

FIRESTORM 2003 – PROVINCIAL REVIEW

Public Meetings

John Ranta:

We have Regional Districts here in British Columbia; I am the Chair, John Ranta of the Thompson-Nicola Regional District which is a massive area of the province, centered in Kamloops. It goes as far north as half-way between Blue River and Valemont over to 70 Mile House north of Clinton, down the Fraser Canyon to Kanaka Bar south of Lytton over to the toll booth on the Coquihalla Highway, around up to Squilax over on the other side of Chase, and then back up to the Yellowhead Highway. It is about 45,000 square kilometers of the province and the Regional District, in spite of the fact that it's got eight incorporated municipalities within its boundaries, Kamloops the largest – just over 80,000 population – seven other smaller communities scattered around the regional district and the electoral areas. Ten electoral areas with one elected representative in each electoral area. So the Board of the TNRD is comprised of roughly twenty-two directors from around the region.

The TNRD is engaged in the delivery of over one hundred independent services throughout the boundaries of the Regional District. General government services, protective services, environmental health, public health, development services, recreation and cultural services, things like libraries, community halls, parks board facilities and what not and, being involved in such an extensive array of activities throughout the region makes the Regional District the single-most knowledgeable organization relative to a number of matters important to emergency planning, response and recovery.

The Regional District only decided about two years ago to take on the function of emergency preparedness. Mr. Terry Kress is here in the audience, he is our dedicated emergency coordinator. As a result of the wildfire season he has prepared sort of a document that provides families with some suggestions about how they can prepare themselves when disaster strikes. There are comments about an emergency supply kit, how to prepare for wildfires, flooding and severe storm type of disasters. I will pass these on to you.

The personnel have intimate knowledge of the location, status and contacts for all the roadways, all the utilities, all the structures, all the amenities and all the fire departments, all the contractors, the suppliers, the media contacts and all the community leaders and most of the terrain throughout the TNRD area.

All but one of the many 2003 wildfires that burned within the TNRD were situated outside the city of Kamloops, however most of the evacuees from those fires were housed within the city of Kamloops. In order to maximize the efficiency of operations the city of Kamloops officials decided early on to combine forces within the TNRD EOC (Emergency Operations Centre) to jointly provide whatever support services incident command required. The primary

roles of the joint EOC were to provide information gathering and dissemination, Logistical support and emergency social services support.

In terms of information services, the TNRD/EOC responded to 21,840 inquiries, produced 6,000 maps, disseminated 134 evacuation notices, alerts and orders and issued over 100 press releases. They sent 6,000 faxes out and attended seven public information forums and dozens of media scrums and briefings.

In terms of logistics, the EOC received 2,000 requests for goods, issued 400 purchase orders, acquired and installed two dozen gen sets, delivered 1,000 meals, 5,000 rooms, 200,000 bottles of water, 100,000 litres of fuel and thousands of other supplies to those in need.

Emergency social services arm of the EOC accommodated the immediate social service needs such as food, lodging and supplies for more than 12,000 evacuees in seven different locations. It is estimated that 32,000 volunteer hours were required to achieve that task.

The wildfires that ravaged the Interior of British Columbia in the summer of 2003 were absolutely astonishing in every way imaginable, in size, scope, ferocity, frequency and in numbers. Veteran firefighters regularly described them as the worst they had ever seen, as exhibiting inconceivable behaviour and as being able to do and go wherever they wished, the fires.

In the end it took an associated cost of thousands to get the fires under control, ten thousand more in every capacity imaginable to support those fire fighters and to ensure the safety and well being of those affected by the fires, plus of course a few hundred million dollars to cover the cost.

In our opinion the federal and provincial governments, to both their credits, displayed great leadership in eagerly and generously providing virtually every resource at their collective disposal to support the fire fighting effort. Virtually every agency, the RCMP, Search and Rescue, B.C. Parks, B.C. Ambulance, Ministry of Transportation, First Nations, the Federal INAC – you know INAC – just working Indian and Northern Affairs Canada – B.C. Forests, the Office of the Fire Commissioner, the Provincial Emergency Coordination Centre, the PEP program and the PRE-OC, the Provincial Regional Emergency Operations Centre, Hydro, Terrasin and others cooperated in every way requested throughout the ordeal. The fire fighters themselves, forest and structural fire fighter tackled the fires with their usual vigor and bravery despite the horrendous conditions. Local governments and volunteer fundraising agencies and social service agencies such as the Red Cross, Salvation Army, the Barriere Food Bank, the Mennonite Disaster Services, Habitat for Humanity Kamloops and the North Thompson Relief Fund, Emergency Social Services and scores of other contributed well in excess of five million in direct expenditures and in kind services on recovery activities. Even those affected

behaved admirably, avoiding panic, complying with evacuation orders and directions and accepting conditions as they found them.

In general, considering the scope and nature of the ordeal, we were very impressed by the overall efforts of virtually everyone involved in response to the wildfires. In essence the B.C. Emergency Response Management System worked very well.

Although in general response to the 2003 wildfires was considered topnotch, lessons are always learned from any event of such immense stature. Following are a few of the lessons learned that are thought worthy of note in preparation for the next disaster whenever that may arise.

The role of regional districts in emergency response:

Outside the Lower Mainland of British Columbia and Victoria which we should probably refer to as the heartland, and possibly the Kelowna area, most major disasters will likely originate and manifest themselves in the rural areas – the hinterland – which makes up the vast majority of the province. Given that regional district personnel in most regional districts in British Columbia have the intimate knowledge that I was suggesting before about the variety, ... *this is Mayor Mel Rothenburger, Welcome your Worship. (Thank you) ...* The variety of contacts that it has in order to appropriately respond to a disaster, it is thought they are in the best position to provide the kind of support services normally required of an emergency operation center. Due to their limited personnel however, they will require help in terms of staffing, equipment, and possibly financing to deal with larger events like the wildfires of 2003.

The best place to obtain the staffing and equipment is from the member municipalities within the individual regional districts or from consultants serving them as the people normally know each other and how they function. The more seamless the integration, the more helpful the additional staff and equipment will be.

Where practical, this is the recommendation from that section, where practical we should be encouraging regional districts to take on the service of emergency preparedness and ready themselves to support incident command as requested under the BCERMS (the B.C. Emergency Response Management System) model.

Communications: based on the 2003 wildfire experience it is thought that major adjustments are needed to the manner in which communications of every type are handled in future events. This is one area where we believe a number of matters might have been handled better and this is in spite of the fact that we had regular briefings with a variety of emergency response representatives. It was always – we saw it all on local television, the local radio stations did an excellent job of responding to the public interest but

consistently, in any contacts I have had with people affected by the disasters, that's the one common thread that runs through all their comments is – we could have used a little bit better communication. And you know, looking at it from a distance, unless you were affected by the fires you would have thought the communications were good. But the public feels that they need to be improved. The media presentations held in Kamloops seemed to be aimed at stemming the media onslaught rather than providing the information truly required by the people impacted by the wildfires. Although the focus did change in later presentations, at the beginning people were receiving some ludicrous information that was not being aggressively countered. One such event was a media report that Barriere had been totally wiped out and that certainly – we were there yesterday and certainly that wasn't accurate. Secondly, no differentiation was made between dealings with the local media who worked with us to ensure that those impacted got the specific information they needed versus the outside media who seemed more interested in finding a story than helping people.

It became very clear that the local media play an essential role in emergency management and should be viewed and treated as any other response agency. In the person, face-to-face public information meetings that were held in Chase, Cache Creek, 100 Mile House, Sun Peaks and Clearwater nearer the end of the fire season they proved to be very well received and extremely beneficial to the attendees. Instituting them earlier might have eliminated a large amount of angst and confusion. Even local politicians who are generally charged with providing up to date information on community issues were often unaware of the status of events, or left out of the picture altogether. But probably the biggest error made by the TNRD and other agencies was to pass responsibility for information gathering and dissemination over to a joint information centre operated by others. It never worked properly nor did it ever accommodate the people's needs.

There are a number of recommendations:

Town hall style public information meetings should be instituted as early as practical, preferably in or close to the communities affected.

Two, that emphasis should be placed on providing the local media with the access to people, facts and locations they may require to provide the information those impacted need to know.

Local politicians such as mayors and electoral area directors should be brought into the information loop and assigned specific duties regarding information dissemination and message delivery.

Information gathering and dissemination should be carried out by the local EOC as well as by other lead agencies and not subrogated to a central organization comprised of personnel unfamiliar with local issues, geography and contacts.

I will move on now to recovery initiatives, and as well as the aforementioned information circulars we have prepared a recovery plan. We struck a recovery

plan task force before even all the fires got started as a result of the Barriere /McLure fire and we have completed the preparation of the recovery plan and to date delivered it to the federal government last week accompanied by Mayor Rothenberger and John Smith the CEO of the TNRD. It was very well received and they were very complimentary about the speed with which the report had been prepared and the fact that we actually took the time to deliver it in person to the federal government.

Another issue that caused a considerable amount of confusion centered around coordination of all the emergency social service agencies into one cohesive group, operating as efficiently as possible to minimize human suffering. It appears that each agency currently has their own rules and methods of operating, which often meant that evacuees and others requiring assistance had to undergo a number of personal interviews and other invasive ordeals. It was originally thought those agencies – The Red Cross, Salvation Army, Habitat for Humanity, Mennonite Disaster Services, ESS and others had, over the decades, developed systems for working together on such events, but that did not seem to be the case. They all did great work and are all very much appreciated, but some sort of coordination by a lead agency is required. A place where evacuees are interviewed only once and the information is shared by all accredited agencies. A place where information on aid needed and aid given to each registrant is listed and shared between other agencies.

It was also learned that the response and recovery phases of emergency planning are not linear in nature. Planning for recovery measures must take place the moment it's evident they are required. Implementation of recovery measures for one area will likely be required at the same time as response measures are required elsewhere.

So the recommendations are that the lead agency responsible for coordinating all the emergency social service agencies into one cohesive group operating as efficiently as possible to minimize human suffering should be designated as soon as it's evident that social service recovery measures will be required. Evacuees and others requiring assistance of various social service agencies should be interviewed as infrequently as possible and only by the lead agency which would then share the information gathered with all other accredited agencies.

Mitigation measures: obviously the best way to deal with any threat is to reduce the possibility of its occurrence. In terms of wildfires three actions might be considered; regulating new development, taking proactive action to remove fuels etc., and providing more education on fire prevention. The proactive action and education concepts are well-known to all and require no further mention. Instituting new provincial regulations aimed at reducing wildfire risk is not as well understood. Currently regional districts are not permitted to require development permits in areas not governed by official

community plans. Development permits are probably the most useful tools available to local governments to address wildfire risks. Regional districts do not have the resources to develop OCPs throughout their boundaries; the TNRD alone has over 100 unincorporated communities that would require an official community plan.

The recommendation – more attention needs to be given to mitigation measures by all levels of government, especially in terms of proactive measures to reduce risks, more preventative education and development of provincial regulations allowing regional districts to require development permits in areas not governed by official community plans.

On to structural fire equipment rates. As we understand it currently there are only two rates of pay for the usage of most structural fire equipment. One rate for usage, \$500.00 an hour, and another rate for standby at \$250.00 an hour. To us, it seems inconceivable that these local fire departments who contributed as much or more than any of the non-resident fire departments to fight fires that were forest fire in nature, not structural fires originating from within their boundaries, could be snubbed financially. Not only would that be patently unjust, it would send a horribly wrong message to those brave souls who literally risked their lives for the good of others. Non-payment might even bankrupt some of those volunteer departments.

The recommendation is that local fire departments that fought the wildfires from within their own boundaries be compensated in a similar fashion to those brought in to aid in the effort, both in terms of equipment usage and manpower.

That particular issue perhaps you are familiar with, but you know I wrote letters to fifty fire departments that attended the Thompson-Nicola Regional District to assist with protecting structures within our boundaries. They were compensated at one rate, whereas the local fire departments are deemed to be working at home and therefore are not subject to support.

So in conclusion, and my colleague Mayor Mel Rothenburger wishes to have a moment to speak as well – in conclusion considering that as stated earlier, it took an assorted cast of thousands to get the fires under control, ten thousand more in every capacity imaginable to support those fire fighters and to ensure the safety and well-being of those affected the fires, plus of course a few hundred million dollars to cover the cost both the City of Kamloops and the Thompson-Nicola Regional District are generally happy with the overall response provided by all. Lessons were learned, but it must be remembered that fifty thousand people had to be evacuated from their homes, hundreds of homes and businesses were destroyed, hundreds of millions of dollars of personal property incinerated, and vast areas of forest and range lands devastated. And no one other than three brave pilots was killed. Our hearts

and best wishes go out to the victims and our heartfelt thanks go out to the responders.

So I will be happy to answer any questions. I do as I say have reports, I've got a copy of the presentation and –

Gary Filmon:

I will begin by just saying thank you for a comprehensive presentation and when we met with Mr. Smith a couple of weeks ago he indicated you were in the process of doing a very complete and thorough review from a regional district standpoint. This is the product of it and I thank you for doing that. It certainly makes our job easier to have your own review as arriving at conclusions and recommendations that we can then consider on a more comprehensive basis.

GF Just a question as to preference, I would be happy to ask you questions first, but it might be better if I hear from his Worship and then ask you both questions along the way, and I won't limit you to a moment as your partner has suggested.

JR I wasn't meaning anything, but ...

GF Having served in public office I know giving a politician a moment is not doing justice to his needs.

Mayor Mel Rothenburger

Well, thank you very much; I will try to be brief. However, obviously since I just signed the document, I do endorse Chair Ranta's comments and recommendations but I did want to add a few thoughts of my own to that presentation based on my own experience during the crisis. I apologize at this point that I haven't formalized these comments in the way of a written presentation to you, but I will follow up with that and provide you with some of my notes that would be more readable than my handwritten ones that I have with me today.

I want to mention first of all that I make these comments with the understanding that internally within the city as well as the TNRD various post-mortems are under way at various levels – and that when those are completed or in progress they will likely identify other issues that I won't be touching on today but that may be connected to the presentations today as well. And that, also in view of that, my comments today are presented in the absence of extensive consultation with others involved in the emergency response. So it's somewhat of a surface point of view but I think it's worthy of note.

I want to mention this morning that I was at another event in regard to the wildfire crisis. One of our MLAs made the comment that he was amazed that emergency personnel were able to bring order out of chaos in such a rapid time frame. I want to echo those comments because that is my impression as well. And I say that just because we are here to look at I guess the weaknesses to some extent of the emergency response, but by and large I think there was much more that was positive and right about it than there were mistakes. I was tremendously impressed with the dedication, expertise and heroism of those involved at all levels of the response to the wildfires. It was obviously a time of great duress and at times nerves naturally became frayed and disagreements on strategy did occur. I overheard more than a couple of hallway conversations that were taken in a rather heated and passionate manner, but at all times these issues were resolved without any divisiveness being evident to the public, and this highly professional approach was key to maintaining public confidence during the crisis.

You have been hearing concerns about communication issues and my comments will focus on my own experience with one small aspect of what is a broad and important issue, but I think it is probably important to note. Obviously good communications among those responding to such a crisis, as well with the public, is fundamental to dealing with the myriad of issues arising literally minute-to-minute. And, while there were unquestionably gaps in communication, there was also much that was done right.

One of those things was to merge the City of Kamloops emergency efforts with those of the regional district under the Thompson-Nicola Regional District. This was the first order of business in a sense after the fires took over our

lives and this very smart move was instrumental in avoiding some of the duplication that is bound to occur with so many different agencies being involved. It enhanced communication and pooled human resources as well. The decision not to establish a city emergency operations centre did however allow communication between political policy setters and emergency responders to fall through the cracks, as Chair Ranta has mentioned.

Had the city established its own EOC in a different situation, the role of mayor and of council as well would have been very clear. Under the merger of the city and TNRD effort it was not. I hasten to add once again that the decision to place the city's emergency resources under the TNRD was the best possible decision. Unfortunately the Mayor was left out of the loop and my impression is that to a large extent Chair Ranta experienced a similar situation, as did our MLAs and our MP. We were, in a sense all trying to operate in a bit of an information vacuum. Part of it was of course the problem surrounding information communication in general.

