleep in the shade and we were not allowed to interface the fire at that point.

As a result there was a small patch of regen about 200 yards down from staging, sitting in staging were I believe three water truck that were there to transfer into skidders, the skidder tankers that were interfacing the fire, and they were sitting there within several hundred yards of this fire. There was a Forestry crew lined up along the road because this was the prescribed back burn, they wanted to burn off this regen and they stood by the road with skidders and equipment and hoses, and they did nothing to the fire.

Around 11:30 the temperature changes, the monster awakens, and things start to happen. This small back burn on the regen turns from a little bit of a fire into some pretty good roaring blazes. Trees candling, hot coals flying through the air right on the side of our cat guard. And still we were not allowed to do anything. So they called the Bell 214s and three Bell 214s flew one cycle of buckets on that fire. They were unable to extinguish it. After that the vertals(?) were called and the two vertals ran two cycles of buckets onto that fire until they finally slowed this back burn down that they had prescribed. The dollars that were wasted on that when the crews were standing there and could have had it out by 7:00 a.m., they were there and allowed to work, I don't know where we had the right to throw that money away.

On a positive note the military's efforts here were outstanding. They arrived trained, able and eager to work on this fire. I think they were training them as they were coming in on their shifts. If there is a recommendation that important because military is so cross trained in Canada we have a very well trained military. They can probably institute some fire fighting program into them so they show up prepared and they don't have to go through a 2-day course. So when there is a state of emergency, the military can show up prepared and equipped.

A large issue on the McGillivray Lake fire was do you have a nozzle. There were no fire nozzles. I fought fire with my thumb over the hose for a day. I was refused help by New Brunswick. I was refused equipment by New Brunswick. They were on standby and they refused to offer some equipment to put out the fire on the side of the McGillivray Lake Road which was the main thoroughfare to the staging areas where the fire fighters were from. They sat on the side of the road for two hours and threw rocks over the banks towards the fire. I extinguished one fire with Gatorade. We were trying to snag fall the road so the unstable trees that could possibly block the road were removed to keep this thoroughfare open. It was a major transportation road - they were

bringing equipment up and down there. So our job was to snag this road and make sure it was going to stay open for the duration of the fire.

As we worked our way through the black, that was fine, it was getting warmer and warmer but then we met up with the actual fire where it was burning and we didn't get water support for over a day. I actually just had to go and ask Forestry for a skidder – I was offered one skidder – and I had no crew given to me – we were acting alone without direction and were seemingly one of a few of the people who were putting out fires.

I probably have more to say, but for right now there is one final issue – it is a personal thing – my sister-in-law – she offered to bring food down to the fire fighters – this is a crisis in the community and she was doing what she thought would help so she baked a bunch of goods and brought them down to the fire fighters and they refused to accept it because she did not have a Food Safe Ticket. Our bureaucracy is handcuffing our ability to help each other in times of emergency. The WCB and its program are handcuffing us from being able to fight our forest fires as we have traditionally done.

I have a lot to say about the WCB – I don't think it is all for this inquiry, but they – one thing that came out of this fire that affected me directly was a dangerous snag assessor – they offered a two-day course to put these trained people out to assess snags. With the way that they were doing it, effectively because the hiring age was sixteen, you could be a sixteen year old person, take a two-day course and you are a dangerous snag assessor. That dangerous snag assessor came between the crews and the men that did the work. In a lot of cases the fallers were offered the course and they were made assessors and fallers and I believe that there is some change already happening on this. They are going to wipe out all of these tickets.

After WCB created this job, the Forestry was forced to hire these people. The contracts that were given were in the neighbourhood of \$65.00 and hour plus vehicle, expenses, and so on. And they went around with a paint can and a map and mapped out these dangerous trees that they wanted removed.

I didn't make that much. I stepped out into the hot ash with a grenade in my right hand, a fuel filled saw, and my job on the fire is to help protect the fire crews so they can do their work without an overhead hazard around. I don't know where the contract – how the Forestry figures out the contracts and their hiring, but it's pretty helter skelter. It took me three days to get hired onto this fire.

I was a volunteer at the ————Festival in Salmon Arm when it broke out. Some ash fell on me, I looked, I saw the fire from Chase and I went home. That evening I tried to find somebody. There was nobody around and the next morning I found Forestry and I offered my help to fight the fire and was refused, even though I am registered with the Forest District in Salmon Arm.

For the next two days I kept showing up trying to get myself hired and I was finally hired by a gentleman in the parking lot of the Forestry – McGillivray Lake – their head area they were working out of. I was hired in the parking lot by a man from Barriere who had signed a block contract to hire six snag fallers to work on this fire. The hiring was done in blocks. There were crews from Squamish. There were crews from all over and there were local people that were unable to get work on the fire because of the way that Forestry is hiring these things out.

So Forestry didn't have any control on whether that guy that they gave the block contract to whether he was hiring qualified people or not. For that man it was of his interest to get those people working on the block because it was profitable to him for his block of contracts. The qualification was probably secondary to him and that's pretty sad. I think we really need to make some changes and ask ourselves some hard questions. Handcuffing people from fighting fires and bogging them down in bureaucracy is not going to work any more.

Thank you for your time.

GF Thank you very much.

We are going to take a quick break. We have two people who are scheduled to speak and will be back in five minutes. If you would like a cup of coffee there is some at the back of the room.

For being here and for giving me the Chase Pin which I am putting on right now – I would put on the Pritchard Fire Hat but I don't want to appear impolite, so I'll put it on when I am golfing next summer.

Now I just want to check and see if Pete Senechal is ready to present.

Okay, well we'll just wait a little while longer for that and I believe that Bruce Newton has thought of something that he didn't say when he was here previously, so ...

Bruce Newton:

I took the cardboard out of the coffee.

I just wanted to – some of my friends who are here thought I was acting out of character I was so polite and gentlemanly to you folks. I am not normally that way.

GF Well, if you want to give me hell, now's the time.

BN I'd like to follow up on that last gentleman who just spoke because I am a little concerned because he didn't want to give his name and we can understand perhaps why – that maybe his comments would not be given as much weight and I mention to you that the basis of my presentation was to encourage gathering together local intelligence. A number of the speakers since I spoke touched on similar issues and you know when that fire broke out it was right above Wolfe Ranch. I had moved my horses down to Wolfe Ranch because of the Strawberry fire and here my horses were sitting and the fire was breaking out above Wolfe Ranch.

Arnie Raven the manager of Wolfe Ranch and myself went up. We were within maybe a half, three-quarters of a mile of the fire. There was a cat, a large cat, sitting on a trailer. There was a skidder and there were half a dozen people there waiting for orders. There were planes flying in and out. But the orders weren't coming and there was a gentleman from the Pritchard fire department saying that fire could have been put out. I have already said I am not a fire fighter, but that was around nine o'clock in the morning that this was going on. I said to Arnie – what about the cattle – and he said don't worry about them. I took off and left about eleven o'clock that day and I went home to my place via some friends. We went and had lunch and at three o'clock Arnie phoned and said get down here I need you. I grabbed – my horse was down there and I grabbed my saddle – I grabbed a couple of the neighbour's boys and we got horses and that fire was just going crazy and that day we got 110 yearlings out of one corner.

