

**FIRESTORM 2003 – PROVINCIAL REVIEW**  
Public Meetings  
***Cranbrook***  
***Part C***

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Evening meeting – approx. 7:00 p.m.

Faye Street

... You're right that's my name and I guess I am known as the Head Wrangler for the Regional Cattlemen's Association in this area – the Kootenay Livestock Association. On behalf of the hardworking ranchers in the East Kootenays I want to welcome you both. I want to thank you very much for taking on this task.

After the horrific events of the fire season of 2003 this review is critical and we are very hopeful that it will effect some badly needed changes to the forest practices and policies. You have heard a whole lot of stuff today. That's what's really nice about coming later or last. You've got all the technical information. A lot of the information Maurice Hansen presented to you this afternoon is really where our industry is coming from. Some of the things that Ms. Mose presented to you this afternoon are a huge part of the heart of our industry. She did a very good job of presenting why it's tough for the ranching industry to walk away from an operation. I guess the one thing I would add that she didn't is that when you walk away from those ranches, you walk away from your animals and that's a tough thing to do.

Anyway the cattle ranching industry in this province depends largely on the health of the Crown range resource. Most ranchers depend on Crown range for their cattle from May to October of each year. Also, unlike our fellow ranchers in other provinces, we live and operate in a province where government owns a vast majority of the land base. This means a good working relationship between landlord and tenant is imperative to the sustainability of our industry.

Agriculture overall contributes \$2.3B annually to the B.C. economy. The cattle ranching industry alone contributes almost \$400M a year in farm gate receipts and \$1.5B in spin-off impacts. Our industry is very proud to be a part of this province and this nation's great food producing industry. We supply our citizens with an abundance of healthy, clean, safe and delicious nourishment. However, we accomplish this by taking on huge financial commitments, working very long and hard hours, while constantly challenged by the most cranky and unpredictable factors – old Mother Nature. If that isn't enough, we are constantly challenged by changing government goal posts and policies, as well as mismanagement of the Crown resource that we so heavily rely on to sustain our industry in all of British Columbia. If this mismanagement continues it will surely wipe out our industry here in the Kootenays.

By mismanagement we mean forest in-growth which is something you have been hearing a lot about here today. Forest in-growth is erasing food on the ground for not only cattle, but for wild life as well. In-growth is estimated to occur in this area at a rate of 3500 hectares per year – translating to a loss of approximately two-thirds of the Rocky Mountain Trench to forest encroachment since 1950.

In the Trench cattle ranchers have worked with those advocates of wild life and grasslands as well as forests for more than three decades to stop and/or reverse the forest in-growth. We have come together under what was dubbed the Wild Life Agricultural Conflict which only masks the real underlying issue which is mismanagement of Crown land.

In order to reduce and reverse forest in-growth as well as fireproof grasslands, range land areas and communities we require larger fire window and also change to forest legislation and policy. Currently this work cannot be accomplished. Although it appears that we are meeting the targets set out in the Kootenay Boundary Land Use Plan for reducing forest in-growth – referred to as ecosystem restoration, those targets are meaningless and they are grossly insufficient.

As a result cattle ranching in the East Kootenays is at risk. We are losing ranchers every year and we are constantly faced with cuts in allowable forage and numbers of cattle on our Crown range. Ranchers are going broke. Without being able to maintain a minimum herd size, ranching becomes uneconomic and will soon no longer be a sustainable contributor to our local and provincial economies.

This mismanagement does not only affect ranching but all those who enjoy and benefit from our area's beautiful and invaluable wild life populations. Wild life and cattle are increasingly forced to compete for a diminishing resource which, if not reversed will devastate wild life numbers as well as the ranching industry.

The recommendations to improve forest management for the safety of communities and the sustainability of land based industries are clear. We must make the necessary changes to provincial legislation to allow fireproofing of communities and Crown range lands to occur immediately.

There is no question that money will be required to undo the mistakes in the forest management over the last one hundred years. The government currently states that there is no provincial money available for fireproofing and ecosystem restoration. – my friend Steve and I had a discussion about that at a meeting a couple of weeks ago in Fernie. However, this is a weak and unacceptable position in the face of the cost to the taxpayers to fight fire. The numbers I have seen put on a board in Fernie were \$500M to fight fire and for restoration work another \$25M and in the face of value of timber lost, \$5B. Do these numbers not speak for themselves, loud and clear? It brings to mind the cliché 'penny wise, pound foolish.'

Mr. Filmon we implore that you recommend that this government invest money in this province's economic and social futures. Also, allow ranchers, wild life advocates and grassland advocates to play a role in fireproofing. We

ask that you recommend changes to provincial legislation and policy so that we can help in getting the work done.

For example we would recommend an overall basic operational procedure for fire rehabilitation work, currently administered by the Fire Protection Branch of the Ministry of Forests. We understand that there is a basic process in place for rehabilitation of fire roads and fire guards but the issue of what to seed became a show stopping event here in our area. And I am not sure whether the seed has hit the ground in those areas yet or not because there was a huge argument over whether native seed should be put down or domestic seed or – you know all that kind of stuff should be done before a fire ever starts. There needs to be a basic operational procedure in place to take care of that stuff so that in a timely manner it can be done.

This means drastically increased risk of erosion in the spring for us, noxious weed infestation and negative impacts to livestock, wild life and forestry. We don't expect the government to pay the whole shot, but we do expect the government to make changes to properly manage our Crown land for the benefit of all. Currently this is not happening and we are all at risk.

Thank you.

GF Thank you very much, Faye. Obviously there is a meeting of minds amongst a very large number of you who have presented here with respect to the forest management practices and the use of prescribed burnings and thinning and all of those things. Early on in October, just after I was appointed I flew over a number of the areas in which there remains significant ranching. Unfortunately because of weather we couldn't come over here, but we saw similar circumstances in and around Kamloops and north and out towards Chase and in that area where there is a lot of cattle country. You could see the encroachment and certainly – again I am not trying to defend forestry people – but I don't think they would argue with the need to continue to do some proper practices and thinning and keeping back the encroachment of the forest into the grasslands of British Columbia. So we are going to have to just find ways to get it done, I guess.

With respect to fireproofing, when you say that you want to be a positive player, do you see an ability to have private organizations like the Cattle Producers or the Wild Life Federation – because they are very supportive, they have made two presentations to us – that somehow there would be a role for them to play in this. I know that there would be an issue with respect to liability coverage from an insurance standpoint should something get away and nobody wants to accept that responsibility. I intend to speak to the insurance industry about it incidentally, I think it is in their interest to find ways to loosen up the liability based on people following prescribed procedures and doing it under due care and attention that some of that

liability risk should perhaps be lightened. Do you see that as being a possibility for your participation in it?