It was just very, very difficult to get current information from the front lines to the EOC and all of the others who were involved in emergency response. But, it was also due to the fact that there was no clear strategy or structure for the political element to access what information was available. It wasn't a case of reluctance to provide information; it was simply the lack of a clear methodology for achieving it. It created a problem because in large part the local politicians instantly became spokespersons for our community, particularly for the outside world. There was a media frenzy going on right from the beginning and on one memorable day due to time zone changes my first interview was at 3:00 a.m. and the next was at 3:30, 4:00, 5:00 and it ran that way up until mid-morning so that the Eastern media could get their live interviews. This was not that unusual. But we were put in a position where having a dearth of information to present, so we were winging it frankly a lot of the times. We were giving impressions of how the community was responding. We were providing whatever information we could get on details and internally of course I would be asked – well how many firefighters do you have actually assisting the effort and what is happening with city staff – and those kinds of things I could answer but a lot of the broad questions were more difficult.

That was being done in the context of what I saw as immediate liaison effort – and again that's been commented on by Chair Ranta – that was less than it could have been. We had, I felt, media liaison people who had little or no media training trying to handle this onslaught of media attention. And, at the same time as all that media attention provided a golden opportunity for communication to the public, it created a problem because we didn't have the information at times that really would have been helpful. So there was a real scramble in general and the media became very unhappy very quickly. Not necessary at we the politicians, but in the lack of information in general, and we could have done something to improve that. I mean we weren't obviously there to make the media happy necessarily, except that the media could have

been I guess brought into the communication effort much more effectively than they were. There was, understandably, a certain sensitivity around divulging some personal information about property damage and so on, but I think that in part, in combination with an imperfect communication strategy created the issue.

This, in fact, created a dangerous situation. It could have been dangerous because this lack of up-to-date, current and full information could have resulted in dangerous situations. For example, some political spokespersons were actually attempting to provide evacuation information at times, and sometimes it was either a little bit ahead of the game, or behind it, and it could have resulted in some bigger problems than it actually did. We, in the political representatives, tended to try to stay out of that but there was the potential there.

So, I guess my conclusion is that communications being key, my area of communication was not well prepared. I think our own post-mortems will in large part identify the gaps and that we will be able to do something about it to prevent an occurrence should we face a similar situation again. But also I think that any recommendations that might come out of your commission is regard to communication strategy and structure needs to include the political spokespersons in that picture because there was an important role to play there and I think that we all felt that we weren't able to do it as well as we would have hoped.

Thank you.

GF Thank you very much, your Worship and Chairman for your presentations. I hope you don't mind if we spend a little time exploring these issues with you. I know you have put a lot of thought into it and so I want to do justice to it and make sure that I understand. I have been remiss on not identifying the people on either side of me who are here as part of the team to help absorb as much information as possible ultimately for the writing of the report.

On my right is Don Leitch who for a long time was my clerk of the executive council, which is the secretary of cabinet, during my time in office and we worked together for about twenty years. Principally he served this exact role with Justice Gordon Hall when he did the review of the grain transportation in Western Canada back in the '80s. As well, Jim Sproul who has been in government service for twenty years or more – he doesn't look that old – and has much experience in dealing with various levels of government agency departments and so on.

I will just ask a number of questions along the way trying to explore hopefully things that will lead us to better understandings. I know that, again from having served at both the municipal level and the provincial level in government, that there is always a good deal of difficulty with staking out

one's territory and accepting the various different roles and responsibilities and always I think concern about one intruding on the others in the areas of responsibility and jurisdiction.

So that's really one of the things I want to talk about to some degree in that the regional district concept is different than what I am used to in Manitoba. We don't have regional district governments that overlay a number of different municipalities. And there is I think a great deal of merit in ensuring that there is local initiative in a lot of these things because even at a province-wide level, sending in the troops to take over a situation can tend to ignore all the information that is available at the local level. In fact it can't be done adequately. There could be a role for coordination, there could be a role for direction on an overall basis, but if we aren't delivering a lot of these direct services that you were talking about in your report, that you have been talking about your Worship, then there could be a great deal even more confusion than some people believe there was. So it is important for us to try and stake out where you see the areas of responsibility.

I think, Mr. Chair, that you suggested that the regional district had taken on the responsibility for emergency services in your area willingly and had in place a plan for dealing with and responding to emergencies. An exercise that I know exists in most provinces where at the local level there is an emergency services plan for any potential disaster, any potential emergency consequence. So, you believe that is the right way, obviously, you feel very strongly that at the local level you should have your own emergency planning operation that kicks in immediately with any type of local emergency – whether it was a flood or ice storm or whatever?

JR Certainly I do and it is basically a requirement of incorporated municipalities to have such plans, but there is no such requirement for a regional district. So we proactively and voluntarily took on the service throughout the region in spite of the fact that the majority of the region is unincorporated. And, without that, we would have been suffering significantly more challenges than what we suffered under the current environment.

GF In particular, because these interface fires involved a number of different municipal jurisdictions and maybe even unincorporated jurisdictions, it would have been difficult if it had attempted to be addressed by each individual municipal jurisdiction and further complication. My understanding, is this true that there are not fire services in every area? (right) There are volunteer fire services in some areas, there are obviously full time fire services in other areas, but some areas have no fire service?

JR Absolutely right – the majority I would say of the regional district is without fire protection.

- GF It is an interesting study in how to address it then when there is no existing coverage in some areas – who takes the responsibility. A suggestion was yesterday that we needed mutual aid agreements then to tie all these together. We do have that I know in areas throughout Manitoba where areas that don't have their own coverage contract with adjacent areas under a mutual aid agreement.
- JR We have similar agreements right within the regional district, sort of inter-municipal agreements – I'm the Mayor of Cache Creek and there is another municipality just six miles away, the Village of Ashcroft, and we have mutual aid agreements between our two communities in event of a substantial disaster, I suppose, in either community.
- MR The reality of a crisis situation is that you don't sit around or go searching through your files to see if you have a mutual aid agreement at the time. I recall on the first day that things really started going haywire with the McLure fire and it was getting close to Barriere, one of our fire chiefs told me that, you know we might have to send a couple of trucks up there to help out. And it's way outside our boundaries and obviously, you know, we were going to do whatever it took to help with the situation barring creating some danger for our own community. You always have to think about that too. But you don't really think about formality of agreements in those kinds of situations.
- GF No, I don't mean to say that you feel bound by the agreement, but it's also problematic if there is no plan in place.
- MR The problem comes later when you are trying to sort it out.
- GF Well, the financial part of course – in a time of crisis you respond appropriately with the most generous and open response that you can and then work out the financial part of it later. Which, in a sense, you have done with respect to the feds. Because, having worked with the disaster financial assistance program ourselves, many of the things that were done in the flood of '97. In fact our forest fires of '89, it was I think about eight years before we collected an appropriate share from the federal government so I don't want to suggest to you that you worry about that now, but these things are all details, important details, but in many cases they can't be thought about when you are fighting the emerging situation.
- MR I think one of the things that happened here locally, early on in the fire season was recognition by the province that this was a province-wide potential disaster and the implementation, or the declaration of a provincial state of emergency that allowed the province to coordinate the efforts of all structural fire fighters, all fire departments in the province I think was very helpful. At the time that that declaration was made we were just in the process of considering the declaration of a local state of emergency so that would have

provided the local area with some extraordinary powers, but since the province went ahead with their declaration, it wasn't necessary for us.

GF What date was that? These fires started in late July; do you recall the exact date that the province declared the state of emergency?

MR I don't recall the exact date but we can provide the information for you – early in August.

JR It was around August 3rd or something.

GF So until then there was this situation where the local municipalities and regional district were left to deal with it.

JR Even, you know, we talk a little bit about communication here and the challenges – our Emergency Operations Centre is right in the Boardroom at the TNRD and they reconfigure the whole thing and there is a variety of different departments around the room. When a fire like the nature of the fire disaster – when the fire started, the Barriere fire, of course it was a very small fire and that doesn't constitute a disaster, or it wasn't contemplated that it was a disaster, a province-wide disaster in the making. It was a small fire adjacent to a coffee shop in Barriere and in the first couple of days, or three days, as the Chair of the Regional District, you get the phone call from the staff – well, we've implemented the Emergency Operations Centre, it's up and running, we are responding to the catastrophe – we thought we had better let you know as the Chair – so that I can respond to any inquiries from the media and whatnot – as Mayor Rothenburger suggests is the expectation of the public. And so you have sort of twice-daily briefings from the Emergency Operations Centre – this is what's going on – we believe we have it under control – we will be able to stand down the emergency operation centre probably at four o'clock this evening and everything is going to be under control.

And that happened twice a day or three times a day, the phone calls on a regular basis for about the first three days and then it stopped. And I am wondering, boy, why did that information channel stop – and, of course we all now know that the information stopped coming to the political branch because the disaster was on a meteoric rise and there just wasn't time for the staff to be able to provide those briefings. And I think that is a component of Mayor Rothenburger's request that we need to have a better communication path so that the politicians who are expected by the public to be knowledgeable about what is going on actually have that communication channel open.

GF I have been remarking how similar so many of the issues were between our flood of the century and these fires, but the one area in which it is entirely different is that we watched the peak come down the river for twenty-one days

before it hit us – before it hit the City of Winnipeg, but it went through towns and villages all the way along. And so there was three weeks' of preparations for most people once Grand Forks went under, people understood that this was a very serious issue and we had all that time to prepare for it. So it was a vastly different situation. You were dealing with a literally instantaneously outburst of wildfire that went in all directions and did all sorts of unpredictable things. And so, the kind of communications needs to be almost on an hourly basis, or certainly much more on a short term basis as opposed to, you know we could adequately inform everybody of all the consequences, all the predicted levels and things of that nature once a day, and then do interim kinds of updates. But this seems as though you need a much more extensive network that's there, operating, and literally 24/7 responsive to requests.

I think your suggestions of designated lead agencies, both in terms of overall social services and in terms of all of the various different agencies that are non-profit, charitable agencies came in – and incidentally last evening we had dinner courtesy of the Mennonite Disaster Services in Barriere, mostly because most of them come from my province and so they are old friends and we had a wonderful visit and got their perspective on a lot of things. All of these agencies of course have done an incredible job of just jumping in and offering services and support and so on.

I had the great good fortune of getting a call within a very short time of us being aware that we were being faced with disastrous circumstances from Premier Bouchard at the time, who had just been through the Sagenay flooding and had had all sorts of experience with that that were quite transferable to what we were facing. One of the first things he said was I have all of these agencies in and will be going through all of the circumstances that you describe of people having to register and provide the same information to half a dozen or more different charitable agencies – I recommend that you set up a coordinating group with one lead agency – we chose the Red Cross as it was where everything came together and they all met daily and did their own planning, preparation and information exchange so that they shared the load as opposed to having everybody have to contact all of them. So those things can be done I think effectively and certainly also from a standpoint of all your social services agencies that involve government. Certainly that can be done.

(tape over)

... would be side-by-side building a dike, one backhoe was the municipal backhoe or front-end loader, the other was a contract one or come from another municipality to help. They were paid for, these weren't. All of those issues are going to be longer term to work out and a lot of it is covered by DFAA regulations, as you know, but they are all ...

MR I guess my understanding based on our presentation in Ottawa is that certainly in the Manitoba floods and the Quebec ice storm, there are – I think we were quoted about four different instances of disasters that the federal government has provided extraordinary assistance for over and above

disaster financial assistance. Any recommendations from you on how we might successfully lobby the federal government for recognition, I guess, would be very much appreciate. And I am sure your report will bolster the provincial application.

GF It turned out we had the great good fortune of having our disaster right in the middle of a federal election campaign. It changed the attitude somehow. I don't how.

MR We are not empowered to call those, locally.

GF Watching TV last night, it might be sooner than you think. But these are all very difficult issues because there have to be rules, there have to be regulations. We all who are in government understand that, but sometimes the rules don't make a lot of sense. I shared with some of your other colleagues at the provincial level that one of the rules that we faced was churches weren't covered by the DFAA and in the case of St. Agath where the dike breached and there was the most beautiful, most expensive building in the community was an old Catholic church. A huge, historic building and eventually DFAA decided that it was a community use building because they held bingos once a week in the basement and so the money did flow to it. But those are the kinds of things that you have to deal with. Certainly we will be looking at that too.

Your Worship, the post-mortem that you are doing, we would certainly appreciate if that produces other recommendations or information that you'd like us to have, to not consider that this be the end of your opportunity to communicate with us, present any more information that you have to us along the way and Mr. Chair, if you go through these I know that you are still going to be having meetings with your various agencies and departments and other information comes forward that you think we should have by all means please bring it forward.

Thank you for that – any other things that you want to share? If not, thank you for taking the time.

TR/MR Thank you very much.

GF Our next registered speaker is Tony Toth of the B.C. Wildlife Federation. I think there are a number of people representing BCWF, so please come forward.

Mr. Filmon, my name is Bob Boswell, I live in Duncan, British Columbia, and I am President of the B.C. Wildlife Federation.

I would like to take this opportunity for allowing us to present our views on the catastrophic wildfires seen in B.C. this year. Our Federation is a solution-based organization. The BC Wildlife Federation is a federation of 121 affiliated clubs located throughout, and virtually in every region of the province. Our overall membership is over 30,000, which includes 3,500 direct members not associated with any club. From this membership there is a broad range of expertise and knowledge.

The knowledge and expertise of our membership is what allows us to be able to participate in all aspects of conservation and management of our fish and wildlife resources and its habitat. Currently we have 22 active committees that work on a large variety of issues. To ensure all aspects of fish and wildlife management are monitored and representation is made to government as deemed necessary. These committees also ensure that the interests of the resident hunter and angler is well represented. Our presentation today will make recommendations that could lessen the intensity of future wildfires.

If I can take this opportunity to introduce the gentleman on my left first, and the gentleman on my right – this is Mr. Phil Halloran who is the Chair of our Land Use Committee and on my right is Mr. Tony Toth, who is our Executive Director. I would ask Mr. Halloran would you be able to – or Mr. Toth, I'm sorry – would you be able to go through our recommendations and presentation which you were provided with in advance, Mr. Filmon.

GF Yes and I want to thank you for that. It is a very comprehensive brief and some very well thought out recommendations. I have read them and I think they should be shared, obviously, with those who are here because they impact on many of the things that people are discussing today with respect to the wildfires. Thank you very much and I look forward to this.

Tony Toth:

You are very welcome. I am glad to have been able to distribute that to you ahead of time, but we will let Mr. Pezderic deliver the presentation.

BB Mr. Pezderic is the Chairman of our Forestry Committee. He's from Golden.

Andy Pezderic:

Good afternoon, gentlemen. I had a sandwich with hot peppers in it for lunch so I just had to run out to my car to get some Tums.

The brief is pretty technical. It makes some specific recommendations and discussions which would be probably too in-depth to get into in detail here, so we are going to – I am going to make a few comments and then hopefully if you guys have had a chance to read the brief you may have some questions.

The B.C. Wildlife Federation and our members, our clubs, and other groups in B.C. – conservation groups concerned with wildlife habitat or the Cattlemen's Association concerned with grazing and ground land have been utilizing controlled burns for quite a while now to rejuvenate wildlife habitat and range land. The real problem in B.C. has been that we have allowed fuel to build up over the years in the forest interface zones. So our basic – the basic bottom line of our brief recommends a controlled burning program to remove fuel from the forest interface zones.

The different between this and other burning programs that have taken place is the forest interface zones, important wild life and crown grazing land all overlap. They are all the same areas in many, many cases. So we are proposing a joint cooperative controlled burning program with multiple partners and multiple goals so that we can employ a broader range of resources and funding sources, and more people involved.

That is really the basis of our brief, and we have independent funding sources in B.C. that we use through wildlife as other sectors do. We have also made some very specific recommendations about fish habitat and about recovery of burn areas afterwards. Again, you really have to read the brief; they are just a little too complicated to discuss that quickly.

One area that we did discuss but we didn't make a recommendation on, are the regulatory issues that we have. Nearly all the forest interface Crown land that surrounds the rural subdivisions, the wild life habitat, the Crown range is all part of our provincial forest reserve. It is all managed by the Forestry under the Forest Act and the Forest Practices Code. Their mandate is to grow trees, not grass or food for wildlife, so we fear that launching a controlled burning program to de-fuel the interface zones could come into a fairly high degree of conflict with forest management policies and we actually think that the forest management policies have hurt cattle interests, wildlife interests – and I think that these regulations maybe need to be looked at, especially smoke guidelines, reforestation guidelines – a few things that we just need to loosen up a little bit if we ever hope to have a controlled burning program like this – to make the interface zones safer. In actual fact I don't think that there is a more efficient way or a more cost-effective way to get rid of the fuel out of those interface zones than through controlled burns.