So what I am coming to is after that we started riding at about five, five-thirty in the morning. The fire fighters – when we finished riding at about nine, the fire fighters were still standing in the corners at the assembly points – they weren't going anywhere and what that gentleman was saying is absolutely true – I saw time and time again fire fighters waiting for orders or waiting for instructions – they weren't going anywhere. And, we saw equipment – Arnie tried to get a cat because he knew where he wanted a fire guard. He couldn't get the cat because he didn't have the proper priority.

We were interviewed by CBC, we had this big long interview with CBC, we happened to spot some fire fighters walking out into a field. Arnie stopped them – what are you doing? We are going to back burn. He said why are you

back burning here? There's no fire, and my hay field is right beside you. It was within half a mile of his haystacks and they'd had two crops already. They wouldn't listen to him, obviously they had their orders. We went and found a supervisor. Arnie complained about a back burn. The supervisor explained to Arnie why he wanted the back burn but it turned out it was in the wrong place. These guys were waiting for a water truck; the water truck was over where it was supposed to be – about two miles away.

The fire – I talked about when the fire started, and then there was a period of time where that fire kind of held on in the south east corner, I think it was going north. But there was a spot, almost – and I know you folks don't know the geography – but there was a spot almost directly above the Wolfe Ranch main house where that fire just stopped its south westerly movement and it sat there for about two, three days. It didn't move but no one seemed to be going at it. And Arnie kept saying it's going to go to the bluffs, it's going to go around the corner. And when it did do that, we were driving cattle. We didn't know we were being evacuated, we got out and after the fact when I told some people we didn't get an alert, they said oh, and we were caught by surprise.

This is wrong. There are some huge, huge communications problems and you are hearing it I know, over and over again. Please take – I am no better than anyone else, and I am no more intelligent than anyone else, but at least my background – I'm telling you there are some really serious organization problems – very, very serious ones. We did not even get an alert. My wife was sitting up there, I was riding, the only person who phoned was my friend and he said you'd better get out of there – she couldn't tell the difference from the smoke we had been getting for days and days and days and the smoke that had cut one of our ways out. We only had one way out after that.

So – you know – I feel sorry for the people who were on the front lines and I feel sorry for the management who were having to deal with this huge problem. Maybe they should read Thomas Homer Dickson's Ingenuity Gap because people are not coming up with the solutions. They are caught in the policy and people are afraid when they are on the ground to move away from the policy because they will get in trouble. And the comment about the contractors is true. The contractors would not say boo because they won't get re-hired.

I think the timing was critical. I am not an experienced old-time rancher, I just look old time. But a lot of my friends are and they drive cattle at five in the morning, four-thirty as soon as day break and they are finished, the cattle are cool, and you can get at them. The fire fighters waited 'til ten and eleven o'clock in the morning when it was really getting hot.

Thank you for listening to me a second time and I hope maybe I gave you a different perspective of who I am and all about. Please take a look at what I said and you need a communication link with the local people.

GF If you had worn that hat we would have known what you were all about. Thank you.

The early morning start has been raised at virtually every session that we have been in and I don't know what the answer is but we will certainly have to find out.

BN Thank you.

Okay, is Pete Senchal here? No? Okay. Is there anyone else then? Come forward, please.

Gerry MacDougall

My name is Gerry MacDougall, I am a professional forester. I live in the community of Chase and this will be the Cole's notes version of a written submission I sent to your group by e-mail a couple of days ago, or yesterday.

The focal point of the written presentation I sent in relates to the bigger picture and there is a tremendous amount of concern and emotion surrounding the fire fighting and ways and means. I won't be talking about that perspective. I am speaking mainly from the perspective of the forest land planning and forest policy perspective. I have a diploma in advanced Silva culture and I have other responsibilities in terms of my work. Most of my work is in the Okanagan Valley, the Vernon/Armstrong/Lumby/Kelowna corridor. I am also involved in the Defined Forest Area Management Program in the Okanagan Valley which is a cooperative of a number of companies this year to deal with things like mountain pine beetle.

So my view and I am speaking as just a forester, this is strictly my own opinions today. There is a tremendous amount of mature and over-mature timber in the forest lands. It has been said, I don't know by me it's the first time, but certainly by others – that our forest lands are both a blessing and a curse. We started out in British Columbia with a huge preponderance of mature timber which is great during the industrial business, but if you are counting on that timber to be around for the next eighty to hundred years, or even fifty years, it may not be. It will cost us much more as time progresses to protect that timber so it is available for other purposes, whether there are other land use objectives such as hydrology or wild life or visual effects, all of which are bona fide uses of a forest land. But, unfortunately unlike some other parts of the world where there is a heterogeneous age class structure we have these large tracts of land.

A lot of my work in the past – I spent about thirteen years in the ———lake Valley and since then and during that period I have put my professional signature and seal on over 300 silva culture prescriptions for various cut lots, so I have had an effect on the visual effective land base. But, through that time I've dug a huge number of soil pits to verify what my interpretation of the eco system processes are in each one of those areas and it is very rare to dig a soil pit through this region and not find charcoal. The point is, is that most of our forests are fire origin. It's a natural part of our ecosystems and usually insects are there as well and disease as well. And so there is a turnover of our forests over time. Now, in the absence of fire, which there has been more or less an absence of fire with fire prevention over the years there is a fuel build up that has happened. And that fulfills our objectives for protecting it for other purposes but it also allows the fuels to develop.

Now the point I made in the written submission, I drew this information from the Okanagan Timber Supply Analysis prepared by the Chief Forester in

2000/2001 and similarly from the Kamloops Timber Supply Analysis – which are data packages for the Chief Forester to derive how much timber should be cut each year. In each one of these the leading species of fir, pine and spruce – pine in this case – all have more than 50% of their proportions in mature and over-mature ages which means that right now there is a lot of mature forest out there. So that means in order to protect that it takes a lot more energy than it would have necessarily because of fuel loading to protect younger forests that are heterogeneously age-classed across our landscape.

So my point of my presentation is that our forest lands ...
(*tape over*) ... if we are dealing with fires this year and we've got another drought facing us next year, which we may well have because the soils are very, very dry now – this large volume of timber and fuel loading will be presenting us problems for the next decades to come, unless we find a solution to resolving it with a deliberate manner.

So that's my presentation. The Cole's notes version. I thank you for this impromptu submission. I sent it in because I didn't expect to be in town today, but given the condition of the roads it wasn't wise to venture very far.

GF Thank you very much Mr. MacDougall and we will look forward to reading the comprehensive version that you've given us. But the whole issue of forest management practices is going to be an important part of the review in terms of the various stakeholder interests that are there. It's not just for harvesting timber, obviously the recreational use is the beautification, all of those different issues are all out there and lots of people who are interested in them, environmentalists and so on. And so I will certainly be interested in seeing your perspective on it. Thank you.

Now we will try one more time for Pete Senechal.

