

FIRESTORM 2003 – PROVINCIAL REVIEW

Public Meetings

November 13th, 2003 – Kamloops

Missing Segment 7:00-7:50 p.m.

Welcome back – I think that we have at least one person registered to speak this evening and it's Tim Broere. Please have a seat, and welcome.

Tim Broere

Thanks for coming and thank you for inviting the public, we appreciate the opportunity to speak. I would also like to extend an invitation to you to bring you out to McLure and Barriere with one of the local boys if you would like to take a drive around and be told some stories that'll make the hair on the back of your neck stand up, or make you shake your head, I'm your guy.

GF Okay.

TB Take me up on that.

Some of what I am going to say is probably fairly evident or in retrospect fairly easy to say when it's all settled down and calmed down. It might be very basic and very obvious but I'll say some of it anyway.

Mother Nature put this fire out. At the end of all of it we spent a half a billion dollars plus, we fought hard, tried our best, but she started it and she put it out. The men didn't – we stood back and watched. We tried very hard but you know a fire can jump back and forth the North Thompson River three times in an evening and there's not a whole lot you can do. People talk about fire guards – how wide does a fire guard need to be – well obviously bigger than the North Thompson. Forestry did what they could, the equipment did what they could, but it was too late. People who I suspect over the last two days or so or in the oncoming days will give you their suggestions on their policies and what they think should happen to fight fires. This is what we need to do, this is what we need to do, I guess taken for granted then that we are in a situation like that again.

How about if we never get into a situation like that again and if we put them all out on day one – any interface fire – any fire that potentially could be an interface fire, which is a lot of them because a fire can move over fifteen kilometers in an evening – how about if we put them out on the first day. If we spend half a billion dollars a few weeks later, lets spend a half a billion on the first day and then we've got all those resources we can move to the next fire to the next fire.

It seems fairly easy when you are standing by and watching your friend's house burn down that, you know, why couldn't we put them out on the first day when they are very tiny. I am not a logger and I'm not a forester but I know that watching all of those trees burn, there's got to be huge economic detriment. I am not sure what the real numbers are – I've got a magazine here that says that somewhere between four and six billion dollars worth of wood burned – 2,500 square kilometers – a lot of wood to go down.

Sorry, I'm nervous. I've never spoken in front of somebody before.

GF Just relax, I've spent a lot of my life being nervous and still am, so ...

TB I am not sure how much of your mandate involves rebuilding of McLure – or sorry, Barriere, when this all ends and Barriere is standing without a mill anymore. We've got a few hundred people that have mortgages and are without a job. Now the provincial government holds all of the power here and all of the money. I remember a few years ago just outside of Armstrong they wanted to have some economic development in Armstrong so they attracted, they waved some money around, and there were some wage subsidies handed out, some economic development money. They were offered some tax breaks and incentives which are offered all the time. Maybe the provincial government could offer these kinds of things to some big manufacturing plants that are looking to coming to Canada and make it so appealing that they can't say no. The provincial government has the opportunity right now – they have all of the power and they could make somebody come. And I truly mean make them come – so that there is no other place on the planet where they could go.

Again, I am not sure that this is a part of your mandate, but the after effect – I guess there may be some building code changes. What are we allowed to build with, what are our offsets going to be, how far are trees allowed to be from the place, what kind of material do you have to use. We live in British Columbia; we live in one of the most beautiful places in the world. Certainly being able to live in the forest with the forest all around you coming right up to your property's edge is one of the big benefits that we have. Hopefully that doesn't change too much and we can go back to that, whereas if we put them out on day one, then we don't have to worry about that quite so much anymore.

As a person who is just about to start building a new home, I hope some of the recommendations are that don't make it too restrictive, I don't want to have a whole bunch of new laws imposed on my building my new home. You know I like being in the trees, I like being able to use natural products, I don't want the cost of my home to go up too much. As I say, if we put them all out on day one we don't have to worry about that.

One thing that I found interesting while listening to the news, one of the air tanker bosses was at one of the meetings they were having at the college, came on the TV and they asked him some questions about dropping retardant and how much and what it cost and that kind of thing. Somebody made a statement about putting fires out – about the air tankers putting fires out – and he was pretty indignant. He said air tankers don't put fires out, we stop their advancement. I thought that was kind of an odd statement, if you are not putting it out then it's obviously advancing. If you look back at the fire spread, there was no day between one and two and three and four that it actually reduced in size – they always get bigger. So if the air tanker's job is not to put

them out then it seems kind of odd, what are they doing there. His statement was 'we don't put them out we just stop their advancement.'