Of course you might ask what's the difference between a wildfire and controlled burn, but the burns – the control burns are conducted in the spring when humidities are high. We have fire guards built. We have fire fighting crews and equipment in place before we even light them so they are controlled. So that's basically all I want to say.

So if you guys have actually had a chance to read the brief, we are willing to put some questions in there.

GF Okay, thank you very much. This is a very comprehensive brief and I will try and do it justice by bringing out some issues for questioning and discussion with you, but – I have had some experience with public reaction to so-called controlled burns and of course there are two aspects of it that are of great concern. One is the health of citizens. I mean I am sympathetic and was in my dealings with things like stubble burning which is a normal practice in agriculture in a province like ours. And in a case of our cities, they are surrounded by agriculture land, you have the burning taking place and you have people with respiratory illnesses – children, adults, elderly and so on and it becomes a huge controversial issue.

Do you expect that similar things would apply here – that you would have a resistance from people?

AP Absolutely.

GF So how do you propose to deal with that?

AP Well, you know the current conditions in the forest interface zones are literally a bomb waiting to happen. And Firestorm 2004 and 2005 are coming as you know. And really, what other way is there to protect those zones? Also, these are controlled burns so we can pick and choose what conditions we light off, and they are not urban areas – they are generally subdivisions close to an urban area, but we can always choose a day when the wind is blowing away from a population centre before we light off. You know, being that they are controlled; we can control some of those factors.

GF Those factors can be controlled to a degree, but obviously wind shifts and conditions change and ...

AP Controlled burns get out of control.

GF ... controlled burns get out of control and you have the whole issue of risk and again what does the insurance industry say about it, and how do you address issues. As they have had in various places and been well publicized in the United States where these things get out of hand, it becomes a huge conflagration with millions of dollars of damage and the liability issue then. So how do you ...

AP But the controlled burns that we have been conducting for several years now for wildlife and for range enhancement have actually slowed down to a very low level of activity because of regulatory issues and because of liability issues. We have to find a way around those liability issues. The insurance companies really have more to benefit out of de-fueling this forest interface zone than anybody else. And a lot of the liability is on account of insurance companies – the cost of liability insurance and things like that. So we just have to find a way around it, I think.

?? We can do controlled burns under the auspices of the Forest Service and understand we are not talking about us doing the controlled burns, we are talking about professional people within the Forest Ministry, within the Protection Branch of the Forest Ministry, doing controlled burns – preparing the burns so that the guards are there, so that in fact if the burn begin to get too hot, an escape ——— stopping it. Doing aggressive slashing so that they come down and drop some of the trees down to the ground and then burn and clean off the ground so they ————— so the fire itself does not have an opportunity to crown, which is what happened with the firestorm across the province – and various other protection devices that the Forest Service know how to do. We have nothing but admiration for the Protection Division of the Forest Service despite some criticism of them for the summer’s activities; we think they did a marvelous job. And we also think they do a marvelous job when they are doing control burns. We had a control burn in the Kamloops area this spring where something went wrong, and you are right, people with asthma, people with respiratory diseases complained. They are not complaining today because they actually watched the Strawberry Hill fire go on and saw the alternative.

The alternative to not having controlled burns well designed, well supervised and done properly by professionals is one above. There isn’t – it’s black and white, there isn’t any grey in this. And so we are confident that the Forest Service and various other people can do this and we have contractors in this province who can do this.

GF Do you think that the – because I am going to be meeting with them – that the insurance industry would be supportive of this in the sense of maybe even the liability issue – of being cooperative with the liability issue if they saw it in their interest to lower the risk by doing these control burns. Have had you had any discussion with them on it, do you have any sense of where they might be?

?? No we haven’t and we just can’t see them opposing it. They have more to win out of this than to lose. I mean, what are they paying out in Kelowna right now, you know. And all they need to do is provide us with some liability insurance at a reasonable cost so that we can send the crews in here to do these control burns.

GF Okay, well that will be a topic I will pursue with them because I think it is key to your recommendation. If it weren't possible to get some reasonable liability insurance then you might have difficulty with it. You have – it is interesting, and I should have asked our previous speakers – you have raised the issue in your presentation about building code restrictions and land use guidelines – set back distances and all sorts of things. Have you discussed that with municipal leaders – is that something that ...

?? It's not really an area of expertise that we have, it is just something that seems so obvious that we really felt we had to mention it, you know. Obviously in the Red Deer River Valley bottom, below the flood plain you don't allow people to develop sub-divisions, right?

GF We didn't use to. I mean we don't now. And I speak from experience. I mean it was, in the beginning as long people felt that the risk wasn't all that great a lot of things happened where people did develop below certain levels than they knew they should have.

?? Well, that is exactly what has happened here. We have allowed sub-divisions to be developed in these heavily fuel-laden forest interface zones. We won't be able to do that anymore either unless we can de-fuel these zones.

?? Interesting to us that had no inkling or information that Chairman Ranta or Mayor Rothenburger was going to talk about the restrictions on reasonable ——— . I mean we had talked about ——— and we understand the restrictions and we have gone when dealing with subdivision proposals we have presented ourselves to the boards and suggested that we have got problems here because we are in an interface zone and were told that they really have no control over that. So what we're suggesting to them is that somewhere along the line there needs to be some control over that as a hazard no different than a flood plain, no different than rock slides, no different anything else —————

GF Well, as part of my preparation for this, I asked the question as to whether or not there are building code restrictions throughout British Columbia for interface develops. I am told there is only one municipality in all of British Columbia that has them. I have yet to verify that and to find out which municipality it is. But that's obviously a topic that has to be pursued as well.

The topic that was discussed by Chairman Ranta and Mayor Rothenburger with respect to the fact that there isn't any responsibility in some areas of region districts for things like having a mandatory fire department, or the fact that it's not mandatory that they have, or they buy into responsibility for local emergency planning and delivery. That this is a choice they make. Do you see this as a responsibility of the provincial government to mandate it, because I know at the moment it's not mandated.

?? That's a really difficult question because local government now believe that the provincial government is downloading all of their responsibilities to them and they may or may not be right. We're not going to say one way or the other. However, there is a need for common rules throughout the province. And common rules are the responsibility of the provincial government. We are fortunate, and I am fortunate because I live in Kamloops, to live in the Thompson-Nicola Regional District which is one of the more progressive regional districts in their planning and various other things. I can show you other regional districts that are nowhere near them. I can show you other regional districts that don't have building inspections, for example. And so to expect the uniform application of rules from the regional districts that are dispersed is looking for pie in the sky. So there has to be a basic provincial bottom line that nobody crosses. At the moment in the province the Ministry of Highways is responsible for sub-divisions in unorganized territory. They are the ones who sign it on. And so the province still has that authority. They are now trying to evolve it through the various regional districts but at the moment they still have it. So, it makes sense to us that that's where the rules would be made.

GF Thank you. Forest Management policies are in conflict with wildlife habitat. I had the opportunity to fly both in a fixed wing and a helicopter over the areas that were affected by the fires and one of the things that was pretty visible from the air is the encroachment of the forest on what used to be the grazing lands. Obviously you have strong feelings about how that ought to be handled in the future.

?? Well the grazing lands are wild life habitats and that's our mandate as well. So it all fits together, a single coordinated effort amongst multiple users. It is our approach, you know, it is our vision.

GF And you refer to the fact that this is going to require controversial recommendations and unprecedented cooperation among several levels of government. Do you sense that after the unprecedented fires that you experienced that there is a desire for cooperation and that people will look at this in a different way than they might have five years ago or ten years ago?

?? Yes, and no, too. The rural people are definitely pretty nervous – the people that live in these interface zones are pretty nervous right now and they are really anxious to listen to ideas about how to get rid of all that fuel loading out there that's only a quarter mile from their house. But that attitude actually can change really rapidly when the smoke drifts over their house in early April while we are doing the control burn, too, right at the same time as they are trying to have a barbecue outside.

Governments, I really don't think there is going to be a problem with governments coming together on it at different levels because I think the

governments can all see the urgency in the requirements that are needed right now.

GF Identifying the priority zones for fire fighting.

?? This is something we have actually been kicking around for several years now.

GF It's been my impression, because I know it's done certainly in our province, that where there is no timber value or no infrastructures or people at risk that judgments are made and fires are allowed to just burn. And, it's been my impression that if it isn't a formal policy, that it is done in British Columbia as well.

?? It's not a formal policy and there is no real framework for deciding on which fires to let go and which fires to attack on which levels of its suppression. It happens, I mean this year right in the middle of the Kamloops and McLure and Kelowna fires, there was a huge fire burning up in Northern B.C. that nobody even heard about on the news. If the big fires weren't burning in the south, they would have probably deployed people up there to fight those fires. They just didn't have the resources left to fight those remote fires this summer. Other years, they probably would have. And there is just no formality to it, you know, it is just a day to day decision sort of when the fire starts. So I think we need an actual structured plan for determining the levels of priority.

Do you have something to add, Phil?

PH If it's in the spring you'll put out a fire anywhere because they need the practice. In the summer because there are lots of fires ——— people, they will let some of them go. —————

GF The recommendation on putting screens on helicopter dip buckets for the benefit of others so they don't pick up fish or fry and that – I am not sure, is this done elsewhere? Would this make them less efficient or would it make it difficult to load the buckets?

?? We don't know, but we do know that there's no salmon out there. So in this particular case it is more important in this recommendation that we look at pumps rather than the dip buckets. The dip buckets may be impractical to do but the pumps certainly are not and more pumps were put into the creeks this year in emergency situations – we are not being critical of anybody by saying that – but now is the time in the winter to put screens on those pumps and then the fry won't get pumped onto the plane.

GF Okay, and just the issue of toxicity of retardant chemicals and the damage – you know it's so clear when you are flying over it, all the fire retardant, the colours are very readily – well even just driving by, and so many areas of the

- interior have got retardant chemicals on it. Are you saying that there are new and better chemicals that could be used.
- ?? After the reports on TV this year in Vancouver and a couple of newspaper articles were written, there was a kind of alarm bell sounded about the toxicity of these retardants and we are not ready to dismiss those as being non-existent concerns, all we really want is a little bit of research. We want that issue looked at to make sure we are not dumping something toxic out there that is hurting people.
- GF You raised an interesting point about using volunteer groups in assisting in a lot of these efforts and certainly that would be a preferable thing I would think from anybody's standpoint, provided that they have the proper training so they don't run into issues of liability or Workers Compensation or other matters. So does the Wild Life Federation have the capacity to maybe sponsor training programs.
- ?? Our recommendation eleven is basically referring to the Ministry of Forests hopefully conducting seminars and certifying some of our volunteers. For years we have been doing control burns for wildlife with volunteers. In the last five to ten years liability issues and stuff has almost stopped that. Now we have to have certified people. But, if there was more of an opportunity for training, we could actually get a large number of our volunteers certified.
- GF It's a great idea as long as we can have the rules that permit it. I think it's a great idea to use volunteers for these kinds of things and it may be the – well certainly it would be the least cost approach. Those are all very, very interesting and well thought out recommendations. Sorry Phil.
- PH One other point that we would really like to stress is the use of natural native vegetation and the need for the government to begin to identify sources of that long before they need it. What happens now is the fires occur, they need to be rehabilitated; then the mad scramble comes to find natural seeding, or natural plants or whatever. And then eventually because of the delays that occur in that, the ground cover doesn't go on fast enough and then we begin to get erosion. So, now that we have the opportunity that the fires are over we need to be able to identify sources of those seeds that are readily available for the next year fires are going to occur.
- ?? If I might, Mr. Filmon, I would like to thank you for providing us with an opportunity to address some of the issues. I would like to thank my two colleagues for their expert knowledge on the subject and I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the fire fighters for their unparalleled dedication and courage and expertise that they demonstrated in protecting life and property in the province during this situation.
- GF Thank you very much gentlemen.

Your local member of the Legislature who I also believe is the Speaker of the House, Mr. Richmond is here. So I just welcome him. Thank you.

Now we have others who have registered and as I indicated earlier that if you haven't registered you are certainly welcome to do so with Lisa over here to my right. I believe my next speaker who is registered is Jim McComb, a resident of Venables Valley. Mr. McComb please come forward. Welcome.

Jim McComb:

I will be brief. Thank you for allowing me to share my thoughts on how we can improve our forest fire fighting and prevention strategies. I am a logging contractor and organic farmer in Venables Valley. My suggestions arise from my first-hand experience with the Venables fire this past summer. My home and property came very close to being damaged. The fire burned almost to my doorstep. By the way, I was the first person to observe the fire and report it to the Forest Fire Service in Kamloops.

I was driving down the gravel road towards the highway about seven o'clock at night in the evening and a fire, not larger than this table you are sitting at, right on the roadside in the ditch. I immediately turned around and drove home, ten minutes to my home and reported it. My neighbour later informed me that she had driven down the road two hours previously and there was a strange couple in a car parked on that exact spot and they were out standing on the roadside, letter their dog run and both of them were smoking a cigarette. Anyway, after reporting the fire I returned with my neighbours with our old antique fire truck but within a half an hour that fire had exploded all over the mountainside. Also from my first-hand experience, the staging grounds for the fighting of that fire was just down the road from my driveway.

So I have two main suggestions. The first one, the people in rural areas and communities must be more involved in all aspects of planning, prevention and the actual fire fighting in their local areas. Volunteer fire departments in rural areas must be empowered with training and equipment. Training should include fighting forest fires, not just house fires. I took over three hours for the first fire fighters to arrive from Kamloops on the scene after the Venables fire was first reported. Local people can be in action with half an hour of a reported fire.

Also, local fire departments should be consulted before evacuation orders are given by some bureaucrat in Victoria. A great deal of disruption, panic, chaos and cost was generated when evacuation orders came down. Almost thirty families were forced to stay in motels for three weeks at great cost to the government when, for the most part of that time people could have stayed in their homes and carried on their lives with minimum disruption.

Also, local people should be involved with professionals to develop strategies for prevention and some of the points in this connection have been brought up by previous people.

Strategically placed fire guards to be permanently maintained by local fire departments.

Also we need to address the huge build-up of fuel in the interior forests. This could be accomplished by several methods. 1) controlled burning, 2) chipping the wood and spreading it on the forest floor, and 3) commercial thinning, and

perhaps others. The previous speakers were talking about controlled burning. In our area of Venables Valley there are some areas where controlled burning would be appropriate. In other areas it would be a total disaster. It couldn't be done in certain areas where the fuel is so highly built up, but chipping the wood and mulching it back on the ground is a very effective method if the proper equipment is available. And also commercial thinning.

So, again I cannot emphasize enough local people should be involved at every level. The government should be providing leadership to implement training programs and provide equipment. For the most part rural people in B.C. are very committed to their communities and land. Local people will go the extra mile. In our case, even though evacuation orders came down some of us, myself and a few of our neighbours never did leave. It wasn't necessary to leave. We had escape routes already planned out amongst our community. We were never consulted on that. We had – our bags were packed and we had our plans in place. So some of us stayed and we did volunteer duty for over a week, every night patrolling fire guards and putting out spot fires so sparks wouldn't jump and send the fire into our community. It was a little frustrating to watch the paid night watchmen many times sleeping in their cabs of their pick-ups while we were doing this.

A further frustrating experience occurred when I repeatedly pointed out to the fire bosses a particularly vulnerable spot where the fire could easily jump the guard and move towards our community. A little extra caterpillar work was all that was needed in that spot. But I was ignored and, sure enough on the fourth day of the fire, the fire did indeed jump in that exact spot and take off towards the homes in our valley. Well in excess of a million dollars must have been spent in stopping it. Five water bombers, three helicopters, many water trucks and over a hundred men fought valiantly and held the ridge. They were victorious in saving our community and certainly we are very grateful for that. But that battle could have been prevented had local people been heard and involved.

So my second point, also brief because it has been brought up before, my point is streamline the line of command and communication process during a fire. I was able to observe many, very costly inefficiencies as a result of so many departments of government being involved. Again, local rural fire departments should be active participants. I was – every day at the staging grounds for the firefighting I would be there at seven o'clock when all the fire fighters, over a hundred men every day would arrive in buses from their motels. I would be there and watch how they stood around for upwards of two hours while various government officials were in huddle trying to figure out what they should be doing while the fire was raging on and when they should have been out fighting it. In essence the too many cooks spoil the brew, or the stew.

So those are my two main points. In conclusion, government agencies, the Ministry of Forests should coordinate rural areas, organizing rural areas so they have the equipment and training and secondly overall some streamlining of the whole line or chain of command. Thank you.

GF Thank you very much Jim, I appreciate your presentation and if you have a copy of it we would like to have it for the record as well, please.