Okay, I just want to thank Cathy August for giving me some information at the break and sharing her pictures. She didn't want to make a presentation but did have some thoughts and I appreciate her bringing forward a review that she had done on it.

We will try and find where Pete Senechal is, and that appears to be the last presentation we're going to be dealing with.

Yes sir. Okay. Come on forward.

Snag Faller

?? I am the snag faller that spoke earlier. A few points that I didn't bring up during my presentation was the mapping. We were given maps by Forestry and they were satellite images. The scale was huge and they were overlayed with the infrared scan to show us the size and shape of the fire. But a satellite picture that has a fire overlayed over it – the satellite photographs were very old. I really don't know how old they were; because there were cut blocks that had been cut that weren't on the map. You couldn't distinguish a road from anywhere and when you have people from outside of the area trying to work the fire, when they don't know how to get from A to B that really hampered a lot of people. They were terrible maps. Fortunately on the Skemano(?)Lake side, Adams Lake Interfor provided maps for their crews and they were excellent and I'm sure they aided in their ability to get control of that end of the fire.

I spoke earlier of a patch of region that they back burned off. I forgot to mention that we put it out a couple of days earlier and then they re-lit it and it had been put out once already – and then they re-lit and then put all the helicopter time on it. I was personally involved in putting that patch of ground out. It's a little funny to have your work reversed on you.

And the third point that I didn't bring up was how ineffective the back burns really were. In the case of a firestorm it's a little different than in a normal fire where it is burning along the ground. In a firestorm it's when the fire reaches the canopy and starts spreading across the top of the canopy of the fire. The back burns that were lit burned the ground layer off, but they didn't burn the canopy off so they effectively killed the trees but never removed the real hazard of this fire spreading. You probably understand now that firestorms spread through the canopy and not through the ground. It creeps on the ground and it spreads quickly through the canopy. So they just killed the trees and those were the only point that I forgot to make.

GF Thank you very much.

We're going to attempt to call Pete Senechal and just see whether or not he is still around. He was here this morning, but chose not to present.

As I indicated earlier, the opportunity that we have to go into all the various areas that have been affected does bring us different perspectives and specific local issues that you have encountered here that may have been different from ones that were encountered in other parts of the Interior and other fires. So it has been a great benefit to us to hear from people and we certainly thank all of you for coming out today to participate, both for your presentations and also just for sitting in and listening to the various discussions because certainly this community had plenty of action around here.

We flew over the McGillivray fire – all of them actually back early in the season in early October and had a pretty good perspective of what you were dealing with and these fires were out of control and unpredictable in so many different ways. So it was quite a challenge for all of you to be involved with and I complement you on all the work that was done by a great many people working to heroic proportions in many cases.

I think what we'll do is we'll give a few minutes to Pete and if he's not here we'll wrap up. So if you like you are on standby for a while.

Hi, Welcome.

Joanne Senechal and Pete Senechal

Thank you for waiting for us and for spending so much time with us today and giving us the opportunity to talk to you about the fire that happened in the Niskonlith Lake area close to where we live.

Initially when we thought the people were being invited to talk at an inquiry, we thought that we would make a presentation about the inadequacies we saw during the fire, in general about the actions of B.C. Forest Services and where we felt they could have improved on their methods.

It sounds like you have heard a lot of that information throughout the inquiry and a lot of inadequacies and lack of communication and general problems that they were having so we thought we would change our objectives a little bit and talk about the specifics of what happened in the valley that we live in because there was an awful lot of private property damage in that valley during fire suppression and ours wasn't the only property damaged but we would like to talk about what we are familiar with as far as that goes.

We have a place – a 92 acre ranch – on Locum Bear Creek Road and it's about – as I said it's 92 acres – but fifty acres of it is pasture and the rest of it extends from the hillsides, one side to the other. Actually if you want I have a little copy of what we have that I can give you – is that easier? We might not stick right to it, but ...

As I said on either side of the valley our property extends to the top of each hillside and we had timber on those hillsides and we had a managed forest that we had logged in past and Pete's family has had the property for about forty years and they have done some logging in the past as well, but there was timber and some of it was quite old. There were 75 to 100 year old trees there. There was some fir and spruce that were two to four feet in diameter, and it was really a beautiful place. We have some pictures here that we would like to show you – until a couple of months ago it was a beautiful place.

We felt threatened by the Niskonlith-McGillivray Lake fire on August 16th and the few days after – August 16th. However, it wasn't the fire that did the damage to our home, our fields; our fences and the bridge that we need to access our property. The fire didn't do any of the damage – the natural fire – every bit of the damage was done by B.C. Forest Services and we wanted to describe to you the events that happened in those following days after the fire started. The way they dealt with the properties, the way they dealt with the property owners and in general the lack of competence and professionalism that we feel they portrayed.

PS Some of the stuff that happened – during the first few days of the fire we had lots of people coming through there, lots of crews and stuff – some of the

maps and stuff they had were just like satellite maps – particularly there were three or four pick-up loads of guys from New Brunswick and they were looking for Niskonlith Lake Road. There is no Niskonlith Lake Road, it's called Louie Road and they were looking for the provincial campsite. I was out at the end of the driveway and they stopped me and asked where this campsite was – and I said it was down on Louie Road here a couple of miles – just turn on that and you will be right in there. And they said well we drove by that road looking for Niskonlith Lake Road – so I helped them draw up maps and stuff for around there and –

JS Just following that actual name of that road is Louie Road and it's posted as a sign – it's BCFS that changed the name of that road during the fire fighting procedures. It was a strategic location. They needed that road; it was close to where the fire started. They needed it for access to where the fire began and they changed the name of the road without making any designation whatsoever for anyone coming in to be aware of it.

PS Anyways, so I helped draw up some maps and stuff down there and explained a little bit of the area. Some of the other neighbours did the same thing I believe and every day it was kind of the same thing. Getting different crews showing up at our place with poor maps, or they wouldn't pass the information on to the other crews and just like every day it was like that. And bringing in crews from out of province and stuff, it's good that they come and help out, but they've got to have decent maps or they've got to pass on the information to each other. A lot of people are talking about communication with the media, but they didn't even communicate between themselves. Somebody didn't pass the information on to these guys and ... go ahead with ...

JS Okay, so essentially we had people in the valley for a week after the fire started that were checking out the valley and making their own maps. At one point Pete took out a B.C. Forest Services map for them to see and give them some idea of the topography and the private properties in the area, and they had a look at the map and were quite impressed with. Well it's a B.C. Forest Services map – you'd think that was what they would have been supplied with. But really the maps that we looked at that they were supplied with, we live in the valley and we couldn't even make head or tail of it. So it is pretty difficult to find your way around.

Anyway during that week we had a number of structural support fire fighters from all over the province come into our property. They were great. They hosed down the buildings; they hosed down the trees on the property that were close to the yard. They were there sometimes once, sometimes twice a day. Each time they came through again they checked the property and checked the bridge that gave us access to the property through the driveway. They decided each time that they would send their lighter trucks or their unloaded trucks over the bridge, but they wouldn't send the larger heavier truck over the bridge, they would just hose the foam in from the other side of the bridge.