FS Yes, I do, Mr. Filmon and it's happened in the past. Ranchers, wild life groups, Forestry – we used to go out together on prescribed burns. We have equipment, we have knowledge, and we are on the ground all the time. As Ms. Mose pointed out, we know where the water sources are, we know the road areas – sure it can be done together. But when you get stupidity clambering over stupidity then that kind of stuff – oh well you can't do it because of Workers' Compensation and you can't burn because people don't like smoke, and you can't do – you know what? I wonder how they liked the smoke this summer. And you know what? It would be a lot more economically efficient to take those poor people who – I feel sorry for people who have smoke problems – if they have asthma or breathing difficulties, or whatever – then plan some prescribed burns – take those people, move them to a different city, put them up in a hotel and feed them or whatever for the few days or at maximum a week. It would be a whole hell of a lot cheaper than the money that was spent this summer trying to look after people during a wild fire. I mean, some common sense has to be returned to the whole situation. And it can be taken care of. And yes, some money has to be spent.

GF On the Prairies we have similar issues with stubble burning and it's been a huge issue as long as I have been in public office, which is longer than I care to remember. But the outcome eventually was that an acknowledgement that it was a natural and important part of land management and we had to then put very, very tight circumstances in terms of wind conditions and, you know, the dryness and all of those things and there were certain periods of the year in which eventually it was zeroed in on those periods of the year in which we had a reasonable prospect of those weather conditions and we were able to do it. Because we have exactly the same issues with respect to respiratory illnesses and people who don't want the smoke and so on. So if there is a will and a consensus, there has got to be a way.

FS Exactly.

GF Thank you very much.

FS Thank you.

GF We now have Sheldon Reed. Good evening. Welcome.

Sheldon Reed:

My name is Sheldon Reed, you got that right – alias Fire at One – I am also the guide outfitter in the Land Creek/Moyie River area and a life long member of Cranbrook.

First off, I would like to take my hat off to all the fire fighters, loggers, helicopter pilots and personnel who took part in the suppression of this fire and all the other wild fires across B.C.

This summer I worked for thirty plus days on the Lamb Creek fire as a strike forest task force leader and also actioned four other spot fires that were started by lightning. Due to my vested interest in this particular area, knowledge of the land and the terrain, it brings concern to me to how this fire was actioned and the strategic planning of stopping it or whatever you want to make of that.

Was the fire labeled as a project fire after three days of observation? The value protection, they stood by and watched it. Heavy equipment – they could have been onto it in a couple of hours and why were we putting in fire lines instead of fire guards. Back burning in this country, in this type of terrain should be a lesson to us. In this terrain and the conditions there are too many spot fires with dominant winds in the directions that were the wrong way. Dirt, water, and remove the fuels – don't move fuels into the firesides of guards or add fire to fire – stop the back burning – it doesn't work around here.

A few other questions – why were personnel from out of region and in some cases out of province appointed to upper decision making positions and management of a fire or landscape they knew nothing about? The loggers, equipment operators, guide outfitters and local forestry workers should be the people involved in the strategic planning of this type of task. They are the people who know the land, the fuels, the road systems, logging and access the best out of everyone.

Safety was good. Communications on large fires like this – the different sectors need to be designated channels to operate on. Poor communications

...  
(Tape #11)

...dirt, smoke, the heat in the front lines – you are hard core and you did a great job and I will stand by you any day.

GF Thank you very much, Sheldon. I obviously don't have the answers to those questions, but we will take the questions and see if we can find answers to them. With respect to a lot of the things that you are speaking of, the use of the back burning as a technique and having outside leadership versus local knowledge when key decisions are being made and fighting the fire ladders that have come before us throughout the hearings and the question of

communications availability. So I will certainly attempt to respond to the questions that you have asked and hopefully we will be able to get some sensible information for you.

SR Okay, sounds good. Just wanted to ask those things.

GF Thank you.

GF Mike Pierce? Good evening. Welcome.

Mike Pierce:

Good evening ladies and gentlemen, my name is Mike Pierce. I have been a forest fire fighter for over ten years or so now. This is my first time that I have done anything like this – as well as speak in front of a group of people, so please bear with me. I am no politician, trust me.

First of all I want to thank Mr. Gary Filmon and everyone involved including everyone here tonight for giving me this opportunity to speak to you people tonight.

As I was reading my local newspaper, I was so happy hear that someone was actually going to investigate this year's past fire season. Then to actually have an opportunity to tell the general public about this year's fire season and the truth of what has actually happened, not only this year but in past years as well.

I am here tonight to tell all of you how the Lamb Creek fire started and what went on during that time on the fire since I was one of the first crews that were there to fight that fire. I brought along a photo album tonight for anyone who would care to see, or have any doubts about what I am saying to you tonight to show the general public what it is like, and what is experienced on a daily basis fighting forest fires.

Since Gary is here tonight I would like to tell my story from the beginning of the fire season and then I will get into the Lamb Creek fire as we all want to know so many things regarding this fire.

First of all I want to state that my speech is not intended to get anyone or any company in trouble or to disrespect anyone in any way. I am doing this because changes are needed; money is being wasted, as well as I almost lost my own life this year three times.

I got a call for employment to work at the Cranbrook PAB Centre here in Cranbrook. So being unemployed at the time I took up that offer. My job was working at the warehouse here in town. When I went down to my new job on the first day to see what my job duties were, I was very shocked at what I saw. But I said to myself, hey this is the way I get to stay in town and don't have to fight forest fires this year and spend more time with my children, this is the year I didn't have to worry about. It's like an itch that never goes away once you start fighting fires. Once it's in your blood it seems to always be there.

But this year I saw the light and truth and finally accepted the fact that all the year nothing has changed – ending up in the hospital, coughing up blood and on various oxygen masks and medicines made me realize a lot of things. One of these being it's not worth my own life any more. And at one point I did care. I fought fires for the people, the forest itself, the animals and their homes

because it made me feel I was doing something good and I was proud of what I did.

Well, back to the warehouse – it was very low in stock – I mean low in all aspects – equipment – some things looked like they were there for years. It was dirty and very disorganized. Fire hoses were laying around outside the building, unrolled. An old trailer that was full of parts of fire equipment lying all around; chain saw parts, tools, etc., but hey, I didn't mind it gave me work and something to do. I enjoyed cleaning up the place, along with another worker they hired the same day that I was hired. They had to hire two more employees to help us at the warehouse as we were getting very busy at this point.