JM I need to clean up my notes and then I will submit them to you.

GF Okay, that's great we have recorded it in any case. I should have said that all presentations are being recorded and will be part of the public record so all your comments and advice will be attached to the final report. Certainly your recording the frustration that has been expressed to us elsewhere of lack of certainty as to who is in charge and that is something that clearly is going to have to be dealt with. It's difficult to anticipate all the eventualities that happen in a crisis situation. Everybody know that reacting and responding is necessary to the best of people's ability and training, but there still does need to be an understood chain of command.

The use of local knowledge and resources is also a resonant theme here and one of the reasons that I have been appointed is because I come with no preconceived knowledge – having said that, that means that I have to use completely the knowledge available to me from all of you who are here and have lived with this. So I think it is very similar when, in the case such as you just went through, it is pretty clear that you had tens of thousands of people coming from all over the province to here and they had equipment, they had expertise, but they didn't have the local knowledge that was resident right here. So those are all things that we will have to think about as to how to best make that happen.

Thank you very much. We appreciate that. I did have the chance of going over the Venables Fire after the fact a few weeks ago and certainly know the devastation that you speak of, as has been the case throughout this area. The interior really did suffer devastation in so many different ways and in so many different places. So, thank you for coming today.

JM Thank you.

GF Chief Rick LeBourdais of the Whispering Pines Indian Band and he has a couple of his counselors with him but Chief LeBourdais is going to be presenting. Welcome. Well, they knew you were capable of doing it on your own.
(new tape: 3:06-4:36 p.m.)

Chief Rick LeBourdais:

It is certainly an honour to have you come here and try and get a handle on what has happened to our communities throughout the region. And it is very important that we look at a lot of issues and a lot of concerns that have happened, not only to the municipal region, the TNRD region, First Nations areas – we lived through it, and we've got to figure out what can we do to make it better – you know, where did we go wrong. So these are some of the things and some of the ideas that we thought we would bring forward to you. I am definitely not as well prepared as good friend Ranta there, with the package that he presented to you. I just have some notes that I will just refer to my notes and hopefully get some points across. And we have pretty well basically the same concerns as the other gentlemen and folks that spoke before me.

One of the things that I would like to say is on behalf of our community we would certainly like to give a big thanks to the volunteer fire people that helped and the professional fire fighters that helped on the west side fire which – call it McLure fire, but it was on the west side and north side of the river. It was through the – I guess through the participation of not only Whispering Pines community members, Black Pines community members, and the members and families and friends that live up on the hill above McLure. And it was a joint effort from all of us pitching in to save the homes of Mr. Horst Braun, who was right on the ground zero and my young counselor here, Ed Lebordais was one of the fighters also, there twenty-four hours a day for a few days before the people started to finally come in to help us. And the fire was there. It was within a hundred feet of the house. And so we all pitched in, all of us and we all battled that fire twenty-four hours a day and kept it away from Mr. Braun's home. But it is the joint efforts, you know all of a sudden we became kind of like one big family there. Everybody was grabbing a shovel or grabbing whatever we could. Whispering Pines community, we donated – well we had a little fire truck and that little truck was busy running up and down that hill twenty-four hours a day. But it was a joint effort that kept that going.

One of the other things that we need to address, I think, is what do we do in the future. How this affected us – one of the key things I think is the safety factor – you look at earlier on this year if somebody would have told us that live here in Kamloops region, that we're going to shut the road down so you can't pass that road just north of Kamloops. And we are going to shut the road down at McLure so we can't go by there. If somebody had of told us that, we would have said you're crazy, there's no way that can happen. Or shut the road in behind Sun Peaks – but that happened and the folks that live in Vinsula(?) and Raley(?) there was no place to escape.

One of the fortunate things that I think we participated in is we were negotiating with the Marine Branch in the province of British Columbia to look at operating the McLure ferry – otherwise the McLure ferry would have been

shut down and that was the only escape route from that side of the river and that's when the fire was really bad in that area. So that became a huge safety factor. You know, a lot of the people were evacuated by a boat down the river and there was no place to go. Two cars at a time across that ferry, 24 hours a day, to get people out of there and whatever goods they could pack. That's kind of unacceptable you know, for the region.

Which brings us to other point that we would like to make mention and like to promote is Whispering Pines, we have been working on a crossing, a bridge, and we have completed a feasibility study to have a bridge connecting the Yellowhead highway with the West side road at Whispering Pines. The feasibility points that it is feasible to build this bridge across there – we look at building a bridge that would be acceptable to logging trucks, you know keep the logging trucks that come through Westside which actually drive right back up the Yellowhead highway north and past our place. That would alleviate all that traffic, the trucks apparently go through several zones on the way down through and across and up, and it would take a lot of that away. And, should a disaster of this magnitude ever happen again, that would definitely – you know we need that access to the Yellowhead highway from the Westside Road. The Westside Road and the north end of McLure of our place up there that was also closed as well. The fire swept that area and so there was really no escape route whatsoever.

So those are some of the things that we would like to bring to your attention. We do have that feasibility for the bridge. It is feasible. It is viable and we would like to promote it. We have packages out to all the ministries in the province of British Columbia and the Federal Government of Indian Affairs, Mr. Knault(?), and we have the presentations out there. We need to group the appropriate ministries together and start promoting it which would address the safety factor of transportation between the two roads. That is one of the things that we need to move on, that we would like to promote and get across.

When we look at – I guess one of the big key factors is that we definitely need to look at a preparedness strategy and I think this is what everybody is referring to and that is no different than the ideas that we have. We look at a communication strategy and there was a definite downfall in communications with all of us. The kinds of things that we thought of – coordinating a centralized emergency centre. And we kind of look at the Thompson-Nicola Regional District of Mr. Ranta utilizing the TNRD as a centralized coordinating body. When we look at that, at the same time we look at regionalized emergency teams, rapid response teams and these rapid response teams coordinated through the central area. We would look at places like Raley(?), McLure, Barriere, Westside, Black Pines, Whispering Pines, Chase, Sun Peaks just to mention a few of the smaller areas. In developing a smaller response team, probably if we had such a thing in place we probably could have prevented that fire from leaving the McLure area when it first started. A quick rapid response would have dealt with the small fire and we wouldn't have had

the major disaster that we had. So that is a recommendation that we would like to bring forward as well.

When we look at – and I know all of this is going to cost money and this the problem that we all have when we start looking at all of these various organizations and rapid response. And, when I look at that kind of thing we also look at whatever other types of small emergencies within the areas, within the regions, you know you take Whispering Pines, Black Pines, McLure, we don't have – our population isn't that much but if we pooled together we would be able to put together a volunteer team that would be able to address a lot of these things. Should, well for an example, this year there are hunters have been lost out there and there is some young people that have been lost out there. And those of us that live in the region, we know the area and we have a really good idea of how and where to approach where a good spot would be, or where we think a possibility of where these people could be that are in distress. So having a team available that would be able to address that, rather than look at the provincial response team which would come in and start laying out the map. That takes time and sometimes life doesn't wait for all of that. So, when you look at regionalizing all of these things, I think it is extremely important.

I guess one of the other things, when we are looking at developing a centralized strategy; we definitely need to involve First Nations. As you are probably aware the North Thompson Indian Band lost a number of houses. We had some homes that were lost in Chase, the Chase Band, Adams Lake, Little Shuswap, Kamloops Indian Band lost a substantial amount of land and trees, resources and a lot of times we seem to – First Nations seem to get swept, you know, under the carpet or pushed aside. Looking at province, federal jurisdiction, saying well you go to the province – and say well we've got provincial land sitting right beside us and we need to address these things. Where we are basically asked to go and deal with the federal government, not knowing that the federal government has also signed an agreement with the province and the agreement entails a few million dollars which supposedly would address some of these issues. Coordinating those kinds of things I think is very important. And when we look at regionalizing a lot of these things, the First Nations in the area have a really good idea of how things happen and what things happen in the region, bringing a resource of information actually just being there on the land.

So those are the kinds of things we look at. One of the other things is funding strategy and funding strategy again I know is very difficult. This is the whole problem, a key thing in order to developing a centralized emergency centre. And our thoughts on it would be looking at provincial funding, federal funding and old Mel isn't going to like this, but municipal funding. And the other thing that we thought of is we should actually be looking at the resources that are out there within these regions. Resources meaning forest, like what has happened out there right now, we have a lot of timber that has to be moved in

a short period of time and I think, looking at some of those resources for capitalizing the communication and strategy for each of the communities, each of the regions, centralized and coordinated through the centralized body which I believe should be right here in Kamloops.

If we look at those kinds of resources to cover the cost of that, I think that would be better – it might be doable, let's put it that way.

Other than that, Mr. Filmon, those are just some of the ideas that we thought that we would bring here and we definitely hope that sometime in the future that we can develop some sort of a strategy that would involve smaller communities within the big picture of the regional district. I think that's one of the way that I think we should be seriously looking at to happen. I think when we look at the region, we have been here for many years – we look at the change in the climate, and things are pointing that this might not be the last of what has happened to us and as mentioned earlier on, there could be possibilities of flood. Right now we have vast areas of timber that is totally gone and our water shed basically doesn't exist any more so the retention of water in the different areas is going to be at a minimum should we get a substantial snowfall this year. So there are things that we kind of have to look at and figure out.

When we look at the post-fire, we also have to take into consideration the wildlife, the habitat, and botanical values that we have out there and how do we bring these kinds of things back, and how do we look after them. How do we make sure that these things are here for our children sometime in the future? So there is a huge area that we need to address and it is just so difficult and hard right now to try and figure out all of the things and how do we address them. Where do we go, setting out a multi-year plan of restoration of what has happened to us? But we have to do it and we have to be prepared for anything else that could come down in the future.

I would like to thank you for this time and if you have any questions I would be more than happy to answer.

- GF Thank you very much, Chief LeBourdais and Counselor LeBourdais. I appreciate your coming here and giving us the benefit of your experiences and especially for reminding us of the losses the First Nations experienced in the summer fires and also the contributions that were made towards the fire fighting. It is very important that we look at it from a perspective of everybody who was affected and also everybody who contributed during the course of the past summer's fires. I also appreciate the comments that you are making and the recommendations that you are making. They certainly mirror those that were made yesterday with respect to access when you are in a confined valley situation and your only means of getting in and getting out is cut off. A lot of people weren't prepared for that and we have to look at whether or not there is a long term strategy to deal with that. That certainly was true also with

respect to the cutting off of electricity, communications service, telecommunications, all of that. When you are in an enclosed area it is important to look at the plans to deal with that on an emergency basis. Also, the utilization of all local resources and knowledge is being repeated time and time again. There does need to be some high level coordination and direction, but the available resources obviously need to be utilized to the fullest extent possible – that knowledge and information that nobody from the outside can bring to it.

All of those are important points and with respect to funding strategy, I think there is going to be a great deal of consideration of all of those issues in the aftermath of this. All levels of government and indeed private sector interests are going to have issues on the table that have to be dealt with. We will certainly be having to comment on that as part of our report.

You remind us of the mixed blessings that we always face. Everybody I know is hoping for a significant snow pack this winter, but if we have had the damage to the watershed that we know we have, then it can turn into a flood very, very easily. So those are all the kinds of issues that people often are not thinking of as they prepare their wish list, so to speak.

Thank you for that commentary. It is very valuable to ensure that we have First Nations' perspective as part of our overall do of what happened this summer and what we need to do to plan for the future.

GF Now I have another person who is registered as Andy Kormendy the Mayor of Ashcroft, is he here? Yes. Welcome your Worship.

Andy Kormendy:

Thank you for the opportunity to make a presentation. Brian Bennewith, our fire chief is on vacation so when you called his name up I was a little surprised, but I am sure that I can speak on his behalf to say that it has been a very interesting summer and we have learned a lot. And I hope we are not going to be critical over the fact of mistakes being made and we want to be supportive of procedures in the future to make it, as you are here, safer for all.

What I have done is I have put together a written report and it is a chronology of events and some recommendations based on our experiences in Ashcroft with respect to the Venables Valley fire.

Of course August 15th is when the Venables Valley fire broke out at approximately 7:00 p.m. and while we saw a small puff of smoke at that time and hindsight is 20/20, it would probably not have taken very much to put it out. But based on the information we received by phone calls to the Kamloops Centre it was a non-issue. By nine o'clock we phoned back again because it certainly did expand and it was still told to us that it was a non-issue at which time I called our administrator who was also the emergency coordinator for the Village and he set up office at our municipal facility. Again, the RCMP were up there evacuating people and by nine o'clock, 9:40, we had ten people in Ashcroft and others moving towards Cache Creek and at that time it was still a non-issue in Kamloops. So, I think there was a real question and concern about communication and I suppose the people in the local area, and I kept hearing that probably had the first hand perspective on it. There was conflicting authorities, which was one of our major concerns, so what I will do is I will simply go over my recommendations and the report will speak through the process.

One thing we found out is there is a need to have a local communication set-up with pre-op and that is critical. And it should be established prior to the fire season. A point person should be established to coordinate the local resource pool. Relying on the outside agencies did not work as efficiently.

Secondly we need to establish and rely on the local chain of command for communication and coordination purposes. We suggest at the local level the RCMP, they were the first ones called out. They began the evacuation process. I guess they phoned into the pre-op centre in Kamloops and again they were contradicted to the point where at some point later on the Fire Chief/Commissioner responsible said, yeah, okay there is an emergency and they phoned the RCMP back and said, yeah, we agree with you at that time. So there should be, I think, coordination with the RCMP, the Highways Manager locally who knows the area, the Provincial Emergency Local Coordinator, the local Fire Chiefs, and then Forestry. I think because we lost our Forestry office as did a lot of the smaller communities, there may not be that specific understanding that there used to be when there was a Forestry Office in Ashcroft or there was one in Lillooet. Then you end up with people from the

outside coming in and with all due respect they do the best they can under the information they are given, but I think there was to some extent a lack of coordination – not to blame them, but basically on the process of centralization which I think impacted on the smaller communities.

There should also be a requirement to train local personnel for forest fire fighting before these emergencies happen at the local level. The local fire department – they are there for structural fires and are not familiar with interface fires. I think that type of training would be very supportive and helpful at the immediate stage where in fact we could control some of the initial situations should it be close enough to the fire department to react, and have some sort of agreement with the fringe settlement area that expands within the regional district where housing and people live, such as Venables Valley, under these circumstances.

There should also be an inventory in place of local personnel and equipment available for fire fighting purposes. That's not only the Ashcroft Fire Department; there is the Cache Creek Land Fill which has its own fire protection zone. There is also a tie treatment plant which has a fire suppression crew, and IG Machine & Fibre up in our area has their own fire resources. So we need a coordination of those elements in case of emergency to back up and support each other, not just at the municipal level but also at the industrial level.

There needs to be the establishment as I see of a joint EOC location within the Ashcroft/Cache Creek area where the Venables Valley Fire was central to us. With that in mind we think that the RCMP who has the communication first response should be part of that EOC process. One of the problems we had was that with the utilities being under pressure of fire we could have lost our hydro, our power, and I think in many ways were supportive to the – thankful to Telus because they gave a telephone which is based on satellite communication. Right now we have in fact digital phone service, but I am not sure if that would be impacted either by the power being out. So these are some of the factors that need to be clarified.

We also need to establish an understanding of the assets and the liabilities within an area such as the Venables Valley because on the one side you have a lot of forests, as you come closer to Ashcroft it changes from forest to brush and on the other side there is a huge – the world's largest deposits of low-grade coal. If the fires were going to extend to the west it would have gone towards that coal base – now what kind of resources were there to fight a coal based fire that probably, as far as I know could have lasted for years and years if it is not protected from fire. Coming to the other way, going across to Ashcroft, there is a magazine storing tons of dynamite and so what was the evacuation procedure for that. I think it is on the outside in the outskirts and well hidden, but there is a business plan for that but I think that the coordination people need to know and understand what are the hazards, what

are the liabilities and how can we manage those in a way that everyone is familiar with the risks within the area for the general population.

I think some of the pamphlets that were give out – how to protect your property and what to do in case of an evacuation – are excellent pamphlets. Right off the bat I think that information should be divested and given to the local populace in question and anything like that so that they would be on hand. They had certainly a lot of questions – when will we be evacuated, and the story is, we don't know, it depends on the wind conditions, it depends on the type of fuel. You have got the location A, B, C – we can't tell you which way to go – to the north, south, or to the west until such time as it becomes that critical to us and then we will tell you which way to go. Those are the kind of factors that need to be explained in these pamphlets. Don't panic – and I think that there wasn't any.