That seemed to be the best way. Pete pointed out quite often when he was helping with the mapping of the area that our bridge was a weak bridge, that there were stronger bridges in the area, that there is a creek that runs right through all the private properties on that side – not all of the private properties, but many of them on that side. And for anyone to gain access, whether it was B.C. Forest Services they did need to cross bridges in each and every one of our driveways which, through our story you will find some funny things about.

Anyway, we watched the fire climb the hill behind our property. It seemed at one point to be coming towards us but in all honesty B.C. Forest Services seemed to find it and guiding it up the hill away from the private properties and sending it upwards on the high side of the Mica Dam power line. We'll show you some photographs that really show the picture a little bit better, but our property extended to the top of the hillside then there was a plateau with the Mica Dam Power Line which provides quite a great natural fire guard and the natural fire was on the hillside behind that.

We thought that we were not in as much of an immediate threat from the natural fire at this stage of the game. It was heading beyond us, actually. It went beyond our property lines on the hillside up and the other side of the power line from us.

At this stage of the game when we felt that the immediate danger was reduced, B.C. Forest Services decided that it was time to build a cat guard on our property and our neighbours' properties. They did this in the middle of the afternoon, broad daylight – they sent in contractors, logging contractors with absolutely no supervision. One of these contractors did irreparable damage to our property. Some, quite a bit of this damage has been compensated for BCFS, as far as structures that were destroyed. This contractor drove through two structures, two building structures, destroyed farm machinery, but the biggest damage that he did was that he removed only the largest trees on the property. We had a big stand of cedar and fir behind our house and he got in there with his wincher and built a huge cat guard. There were two loggers with two bunchers on the property, one was very responsible and built a fifteen foot space beyond the cat guard. The other went up the hill forty-five feet and when we questioned him on his actions he said his machine made a pig of itself in the big stuff. He had no supervision. He was allowed on private property to do what he chose to do. This damage wasn't necessary. These were trees and as I say we did log our property but these were trees that we would have never touched.

PS Well, we selectively logged our property. We didn't just go in there and raze it. We were managing it. You could have logged there for the rest of the life if you wanted to and it's all gone. We've had foresters in there and they said maybe two percent of our timber will live. That was our nest egg there, for

emergencies or retirement or whatever you wanted – it's gone. You can't replace that.

JS And at the time they did this from all appearances the fire was going in another direction. As a matter of fact another cat guard had been built above our property, beside the Mica Dam power line and there were people working that fire guard and maintaining it. The fire was moving up the hillside, not down and that fire guard seemed to be in a logical spot above all the private property at that power line.

Since this damage happened and since the contractor was in we have asked every single BCFS worker who visited our property in the past months if they could give us an explanation and every reply is there is no reasonable explanation for what happened here. Or, this is obviously the work of a production logger. This is called sport logging. The fire was not a threat to the contractor at the time of the installation of the cat guard. One of the contractors at the time said it's pretty hard to make good decisions when the fire is coming right up behind you. The fire was not there. Not the natural fire. One of the B.C. Assess people who came in said well this is what happens when there is panic, this is called a fire flap, and this is what happens when there is pressure and urgency to put in a fire guard. There was no pressure. There was no urgency we have found out since that time.

They put in the cat guard and we thought that was the worst damage that would be done to our property. We tried to talk to people to give us an explanation about what happened initially and didn't have much luck. Two days after the cat guard went in, the BCFS decided to back burn our property. We found out it was going to happen at 4:00 o'clock on a Sunday afternoon. We tried to get some information from anyone from BSFS to let us know what their intention was, what the plan of attack was and really, the necessity of doing this. We had a difficulty time finding anyone. When we did find some BCFS personnel on the day shift they said sorry, we can't really give the information that's the night shift that takes care of the back burning. We can't give you any of that information. They will be here at seven tonight. We asked for them to make sure that the night shift BCFS person came to see us before they started the back burn. That didn't happen.

Oh, during this time we were trying to find someone to give us an explanation we found that once again there was a communication problem with BCFS. They were on one channel of the radios – the loggers and the timber company that was working the area as well were on a different station. They didn't even have the same frequencies on the radio, they had to drive around and look for each other to find one another.

At seven o'clock when Gene Drews a person in charge of the night shift who is a BCFS person from Cobble Hill on the Island, really unfamiliar with anything in this area got to work at 7:00 p.m. from what we were told. At 8:00 p.m. we

saw the back burn being lit further down the valley at our neighbour's place. At that stage of the game we insisted that Gene Drew, we didn't know his name at that stage, but that he gets to our property and give us an explanation of what was going on and the necessity of it.

They did radio him, he came to our property, talked to us about his perspective on what was happening or what he planned to do and assured us that the burn would only burn the ground fuel, that it wouldn't destroy trees any further than three to four feet, and that it was the only thing they could do in order to save our property from the fire. He also said that they would burn right up to the fire line – the natural fire line – and that that was their method of saving private properties and saving any properties from the fire coming down and destroying things.

When the fire was lit, and we saw it was lit, he insisted that we come down to our property; there was not one bit of fire fighting equipment on the property or on the neighbouring property. We had had fire fighters in all week, as I said the structural guys and when the back burn was set up there nothing more than a water trough that we had placed in the centre of our yard. That was it. No fire trucks, no hose laying, no machinery – there was one cat – no fire fighters whatsoever to supervise things – nothing. We insisted to Gene Drew that he get those support people up there. Had we not been on the property, I doubt that would have happened. He wasn't prepared to bring them up, they weren't on standby, and they weren't ready to come.

PS Then during this back burn thing, once they got the fire trucks and stuff in there – I told them our bridge wasn't safe to bring big tank trucks across – like they were using kind of axle gravel trucks with probably two or three thousand gallon water tanks in there. And he wanted to bring those across the bridge – I said no, you'll collapse the bridge. And he said according to his map our bridge was good. I said let's see the map and it was one that I helped draw up and it said right there 'weak bridge'. It was the next door neighbour's bridge to the north of us was a good bridge and he could have come in that way. Like we had been up for about forty-two hours straight and I am sitting in my pick-up and I look and I've got three gravel trucks parked beside me with water tanks in them. I'm trying to figure how they got in there – so then I thought I'd better go have a look at our bridge – well they had just collapsed the bridge. I argued with him before that, I argued with him that our bridge wasn't any good and he was determined that our bridge was a good one. He didn't even have a look at it.

JS The neighbouring bridge was 100 feet away, he could have walked over. Besides that he claimed that he had been through the entire valley that he had checked every property before the back burn. Not every one of the properties that he back burned, but a number of the properties that he back burned had the same creek running through them. He drove over a bridge into every property. As we go on you will see that he didn't realize it was a creek

under those bridges. They were hauling water in those trucks from elsewhere and as that burn proceeded we asked them where they were getting their water from and why they were hauling it in those trucks, and they said well the nearest water supply is 3K down the road. Once we had the hose laying in and no pumps on our property, but they said they were pumping out of Locum Creek 3K down. We said well if you are pumping out of Locum Creek 3K down, is there any reason you can't pump out of it right here where it's on our property?