So then after we had four of us clean up the place, various fields, etc. We had an overflow of ranger tents set up as well, full of fire fighter equipment. Then one day I had a day off as I was working fourteen days straight, two days off down at the warehouse. So on my day off I went to do some errands and when I came home there was a message on my answering machine from the PAB. I called back and that person told me that things were getting very slow and they had to lay somebody off – and it was me. Something a little fishy here. First of all, I was the first guy hired and then they hired one more person, and then a few days later two more people to help in the warehouse for other various duties – why was I the first person to be laid off I said to myself. So I knew something was up.

So in turn I went to work and guess what I did – I fought forest fires. It took a matter of ten minutes to find work because of all the fires. I guess they didn't want anyone with fire experience working at the warehouse because the other three guys that were hired never had their S-100 nor fought forest fires before. These guys were ordering fire equipment and loading up supply trucks – what a gong show I said to myself.

Then, as I was fighting forest fires I heard there was a guy who was also hired who had worked for them for a few years, had experience in the fire field but he mainly did supply lines and was running a portable warehouse out on a fire.

Then I heard a rumour that they let me go because someone smelled alcohol on my breath. What an excuse and what a lie. So I went to confront that person who hired me. I won't say who – and they said they didn't have time to talk to me and to avoid the subject. But when I got my word in, they denied it.

So Mr. Filmon, investigate that, please. I call that wrongful dismissal of employment and lost wages as far as I am concerned, a legal issue I do believe.

So as I headed to the PAB to get supplies for my truck to go fight a fire, I see those same guys running around with their heads cut off and laughed to myself saying, hey that's your loss.

The first fire I went to I had personally driven the equipment out to was the fire in Fernie B.C. Still they were ordering more gear for this fire that was going on for two weeks when I arrived there. I saw equipment just lying around in the bush that could have been back at the warehouse for other fires that needed it.

This fire when it started, I remember taking the cube van out, not quite half full of gear to meet other contract crews and government crews and was to wait at a marshalling point to take the gear to the fire. I didn't have any other instructions, other than to meet there and wait for further instructions. So, as we all waited for the fire boss or any government person to meet us there, they just drove by us, just kept trucking by to the fire. So I contacted them on the radio for instructions to the fire, along with my van various crews and two water trucks. What a lack of communication there. No one knew what they were doing or where to go – big problem again.

So, we all went to find this fire point, luckily we did and it wasn't too far out of town. So when I arrived I was there until about 2:00 p.m. before they let me drive back into town. I was there at 7:30 a.m. on that day waiting for the government people to arrive to take us to the fire. We arrived around 9:30 or so and the guys started slinging equipment from me and went up on the top of the mound at 10:00 a.m. What a waste of time and effort trying to fight a fire of around 300 hectares. I have a map of this fire from my own personal records.

I worked on this fire for around five or seven days, stayed in a nice motel in Fernie along with a lot of fire fighters. There were around 70 people working on this fire. I have a manifest of all the people who were working on the fire. I can't believe it. So many people on a small 300 hectare fire – a waste of money in many ways and time that's for sure. I have pictures of this fire in my photo album here tonight.

Sorry – for the record – this was not the first fire I was called to. It was the Lamb Creek fire but I wanted to talk last about that fire and then my speech. So as I went from one fire to another, I ended up in Creston at a fire base camp that was still being built when I arrived. So we in turn helped set it up. I even had pictures taken there that ended up in the newspaper there.

There were a few different fires around that region so many crews were at different fires from that camp. There were a lot of problems at that camp that's for sure. Just to list a few, out of province crews sitting doing nothing for days, no food for fire fighters, lunches – particularly in the morning. Someone stole a whole lot of computer equipment from the base. General things like

personal blinds being stolen from our sleeping quarters. Our own personal cell phones, etc.

People in charge – we call them ICs – that had no experience or haven't done this type of work for thirteen years as one has told me – having meetings the night before discussing what the plan was for the next day and what equipment we would need. Every day the same old thing – no plan was ever executed in the manner it was supposed to be, no equipment on site that we had set up for the day for that fire. Out of province people sitting at the bottom of a mountain until the day was almost over before someone sent them up the mountain at 4:00 p.m. We would usually leave around 6:00 p.m. on the top of the mountain.

The list goes on and on but I don't have the time here tonight to tell you. I could write a book about this and the past year's experience, but the general public would not be too impressed with this book, trust me.

The Lamb Creek fire – oh what a mess this was to begin with. As I said earlier, I was one of the first people to be on site to fight this fire. When I arrived there, there were two contract crews loaded up full of gear, and one government crew. We waited for a pre-meeting and got a run down on the fire, how big it was and what we were going to do on that first day. Well we were told they watched it burn for two to three days first of all, and they told us they thought it would be fine because it was burning around some cut blocks and would not pose any threat at any time. We were all briefly shown a map of the fire, but no maps were available for anyone for our own means. So we were told there were two spot fires they wanted us to look at first which were approximately one kilometer away from the main fire.

So off we went to the spot fires, one contract crew of five men, and one crew of five to another. These so-called spot fires were not that big at all. The first one was the size of approximately 30 feet square, which was only warm since a skidder had already dumped a few loads of water on it before we arrived to it. The other spot fire was three times as big but again the ground was only hot as the rocks kept the heat around – again a skidder had dumped water on that one as well. So we ran a small pump and ran a few lengths of econohose to each spot fire, doused the ground and cleared the area with our chain saws and dug a hand guard all around the spot fire.

After my crew was done we went up to help the other contract crew with their spot fire. As we did, the same thing – this was our whole day and we were sent home around 4:00 p.m. that day to come back tomorrow at 8:00 a.m. Which we did and came back at 8:00 a.m.

Day two of the Lamb Creek fire, we waited around for the head guys who were late in showing up again, as usual in every fire that I have been on this year. All the bigwigs are never there when they tell them to show up. It must be that

good old Tim Horton's Coffee – just joking. Anyway as we had our daily morning meeting when they finally arrived, I could not believe what we were told what our duties were for the day. We were told to go to the safety zone which turned out to be a real safety zone and go fight fire from the front of the fire. What kind of coffee did he have this morning? Was this guy for real? You don't send ten guys to fight an out of control fire with no resources set up, especially to the head of the fire. So we told the head guy that we don't fight fires like that – he says okay, I don't know what I'm doing, you guys set up your system and you tell me how to do it. So we told him what our plan of action was and so he agreed with our plan of attack and off he went to the safety zone to meet the helicopter that was slinging our equipment to the landing site so that we could set up our plan of attack and start running hoses and try to get this fire under some kind of control.