And last, but not least, is the question of communication with respect to the media. The media really wants to be on top of this in many cases. They were looking at sources that were perhaps not verified. I think some of that information we heard on the radio, there was a statement made that there was some structural damage done at the Ashcroft Ranch among other locations that never happened. So I think in some ways you have to have again through that process of one individual speaking on behalf of the coordination within the small community. It might be more helpful to give the facts out, not to hide them but to provide accurate information. And part of the problem with the accurate information was myself as well; in calling the central location in Kamloops to what was happening in front of me were two different things. So who do I believe? Eventually I went with the RCMP, got on the vehicle and drove around with them. Because they were right there, hands on and so in some ways the communication gap between the local area and the Kamloops centre was huge. I think that is also the possibility where misinformation comes not by intent but because of the distances and inability to get reliable information.

So in a nutshell, I know you have been very inundated with information, the rest of the report bases my recommendations and this is here for your information and I am happy to answer your questions if you have any.

GF Thank you very much, your Worship, and we do want a copy of the report which we will read in detail as well. But we appreciate all of the various recommendations you are making. When I think of Ashcroft, I think it is the hottest and driest place I have ever been in in my life. I was there for the Ashcroft Rodeo in the early '70s and I still have pictures of my kids, who were very young at the time, and we couldn't take off enough clothes to get cool. We were there an entire day and by the end of it I had dust in every pore and every part of me. So I know the conditions that you have in the middle of the summer and it is not a wonder that a fire could break out and get out of control. But it is quite a place. We had friends in those days who were in

Kamloops and Cache Creek and we went to the rodeo for the day and had a great time. Anyway, I know the conditions you dealt with obviously some of the time.

The resonating themes that you are bringing forward about who was in charge and where do you turn in times of emergencies is obviously a very critical thing to have in place – the whole concern about communications, where do you turn to for the right information, and if you don't have the right information you are handicapped and you can't do the job that you have to do. The need of some local point person to coordinate the resources that are there and having a cache and inventory of available equipment and resources is very much a part of a local emergency planning exercise and blueprint that I think is needed in almost any community. But whether or not, it is all about responsibilities now as to whether this is a provincial, regional, local – at what level do you put the responsibility and who is it that hold people accountable for making sure that these things are there and available. These are all things we are going to have to wrestle with as we come forward with some consensus on it, but clearly you have identified the issues very, very well.

Also this business of training for dealing with structural fires as opposed to interface fires, it is somewhere betwixt and between because the Forestry people clearly are very competent at dealing with fires in Forestry and in the broader context and then when you get to the interface it is sort of half-way in between local fire departments and the forest people. There is an element in each involved and again I don't know what the best answer is, but hopefully before this review is over we will have a better sense of that.

Again, how to set up the joint emergency operation centres, how many of them, coordination, all of those kinds of things. Certainly the identification of hazards and risks that may be very, very specialized from community to community is an important issue.

I too am impressed with the pamphlets that are available. I have seen them, the copies of them, and it is clear that a lot of work and effort and information has gone into them. The question is about their availability. They do not appear to be widely available or known. And again, that isn't a knock on anybody because I think if I were given all of these pamphlets at a time when there wasn't a sense of urgency I wouldn't necessarily sit down and read them all through and commit them to memory. So these are interesting things as to how best to make the knowledge and information available to people when they need it. But it is reassuring to know that at least somebody sat down and put it all together in a very cohesive form.

So we thank you for all of that and we very much want to have a copy of this so that we can look in more detail at the recommendations that you have. Thank you very much, your Worship.

AK We appreciate you for taking on this task. I am sure it will help us.

GF I know we have others who have indicated a desire to speak and there is a gentleman here who has to leave us in about ten minutes so if you would like to come forward please, sir, and identify yourself and proceed.

Tony Brumell:

Thank you very much Mr. Filmon I certainly appreciate allowing me to kind of jump in here. I am – there are some time constraints. I would like to, if I may, my name is Tony Brumell, by the way. I don't know what kind of personal information you want. I am a resident of Kamloops, have been for thirty years. Do you want my contact information?

GF We'll get it from you actually later.

TB I was not directly affected by the fires per se, I am here because I spent three days volunteering at the Evac centre in Kamloops here. After having volunteered my services up at Paul Lake Road and being told I was of no interest and no value to them even though I had fire fighting experience, I was not certified and therefore, you know – go away and don't bother us.

They didn't even know that there was an evac centre running at the time. I went down there and basically took on a position as – they called them a floater – basically I did whatever was necessary at the time. I provided water for people all over the place, I worked on the situation maps, I actually counseled one man who was literally despondent and I thought possibly suicidal and I couldn't find anybody to help him. I mean rivers of tears were flowing down this man's cheeks. He was sitting in the hockey arena there and I can't find anybody to talk to this guy. That was very distressing.

The flow of information for the first three days sucked. There was no other word for it. The situation maps, the information we were being given on evacuation and so on was garbage. Nobody got any decent information. People who had been evacuated and so on, some of them fifteen kilometers in advance of the fire, not given any time to get their belongings or anything else out, that sort of thing. And I don't really mean to be critical about the RCMP but they were rude, they were intimidating and had no respect for many of the people that they talked to – saying such things as 'the fire is one kilometer down the road' – we later found out it was eight kilometers down the road. 'Who is your dentist?' you know because we want to be able to identify your remains when you are burnt to a crisp.

You know in times of crisis when the authorities come to you and say we have a problem here, we have to be able to believe what they say and this is not happening. They actually, now this is personal experience that I experienced on another fire a few years previous, they told the landowner that if he did not evacuate his insurance would be void. That was a lie and they did it again on other fires this last summer. I am very upset about that because I then followed that up and found out in fact that it was a lie. I talked to insurance people all over the place, I talked to the radio stations and then I talked to the police themselves. That's very distressing and as far as I understand it was still going on in this last fire.

The government now wishes to spend in so-called mitigation for forest fire damage \$16M to provide a paved highway through the back country up to Sun Peaks. Sun Peaks wasn't touched in the fire. The road was closed and the business suffered a little bit, but that \$16M needs to go somewhere else – to help the people of Barriere, McLure Creek, Niskonlith, etc. we don't need a new road into a ski lodge. That's kind of distressing as well.

I did not do any kind of a coordinated approach here. I kind of wrote points down and if I may I will just kind of run through them one at a time.

Number one, and this has always been a concern of mine that when commissions and stuff are set up, like yours, and the final report is put in there is a great foofaraw about how great this is and how many things were learned and so on and the report gets buried, it never sees the light of day. It costs tens of thousands, hundred of thousands of dollars. We have to know that you and other people involved in this can make sure that the recommendations brought forward by your committee are implemented, or at least decided on and look at – no just put away in somebody's file cabinet. This has happened an awful lot.

The damage caused by the fires this year is not over by a long shot. Mr. Halloran and the rest touched on this with the B.C. Wildlife Federation, but did not address the idea that depending on what happens during our next freshet, depending on how much snow we get, depending on how much rain we get, the speed at which it may thaw, this sort of thing. The basic overall activity of the freshet may introduce huge amounts of ash and water and dirt mixture, etc., into the streams which now contain some endangered species, i.e., Coho, steelhead, etc. I don't know if you have ever made homemade lye soap, but it is not pleasant and it is made with ash and water and animal fat. Well, maybe the animal fat won't be there, but the lye will be. Now I don't know if there are mitigating features that can be done to lessen the impact of this huge slug of basic material that is going to come down these streams, but so help me, a PH11 or 10 or something like that, it will burn that creek out entirely and there will be no aquatic life left. What I am suggesting is that somehow a monitoring system be put up, at least on those streams where the impact could be the worst, that sort of thing.

When I finished my time at the evac centre down here, I thought well the main rush is over; basically I am going to try and get my life back and this sort of thing. Well, that didn't happen. I went home, I live in a bedroom community just sort of on the East side of Kamloops and the very night, the very time that I got home, I got a phone call. An old friend saying we have to set up some kind of community fire watch. So we did, and for the next thirty-five nights volunteers from my community came out and we covered, drove the area looking for any kind of activity that might be considered potentially dangerous. During that time there were five arson fires in our area, started by teenagers and other people who really didn't understand the potential impact of what

they were doing. There were a couple of – they call them pallet parties – they go and collect pallets all over the place and take them up into the back woods and torch them. They have a great old time there. There were two of those. The waste bins out near the arena on Valleyview were torched twice. One group of kids decided it would be fun to haul a canoe that was leaned up against the side of one of the houses, hauled down to the main drag, filled it with gasoline, or put \$5 of gasoline on it and torch it. Well, those activities basically came to a halt once it became known that we were there. The drug deals cut way back, the big parties were stopped, that sort of thing. The fire watches were started in other communities, up in Rose Hill, Bernardsville(?), Pinatan(?), etc. Everybody out there, you know two or three, four, five six people in a night putting in two hours shifts all the way up to six o'clock in the morning in some cases. Suggestions were made. We asked for support and we got very little more than people saying yes, that's a great idea. But nobody was willing to help us and help us coordinate the efforts that we were putting forth. I spent probably \$150 on gasoline, for instance, just during that amount of time. A little bit of support from the city would have – we asked for things like, perhaps an ongoing program of a water truck, for instance – just twice a night to run up and down the feeder roads to our bedroom communities, dampening down the shoulders of the road. No, we were told that would cost too much. And I thought, I wonder how much a big fire would cost from a cigarette thrown out a window. It wouldn't have been one hundred percent, but it might have lessened the danger because even after 25 or 30 days of fire watch there were still people doing that. Cigarettes going out the window. Not because people don't understand the risk, and/or don't care. So what we had to do somehow was to mitigate those risks.

Insurance – houses that are in or near interface areas I believe should be required either by the insurance companies or by local building codes to have installed those features which could be termed as permanent fire safety measures. I.e. a permanent, separately plumbed in sprinkler system on the roof. Now I don't know if you saw some of the photographs in the newspapers and this sort of thing where houses had burned to the ground but trees thirty feet away were still green. Those houses burned because of embers coming in on the wind. Plus the fact that the materials those houses are made of are highly flammable. I have heard of instances where the insurance companies could offer incentives if possible. We have a safe driver incentive for ICBC, why not have a safe homeowner incentive in fire areas.

I guess that's about all. There are a couple of minor things, but nothing that is all that significant anymore. I guess that's about it and that's about all my recommendations have been. I put a letter in the newspaper and I had the fire department call me and say hey, these are great, congratulations, etc., etc.

Are any of these going to be acted upon, I don't know. Maybe you have the authority to recommend some of these things. Thank you.

GF Thank you very much Mr. Brumell. There are a lot of common sense ideas that you put forward and I think you for them. You've hit obviously an issue that a lot of people have – whether or not this report, other than the effort and cost that it implies, is going to be implemented and it is obviously not something in my control. But, I would say to you that I wouldn't have taken on the exercise if I felt it would end up being on a shelf gathering dust. I have other things that I would rather be doing. Having said that, I think it is an important task and I believe that the government is sincere in asking me to do this. I believe it is absolutely worthwhile because we learn from it and implement the things that can help us in the future then everybody will be better off as a result of it. I also recognize and that is why in the earlier sessions I am attempting to probe the practicality of whether or not these things are implementable.

There are very, very good ideas, but if I learned anything in 25 years in public office, that is that you can only do what is doable. If there isn't a will on the part of a whole lot of vested interests in this process to accept difficult choices, things that are going to cramp people's style so to speak, then it well may be that the recommendations are right but they are not acceptable for a whole host of reasons that go beyond just being the right recommendations. That's really where I am in an interface, so to speak, between having the right solutions and having solutions that are not only the right solutions, but are able to be implementable. So, I do accept some of the responsibility as to whether or not my report ultimately does get into practice.

You make a really interesting point about, you know, threats and intimidation, evacuation process, things that I have been hearing. The question that I have, though, and somebody raised it yesterday in Barriere, is what price do you put on a life, and there is no question that it is a minor miracle and a great achievement that nobody was killed in the process of this. There was the loss of three pilots and it is a tragic thing and obviously none of us wanted that to happen, but the fact that we are all very, very sorry that that is a consequence of the fire fighting effort. But, on the other side of the coin, zero risk appears to have been the mantra of the day and...

TB People aren't willing to leave their homes like that, though. I'm not, even though I live in a semi-interface area. I am willing to take a certain risk to try and save what my life has – the sum total of my life in that house. I think that at least has to be treated with respect.

GF There is no question about that. In the end though, if you were the person in charge and somebody refused an evacuation order and you lost your life, do you suppose that there would not be any blame put on you for that? I don't mean you as the evacuee, I mean you as the person in charge.

TB I think that is why we live in what's called a free society, that we have the right to do that. I mean even suicide is not illegal in this country and if we decide that we wish to take what is a calculated – may be a calculated risk to protect

that property or whatever it is, given certain circumstances we should be allowed to do so without the kind of processes that occurred with the RCMP. I mean, one of these things out on the South Thompson, the chap out there who has a little ranch and he is right on the river. He has a boat, the whole thing – and yet they told him if you don't leave your insurance is void. Who is your dentist. I mean good heavens. That's not the way you treat people under those circumstances. They have to be able to rely on what they are being told.

GF No, I am not passing judgment on tactics or treatment, I am just talking in principal terms about who ultimately bears the responsibility and it is a difficult issue.

Your comments about monitoring and ensuring that there isn't long term damage to wild life in rivers and streams is something that we will want to have a look at as well. The community fire watch has appeared to have had some positive impact not only here, but elsewhere that we have heard about them and certainly this – the recommendations on building code restrictions are ones that have to be looked at. Whether it is permanent sprinkler systems in roofs, there is some very, very good information that has come out as a result of these fires with places where the use of non-flammable materials in construction, all of those things are information that has to be a part of the report. So thank you very much for that.

TB Thank you very much for hearing me.

GF We have also Mr. Gordon Chow who would like to appear. Mr. Chow.

Gordon Chow:

My name is Gordon Chow and I am a construction labourer and this summer time that if I wanted to volunteer for fire fighting at that time I would have to take a course before I could even get out and fight the fire. But the government itself only gave 100 people throughout the whole province the course to do the fire fighting at that time and therefore there was no way that I could get a pick and shovel and go out and help other people. But about 30 years ago or so they used to conscript people from pubs to go out and fight the forest fires and at that time period you didn't need any skills. At the moment that is why Mr. Campbell had to get the military in so they could be able to do all the work to fight the forest fires that time.

I am just wondering, where did Gordon Campbell spend his \$400B in deficit because I've got his financial reports here for March 31st, 2003 and I went through the section on the Department of Forestry and there is a section on fire suppression that time and they said the time in 2001 and 2002 they spent what was it \$85M on forest fire fighting. And when Gordon Campbell came in with his budget for 2002 and 2003 he only spent \$55M on his fire fighting. So who do I blame? Okay.

What happened, I have the papers here, and it says here salaries, they spent \$60M in 2001/2002 and \$17M for 2002/2003. But they cut back on the costs, the operating costs from \$69M for 2001/2002 and 2002/2003 they reduced it, there's \$38M for operating costs. Somewhere there somebody is making drastic cutbacks and I think that Gordon Campbell should be asked to come here and explain why he reduced the department of finance for the forest fighting by half. I asked him when he came to Kamloops that time if he did and he said out rightly that he did not do it. I think he is a liar.

Therefore I think that he has a lot of explaining to do on why we have drastic cutbacks in the forestry department, we have drastic cutbacks in the environment and we had drastic cutbacks in other parts of the government. In the future we are going to have even greater problems with health care and at the moment he has been outsourcing the hospital expenses and privatizing certain parts of it like laundry and stuff like that.

GF Thank you Mr. Chow, I appreciate the comments that you are making. As I indicated earlier they are part of the public record of these consultations. I don't have answers to them. I am not here to speak on behalf of government, I am here as a person who is independent of government doing the review, so I am not in a position where I can answer any of the questions you put to me.

GC It's too bad that you're not the premier of B.C instead of Gordon Campbell. Because you would have done a better job than he would have in trying to balance the priorities in this province. The province has shifted away from taking care of the elderly and the young to giving tax cuts to business and

making it really difficult for most people to be able to make a decent living in this province.

GF Thank you very much for your comments, Gordon.

I also have an indication that Marvin Gonvick would like to come forward, please.
Welcome.