PS It's only like 100 yards from our house to the creek. So once he realized there was a creek there, I said well why don't we just throw pumps in the creek here. I said give me a roll of flagging tape and I'll walk down and I'll pick out some spots where I think you can drop a pump in and he said yeah, that's a good idea, Pete. So I went found a couple of spots, they threw a pump in there, ran a hose lay up. Like there was nothing there when the back burns came and here they have lit our timber on fire within 25 yards of our house, and it's going up in flames and there's no water – when there's water 100 yards away, all the water you want.

JS And if it had been an emergency situation that would have been one thing, but they were there for nine days before they lit it up – nine days – and during that time they claimed to have investigated every property, and investigated their other alternatives.

In the morning Gene Drew had followed the back burn along and burned our neighbouring properties as well. He was no longer on the property in the morning. The fire crews, the structural support guys left the property, they were not allowed to do anything in the bush, only the structural fire fighting or fire prevention and at this stage there was nobody there. There was no hose layed, there was no ground crew, there was nobody to fight the fire. So we had Gene radioed and brought back to our property. There were no ground crews as I say and nobody starting the hose lay at 7:10 a.m. We expressed our concerned once again to him and said we want somebody up here fighting the fire that you started. And he said, oh, you know what, it's 7:10, I was off at 7:00 o'clock. I'm leaving. He wasn't planning on waiting around for the day crew.

The ground crew – day crew – arrived some time later and installed hoses along the cat guard. The cat guard that had been put in was quite a distance from the tree line, actually, through the middle of the hay fields. And this is a really crucial point because they put the hose in along the cat guard which really prevented them from getting into the trees and doing some fire prevention with some water up there because they are only allowed to go a certain distance from the hose lay and the cat guard. Had the cat guard been at the tree line they could have gone farther into the trees, but their regulations wouldn't allow them to do that. The cat guard was placed in a spot that, once again, there was no reasonable explanation for.

- We feel that quite a bit of burn damage was done in the morning before they were able to get any water into the area. When Gene Drew left, he left us with one broken-down skidder, one empty skidder with no water for his water tank because they couldn't get water onto our property. A water truck finally did try to use the cat guard to enter our property, got stuck very badly and it was only at this stage of the game that they would attempt to use the neighbour's bridge.
- PS When he got stuck he had to dump all the water out of his tank onto the cat guard because the cat couldn't pull him out because he was fully loaded and would have tipped right over. So he had to dump all the water out. So now he's got the water out, so now he's got to turn around, go back and load up again and then come in through the neighbour's property.
- JS The first day after the burn, well the day, the morning of – the ground crews finally, as we said, did arrive, put in the hose lay – they left, the ground crew at the end of their shift about 6:00 p.m. The day shift personnel from BCFS was Neil Bodnaruk(?). We questioned him on when the night shift would show up, we thought it would be an overlapping occurrence, that we would have some fire fighting support throughout the day, especially the day less than 24 hours after they'd burned the property. He said he wasn't sure what time they would arrive, but they would be there soon. We asked what we were supposed to do in the meantime – he said – he told me we could fight by ourselves. He said send your wife down to man the pump at the creek and run the hoses. The left us one skidder and one swamper for the skidder and not much of a supply for those guys either because they were still trucking water to them. The night crew arrived at nine o'clock. We went to bed at that stage; we'd been up for a couple of days.
- PS Well we helped the guys fight a couple of flare-ups before that and actually the skidder operator and the swamper, they were really the guys that said go to bed, you guys have been up too long, but if we come into the house and tell you to come out, you listen to us. So we felt pretty safe with those guys around because of the flare-ups.
- JS The next morning we awoke to the sound of chain saws. Apparently they were danger trees and they were coming in to remove more trees. When Pete questioned the danger trees, as the reasoning behind the trees that he could see that they cut because we didn't personally feel that it was necessary, he asked the danger trees assessor what was the reason for cutting down that particular tree and the answer he received was – I don't know. Pete said well I'd like it if you'd stop cutting trees until you can find somebody who knows. – or somebody with authority – *isn't that what you said?* And the people with authority who came up were the RCMP, and ...

PS Threatened to arrest me if I didn't leave because somebody said we were impeding progress. But the day before they had asked us to fight fire ourselves – 24 hours later – not even 24 hour later they were there with the RCMP going to arrest me for impeding progress.

JS So since then we have been subjected to removal from our property by the RCMP, we have had our fences removed which required constant care of our animals. Some of them, we still don't have our horses home. We had a barrage of BCFS workers into our property, many of whom have caused further destruction to our property which is questionable at best.

At one stage we were sent a negotiator who was actually a retired BCFS worker, who had been brought back for the purpose of settling private property claims in this area. However he had no experience dealing with private property owners, neither had he undertaken any training in negotiation. We had to endure his bullying tactics trying to ensure settlement with the province often pressuring us to take less than we initially had before BCFS entered our property.

I don't think we deserve this kind of treatment. To be honest, we have since that time had some great BCFS employees enter our property. They have been caring and compassionate. We have had some great contractor workers. They have made an incredible effort to rectify the situation to the best of their abilities, to at least replace the things that had been destroyed. They did build a new bridge. They were working on building some buildings –

and something that hasn't been including in here which is our septic system which was driven through during the morning of that burning and the morning after. We asked as one stage if we should mark our septic system which was near the house and we were told no, it was not necessary because any vehicles that are coming in will stay on the cat guard, we've already got that. It wasn't eight hours later when somebody drove through the septic system.

PS A pickup fell through the tank and stuck there.

JS A B.C. Forest Service's truck.

PS They were only supposed to be on the cat guard they are not supposed to be off the cat guard.

JS As far as the back burn goes, we don't presume to be fire fighters, we can't tell anybody what their job would be or what their objective should have been from the back burn. All we know is what they told us, and they told us their objective was to burn up to the natural fire. We have pictures to show you that it wasn't burned to the natural fire. It was essentially burned property line to property line. There is Crown timber above us that is still healthy and green looking. They burned – there is ground burn in that area but those trees will

survive. The back burn didn't even get to the Mica Dam power line in some areas.

PS The natural fire never came below the Mica Dam power line. It stayed above it. Anything that burned below the Mica Dam power line to two of our neighbouring properties to the south west of it and to the north west of it – any fire that is below there is from the back burn. The natural fire never hit any of us. There are about six properties that were all burned out and it's not from the natural fire.

JS Any BCFS people that have come in have said it wasn't a successful back burn for many reasons. *The conditions weren't right for a back burn. There were many reasons that it – it just was not the appropriate thing to do – in hindsight which is great. I know – they have come up with things like there were a lot of bad decisions made on this fire.* These are all BCFS quotes – *absolutely no reasonable explanation for this. The effort here was essentially fruitless. Objectives were not met. The actions here were done by totally incompetent people.* And, on top of everything – *this place should be used for a case study of what should never happen.*

When we did question BCFS about what their normal standards are for fire suppression on private property we were told that there are no procedures, there are no guidelines in place. There is nothing for them to follow. A lot of the damage done on our property was damage that was done out of ignorance. Things that would normally be done on Crown property shouldn't be done on private property. The needs of the property owners should be taken into account and invariable we were told, sorry but that's the way we do it on Crown land. Well, on Crown land a hundred thousand dollars worth of timber isn't very significant – for most big lumber companies – for us where we thought we had a sustainable forest, we could maybe in years to come taken that much money off of it – yes, that's something you add to your retirement income. And it's gone. And we aren't the only ones in this situation. Our neighbours are in exactly the same situation. Not all of our neighbours, some of our neighbours had done a fair amount of logging. Some had been very responsible loggers and done like we did, left a lot of the timber for growth for future.