Then upon our arrival to the safety zone, to our surprise, there was a government forest fire team in the process of slinging up the equipment to where we were going to go. So we said to ourselves – what's going on here. So in turn we just continued to help them load up their equipment and we slung up half our own equipment that we had on our trucks. The helicopter came back and picked up the remaining crews. So we waited and waited and didn't know what was going on. So we got on the radio to see what was happening, no reply, and afterwards instructions to stay put for now.

During this time we could see the fire burning, coming towards us from our safety zone. Again pictures are in my book to show you. Then we had heard on the radio the fire had burned the helicopter landing zone on top, where they had slung in the equipment and the government guys were running down the mountain to the safety zone. I guess a few of them found a quad on the cat trail and came down and the rest were offed and ran down. We were told to move all the trucks into the middle of the safety zone as we all rushed to do so. But, hey, we could not move the government truck because the keys were nowhere to be found. Where were those keys, in the pocket of this person who was driving that truck? Luckily it wasn't in the way or there might have been some major problems.

So we sat there and watched the fire slowly burn towards us, watched the water being dropped on the fire by buckets of water. We watched for about two hours until they said we are all going back to the meeting point, where we waited for a few more hours and were told to go home and come back again tomorrow at 8:00 a.m. So here we are, ten contract guys waiting there from 7:30 a.m. until finally someone came around at 11:00 a.m. and said quote what are you guys doing here? We say we're here to fight fires if we ever get the chance to do it. This man said this is a project fire now and told us to go back to the PAB centre and ask what we were supposed to do from there.

Again, what can I say? One big gong show. So what can we do – just sit around all day until 6:00 p.m. at the base with a lot of other crews – as well as

out of province crews. Some just went to their hotel rooms waiting for further instructions.

We have to change this system and we have to do it in a big way. The time is now before next season comes. All in all the Lamb Creek fire could have been put out in the very most a week in time – if we had stuck to our motto – the fire fighters motto – hit them fast and hit them hard. Was this done with this fire as well as many fires in British Columbia this year – the answer is no as far as I am concerned. That's why the fire went out of control and did so much damage. Just think of all the money and time and resources we could have saved if we had just stuck to the general rules of fighting forest fires. Just maybe all those other fires in B.C. would never have done what they did. All those homes might have been saved.

But Mr. Gary Filmon if you are very serious about doing something – I am here and I am proof and I will help and I know I can make a difference – save our government money, time and resources that we had no matter what anyone has said this past year. I have been there. I have risked my own life over many years and have never received a thank you from anyone except this year people posting signs and in the newspapers.

I'd like to start up a special team of guys and wander through the bush and document each fire and what goes on to show you and it would blow your mind at the things you would see. Remember I have been there, I know what goes on in this real world. I can say that if I were to write a book of my experiences and told the general public what I have seen over the past years fighting forest fires, it would be all over the newspapers, etc. and there would be a lot of explaining to do from both the Forestry and the government. I always seem to remember each year us fire fighters are not allowed to talk to the general public. I wonder why.

That's all I have to say for now and I want to thank all the people for their time and effort in fighting the forest fires in B.C. this year and I was happy to see all the great efforts in contract crews working in turn with each other, alongside, with the government. For all the people who lost their homes and property, and for the ones that lost their lives and have gotten hurt, I remember this year as a year I made a choice. That choice was to speak out and try to make a difference. I hope in some way I will be able to do so. No more excuses about lack of resources or inexperienced people. We had the resources right here in Cranbrook itself. There were plenty of people that were qualified to fight the fires that were just called to work.

Thank you to everyone here for letting me have this opportunity to speak to you, everyone involved in Firestorm 2003 and also a special thank you to Mr. Gary Filmon and wish you the very best in your project. I hope everyone here can enjoy the rest of your evening.

Thank you.

GF Thank you for all of your efforts and the commitment you have made in fighting the forest fires over the years. You can be assured that your presentation will be part of the public record. Can we have a copy of it, please?

MP I have sent a copy by e-mail to Firestorm 2003, they wanted it.

GF We'll have it at the office then.

MP But if you'd like I can leave you a copy.

GF That's all right; if it's there we'll get it. Thank you very much.

MP Thanks.

GF Mr. Rob Gay. Good evening, welcome.

Rob Gay:

Thank you, thank you very much. Ladies and gentlemen and Gary and Jim pleased to meet you tonight. Thank you for your time this evening and thank you very much for coming to our region to hear some of our ideas on how our province might more effectively and efficiently deal with the many aspect of managing fires and the people impacted by the ineffectiveness of the fire planning that we have witnessed – probably not this year, but in the last few years.

As I mentioned, my name is Rob Gay and I would like to bring a few perspectives to this review team this evening. I started out in forestry. I am a professional forester at the age of 17 in a little fire camp called Elko B.C., a little community up the road and for 23 some years I worked for the Ministry of Forests starting with a shovel, building fire lines and at the end I was I guess what they call a Fire Boss A. So I have handled fire crews of up to 400 people. So I can understand some of the issues that Mike had talked about earlier because those larger fires are quite a challenge. But I don't ever remember starting to work at 8:00 in the morning, in that time of the year the daylight is quite a bit earlier than that. So things have changed maybe for the better but in the old days we used to fight fires long days and there are people in this room who will attest to that, they were on some of my crews.

I finished fighting fires in 1984 when I left the Ministry of Forests in an international fire in the Flathead area and I was also on the Semlin Creek fire which became part of the Lamb Creek fire and probably part of the fire guard that helped stop that fire. So I have a little bit of background on the fires and I don't have a lot of experience on structural fires. I did though spend seven years on a volunteer fire department in a small town in B.C.

The other thing I'd like to mention, the other perspective is kind of assistant to business. In my present position I am the General Manager with a corporation called Community Futures Development Corporation and my staff and I provide loans, business educational services and assistance to community economic development. So I just have a little word on that as well.

The points I want to talk about are roles and responsibility including the current command structure we've got and a little bit on interface and finally the impact of the state of emergency on small businesses in the community.

The fall of 1994 was the turning point in my view for the B.C. Forest Service. The provincial fire control was centralized into five or six fire centres. The objectives stated at the time were to maximize effectiveness and the authors of the plan also predicted cost effectiveness, enhanced preparedness and many other benefits. After nine years of watching this, and these years have not been unprecedented, we have had in my experience many fires, we have burned as many hectares, so some of the stuff that I hear, and I just don't see

the statistics to back it up. But I think we have tried this model, the centralized model where the command centre is basically out of Victoria and in my view it is a fire control model and it does not do much for fire preparedness. I just caught the end of Faye's presentation but I know the ranchers and the wild life people just feel that we are not managing our fuels. And I can only speak for the southern interior, I haven't worked in the north or on the coast, but from the southern interior I feel quite comfortable.