Marvin Gonvick:

Thank you very much. I appreciate the opportunity to speak. For the people who don't know, my name is Marvin Gonvick, I held the position of Fire Chief for the McLure Fire Department for about fourteen years. I am now retired from the position; I retired about three years ago. At the time I was also a mop-up contractor for the Ministry of Forests. I spent 21 years in that business. Four years of that was done in the Chetwynd area and 17 years in the Kamloops area so, while I do not really consider myself an expert, I do have considerable experience. I made these notes up really fast, I didn't expect I was going to get a chance to speak, so I have a very condensed thing here and I may flesh out a little bit here and there as I go.

I live in Kamloops now so I am about 25 miles from McLure and it takes me a little while to get there. In this particular instance with the McLure fire I arrived at the scene about 4:30 p.m., which was about 3-1/2 hours of the start up of the fire. I just went to volunteer my assistance given that I had some experience in that type of fire fighting.

At the time I arrived that fire was well established and what was what you would call a Rank V to Rank VI condition which is about as severe as a fire gets. From the location of the fire start the McLure fire department never had a chance of stopping that fire because there was no fire vehicle access to the area of the head of the fire. From everything I have seen or heard it appears to me that everything that was possible to do to control this fire was done. I can't comment what happened in other areas such as Barriere after the fire burned past McLure because all my attention and efforts were directed at continuing to defend McLure. However, I will say I have never seen fire conditions and fire spread rates like what occurred on this fire. Many people can stand on the sidelines and form opinions of what should or could have been done and are quick to voice their opinions to anyone who will listen. Generally they mean well but unless they have actually experienced the conditions first hand they can't know what it was like on the fire line. I have heard this same criticism on every fire that I have been involved with.

Now I am not going to get into any mechanics of fire fighting because you probably hear lots of that from people who are much more learned than I. But pointing out one little part of this fire, the fire started in the bush behind the buildings, several hundred feet from the closest point we could get a fire truck. So, by the time the fire truck arrived, which would have been approximately eight minutes from the time the call came in, the fire was well established and on the road. So to try to drag a fire hose up that steep hill, through the fire to try to get to the head of the fire to cut it off was just impossible. There was no vehicle access. So, basically the fire department kind of had to wait for the Forest Service to come in and activate that. I know that the water bombers, the Forest Service was alerted and the water bombers were requested within about four minutes of the time the fire

department came on. One of my colleagues has the actual 911 printed reports of the time.

When I hear people say well I could have put that out with my foot, or I could have spit that fire out, or whatever. They really don't know. So I think that your commission needs to hear a little bit from some of the people who actually do the fire fighting too.

That kind of concludes my feelings on that. If you have any questions I certainly am willing to answer them. Also, I speak for myself. I don't speak as an official spokesman for the fire department because I am just an auxiliary member at this point.

A few other things that came along that I would like to talk about. One criticism that I had was the way that the RCMP road blocks were handled. There did not seem to me to be much if any communication between the check points. Most of the officers were not local people and were not familiar with the area and the people involved in the suppression work. Procedures would be set up to permit the movement of fire personnel and then a shift change would occur and the placement officers would either not be informed of the procedures or would choose not to follow them.

Another problem was that only part of McLure was ordered evacuated so if anyone who was not ordered out left the area they would not be allowed to return home. So they were stuck – they couldn't go home and they couldn't get any help with emergency housing or other help needed because they were not under an official evacuation order.

We ran into that several times where people would talk to us as the fire department and say what are we supposed to do. Well, in several cases, myself and others spoke to people at the RCMP check point and asked them if it was possible that they could radio a 911 dispatch or radio their other people at the other checkpoint and try to resolve that issue and they didn't seem to want to do that. Now there was lots going on, but there were lots of problems. I know it created a lot of inconvenience for the people who were caught but I guess that type of inconvenience I will have to say is pretty minor compared to the inconvenience of losing your home, because those people did not. As a matter of fact in the community of McLure itself we didn't lose a single home. We were extremely fortunate that way. So the inconvenience was just that – inconvenience. But I think that maybe the RCMP could have been a little bit more cooperative in trying to resolve some of those problems.

I was at the meeting yesterday in Barriere and I heard the Fire Chief Kirkwood speak of the need for some organization and mutual aid so that the departments of the North Thompson can work together in incidents like this. When I was Chief of the McLure Fire Department I attended many discussions with other chiefs in the valley. We were all in agreement of the need for such

an organization but the TNRD adamantly refused to allow anything to proceed. As recently as last week or so they still refused to consider it, even after this tragedy of this summer.

Up the North Thompson, within approximately an hour's drive there are seven small volunteer fire departments, Barriere, McLure, Chu Chua, Little Fort, Blackpool, Clearwater and Vavenby are the seven that I am referring to. And they are about from the extreme end to the other end. The only mutual aid agreement that has been able to be made in that area is between Blackpool and Clearwater. I am not exactly sure why that one was permitted to proceed but I know when McLure tried to work with Barriere, when Barriere tried to work with Little Fort or, when we all tried to work together we just got shot down every time. We were just told flat out that it's not going to happen.

Yesterday when I was in Barriere I read the Barriere newspaper. I regret now that I didn't clip the article out, but there was an article in there about the TNRD refusing to allow mutual aid for that area. I don't know what the reasoning is; I just know that that's the way it is. I think it would be a great help – we had, developed what we thought was a pretty good system whereby one department would send a truck to the next community – the community behind would then have a truck available to help defend the first community and so on – you know, by stepping forward and stepping back sort of thing we would be very well covered.

Another problem is the fact that departments cannot go out of their official boundaries without risking the loss of insurance protection or exposure to lawsuits. At the present time there is a stretch of area which is about two kilometers long between McLure and Barriere and a stretch of about 15 kilometers between McLure and Kamloops. If an incident occurs in one of these areas there is no way that we can respond without the above-mentioned risks. One case in point happened a few years ago one kilometer south of the McLure boundary along Highway Five when a semi-truck rolled over a small car, killing all in the car, and coming to rest cross-ways on the highway and catching fire. The resulting fire closed the highway for six hours until the fire burned itself out and the highway could be cleared. Meanwhile the McLure fire truck was parked one kilometer down the road and was helpless to assist. In a summer like this past one there could have been a wildfire started with the result such as we saw this year.

I think we need to have the ability to handle these situations without having the possible loss of liability coverage or lawsuit hanging over our heads. There needs to be some kind of legislation put in place to help us in this situation. I am not saying that a fire department should go miles and miles in the middle of nowhere, but when we are looking at such relatively short distances such as two kilometers between McLure and Barriere, or 15 or so kilometers between Kamloops and McLure, we should be able to handle those. The insurance advisory board suggests that five miles from the fire hall, or eight

kilometers is the limit that a fire department should run to be effective. This may be true in say strictly structural protection where time is so much of the essence to get to a building that is on fire. They say that any distances beyond that render the fire department relatively useless. Well, two things that I have to rebut that, one is particularly in the case of non-structural fires which could develop into wildfire like we had this year, is that we have more time to work to catch – say a grass fire. If we have somebody who flips a cigarette but out on that piece of no-man’s land it will, when it starts a fire we will have more time to react to it. Another thing is when we have our fire trucks up and they are at speed and we are five miles from the fire hall we have to go six miles or seven miles. We are looking at less than a mile, or approximately a minute per mile. So the time factor between five miles and six miles, I should say kilometers – eight kilometers or say 9 or 10 kilometers is a factor of a few seconds – 60 to 75 seconds. If you are pulling very steep hills it is a different story but when you are running level and like I say you are up to speed on a highway that is generally not crowded, time isn’t a huge factor. Now the Insurance Advisory Board says well if you are out there and you have a fire in your community, then your community is not protected. Well, this year McLure is celebrating its 20th Anniversary as a fire department. In twenty years we had one chimney fire that developed into a structure fire. We had one chicken house that burned, and nothing else as far as structural fire. So, when they express a real concern about simultaneous fires I think it is not a huge factor. Twenty years of experience bears that out; that the chances are that we are not going to have simultaneous fires – one outside the district and one in. but, there again if we had the mutual aid agreement, and it were particularly in that area south of McLure and Barriere is permitted to come down and help McLure that problem is pretty much alleviated. McLure sits with two fire trucks so if we sent one truck out of area we still wouldn’t have the community unprotected, we would still have one truck left and that truck can do initial attack until a Barriere truck could come in to help out.

So I think my feelings are that somehow we have to resolve this issue of these no-man’s lands where there is no protection. There is just too much potential of disaster happening. All it would have taken while the McLure fire was on was a cigarette out the window in that Minsula(?) area and all of a sudden we would have had fire running at McLure from two sides and we would have been helpless to do it, legally.

I think that is about all I have to say, I want to keep it very short because I know there is other people to speak. So I very much appreciate the opportunity to talk and if you have any questions, I am certainly willing to answer.

GF Thanks very much, Marvin for giving us the benefit of your experience on this. I had the opportunity to fly, first with fixed wing and then with helicopter, over the McLure fire. It certainly is very evident to see that this was a completely out of control unpredictable kind of fire because it jumped the highway, it

jumped the river, it went at different times in four different directions it appears over the process.

MG That's pretty much the way it was. In my experience I never saw fire spread rates such as these. I saw a fire come downhill faster than it normally goes uphill. I saw a fire come back against the wind and it's not supposed to do that and it just marched for miles against the wind. It was conditions like I have never seen and we were virtually powerless to do anything with it. Kind of only guide the fire, try to flank it and push it away, or whatever.

GF Well it is a remarkable situation that is difficult for people to conceive if they haven't been there so that is why I think your experience is very valuable. The confusion over evacuations and so on is obviously something that was expressed on most occasions yesterday as well as today.

MG I also spent five days on the McGillvary fire near Niskonlith Lake and I found some of the same problems with the road blocks there. It was kind of the same strategy that was applied. It was sometimes inconsistent as to who was allowed in and who wasn't and there were times – I know at one point the evacuation order was lifted for Niskonlith Lake and there was one permanent resident there – he wasn't permitted to go home. When he finally was permitted to go home, he wasn't allowed to take his twelve year old son home. And yet the order had been lifted at that time. It was well publicized that it had been lifted and he still wasn't. And some of the excuses that were used were kind of off the wall, I thought. They said well there was a risk of fire. Well, there was nothing left to burn at that time. It was total devastation except for this gentleman's house. Then they said well, there were looters in the area. The gentleman who lived there said well maybe that's all the more reason I should be at the house. Well, no, you can't go, what if there is a lightening strike? Well, the man said I've lived here 25 years, we have gone through lightening storms all this time, and if there was there is nothing to burn. But they still didn't want to let him in so he finally, he ended going into Chase and speaking to some higher-ups and finally got permission to go, but they still wouldn't let him take this twelve year old son with him. It just didn't make too much sense. I know they erred on caution, but it seemed to me a little inconsistent. There were many other stories that I heard, they are rumours and stories and I won't delve into them because I don't know for a fact.

GF I appreciate very much your coming yesterday and today and thank you for your presentation, Martin.

MG Thank you. Would you like this?

GF Yes, I would, please.

Our next presenter is Al Gotuaco. (Good afternoon) Good afternoon. Welcome.

Al Gotuaco:

My name is Al Gotuaco. I have been on the McLure Fire Department for nine years. I have been a Deputy Chief for two and a Chief for two and an incident commander for two out of that nine years. I was first on the scene at the McLure fire. Upon arriving I saw it was up the hill, there was no way we could make it up there, absolutely no way. There was a way, it was blocked off. Our first priority was the safety of the fire fighters; our second priority was the safety of the structures and the people who lived in those structures.

We immediately evacuated the restaurant, set up a staging area, tried to make some incident action plans to protect all the structures. As soon as things started really getting out of control I called for an evacuation for McLure south. 911 dispatch ordered that Forestry will handle all that. I called up for the water bombers in four minutes – any fixed air wing. There was a fire 24 hours prior to this fire which was caused by CN hot brake material coming off the track on tall grass. There was a helicopter that arrived, dropped off a Forestry quick initial attack crew and then there was a water bomber that came by and did a beautiful air show and put that fire out 24 hours before this big one.

So we were ready for a fire but not anything like this. The difference in response times and how we approached it were pretty much similar. We did everything that we could in the manner that we could. It is our 20th year anniversary; we are playing around with a truck that is a 1964 International with 500 gallons. Our other truck is a 1976 Ford which, as some of the locals know is holding up a sign of Jubilee RB, the hosting – it used to belong to Sun Peaks. After saying that, the equipment we have is not very good. We operate off a \$10,000 budget since 1992. Prior to that it was just cupcakes and poking needles in thread and wool. We desperately need to update those trucks. Talking to Superior Engine Builders last week, there is a company named Pro-Fire down in Abbotsford who are willing to give us a deal on a truck and a chassis and all that. He mentioned after the first day he saw our trucks on TV he said there were two trucks in their yard for McLure to use. He called somebody in Kamloops to let him know, we never got the word. Somewhere along the line, perhaps maybe these big communities like Coquitlam, or Burnaby, Vancouver, Richmond could maybe let some of their equipment go that is not up to par for their standards but would be viable for what we do with it. That might not be in all cases, but perhaps in the future some of these other big city fire departments that go through their equipment that much faster, if they were to release some of their equipment prior to it being outdated and passing it on to the rural fire departments, then we could all have better equipment to use. I don't know if that is possible or not, it's just an idea.

For three days after the fire started we didn't see any other fire trucks. We didn't hear from anybody. The power was out, the telephone was out. All we could talk to was 911 dispatch. When the fire raged towards Barriere and

Strawberry Hill caught on the third Friday, when there was a forty car line-up at the ferry, that left two fire fighters standing there with three water trucks, two medics and one forestry crew.

The forestry pulled out all their equipment, all the heavy equipment left, went to Barriere, some went to Strawberry Hill and we had absolutely no communication with anybody. The power was out; our batteries were wearing out three times faster than they normally would for our radios. It kind of left us in the dark but we just had to make it through the night. So, as an incident commander I pulled together everything, all the resources we had right that night, aimed one truck north, aimed one truck south, had a water tender follow that truck. There were very few residences around and with no communication had the fire spotted anywhere we could have been in real trouble. Lucky we weren't. But there were a lot of things that could have been done, might have been done, but we were just trying to get through this nightmare that didn't end for 29 days.

We have just been debriefed yesterday. Somehow McLure got left out of the debriefing, or the defusing. We are only a small fire department but we can't forget about the small fire departments.

I think all fire departments should have their members understand the incident command system for structural and I think these two members whether officers or not should have the level two incident command system and possibly one with a level three. These courses are not very cheap. They need to come down in price. The course I took was in Kelowna. It was put on by the B.C. Fire Chiefs Association and the Office of the Fire Commissioner. I think that was a \$350 course with a \$10,000 budget a year, \$350 is not even really there, plus hotel rooms and what not.

Just so there is more continuity between inter-agency stuff, as well as other departments and the people you have to work with. We used to have fire chief meetings; we still do every two months along up and down the North Thompson Valley. The continuity with the Office of the Fire Commissioner was very fluid. They were there once or twice every two months. I think maybe Forestry should maybe be involved in some of these meetings just to keep everything nice and fluid. So in an event like this there are no erratic thoughts or anything that like, that we are used to talking to people on a regular basis and know how people work.

I think that is all I have to say.

GF Thank you very much Al, I appreciate – firstly thank you for what you are doing as a volunteer and all of the risks and efforts that you are putting into this. Obviously this has been a very difficult time for you. It is not easy to put up with criticism from outside and from people who don't have to walk in your boots. Thank you for coming here.

We will take another quick break and be right back.

Welcome.

Thank you and good afternoon, Mr. Filmon.

Rick Sommer:

My name is Rick Sommer. I am Woods Manager for Tolko Industries. Since the fire I have been reassigned to our Heffley Creek operations. I was the Woods Manager at Louis Creek and as you are aware our operation suffered demise during the fire.

Thank you for this opportunity to participate in the provincial review of last summer's fire suppression activities. It was a challenging period for many. I'm sure you have heard lots of stories about heroism and lots of stories about the activities of a lot of volunteers and fire fighters themselves. As you pointed out, unfortunately we did suffer three fatalities in all the fires in the province, but I think the big celebration is the fires are out and there was hundreds of thousands of man hours contributed to the fire quite successfully. The Louis Creek Woodlands group was particularly hard hit with suppression activities this summer. We were intimately involved in the McLure Fire, the McGillvary Fire and the Venables fire – one of those little quiet ones that was off in the distance that not many folks knew about. So we look forward to your recommendations for building on the province's history of fire suppression and we are pleased to contribute to your process. I have a report here that I will share with you when I am done.