Like I said ours isn't an isolated case in this valley, but the damage by the logger was probably exceptional and isolated to our property. But the BCFS damages as far as the burning was not – it was done throughout the valley.

The actions of BCFS have brought us to believe that private properties in this valley were looked at as expendable. That if the crews were to button them up, which is a quote, they would take their limited resources to go on and fire fight other areas before – threatened larger businesses in the area such as Sun Peaks and Adams Lake Mill. And we understand that those businesses employ a lot of people and priorities have to be set at some stage in the game

but again the objectives weren't met if nothing conceivably solid came out of this action we can't justify it.

Support of this theory happened one night when we were re-evacuated. By the way we missed that part – we were evacuated for twenty-nine days – and during that time there were radio reports about the proximity of the fire to Sun Peaks which ...

PS Well, they were saying it was 8 kilometers from Sun Peaks. Sun Peaks is still doing business. Our house as the crow flies is less than 8 kilometers from Sun Peaks and the fire was between us and Sun Peaks. At one point in the game the fire was closer to Sun Peaks than us and we were evacuated, they weren't. They were still doing business. Which is fine, but I mean, we were evacuated for way too long. There was no need for it to be that long and to have trouble coming in and out, like we never left until the RCMP got us out of there and the only way we could come back in was because we had livestock and we'd get a police escort back in to feed our cows and then we'd be there for a couple of hours and we'd have to leave again. And the fire was closer to Sun Peaks, they were in more danger than we were, the fire had gone by us. They had back burned our property to make it safe and they are up there selling condos and stuff.

JS Selling condos and inviting the public up to Sun Peaks. We had a friend who took his mountain bike up there and so they were still having people mountain biking in the back country closer to the fire than we were – the active fire – and we were evacuated and they were up and running – and encouraging people to go out in the bush. Maybe not in the bush, but you know, cycling down there at the ski runs.

Anyway what Pete was saying about having trouble getting in and out – we do refer to that later on in this report but we and our neighbours had a difficult time accessing our properties because of the evacuation and there were better ways I think that it could have been handled. Anyway to support that period that we said that at one stage of the game we were unevacuated for a period of twenty-four hours. At the end of that 24 hour period a police officer came onto the property and he was a police officer again unfamiliar with the local territories – had to ask us where there were other people living – where there were other houses in the area before he could go on. And he said that he thought that we should leave, that we were in imminent danger – we asked at that stage if there were any BCFS people in the area. He didn't know, he couldn't find them – Chase fire department came up, they were looking for BCFS people – they couldn't find them. If we were in imminent danger, if there was a fire that meant we should be evacuated, why weren't we protected at that stage of the game? Again, we were left to fire fight on our own if need be.

Another night there was a flare-up that was very intense. This was after BCFS had left us, although there were daytime ground crews and skidders at night. I

phoned that fire in to the fire hot line because it was a huge flare-up. The sky was red. I was told by Steve — (?) from the Kamloops forest district that I was in an evacuated area and I should leave and BCFS would take care of it. I told him that I didn't believe there were any BCFS staff present and he told me there were. I know for a fact that loggers went in to fight that fire on their own, they risked their lives. And the next day BCFS had two helicopters for six hours on it.

There is a little bit here about putting us on evacuation for so long. It really leaves our homes unsecured. I will just read this little bit – putting home owners under evacuation causes tremendous dislocation, distress and danger to animals and leaves the private property without the inside supervision of those who have the most interest in it – the home owners themselves. Was the extended period of evacuation in our area a strategic move to allow an interrupted use of the road that accesses our property and gave fire crews direct access to Sun Peaks Ski Resort as well as the fire in general. Animals needed to be taken care of on the farms. People needed to know what was happening in this evacuated area. Why would we leave those properties for that extended period of time in the hands of people that obviously were not prepared to handle it and take care of it?

During this period of time there was one Town Hall Meeting in Chase, and that was within the first week of the fire. The other people who had left their properties left them evacuated for twenty-nine days without one word about what was happening. There were no more town meetings. Those people had no contact with what was going on.

We have made some recommendations here and I don't know if there is anything specific that you want to go over, but – about leadership, having somebody in command, having a local BCFS employee in a position of direct command. I am sure all of you know that fire was contracted to Ontario fire personnel. The only BCFS people that we were aware of that were on this job – there was one from Salmon Arm – Wayne Anshone(?) on the day shift during the first fourteen days of the fire. other than that, any BCFS people that were in supervisory capacity appeared to be – at least the ones out in the field – appeared to be from Cobble Hill on the Island around Duncan – people who hadn't been on active fires for nine years. At one stage we were told that the Chase fire was the most volatile fire in the province. At an early stage in the game, there was too much to lose, there were too many properties in direct proximity between Chase, Pritchard, Sun Peaks, Adams Lake Lumber and the chance that had the fire gone down the valley it would have gotten to Squilax or the North Shuswap. It was really an intense volatile difficult situation and they contracted it to people who were absolutely unfamiliar with the area and sent in BCFS people who hadn't been on active fires in nine or ten years – with no supervision from anyone that was local.

We don't know that all the media information was accurate and we have given some examples here.

Policies and procedures are one of the big things that we think need to be taken into account. There have to be policies and procedures put into place for work on private property. There are no guidelines from what we understand at this stage in the game.

PS Part of the deal with this – what they were doing on private properties – I am not going to stop anybody from coming in and cutting down actual danger trees. I don't want anybody to get hurt on our property. But to cut down fir that is two feet in diameter and start cutting it up into three foot lengths – those are our trees. If they are cut down we'll sell them to a mill. They cut it up into three foot lengths. I've got enough firewood, thank you. And I can buy fire wood for a lot less than what that tree is worth. And there was cedar and fir and stuff cut down all over the place up there and I got them to stop cutting them up into 3' lengths.

JS Some of them. But you had to communicate it to every single person.

PS Yes, every time there was a danger tree faller come in there it was the same thing.

JS And then the army came in and they had their own instructions, when they ... (*new tape*) ... and I know resources were limited as far as having experts in any area of this fire but they sent in fallers who had a look and dropped the tree and we have had other people in since then that can't understand – from foresters to other danger tree assessors who are qualified – who can't understand why some of these trees were dropped.

PS And the trees are supposed to be flagged and marked by an assessor and then dropped – was my understanding of it. Well you can pick a hundred trees on our place that were cut. I counted four of them that had a flag on them saying it was a danger tree.

JS There is a procedure in place for danger tree assessment and falling them. The procedure wasn't followed on our property, but we did go to Niskonlith Lake and noticed that it was followed there. Every tree that was fallen had a flag on it and Skemano(?) Lake as well. Both provincial parks.