When they made this plan and you know I am not against centralization by any means, I know business has to do that to be effective in some cases, but they predicted I think some of the outcomes but some of them they didn't. One of the ones that I really have a problem with and unfortunately is the back bone to our system is what I call a sub-culture basically and in British Columbia fire fighting is not a full time job. In the past we had crews reporting to a local manager or a district manager, a forest ranger or whatever you call it and these crews in the summers did project work. They were summer crews and for the most part seasonal crews that were going to college and university, so they were student crews. What has happened now is we have created these four or three month summer jobs with almost an elite crew of fire fighters and they are well trained and very well paid. But that's all they do. They fight fire and they go around to different provinces and we have created such a system and our union backs it, our government backs it, our employment insurance backs it and the fact that these young people never move on. We have created a culture where they can make enough money in that short period of time to survive their year on. This is the back bone of our system and I keep asking myself, what is the incentive to put a fire out? If I am making my money in my three or four months and overtime and everything else that goes with it, it's not a good model, and it hasn't proven well.

Conceptually it is probably right, you are highly skilled you've got trained workers but it's a very short season so I think you need to re-think this and as Mike mentioned earlier that the fire management is coming in from all over British Columbia, the fire bosses that take charge – they don't have the local knowledge and often those folks are seasonal at best. So when Mike suggested that they had a better plan than the boss that came in, I must agree with that because I have heard that from other people as well.

The forest industry and the ministry personnel I guess in the past took pride in that that was part of the role. If you were logging for them and if you worked for the ministry that was your priority when the fire got high in the summer, you were trained and you would be the fire boss, or some sort of command position on a fire. It worked well for the most part – as I mentioned earlier these crews do not do project work, they mostly stay around on standby or hang around. And they don't do project work because the ministry nor the industry can afford to hire them. So it's a travesty what we are doing to these young people. I don't blame them at all. It's just the system – it's not the right one in place. So I'd better leave that, I think you get my point.

The other thing is reduced dependency on local crews. Some people I know that work in the woods in terms of logging or silva culture work were called in very late on these fires and when they were finally called in, in this year, last year, the last three or four years – the fires get under control a lot quicker and you have heard that probably a number of times around the province about the local crews. We have depleted our local networks. Faye mentioned earlier about some of the burning that was done and that was very true, there were groups that would come together with the ministry; volunteer weekends, whatever. And sure there are some of these liability things and they are very real, but the new model does not encourage that. In fact it is very difficult to even borrow the equipment from a new crew. You know it all belongs to the taxpayer in the long run.

Escalation of costs – aircraft and heavy equipment is now the main line of offense and this capital intensity machinery is just creating uncontrollable expenditure and I think somebody needs to look at that. You know the whole objective of centralization was cost reduction. I don't think it has happened and I don't think it would be very hard to do an analysis to see that one.

Another thing we have created too is a bit of elitism that I really don't like, where we have contract crews, we have government crews, and people probably talk to you about these different crews. They are all treated a little bit different, we saw – you know the volunteers that were helping in Kelowna for the homes and what not, well we had people here making – you know it was a gravy train. There was no real incentive to put these fires out and I hate to say it, but it's very true. We have a system that is now based on greed and elitism and we've got to do something so I am very glad to see you gentlemen come out and hear that.

My other points around the system, a couple more; is a lack of proper fuel management – we hear now from the ecologists and it was nothing new for us in the south east Kootenays every town has got a fire. You talk to Golden they had a sue fire. In the early 70's I fought in a little town called Greenwood, the Haas fire, where we had fire fighters on the roofs of the buildings putting out sparks. This isn't new. But the locals were part of it then. Yes, we had some losses and it wasn't great but we – so it's not new, every town has got a fire in the Kootenays and will continue to do that so we are not hoping to put them out, but we are not managing our fuels at all. We don't do slash burning any longer. We don't do spring burning. We do very little burning for wild life or for the cattle industry, and we are living on a time bomb for sure.

The other thing that concerns me is the model I've heard, and I've never seen it in writing but the rumour is somebody needs to pay for these fires in the interface area; there is no question about it. It's a different type of individual we need to manage those fires, it's quite – we don't have people that do both structural firefighting as well as woods fire fighting and it takes money, so we

have heard of a taxation model where our taxes – we would be taxed – I live in the rural area and the interface area myself – we would be taxed and this tax would go to this fire control centre. Gentlemen, I do not want my taxes going there. I don't mind paying because I think we probably need to pay and I already pay lots of taxes, but that model that's there now – no. That's not the one I want to pay my taxes toward. So if you hear this, I just think that would be a big mistake.

So that's my rant on kind of what I call the failed test and they have had nine years and I just don't think it's done what it was set out to do.

The provincial state of emergency is really interesting and I understand that this authorizes the office of the Fire Commissioner, the Ministry of Forests, the RCMP, and Provincial Emergency Program into action and yes, in emergencies we need to have some way to do that. Unfortunately when that happened very few understood who the coach and manager of this was. And in our situation we were quite fortunate that the city of Cranbrook and the Regional District of East Kootenay took a lead in this and we would get reports – we'd get a number of reports, the communications were pretty good – well I for one, and I'm not sure, I know my colleagues at work, I asked who is in charge of this and nobody really knew. So I think we really need to look at that. You probably heard the confusion, the worry, the loss of income, all the things that this provincial state of emergency and the one-hour notice has caused to a lot of people. I know in my neighbourhood, elderly people – I knew about fire behaviour and I knew about the weather patterns and I wasn't panicking, we were some 12 miles away and they were hauling everything they could away. Their animals – you know they put them up for adoption or whatever and it was terrible to see this while sat by and did little at that time.

The other point that I want to make is the tourism sector which is becoming a large part of the economic driver of this region, of all East Kootenays – it's large, it's growing ...

*(tape #12)*

... that road was closed almost daily by Parks Canada and probably for good reason for public safety but little businesses along that area that depends on the summer – the Radium Hot Springs is a good example, the motels there – many were devastated. Some were my clients and I talked to them daily and when I see, in your terms of reference, that one of the things you are looking at is compensation for the province of B.C. from the federal government and I think that is a wise thing to do, but I think we also need to look at the little guy as well. How can the government of British Columbia help those folks? And I know it is not a part of your terms of reference, but I think we have got to keep that mind.

So in closing, I just have two recommendations. I would really like you to have a look at this nine year old fire management organization of the Ministry of

Forests. I think it is expensive, I think it is elitist and I think it is lacking opportunity for local input and planning for the on the ground local activities.