We would first like to talk to some of the things that actually worked. Maybe not perfectly, and in times such as we were experiencing not as good as some people would expect. Perfection during periods like this, these types of crises are difficult to achieve. It was clear to us right from the out start that we had a very serious situation. The weather conditions leading up to it obviously were something that we hadn't seen for many years and the fact that fires were starting was of major concern to us. It was also very clear to us from the very outset that the priorities set by government was to deal with folks, structures, communities and that sort of thing and we were quite cooperative in that nature in terms of those being a priority, although our interests certainly lie with the forests. I think that communication was quite clear, at least at the operations level.

Once the situation became as large as it was, it certainly became quite chaotic and took a number of days, in fact probably weeks to really develop any sense of organization. And that is not dissimilar to most situations like this. I have been in the industry for over thirty years and have both been on the lighting side from bush fire point of view – I am not an arsonist – and also from putting them out when they go wrong or putting them out when Mother Nature starts them. Chaos is the order of the day early on. But one thing that did work well, particularly in the McLure fire was to keep the areas that were under a particular sector boss small and anything under about five kilometers worked well. It was well managed, well controlled, and a lot of good progress could be made. The inclusion of industry both at the command level and at the fire suppression and operational level worked in the main well, but it is certainly an area where we think some progress can be made in terms of

integrating the knowledge and expertise of industry with those of folks in government and in the fire centres.

The incident command teams in our opinion need to have senior industry personnel as part of that team from the outset. Generally what happens is industry arrives as part of the suppression crew when we are away from communities and we are there for a period of time until the Ministry or the government gets organized enough to take it over and then we kind of fade into the background. We don't think that is a good idea. Local people know what is going on, they know the people that are going to assist, they know the equipment, and they know the terrain. They are an excellent source to work both at the strategic and operational levels.

On the fire suppression lines again industry folks generally know the contractors that are doing the work, they know the equipment, the equipment type, they know the ability of the equipment and they need to be integrated somehow in the team that is going to attempt to put that fire out at an operational level.

As you are aware basic fire training is a requirement in the Forest Industry. It is not only the requirement in terms of the training module, it is an annual review process that folks have to go through, more from a safety point of view than actual fire suppression and knowledge perspective. We think that should be expanded to deal with public at large in terms of creating a bit of a reserve force that can be there to be called on if needed when we get into situations when the core fire fighting group has been tapped in terms of resource.

Again equipment dispatching, industry needs to be involved. We know where the equipment is, we know who owns the equipment, and we know how to get it from one point to another if there is a fire. So that is an area where some expertise from industry can be applied and employed successfully.

The safety and medical aspects – we felt them to be quite adequate on the fire and when chaos is reigning about you, there are always things that don't get done, but there are a few things there and I will leave the details to my report in terms of some improvements.

Suggestions for improvements is an interesting area and these have been put together by the staff who were on all three of the fires and who were called upon to do supervision of equipment, to lay fire lines, to do all sorts of different things. And these are some observations that they had in terms of what they saw.

The length of a shift and shift length right now is twelve hour days, plus or minus depending on whether you are on the line on a given day. ...

New tape (Nov.13-4:37-5:35 p.m.)

Rick Sommer: (continued)

... six fires you know that you are not going to do much in suppression activity after in the early summer probably eleven or twelve o'clock – 11:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. and as you go later in the summer, later into the 1:00 o'clock 2:00 o'clock period. So the crews should be marshaled and ready at first light. We noticed that a lot of crews were marshaled and ready at the camps at first light and in a lot of cases there was an hour to an hour and a half drive and you needed time to employ them where they needed to be on the fire line it was approaching nine or ten o'clock and you had lost a significant amount of daylight period to fight the fire when the fire was less aggressive.

Radio frequencies – the Ministry needs to take a look at providing the protection channels to industry when we get into these situations so there can be better communication between industry folk and Ministry folk. Industry, generally speaking, always provides radio channels to the Ministry so it is a one-sided process at the moment and that needs to be looked at to help with the safety issues; to help with communications issues, deployment issues – a number of things could be improved in terms of efficiencies of applying resources if the communications are improved.

I am just kind of highlighting the ones we that we think are really important here and you will get a chance to review some of the other ones as you read the report.

Maps and site information – it seems like a simple task, but generally speaking the Ministry's currency or the up-to-datedness of their product was lacking and in a lot of cases we were turning out maps, or consultants were turning out maps of the most current location of blocks, roads and access. I think Ministry needs to take a really hard look at themselves in this area and try to develop a more real-time set of data that folks can use. I know a number of times we came out with our maps that we generate in our office and we get lots of drool marks all over them because the stuff that the fire fighters were using was either a high scale so it wasn't very detailed, or was very old and they didn't even know the roads existed or where they had access in certain areas. When you are needing to respond very quickly that is a critical tool in establishing a strategy around putting fire out – both from a safety point of view and just an access point of view.

We noticed that the Ministry, and this may be the right decision, but we certainly think it something that needs review – took the position of a zero risk tolerance point of view and we agree when it comes to human life that is certainly something that needs to be considered, and again we have the aggressiveness that we saw this summer. It may not have been the wrong decision, however we think it needs to be looked at. We think there is opportunity when certain situations can present themselves where zero risk is not necessarily the appropriate concept – in particular, at night using equipment to light the fire line when you have the appropriate ground

conditions and the appropriate situations and the appropriate equipment and operators. It is complimentary in terms of being able to set things up for the next day's activities and there is a coordination between the heavy equipment forces and ground forces to support it. We think there is some opportunity there to improve things.

In the pre-fire situation, we think that a data base that has folks who have equipment attached to fire experience, have knowledge around fire fighting from an individual's perspective needs to have some repair put to it. We know that as industry we submit annually what we call a fire preparedness plan to the Ministry. We also know that the Ministry chooses to put them on the shelf and allow them to gather dust. We don't think this is necessarily the right thing to occur. Whether it is resources required to build a data base or resources required to collate a data base, we don't really know what the issue is there but we think that having a good data base accessible on a province-wide basis is something that would help allocate resources when they become scarce in the regional basis, and we still have opportunity for them across the province.

One of the issues that seems to be maybe overlooked somewhat in all of this is something as simple as meals and the availability of meals out of kind of the norms of seven in the morning, noon and six at night – having some opportunity to re-schedule shifting to match up opportunity with respect to daylight and opportunity with respect to fire behaviour. We found that to be a bit troublesome in terms of folks being able to get an early start to the day. We are talking like three and four in the morning. I know that when we slash burn, most of our crews are on the road by three in the morning to arrive at daylight and start acting on the fire as quickly as possible. It causes some inconvenience, yes, but at times like we had this summer inconvenience is certainly not the thing that we should allow to impair our ability to put the fire out if it's possible.

Daily fire information on the line – it was spotty at best. It needs to be improved in terms of disseminating that both from a safety perspective and just a location perspective in terms of what can people expect on different parts of a fire that has reached 25,000 hectares. One zone may have a totally different behaviour than another zone and having daily fire information on a branch basis, as the Ministry calls it, would certainly assist folks in understanding what is going on in their particular location of the fires as well as other locations. Fortunately the lack of that information, because of the concerted approach that people took did not cause anyone to be injured during fires as they displayed some aggressive behaviour. But we think that improving that through quick deploy stations or some other technology that allows the fire behaviour specialists more information that would help folks apply resources and to attack the fire.

Equipment identification needs to be done somehow differently so that aerial folks can see what cat is where. It could be solved by – GPS units could be solved by a number of different technologies out there. Certainly not being able to identify a particular machine, it's knowing its capabilities by that identification and then using it to deal with various situations was problematic.

Like most chaotic situations where adrenalin is probably driving more behaviour than anything else there were times when we saw a lot of unnecessary fire breaks being constructed. Part of it was an indirect attack strategy versus a direct attack strategy so fire guards were built well away from the fire in an attempt to back burn and then try to consume fuels. I think there needs to be some training in that area so that a broader audience understands what technique is being used, when it can be applied, how it could be applied to prevent the construction of needless guards.

We experienced a lot of situations where we were trying to plan two, three and four days ahead of the fire. We were putting guards in place trying to predict where the fire was going to go as opposed to dealing with it on a daily basis. As one of the incident commanders said, you know we've got this animal that breathes every three days. And the McLure fire if you look at the run that it took, it took a big run one day, kind of settled down for one or two days and then took a big run again. We were trying to deal with that in terms of strategy and attack methodology. So somehow that needs to be better understood so that folks understand why things are happening, and also when to use various techniques and that is an educational thing – both I think in industry and in government.

I think that that covers off most things, other than something we learned from the Ontario guys – sprinkler systems are good – we need to – they are very inexpensive and I am thinking here in terms of not for structural protection which they were generally used for, but also for applications in the forest itself. I was attending one incident commander's debriefing one day and a group from Ontario had just come in and they kept saying to us – so where's the water, where's the water. In Ontario we've got lakes all over the place, all we use is water – just give us water and we'll put the fire out. We had to kind of reeducate them that water is a scarce commodity in British Columbia even though in parts of the province it rains quite heavily. But properly applied the sprinkling system technology and techniques can become a valuable tool and it is not widely used in B.C, and particularly in the interior of B.C. because of a lack of water but I think it is again a learning area that practices could be improved and where teaching could allow folks to better understand its application.

One other piece of technology – GPS units for fire line supervisors – there were numerous times when folks had no idea where they were – either because of smoke or lack of familiarity. A GPS unit properly used could have

given them some better information about where they were on the ground, where the fire was, up close as opposed to just flying over it. We think it would be useful for those folks to have that technology to help them better understand where they are on the fire itself.

Those are kind of the highlights, there are a few other details in here that you can read at your leisure or have someone digest for you to use in your report. With that I will turn it over to questions if you have any.

GF Thank you very much, Rick. We do indeed want to have the copy of your report. We will look at it in detail and benefit from the information. I certainly appreciate a lot of the technical side of the experience that you are providing us. Those are situations that we will definitely want to look at in great detail. The use of an industry representative on the incident command teams is not something that we had heard before but it certainly makes a lot of sense. We obviously, certainly in the areas in which you have operations and are involved in harvesting the forest would have the greatest local knowledge s that seems to make a lot of sense. The integration aspects of so many of these things, knowing the availability of contractors and equipment and all of those aspects again seems very sensible.

Shift length comments certainly safety and health concerns, not unlike so many different activities in life. We have restrictions for truckers and other equipment operators as to how long they can go and how many shifts consecutively, and this is a time of crisis but I think there must be a point at which people lead their effectiveness and become at risk if we overwork them.

Your comment about the hours of operation is certainly mirrored by what was said yesterday and numerous occasions at Barriere and I think it was probably people who were part of your work environment who were making some of the comments about daybreak being the best time to go. Although you have added another wrinkle to that by suggesting that some of the things can be done at night, like laying the fire lines and setting up some of the next day's activities. Those are things that I know are part of current operational parameters and they certainly are things that we will review as potential for recommendation. The data base of course that you speak of, that goes all the way from the availability of maps to inventories of equipment, knowledgeable people and all of that is also very interesting information for us. One of the things it think – maybe it is inter-tied when you talk about people not being available to go out at daybreak. It appears as though mealtimes are a part of that process, so the flexibility that you are talking about may be part of the solution.

GPS and others things are things that we didn't have before, certainly within the last five years they are becoming useful in all sorts of applications and this coordination between particularly airborne equipment and ground level

equipment and all of those things are tied into that. So thank you for all of that information. We appreciate it very, very much.

RS Well thank you for the opportunity. I just want to say that on behalf of Tolko we appreciate the work that the Fire Centre did here. We definitely appreciate all the fire fighters that came either from outside the region and came from outside the province. And we are certainly very appreciative of the volunteer fire department, both the McLure Fire Department and the Barriere Fire Department for the activities that they conducted and the attempts that they made to save the mill.

In my opinion, and having a tremendous amount of experience, I echo some of the earlier comments. There was very little we could do. Circumstances were against us. Mother Nature had the upper hand and she had it for a number of days. We did what we mere mortals could think about doing under the conditions and unfortunately we are living in a world of significant change. We are going to survive. People in the part of the country are survivalists and some good will come out of it, some day. It may not be apparent to most now, but life will carry on.

GF Thank you very much. If we could have a copy of that report please, we will certainly make good use of it. Thank you for coming.

We have another person who has indicated he wishes to speak, Peter Mahaits.
Welcome.

Peter Mahaits:

Thank you. I guess I should say good evening as it is five o'clock. I am a locomotive engineer for CN Rail by trade and I am a Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers Health and Safety Committee representative. We were operating our railway through the fire zone during the time when the highways were still closed to access for the public. I am sorry I don't have my questions and comments in a logical order so I will just start at the top.

In conversation with the company, CN Rail, we have had numerous questions and we have heard their side of the story. What we would like to hear is from the provincial emergency program people. Something along the lines of exactly what process was used to declare or determine when it was safe to operate trains throughout the entire wild fire area during the time period when highways were closed and keeping in mind we operate all kinds of dangerous commodities of any description that you can imagine. Our people were sent out there under extremely smoky conditions and the information that our people and concerns weren't really addressed at the time. I have to comment that this is a brand-new situation for the railway as well.

Another concern that our people had when they were operating trains through this conflagration was – did the provincial emergency team address the potential need to evacuate or rescue train crews from the extremely remote areas when, for all intents and purposes there was zero visibility. So you couldn't send in a helicopter even if one was available – I understand there wasn't a helicopter to be had in the entire area. Or, were those responsibilities simply left up to the railways to look after.

Did the provincial emergency program authority actually have a proper understanding of exactly what was involved in re-starting rail operations prior to making the decision to allow the resumption of rail traffic through the affected area – keeping in mind again the dangerous commodities that we haul. We are not too worried about hauling a hundred loads of wheat through a fire zone, but there are some other commodities that could pose some difficulties obviously.

A comment that goes hand in hand with the comment about involving industry is: consider involving railway health and safety committees in the process. We are the ones that have direct access to the rank and file people who are going to be operating trains through the affected areas – not only the CN, the CP, BC Rail, anywhere where you have rail lines there will be a health and safety committee with certain local expertise and connections available. This is another resource to consider.

Getting back to my original question, what we would really like to understand is the interface process between the railway and the provincial emergency program people. Just what the process is, separate from what our management has told us.

Another thing to consider is don't forget when re-starting rail operations trains have a very real potential to block people from evacuating their property area. It is my understanding that there was one incident where there was a blockage of evacuation.

And, also I would like to include a reminder that the railways have a capacity to transport huge quantities of men and equipment into some really remote areas which may be otherwise inaccessible. I mean that could include for example an entire train of tank cars full of water, just for example, which could be used to refill fire trucks and save them the trip back to town to refill or the nearest creek, whatever.

And I would also like you to consider that even though I understand that the railway had senior management people 24 hours 7 days a week side by side with the Fire Marshall or other provincial authorities, these senior management people tend to come from out of area – Edmonton, Vancouver and through no fault of their own wouldn't really be familiar with what the actually local conditions, resources, etc., are.

Another thing that I would be interested in seeing would be for eventually for the provincial emergency program people to attend various health and safety committees meetings for the railways and other concerned industries. Or, failing that, perhaps put out some sort of presentation, written, Power-Point, whatever, that could be perhaps downloaded off the internet or directly mailed to the various health and safety committees throughout the province so that we can all be a little more prepared to respond to a future conflagration of this type and sort. As I said, the railway has never seen anything like this before. Sure, we have dealt with lots of forest fires, but nothing like this.

And so that's all I've got for you and thank you for listening to me.

GF Well, thank you for coming. This is an interesting area that hasn't been raised for us before. Having been up the valley and seen the railway line there and decisions that had to be made, obviously not necessarily in this case, but in some cases sparks from the railways are the geneses of forest fires – we have certainly had that experience in our province – but also just the risk that is posed or the potential risk of them traveling through at times in which the whole area is shut down. I am not sure in any way how the decisions are made and who makes the ultimate decision on the safety of the people who are involved with the railway operation or the risk that is posed to others because of the operation, blocking off roads or any number of different issues that you have raised – all very interesting points. And ultimately the transport capacity that is represented by a railway line into a barely inaccessible area that may be a substitute and better plan than the roads that are available.

Just the whole business of interaction and exchange of knowledge between the railway operations and the emergency preparedness people is a very good suggestion so I thank you for that.

PM Thanks very much.

GF Now, we have some faces of people who have not come forward to speak. We are open to presentations. We will be back, taking a break for dinner – we will be back at seven o'clock, but if there is anyone who wishes to speak now before we take a break, I am happy to accommodate that. Is there anybody who would like to speak this afternoon?

Welcome.