One other important issue that I think needs to be taken into consideration is that when they are going to do extensive burning like this, whether it be on private property or Crown land, there is rehabilitation that has to be looked at in the big picture. Initially they said there would be no replanting done by BCFS. I think things have changed at this stage in the game. But each property from what we understand is being looked at as an isolated case and I don't think that that really is the way to look at it. I am not familiar as Pete or

as BCFS or other people would be with what happens in a forest, but each case is looked at individually as far now the logging and harvesting that has to be done. We had a valley that had trees. Now we have a valley with no trees.

Replanting, reforestation – looking at the properties I think on the whole has to be done, not individualized by the cases and each of the properties have to be considered and some kind of guideline has to be in place for those private property owners and I think some method of help. And actually it sounds like BCFS is willing to do that at this stage, it may be a long procedure but I think it is something that some guidelines again are going to have to be set up for.

There is some other information there that you can read.

We also want to say that we don't – and said this before – we don't presume to know that we know how to fight fire, we know that they were limited resources and in experts. But everything we have learned in the past two months has made us more aware and cognizant of fire fighting protocol. Everyone including BCFS knows mistakes have been made on our property and our neighbouring properties. They have currently got some really good people in place to do the best they can to make amends and rectify the situation and the damage that our properties have incurred.

The point is that it was a very disorganized chaotic ineffective team that made mistakes in the first place. We suffered huge personal loss at the hands of the BCFS. Our loss was not due to the Niskonlith/McGillivray Lake fire. It was due to the actions of the BCFS. We have lost something absolutely irreplaceable in the trees that we had and I know there other cases in the fire, we are not trying to say that ours is more important than other cases. But in many instances people have lost something due to natural fire, natural forest fire, in some cases those people will be able to rebuild their homes. I am sure they have lost things that can't be accounted for, but they will be able to rebuild their homes, their property values will within a short number of years, under ten years, be maintained. What we have lost has reduced the property value that we had; it has reduced the intrinsic value of this property. These things can't be replaced and won't be in our lifetime. And we want assurances that this kind of thing doesn't happen to other private property owners. We want guidelines put in place. We can't get back what we've lost. But, if anything good comes of this, we should have some part of making sure it doesn't happen again.

Our name and phone number is there if you did want to contact us later. We have some pictures if you have some time. I know this has been long, but if you do have a few minutes to look at our pictures it tells a thousand ...

GF Thank you very much. It has been long, but it's been worthwhile. This is an absolutely terrible story. I agree with the person that said this place should be used for a case study of what should never happen. I think this is obviously

something that lessons have to be learned from. And, as you know this is all part of the public record and will form a part of the report as an appendix. Every presentation will be there for people to read.

Can you tell me, have you received compensation for all the outstanding issues or have you been made a commitment to all the outstanding issues?

PS No, we are still waiting. We have been compensated for a few things, like fences have been put back in so we can keep our cows home – 92 acres and we are down to 2-1/2 acres of fenced property that we can keep our cows in that we are feeding hay, which we only start feeding them in November/December – we started feeding them in August – Fences have been put back in, enough to keep our cows on the property. There is more fencing to be done. So we have been compensated there, some of the corrals around the buildings, around the barns that were buried in the cat guard – they have brought --- up and fence posts and we are going to rebuild that ourselves – like, they are trying to make things right.

JS They have made a commitment to repair the damages that are repairable, to replace the buildings that have been destroyed, and to replace the farm equipment that was destroyed and the septic system as well. Some of those things we were all hoping would be done before winter – we as the property owners and the BCFS. I think initially we had some people on the job as we mentioned that weren't prepared to maybe go ahead with some of this stuff. But now there are some really good people and I am sure they will follow through with the commitment –as far as those things ...

. When it comes to the timber loss – compensation in that area is going to be something new for BCFS and for us as well and so they are going to look at putting some guidelines in place – that could be a long drawn-out process. They have said that we can expect it to be a year before they have those guidelines – in a way its progress – in a small way – but they have committed to doing something.

GF Well that's to their credit – it's to be hoped that by shining light on it we make sure that something proper is done. Cathy August, your neighbour, showed me a number of photographs too, earlier, so I think the circumstances were similar although yours were obviously the worst of the circumstances.

PS Yes, they had a lot of property damage, buildings ...

GF Well, thank you very much. We would like to see the photographs. Can you stay for a little while? I think we have one more speaker and then we will look at the photos with you.

JS/PS Thank you very much.

John Pelcher:

GF Hi, how are you? Welcome.

JP Oh, doing all right. I just have some pretty much some notes I just made up because I didn't realize you guys were in today. So I will try to make it short and I will try to make it quick. It's been a long day.

Out in Pritchard where I was stationed with SUGA 8(?) We found ourselves being called a lot for larger packs – like 20 packs, for ALB and Greycos and other crews like that.

Well, a few instances our head boss would call us and we would go and help out a crew catch up on their situation and problems. We would come back and we'd find our area engulfed and that would set us back from everything we had done that day. So like manpower was an issue out there. We were short many, many times.

Water, I found we would be short maybe an hour or two hours at least per day without having any water whatsoever. We would be on a waiting list. We found ourselves being sent into unassessed areas by the bosses. That was a problem I found. One of the bosses I remember talking to for the BCFS, his quote through it all was to 'just let it all burn'. That kind of troubled me because, you know, we are out there to do a job and try and salvage what we can of the land. And this is the big boss saying 'just let it all – just screw it' pretty much let's say.

Supplies, hoses, nozzles, anything you could think of, we were short on it. We would be waiting or we would come back to start our day again and we'd find our three-ways missing, our water thieves, our fog nozzles to our con nozzles. We even had missing lines so we would have to call up somebody and say we need more equipment. And we get – what happened to your equipment? We don't know. So we get blamed for that. Pumps – the Mark IIIs, one day we went through three of them because they had been misused by previous people. So the equipment that we got here – it feels like it was fourth or fifth hand me downs that really no one cared about and figured – we just shove it through the line and if it breaks down, oh well, we'll send it back. There are only so many times you can fix something before you get tired of doing it and repeating yourself.

I found drug use a big problem up there. Many of the fire fighters I found were clearly stoned out of their minds up there and how do you function when you are stoned? You don't. Everything is just like – duh. So I feel there we should have some sort of drug screening to be able to actually do these kinds of things because you are putting not just yourself in danger but you are putting your crew members in danger as well.

Our base camp – it wasn't really a regular base camp where you had a – you up at five or five-thirty, out at six, eat your breakfast, get the truck, go to the mountain, come back in, go to the washroom, shower, whatever – stay out until ten and back in. This base camp was pretty much all the time around. You could go anywhere you wanted whenever you wanted; it didn't matter when you came back to camp as long as you were there. If your buddy lived, say four doors down, from base camp you went and crashed there because you had a comfy bed to sleep on.