The other thing is it would be very nice to see some assistance to the Regional Districts and the communities to become an integral part of the Emergency Response Process in B.C. They are here, they want to do it and I think they can do it well if they are provided with some support and training to get involved with it.

Thank you very much.

GF Thank you very much, Rob. Addressing your last point, I don't think there is anything inconsistent with having the state of emergency declared at the provincial level because that is where the legislative authority is, and having local governments, either municipal or regional, take the lead in fighting the – you know – the challenge whatever it is – whether it's a flood or a fire or whatever other state of emergency there might be – a mud slide or an avalanche. It works that way in other provinces. In Manitoba there is a coordinating function that is played by the provincial level just simply because as I said in Kelowna you don't want Gerry Zimmerman on the phone trying to get pumper trucks from the lower mainland. Somebody at the provincial level can do that because they have the contacts and can perform that role of commandeering the equipment and getting it moved down to where it is needed. All these kinds of resources that would be beyond what you would have available here in terms of equipment, personnel, whatever – getting the water bombers in from other provinces, all those kinds of things; you need that coordinating role and you need somebody who has those contacts beyond the local level. But, in terms of who's the general in charge of the emergency, I see no reason why it can't be a local person. And you have said it, Mike said it, other people have said it consistently that having local input in a time of emergency can not only save a lot of resources, but can save lives. Knowing where the back roads are, knowing where the water supplies are, and knowing who to call for a piece of equipment that you need instantly, kind of thing. Most of the time local people know that. Somebody from Kamloops or Victoria isn't going to know that. So these are common sense solutions to a problem of not just who is in charge, but how does the structure work, and I think it can be made to work.

A lot of the issues that you have referred to, for instance the matter of the difference between the training and the capabilities of a structural fighter versus a wild fire fighter and I think they both acknowledge right now that neither feels comfortable going into the other's territory. Many people have suggested and I don't think it's a problem in fact I think both sides would probably prefer to have some training in the other's area. I know Chief Zimmerman said that his fire fighters would prefer to have a greater knowledge of fighting fires in the interface area that take place in the forest and the forestry people have said they would like to have a greater

understanding of the issues that the structural fighters deal with because they end up backing into each other's territory and it would be a helpful thing. So those are good suggestions that I think can be worked on.

The issue of what time people action the fires – it's been raised virtually every place that we have been and there seems to be a perception that it used to be that people went on to the fire scene at dawn, as soon as it was light and safe enough to move around and got the best use of the hours between dawn and say 10:00 o'clock in the morning when conditions were cool and most receptive to fighting fires. So I have no idea what the answer is on that, but it is certainly something we are going to have to find out.

The summer project work – I think it is a mixed blessing. One of the things is that there are very few areas of government in which you can effectively use and balloon your – have an expanding staff, where you need to all of a sudden gear up in a big way in the summer. We normally don't get trained people who are available to you for four months of the year. Normally they are looking for a full-time job. So this is one of those instances in which they are well trained and skilled to do their job, it may be the best solution rather than trying to keep people on year round. There is an alternative to that which I think you have suggested, which is utilizing people who are forestry workers themselves and are available in the local community and maybe because of their skills and local knowledge are just as capable of doing it. On the other hand when I look at what the rap attack people do, you know – flying in on a helicopter and repelling down to the ground and doing all those kinds of things, you've got to be really, really trained to do that. There isn't one person ...

RG There is room for specialization in the model as well.

GF Again we have to look for a blend in which we take advantage of all of the good things and maybe fix some of the other things. So, thanks for coming.

RG Thank you very much.

GF Joan Bray? Welcome.

Joan Bray:

Thanks. It's nice to be here. I guess – I don't – I'm not a forester and I don't understand fires very well and I am coming at this from a human perspective.

What I would like to say is sort of how a person goes from being a responsible citizen to being forced to be a victim and then treated like a villain and hopefully by not driving by this hotel on the way home from the office today, I am reclaiming my rights as a responsible citizen.

I just want to share with you some of the insights that I have gained by being, I guess evacuated in the fire. I don't think I will be as articulate as many of the previous speakers, but it's really been one of the most difficult things I have had to deal with in my life. And I am no stranger to government systems; I've worked in health care for thirty years and was previously the co-chair to the Minister of Health Advisory Committee on HIV and AIDS. Plus I have my nine years of living in the Kootenays I managed a health care program throughout the entire East Kootenays so I understand this country, including most of the back roads, seeing palliative care clients very well.

Nothing though in my previous years of dealing with government and dealing with health care work had prepared me for what it was going to be like to be evacuated. I know that people were trying their best. I sat through some of the previous presentations thinking I must have been in some sort of delusional state as people talked about the excellent communications and how well they kept people informed and I sincerely think they tried their best, but maybe some displaced egos and some very internal patting on the back and not listening to any voices of dissent – I do feel that being evacuated we were the lowest common denominator and a human condition associated with fires – there was never once that I was really afraid of the fire – but two days after we were evacuated I became sincerely concerned and afraid of the bureaucracy.

The government philosophy that I experienced during the fire and was clearly articulated at the few evacuee meetings I was able to attend, was a philosophy of absolute paternalism and an attitude of please just sit down, shut up, act like a victim and let us take care of you. The system I am used to in health care where we deliberately cut, leave people at maximum risk, give them ultimate autonomy, let them make decisions about their own life were all things that were removed from me during the evacuation state.

The Provincial Emergency Program, and I will just go over a few of my observations and I will send notes – the Provincial Emergency Program to me is one of the most confusing bureaucratic structures I have ever seen and I guess to sum it up, it seemed like there was no one person who could be responsible to make a decision, but all participants clearly had the right to say no. And you may have gathered I am sort of not a sit down and take things lightly kind of person, so we did have the opportunity to visit the fire camp.

The police that were set up at the end of our road – I actually quite got to like them – they were RCMP from Vancouver, and we had great chats because previously they had worked on the G-8 Summit and talked about opposing views on pepper spraying, and idealistic young Canadians. I sincerely questioned them on what they were going to do with a middle-aged woman should I decide to get out of control – in fact they got to like me so well, and I think they were as frustrated about their lack of information on the fire that when I'd pull up after work they would just simply hand me the briefing notes that they had received that day.