Ruth Madsen:

Thank you. Welcome here. We much appreciate what you are doing here. I just want to change my glasses so I can see my notes. I am Ruth Madsen and I am with Thomson Institute of Environmental Studies in Kamloops. It's partly as Chair of that environmental group that I am here, but also I spent over six weeks volunteering with emergency social services, working with evacuees – sometimes eight, ten and twelve hours a day, so some of my comments are going to come from that experience. I don't have something written, but I will do that and send it in. And, I guess my first question – I happen to have an emergency meeting tomorrow of the Kamloops Land Plan to deal with one of the issues from the fires and I wondered – I had to go and pick them up at four o'clock – whether you have seen the maps from the fire, just to see how extensive they are. I just wondered whether you have actually – I picked them up because I needed to view them in order to do this emergency meeting tomorrow.

GF We do have copies of them courtesy of the Ministry of Forests. They are up in our office actually in Vancouver and we also ...

RM Some of my comments will actually relate to those maps, so thank you.

I want to begin with, I think the thing that I heard the most – I mostly worked and when I was home my husband made me meals and I slept, so whenever I was home for that period of time that's all I did was sleep, I did nothing else. So I spent 8, 10, 12, 16 hours at the emergency centre working for emergency social services.

The first thing that comes to mind that I remember from the media, if I did sit down to eat a meal and have the TV on was the fact that the media was excluded and they didn't know what was going on. I just wanted to say certainly from our location down at Sport Mart Place we sometimes had evacuees sitting for three and four hours waiting to be processed. To begin with – and it was through no fault of anybody's because when it first began nobody realized what we were really getting into and how extensive this was going to be. The people came by the hundreds and had to wait by the hundreds. And we would sometimes be thirty people sitting in a circle with all of these people sitting in the middle waiting for us. But if we had had media at that location it would have been utter chaos and nothing would have gotten done. The first few days there nobody knew what had happened to their homes. You know, people didn't know what they had lost, and hadn't lost. And so to have had media there in the process of that would have – it was very, very difficult. I just want to support that decision because I know there has been a lot of criticism and in some areas I don't know. I can only speak about the area that I was involved with.

The second issue is an issue that I debated whether I should raise, but I don't know whether to raise it because I have contacted Ministry people and I have

not got phone calls back. This is an issue that came up, not the first few days, because the first few days with Louis Creek everybody got treated the same way. Then, once we got into more and more areas I ended up seeing incredible inequity depending on who you were as to how you got treated. This is very difficult for me, but I have spent ten years working in British Columbia with the B.C. Treaty Process, advising both the provincial and federal governments and I am still working with the federal government, although the province has stepped away from that consultation process. We are still consulting three times a year with the federal government. I don't know where this inequity or this unfairness came from, I don't know if it came and it is one of the things I think needs to be looked into. I don't know if it came from the province or whether in fact it came from the federal government and from Indian Affairs. But I do know that every paper that we filled out if it was a First Nations person we had to put INAC at the top, which is Indian, and Northern Affairs Canada, and the band name beside it. Once we got past those first initial few days, and got into other areas where we had many of the other bands – we first began only with Chu Chua – they now call themselves North Thompson. I have been here a long time and when I first came I taught swimming and it was the Chu Chua Band. But the North Thompson Band we didn't run into these kinds of problems, but then we got into Niskonlith and Little Shuswap and – help me, who is the third band – we had huge evacuations and all of the bands got evacuated. I know that it may only seem like perception, but I don't believe it was only perception. What began to happen was we were told as the people who assisted the people at the table – we gave out chits for money basically, we found hotel rooms, and we found people restaurants. But what we did also because the majority of the people who were evacuated here – and I want to say thank God, I have been watching what happened in California and in California they had twelve people die, some of them in their cars on the roads because there was no notice. I want to say what everybody did here is amazing; it's just amazing because nobody got caught at home and nobody burned to death in their homes or their cars trying to escape. So what happened here was wonderful in many, many aspects. But this inequity – what happened to begin with was we were allowed to give out \$150 in clothing because people only got five minutes notice and in five minutes – and I understood it when I on the first week I walked the door and my best friend said to me 'take a look around your house, what would you gather in five minutes?' and I think it is something really important that people at MHR (Ministry of Human Resources) need to understand. They were the ones who made the final decisions. Our coordinators were amazing. Our coordinators supported our concerns because when I finished the shift I would raise these concerns and say this inequity here isn't right. I know that people up in one of the areas – the fire fighters who came in were able to get boots – we had five First Nations people come in on their way being transferred from the McLure fire to the – and you know we had so many fires I can't remember which one they were transferred to – but their boots were all burned, they had nothing to wear on their feet and they hadn't received a pay cheque. They came in for money for boots and

they were declined. And yet, I know of other people who weren't First Nations who received it.

We were told with the First Nations people that – not to tell them there was a \$150 clothing allowance – that if they knew it we had to give it, or to give them \$50 per person instead of the \$150. I have major concerns with something like that and it is something that I really want to know. Did that come from the province? Because I know it came from the top because my coordinators fought for those of us who had those concerns. Some people quit because they couldn't stand to work there with that kind of thing happening. And I know of somebody who was let go because she wouldn't leave it alone. She said something has to be done here. This has got to be fair and equitable. And sometimes it depended on who you got from MHR when you put your little flag up to get somebody to come and sign. Because although we filled them all out, the final word before we handed out any of these chits came from the Minister of Human Resources. And on the same shift I would try and get somebody that I knew wouldn't do this to me and would support my evacuees sitting across the table from me and sign what I – because I had to really make the decision. People told me their story if they were a first time in, they had to tell me the story and then I had to help them figure out what they needed because most people didn't even know what they needed. They left their home and to begin with, as I say, we thought they might be out for three days because that is what we were allowed to give them. That was three days' hotel, three days' restaurants, and we expected everybody would be back home. We didn't know this was – some people were out 6-1/2 weeks. You know and people arrived – they hadn't happened to have been home when they got the five minute notice. They then weren't allowed to go to their homes and some of these band members had no shoes, they had a single pair of shorts. And we were told to offer them nothing or fifty dollars per person and then it would depend on whether we got that depending on who our Ministry of Human Resources person was.

As I say this makes it very difficult because it makes it sound like I am criticizing the whole process and I'm not. We were an incredible family down at Sport Mart Place. Everybody supported each other as best as they could. Our coordinators – I am actually apply for both the coordinator and the assistant coordinator for Governor General awards because I think it is people like them who gave beyond what a human being can actually give and yet are not recognized really anywhere. The awards are going to go to them. And the fire fighters – everybody deserves everything they ever get out of this because we had fire fighters who also were evacuees and came in a so we saw them all.

So whether – how this happened I really don't know, but I know that Niskonlith Band Members came and they challenged it and so they were immediately given – and they were people who looked after social services for their band – so they were immediately given everything that was there and

that happened at four o'clock in the morning one morning when we ended up getting the challenge. In many other cases the inequity was completely unfair. I will move away from that.

I want to say the evacuees were patient, they were worried, and they were wonderful. The volunteers worked beyond what could be asked – and I am talking all the volunteers. There were the odd complaints, there were people who only lasted two hours, but there were many of us who worked 12, 16 hours a day for the whole length of the time and everybody was fantastic.

I want to just touch on the McLure ferry. I don't know how many people mentioned it, but the McLure ferry is something in our area that unless they build a bridge up there for safety's sake that is something that should not be taken out. Because not only that the only way the fire fighters got into that area was through the McLure ferry. So I think it something really, really important for you to keep in mind,

And now I want to get to the environmental aspect of all of this. I have also spent ten years on the Kamloops LRMP which is our Land Resource Management Plan, of where we have been in complete consensus since 1995 in the area here. So that is industry and everybody at the table. But I am worried. My maps which I have just picked up for my meeting tomorrow show extensive, extensive fire damage. And it's my understanding most of this fire damage is going to be clear-cut, which means we are going to be talking huge erosion. Tomorrow we are only dealing with deer winter range but in fact at the meeting tomorrow even, we are being asked to change objectives and strategies in our Kamloops Land and Management Plan which was actually the only plan in British Columbia where the whole plan was legislated because we were in complete agreement. And so, spur of the moment at an emergency meeting with a few days' notice we are going to be looking in our deer winter range. We are talking a maximum of five hectare clear cuts. We are going to be asked tomorrow to eliminate that size and talk about other things.

Now I have a concern in deer winter range, I have a concern out in those huge areas that aren't in critical deer winter range. We have lost half of Cornwall Park. Now I understand that is going to be left to natural regeneration which is exactly what I would like to see. We have an area up in our Bonaparte Park which is a moratorium area that we just traded with 100 Mile House, which also burned. But it is our main land management that I have concerns about. I have a little bit of faith, because it is my understanding that First Nations are going to be doing the logging out there. I am going to out and try and meet with those First Nations, all of the Bands in our area are going to be logging in I guess whatever is their specific area. They talk about innovative logging, or they have in the past, at all of the meetings that I have attended for all of these years. I am hoping that the province will in fact allow them to use innovation and not follow this new working forest because our Kamloops land plan was not based on the Forest Practices Code – I guess they were in all the

rest of the province – but in our area here we based our land plan on bio-diversity. We didn't base it on the Forest Practices Code and I am so glad that we didn't because that has been thrown out by our government. We now have what they call the working forest and in fact that probably means that all of this would be clear-cut. Clear-cutting, should we begin to have rains, we don't have much rains but it can happen, and over time you know what happens in areas where everything is clear-cut. So that's a major concern.

I have a concern also because I am hearing that the wood from the fire is going to go to the forest industry and the First Nations will get the jobs. I think that whichever First Nations was affected and whatever community was affected, the advice I would like you to give is that any monetary advantage from this fire should go to those First Nations and go to the local communities. Any financial advantage should not go to industry; it should go to the communities affected.

We are going to have a terrible time in our area trying to figure out how to make our communities viable again. The communities north of here, but even the communities in the Pritchard area – any of the areas that were affected – down in the area I mentioned first where our Cornwall fire was – those communities are going to have a hard time and in future you know, it is actually the wood from those communities that's burned and all the communities are going to get from other jobs and I don't think that's sufficient. I think that any advantage should go to the community, be they First Nations or be they part, such as Louis Creek which are part First Nations and part local community. I also heard that \$30M from the fire fund was going to go to the forest industry in our region and I heard that on CBC, and hopefully it isn't true. But I think money should not be going to the forest industry. I believe that it should go to community and community expansion.

Tolko is not going to re-open again. The sawmill that is up in that area. I am very disappointed. I had hoped – Rick Sommers, who you heard from earlier to day, has been the Tolko member at our Kamloops LRMP for ten years and I was hoping he would somehow convince the company that they needed to re-open. But they are not going to re-open and so a second piece of advice that I would like to give to you is that wood that would go with that licence for that sawmill should in fact not go with Tolko, who are not going to re-open that sawmill, but be left available so that either the community there can open and they may have to begin very small, because I know they have no money. Or, some of that major money that's going to come to the province if there is \$440M lost, \$200M comes from the federal government – maybe what we need to do is to assist the local residents up there, or the First Nations residents I know that North Thompson Band have their own sawmill, maybe they could expand their sawmill, or maybe the community of Louis Creek would like to have a community sawmill and thus end up having a tree farm licence that goes with that sawmill.

So I think it is really important when we have had such huge wild fires that the communities are looked after in such an aspect that a company, be they big or small, if they are not going to re-open that that would be left available for communities. I know it was the kind of thing we spoke about here when we talked about what to do with the forest resources. And that five percent of the resources in the province of British Columbia should go to First Nations and another five percent should go to communities. That hasn't happened.

What has happened in the province of British Columbia since we did that forest review is, the First Nations are getting the jobs of working in the forest but they are not getting that community 5% and the small communities are not get their 5%. So again I think it is a recommendation that you might not hear somewhere else.

I am sorry; I have kind of jumped all over the place here because I only found out by watching the news that you were going to be here today. I have been up to my neck in something else and trying to do my homework for this LRMP meeting tomorrow.
(tape over)

... have been trained. It's an expense that you do once in a lifetime and its one of the biggest investments that we could have in this province and so I thank the people who have spent that \$350 but I see it as a huge investment and not an expense.

The meals again were another thing where we heard from our First Nations people who came in that could they somehow get a chit for lunches because the other forest workers out there were getting lunches, but the First Nations members weren't getting lunches. And so meals, equitable meals for everybody, I don't care if they are army, navy, air force, forest workers, volunteers, First Nations, we need to look at those kinds of things.

I just want to say that all of my involvement and there was one thing that I had major problems with and somebody may tell you it was perception only, I don't believe that. I spent many hours and I dealt with many, many families who had lost everything and I know I have never been prouder of this government and I did not vote for them, but when I first began sitting at the tables I was so proud of what this government was doing and how they were looking after people. But then when I began to see discrepancies, those discrepancies came from somewhere and if they came from the province, shame on them. And if they came from the federal government then the same goes to them.

But, other than that, my whole experience and I have volunteered for forty years. That's what I do with my life. I am retired, I am a senior citizen and that's what I have done with my life - but the volunteerism I saw here is - I will never see it again in my lifetime and the majority of it was wonderful and it was a wonderful experience.

I thank you for coming and doing this because I think it is really important. People have brought many, many better suggestions than I have and I know my perspective is different than probably what you will hear from somebody else but I lived part of it and the other part I have concerns with what is going to happen with the land base. I really thank you for your time.

GF Thank you, Ruth, I very much appreciate your presentation. My wife would be very proud to meet you. She has spent all of her adult life as what she calls a professional volunteer and she always reminds me that volunteers are the gold of this earth and so I thank you for what you have done throughout your life in that respect.

You do bring an interesting and different perspective. Clearly most of the issues that you raised have not been raised before and that is important for us because although it may not be central to ...

RM It doesn't really 'fit' I know.

GF It falls within one area and that is when the Premier and the government asked me to take this on, part of the terms of reference are the role of volunteers in the process. You may not be aware of that but that is one of the terms of reference and another aspect of it is the treatment of people in general, because there were many, many aspects to this natural disaster, not the least of which was the tens of thousands of people who were uprooted, disrupted and out of their homes and their environments and thrust into a process that was difficult to control. And so I make absolutely no excuses but recognize that in the beginning there probably was a good deal of feeling their way through and I do think that the basic terms and conditions were that people should be looked after – people in need should be looked after – so I think that is the underlying premise. Having said that, I think in almost any system that is set up on the spur of the moment, inequities and inconsistencies creep into it. So, knowing that there was the quality of treatment that you have identified is something that should be looked after and should be addressed.

The identification of people in terms of INAC on the form, I don't know for sure, but I do know that in ...

RM I am assuming it means Indian Affairs paying the shot and if it means Indian Affairs was paying the shot, then the province better not have decided to save money because it wasn't their money and I forgot to say that.

GF I know that in virtually all government, provincial government operations certainly in our province, there was a mandatory recompense from the federal government for First Nations people who are in the Constitution their responsibility and it was – they were never ever denied service whether it be

hospital, schools, whatever, but there was an accounting for it by virtue of this identification to collect back in the process. So I am not sure but certainly all of these matters will be matters that we will try and find out about so that if a recommendation is required for the future then we will certainly address that.

The safety and access of the McLure ferry has been identified.

Environmental issues are important and we talked about it a little earlier in terms of the potential of a heavy snow pack and then erosion and all sorts of other consequences that may be there. So we will certainly be identifying that as a concern.

RM Has someone raised the fact that even if they leave huge patches, be they dead or alive trees, if patches are left it will assist in that?

GF No, but I think that is certainly an implied assumption of the Wildlife Federation people and others who have talked about forest management understand that.

RM I missed their presentation.

GF The investment and training is an interesting thing. I don't think that the comment was made in terms of saying that investment shouldn't be made, but I believe that when we have people who volunteer as fire fighters and spend probably dozens to hundreds of hours a year as a volunteer, it is in the communities' interests that they be well trained and that investment is a community investment and not up to the individual. I think that – that is my interpretation of it because I don't think anybody is complaining about an investment of \$350. It should be made because we all should want our people to be as well educated and trained as possible to be able to protect us. But it is a community investment that is required and I don't think it should be an extra burden on somebody who is already giving all these dozens of hours. So that's my interpretation but we will certainly take it as a very valid point on your part. (Thank you) Thank you.

Now, anybody who would like to speak before we take a break for dinner? Okay, we will take a break for dinner and we will be back at seven o'clock. I am not sure if we have people registered. We will go through the process of inviting presentations again at seven o'clock this evening when we return. Thank you very much, everyone.

end