Myself I stayed in a tent and I froze most of the time. So I got sick up there and I still stuck with my job. I found that there are many, many youths out there on the mountain that really had no business being there. Like the assessor course that was brought up earlier – sixteen year olds going in for a two-day course – coming out – ooh I can assess!. No you can't – you were there for two days, you don't know anything.

We had a seventeen year old skidder operator out in Pritchard. He slept most of the time. And this is one story I heard from quite a few of the guys up there of a young boy who was sixteen years old. He was out swamping for a faller and he went out and there was this flame-up that came and the skidder was not too far away, so the faller told the boy, go over there and ask the guy to come over with the skidder and we'll use the tank off it. The kid went and did that – he was wearing sneakers. The skidder came over towards the fire and that, the kid grabbed the econoline(?) looked around where to put it – he stepped on a hot spot and burned himself pretty seriously. Needless to say he was sent home. Where was WCB for that – watching – we had guys out there not properly attired for the job or with the knowledge?

There should be some sort of requirement other than just your basic S100 fire training like I have – whoopedoo – all it says is that you understand the basics of fire – that's all it does – it doesn't tell you how to use anything, really. It just shows you the basics of it. I feel you should have more of a vast knowledge of what you are doing out there because you are putting people's lives in danger. If you are in the middle of a firestorm and you have greens on your crew – you can't afford to have greens on your crew because they don't know how to deal with such a situation because they are green. So they panic – you turn around – your buddy's gone, your hose lay's all burned up behind you. You are trapped in the centre – you are done. He wasn't there to tell you that it was coming around because he panicked and bailed.

So I feel that we should really step up on the courses – like you go on one for two weeks for your fire fighting to be trained for wild fires. I know Merritt has one, I think Kamloops might and Prince George – I am not too certain about those two. And those are being offered to the military if anything so they could be briefed. I found myself driving by the military quite a few times, seeing them laying out in a field. I watched one guy with a hose stand there, blast away with some water while the other two sat on their butts and watched.

Now I know they are out there for mop-up and that, but ... the last time I checked sitting on your butt isn't doing anything.

Loggers, they are falling. I found quite a few trees that had no reason to be felled. It was just the fact that their timber dollar was worth a lot because they were untouched. So a lot of loggers were out there falling for the salvage rights off that land. And that's not right because those trees have been there for four or five hundred years and they are dropped for no reason. A couple of them had maybe a ten percent burn on them. Not enough to take it down, but they took it down anyway.

The cost and changing of crews on a fire – constantly, constantly we were bouncing people back and forth. Once a guy finally gets familiarized with the area he is working in, he's got to go to another area he has no clue about. You've got to keep guys on an area once they are familiar with it because it makes work that much easier and better and efficient.

Missing equipment at nighttime – I have covered this, but I know there have been people who have driven up there and they have been taking Wajax pumps, nozzles and stuff and taking it for their own use – who are not a part of the fire fighting.

Contact between the fire fighters and their bosses – you get one radio for a five pack. You are on silver – your crew boss has it. You are paired up with your buddy. You are off one end of the hose length doing your job. You are digging; you are wetting it down and turning all the soil over again. Now, this happened to me. We had a fire break out where we had to be evacuated. One of the guys had to come running down to let me know there was a heavy coming and they were going to drop water in the area I was in. I had about sixty seconds to get my butt out of there. My crew boss had five minutes warning. So it took my friend four minutes to run down the hill to where I was to tell my buddy and I to leave the area and drop what we were doing.

Everyone should have a talk-about on him at all times – or at least one for two people so that way you can radio down and say look – there is a heavy coming or a medium, or if there is fallers in the area. One area I was spraying down, no one told us there were fallers in there that day; it was assessed the day before, that's why I was in there. But the fallers came back in because they missed some. I didn't know. I turned my head and looked – I got a tree coming down beside me. What the hell's going on? I find out there are fallers. I have to drop what I am doing and leave.

And people I have talked to in town from the community – I am new here myself I originally reside in 100 Mile House and I came down here to help this community out with the situation on the mountain. I liked it enough. I stayed here. And myself I now work as a cook for a small business and this season, like Chase is a Tourism-based town. They suffered great losses to make it

through the wintertime and to run for next year. So I was asked to ask if there is anything that is going to be done about this, or if small businesses all over that were affected are just going to go under because of the loss of profit for this year.

That's everything I have to say. Thank you for your time.

GF Thank you very much, John. You have made a number of interesting points – with respect to training and crew changes and equipment – maintaining the equipment and so on, and also the contact between crew bosses and fire fighters. We thank you for all of that.

With respect to small business this has been raised in the past. It is not part of my mandate as to whether or not the government has a program to try and deal with losses that have occurred throughout the Okanagan in particular, but in places like this where tourism is central to the economy.

Your presentation and those that have been made are part of the public record so people will be looking at them and obviously this will be something that governments and government agencies will have to take into consideration.

JP Thank you very much then.

GF Thank you.

JP Have a good day.

GF We have one more presentation. I am just going to take a quick break, don't go away.

Michael Joseph De Leeuw:

Stuff on there that I wanted to get off my chest – first on my agenda as we come here today, we voice our concerns. First we knew with the weather over the last few years that it was going to be dry. The warning signs were right in front of us. It was predicted in 2000 why weren't the governing governments which was in charge see the picture before it happened. More funding – funding is needed to prepare for this again. Local fire departments need trucks and equipment to fight these fires better. When there are challenges to our well being that's important. And you come today from a long ways away. You have been put in a position of authority and you should be proud.

But we live here, the people have lived here for hundreds of years and Europeans have been here for hundreds of years now. You have been put in this position, but we live here. When you leave here today I ask for your respect because with the limited source of resources we overcame lots of fear.

Second on my agenda – as my local fire department needs a new truck, new equipment, the government forgets that we the people of Squilax are underfunded. Where is our new fire hall that was promised to the Little Shuswap Indian Band fifteen years ago? We need your guarantee that this will happen in the near future.

Where is the media when there are concerns about a community that is overlooked by senior policy makers?

Third on my agenda – why aren't local fire departments given more respect? I am tired of talking – I grow more tired of your growing lies. Senior policy makers – local people who have said for years we need controlled burns around local communities. Need we learn local communities know more about this land than the B.C. Liberals or the people in office in Victoria and Ottawa?

To go back to my second statement here – our community – I am not Native but I live in that community and we have been told – our Fire Chief Bruce George and Chief Felix Arnuss(?) have fought for years to get a new fire hall, new fire truck and equipment and we have been overlooked and it's about time we are not overlooked anymore because with the situation we have in the forests this could happen again, any time. It could happen next year. It could happen ten years from now. We need that money – to get our community prepared for this if it happens again.

That's all I have to say.

GF Thank you very much Michael.

GF Well thank you everyone for all of your contributions and your presentations. It has been a pleasure meeting all of you. I expect that there will be a great deal of information to be gathered to arrive at conclusions and recommendations; But, you can be assured that everything that has been said here today will be part of the public record and also part of all the considerations that we will make in arriving at our decisions and our recommendations. So thank you very much for your contributions and for being here.

As I indicated at the beginning, the 15th of February is the deadline that has been given and I am going to do everything possible to get my report done by then.

Thank you.