This was sort of the height of oppressed group behaviour and that is one of the – if you are looking at sincerely improving the human condition here, that is one of the theoretical things I think you should look at. When I could get away from work I attended a couple of the meetings that were held in this very hotel and it still makes it kind of hard to come into this place. The people at the meetings who sincerely thought they were doing a good job were people who clearly were used to disseminating information but were in no way prepared and not equipped to handle any difficult questions. And I personally didn't think my questions were difficult. They had actually been questions that after I had been to the fire camp, I'll tell you a little tour about that – I was instructed to come to one of the meetings and say – go to one of those meetings at the thing and ask them what criteria they are using for when you can go home – I live at Green Bay, not at Munro Lake – and under whose direction are you finally going to be allowed to go home. So I thought no this person wouldn't set me up to look like an idiot so I came to the meeting and asked that question. And that was treated with a hostile non-response – at one point we were told ten days, so two days later I came back from meetings and said so it must be eight days now and I was clearly told ten days – and it's still ten days. And I thought oh my God – on their time lines I might never get home.

The police at the roadside, as I said, were there clearly to enforce restrictions. But then the word came down that we could have a visit in – go into the fire camp and pick up your little voucher to get in. So fine, my husband and I toodled off to the fire camp so as he set out to get the voucher that we needed to get in for a four hour pass we were told, I did the things I liked to do, I moseyed around and talked to the people in the fire camp. Some wonderful observations there and asked them, you know, what the experience was like. It's a bit confusing though when you think these are the people that are actually out fighting the fires. They sleep in pretty shabby tents, their menu I sort of checked over didn't look to be that great, and they had no warm fuzzy feelings for the structural fire people. That was one of the few things that put me in a tizzy as I went to my office one day when I rounded the corner on Second Street and saw 144, because our local paper put this picture in – 144 fire fighters and I think 52 pieces of equipment all jammed in the fire station across from the golf course. And of course I stopped and said so what are you doing and they said waiting for structural fires. I said well, you

know, maybe there are some trees – and I was clearly told they do not do trees. At the fire camp we almost had a permit in our hands three times and then when we in fact got to have a little chat with Bob the Burner as he later came to be called, I sort of thought now this is the person in town that's rumored to be the absolute head of this. Why is here standing talking to my husband and I about a permit and clearly, you know again, was the sense of delegation hadn't been given who could make decisions on what. Then, finally, no we couldn't get a permit we were told by Bob because the next day we were going to be allowed back in. So that was fine, it was a guarded visit in. We were staying at our friends who were also evacuated but they had received the same evacuation order as us, but somebody came to deliver the order but never went back to follow-up on it so they didn't have to leave. So we just stayed at their house.

I drove into town only to ride back out in a bus where I was given goggles, a high-vis vest, told to wear long pants, long shirt and hard toed shoes and the visit would be 30 minutes. So we went across the railroad tracks – you really have to tour this wonderful area of the province – I got dropped off at the farthest beach point from my house, walked the entire beach, up the road, up our lane, into our seven acres, and this policeman who was beside me, who couldn't really quite come to terms with what it might be I was going to steal out of my own house, was in the house two minutes when he said I'm sorry you'll have to go. I said I've got thirty minutes and he said oh, and by the way you have to turn off your power – and this had been announced on the bus as we were going in and I said not bloody likely – like I grew up in the Prairies, we have three Ducks Unlimited Projects and my mom just convinced my dad to stop burning stubble. So wait 'til I go home, and phoning them first to tell them Gary Filmon says its okay.

Anyway, the thirty minutes was when we crossed the railroad tracks from the highway until we had to be back across the railroad tracks. Like if they had told me this was a little recess outing, I may have run. Anyway, the whole experience was quite demoralizing, having dress like nobody else dressed, and told to turn the breaker off to your power.

So at the next meeting, and no disrespect to the person who organized this because she is here, I expressed some concerns about how humiliating that was and that there may be some way of normalizing this activity. And, I was quite clearly told we don't need organized visitations at all, we were doing that sort of as an act of kindness. I saw that comment as being very punitive and a further putting in my place.

The group of people that were evacuated, and keep in mind the total number, there was maybe eighty of us, and that included the handful of us that live out there as full time residents and we do have a lot of Easterners as in Albertans that come for a few weeks in the summer. But to me the whole thing reeked of oppressed group behaviour. People were afraid to speak out against any

sort of public authority. You could tell people were given power that maybe never had had a lot of power before in their life – it is a very dangerous thing.

A few more observations that I have made, the railroad never once stopped sending hazardous goods and at times the fire was only a few hundred yards, a few hundred feet down that mountain from the railroad track. Since that, very close to our house, we have had a train derailment. The train derailment is rumored to be caused because the ties were so rotten that the tracks simply gave out. What kind of risk management was done around that?

When we were finally allowed to go back in to our houses, nobody seemed to be able to give us the time or when and in Munro Lake where there had been a huge fire, we were told no, Green Bay residents would be going back in before Munro Lake residents because in fact we had had no damage to our property. When we went back in, Munro Lake residents were already back in, and when we got back in – this is the part where we were made to feel like villains – at one time it was rumored that somebody had stolen a water pump and there were only two people who had stayed in initially in the fire and it rumored that they thought it was those two people. Later it came out that, no, the pump had broken down and sent out for repair but nobody had done the GPS relocation thing on it. So that caused more infighting in these few people that were evacuated.

When we did go back in though, the night that my husband was forced to leave was the night of the fire at Munro Lake and Al Bennett, I guess quite hysterically entered our house and demanded that he leave and the air was quite black that night and stuff – with the promise our house would be taken care of. When we went back in the door to our house had been left open and a friend of mine who is a paramedic, every time he was on duty out there he would go and check our house and say you can't leave the house door open. We had two old cats that because of the haste that Andrew had to leave that night, the police were going up and feeding the cats and then the door of the house was left open. A week before we left there had been a bear in our yard.

You know, unless you live in the Kootenays on seven acres with a south exposure, you probably wouldn't quite understand the rodent problem that we have been dealing with since. And also down the – we have a huge cattle pond on our land – the water supply to the cattle pond had been – the water hose had been cut and also a stonework bench that we had done had been deliberately smashed with a rock and the rock left on top of the bench. So would I trust someone to look after my property again? No, I wouldn't leave.

Some other observations and maybe they are rumours – just we seem to forget it was three days of rain before we were allowed back in. It was rain that finally put the fire out. We need to do on PR around Bob the Burner's reputation because the local folklore now is that Munro Lake didn't almost burn because of the fire, the rumour is and I have no idea if it is correct or not,

Munro Lake almost burned because of a back burn that he set. That is not fair for his reputation if it's not true.

The comment on overtime – what it takes to have a fire in the Kootenays – you know fuel, oxygen, something to ignite it and overtime is also something that you need to do a lot of PR around. That we could use the bombers in the '94 fire but they sat at the airport through this whole fire needs some questions.

That there needs to be some understanding, I guess, of the whole human end of it, to look at – I mean you've got theories on ecosystems and biology – please look at oppressed group behaviour. How could you when you only have eighty people not do some sort of inventory of analysis and look at the skills and the willingness for people to participate in an active meaningful way rather than being forced into a victim role.

To look at the theories around stress – I even phoned one time and found out yes there is stress counseling available – here is the 1-800 number and someone will phone you back from the interior. Not quite good enough. You need to design a system that maintains the dignity of the people that are evacuated. We didn't need to wear goggles and vests and that when no one else was wearing them. That was a rather de-humanizing experience.

It is still very difficult to talk about this and that the equipment – know what you are going to do with it before you get in place and horded in one huge fire station across from the golf course. Look at least like there is some sort of plan. You saw the money wasted all the time. It was like there was some sort of firemen's reunion in town. They paraded up and down the street – they were every place – when I'd go home to my friends and the fire is right there across the road. Like, in nursing there are some cross-training skills – if you work in emergency chances are you can work in surgery, if you work in surgery chances are in a pinch you can work in psychiatry. If you work in community, yes, you can enter a hospital again and know what to do. You know it is not acceptable to say to a middle-aged woman who is walking down my road at Green Bay and stops to talk to one of the guys in the fire thing because they are just standing around, and saying what are you doing and they saying well we don't do trees but if your house catches on fire. I don't know there has got to be a lot of changes to the system.

Who I do commend are the interior fire people for the sprinklers that they set up, that is what saved our homes. I do still, although I am quite sarcastic about the role of people involved that maybe didn't have a lot of power in their life before – I do sincerely believe that they were trying to do their best but I don't think their best understood a whole lot about oppressed group victimization and stress levels. And thanks for your time.

- GF Thank you very much, Joan. I guess the thing that jumps out at me is how difficult it is for any of us to put ourselves in your shoes so to speak, and try and understand all the emotions and anxieties that you went through during this period of time. I have not personally been evacuated, but I know that it would be a terrifying experience to leave everything behind and the cattle producers leaving cattle behind, you are wondering about what is happening and all of those kinds of issues of just walking out and leaving everything, and not know what is happening either to you or to your property. There is a need; there is a great need for straightforward communications and straightforward answers without speaking down to people. Because under those circumstances you are already feeling like you are the lowest on the totem pole. So thanks for sharing the experience and again this is going to be part of the public record that a lot of people will see. So thanks for coming.
- JB Maybe I should say that was Martha Balinski that used to be the provincial program job security. Thank you.

GF Now we have Ken Bridge.

Ken Bridge:

How are you? (Fine thanks, welcome).

I am a long time resident of the Kootenays, I was born and raised here and my Mom and Dad have had property at Munro Lake since 1962. I am a local business owner and what I saw of our tax dollars being spent this year, I don't think I have ever been more furious than I was this summer.

I have just made some notes here of what I basically saw. This is one of the driest years on record and there was a lightening strike up there and it was a low priority. You know I talked to two separate helicopter pilots and offered to bucket it and they said no, it's a low priority. You know, what I want to know is who makes that call and what type of education does he have to make a call on one of the driest years on record that it was low priority.

I understand we have initial attack crews, the rap attacks, why were they not dispersed to put this fire out. That's my first comment.

I am just going to give you a little rundown of the events that I saw. I never – I was one of the evacuees that stayed and I guess I was one of the guys that stole the fire pump. *(Did you give it back?)* Apparently. *(I'm just kidding)*.

On the evening of August 15<sup>th</sup> and on the evening of the 16<sup>th</sup>, I drove up Lamb Creek and the first night I went up 8-1/2 clicks, the second night we went up about 13 clicks – right up to Lamb Creek staging and right up into where the fire was. There was smoke, but I never saw any fire at all. August 16<sup>th</sup> it rained, everything was calm at that point. August 17<sup>th</sup> we were up there and we were up at Spur 2 and the helicopter landed and we asked the fellow what the game plan was. He said well we are getting ready to do some back burns. My background is furniture. I am not a forest fire fighter. You know, I'm like – so great – what have you got to do to put this out.

Monday, August 18<sup>th</sup> they tried to back burn, it would not light up it was too wet. August 18<sup>th</sup> they tried another one and it wouldn't light up. August 19<sup>th</sup>, which was Tuesday we were up at Spur 2 again, where the helicopter landed with the drip torch underneath it and they had another bucket ready to go and the helicopter pilot said no, no, there's no sense putting any more, it's just too wet it won't burn.

Well, Wednesday, August 20<sup>th</sup> there was no action taken other than helicopter bucketing on the fire. There had not been any attack on the fire on the ground, to my knowledge. Now these are questions that I have asked local people that they can't answer. Four privately owned cats were pulled off the fire because there was a lack of work for them so they were removed from the fire. Up to this point everything had been done as far as I know just for cat guards and so on. Nothing had been attacked on that fire.

Jumping ahead to Monday August 25<sup>th</sup> – a back burn was lit at Lamb Creek, they lost control of it, ran ahead and tried to light a second back burn. They lost control of that and that action led to the evacuation of the homes in Munro Lake.

I was up on Lamb Creek staging down by Mineral Lake, the third time they had moved it farther away, and I don't understand – this is what I am hearing from contractors that are right there – I was right there and that's what I was told – I leave and I get in a little boat at the end of the lake – nobody drives me back there – I get in the boat and I drive down. As I'm driving down I watched the fire spill down over into Mud Lake which is a stone's throw away from where I was born and raised.

Monday evening, August 25<sup>th</sup>, through the early morning hours into August 26<sup>th</sup>, after everybody was evacuated I sat there and I listened on my bush radio how they were putting the fire guard back in and then down on the far side of Munro Lake, and then they lit another back burn.

That afternoon of August 26<sup>th</sup> the fire took off and burned the far side of the lake down. At that point we left. I felt pretty comfortable, the winds were going – it took about ten minutes and it burned roughly around a mile down the mountainside. Munro Lake has a little knoll in front of it and a large sort of mountainous type thing behind it. The large mountain was burned off, the little knoll stayed. The winds howled down that valley and we watched 200' fire balls and the police were there and they were chasing us out. I had two other people who were, you know, mid-30's; well aware of what was going on. We had two fire pumps in place, we had a sprinkler system above us, I had a little boat in the lake as an escape route and yet we were sort of forced to go – which I resent. Had I known then what I know now, they would have had to take me out in cuffs.

Wednesday August 27<sup>th</sup>, an information update meeting by the Ministry of Forests representative advised due to winds gusting tonight and lightening a back burn would probably not be considered. In fact a back burn was lit. The weather they predicted arrived and the fire was pushed back on the homes of Munro Lake. The only thing that saved those homes was the Ontario fire fighters – the sprinkler system they had put in. ...

*(Tape #13)*

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