Watching the fire above my home, at one point there were only two helicopters there and one tanker. I imagine somewhere in the province there was probably 15 or 20 tankers and they weren't off the ground yet, there was no other fire to go fight. Again we come back to putting them out on day one. If we had 15 tankers, 20 helicopters and 100 bulldozers, and 50 feller/bunchers all on the first fire on the first night, all of those resources could have been used for the next fire on the second night. It seems pretty simple in hindsight.

Maybe it sounds like kind of a crude remark, but Forestry watching parkland burn – there are other parks in the province – maybe not provincial parks, but there are things like Stanley Park, the Endowment Lands around UBC – would those be allowed to burn? I don't think so.

Hopefully she doesn't do this too often – they say that was a once in a 200 year event, or it could be again next year.

GF Thank you very much, Tim. I think regrettably we don't have that kind of control over Nature. When we were in Manitoba in 1996 we had the fourth worst flood in a century on the Red River and everybody said – not everybody, but a lot of people said – oh well, that means it can't happen again. The following year we had the worst flood in the century. So weather conditions are such that they are completely outside of our control. Totally unpredictable and it's not possible for us to say that we aren't going to get really, really bad forest fires again next year, or the year after and the year after that. And so that is why I think our greatest concern is to try and learn from what we have just experienced and convert that learning into better policies of various sorts and they cover a whole range of issues, but certainly your concentration on preparedness and getting onto it early is certainly one that makes a good deal of sense. The question of course is whether or not even that – how much does it take – how much resources does it take and is it feasible to be able to have all those resources at your disposal any time, any where. I am not sure that that is a realistic thing. To talk about having 15 water bombers available to you for the next strike – the question is, is the next strike going to be in Cranbrook, is it going to be in Barriere, or is it going to be up in the Chilcotin, or where is it going to be? Where do you put those water bombers? They take a while to get around unfortunately, they are slow moving and so it's a challenge. Are helicopters better, lots of interesting choices we are going to have to make and it's a tough decision for people in terms of how much can they put down. See, you may know because I asked, and you probably know that they had 23 water bombers in the interior at one time which I thought an enormous amount. It just boggles my mind because in addition to that they probably had something like eighty helicopters. It's a tremendous number of pieces of equipment.

TB Hopefully we can get them back.

GF Hopefully we don't need them back. That's choice number one, but yes, you are right – there has to be obviously a lot of things on standby to work in our favour.

TB And all the other things that the provincial government does – the lunch programs, the bus money, and all those things seem like special interest groups when you are faced with losing everything you have.

GF Certainly the stories of people these two days, are ones in which some people have lost everything – their life savings, the memories of a lifetime, their homes, everything that they have worked for. We have to be able to do things better.

The building code restrictions and the land development and planning restrictions or requirements are things that have been raised today on a number of occasions. Do you have any specifics that you want to recommend?

TB Well, not to mess with them too much, it's why we enjoy B.C. so much, why it's the most beautiful place on the planet. We like to live within our trees in the forests and it may fly in the face of somebody who is going to present right after me. Again I go back to if we spent enough money putting them out on day one then it wouldn't be that big of an issue.

GF Okay, thank you very much Tim. I appreciate your time.

TB Thank you.

Now, do we have another presenter? Yes.

Ella Brown

I'm Ella Brown, Mayor for Logan Lake and this is Marlon Dosch who is a councilor and we are wondering if we can impose, that maybe you can gather around our table.

GF Sure, sure.

EB We've brought a map with us – we weren't able to get you up to the community. Oh, we can come down there.

GF Whichever is easiest for you. Whichever is easiest for you. Yes, there is better light here.

EB I am trying to find – where is my place? Okay.

Well, we are going to follow up on Tim because he did a pretty good presentation there and he mentioned preparedness and for Logan Lake we don't want to be in the same situation that these other communities in the province have been in throughout this summer. We recognized that few years back so we implemented this study right here which was the Urban Wildland Fire Prevention Plan. What we did was we identified the high risk areas within the community and we pooled together common resources within the community as well as with help with the Fire Prevention Centre here in Kamloops and we put out local manpower and started to reduce the fuels in the Crown Land green spaces that are close to a number of the homes. This was really labour intensive and it could only be done in a short time period because we were using students from our Forestry class as an educational process for them; and raising the awareness of this importance within our community. That was our first step that was one of the goals that we wanted to achieve. These fires this year have heightened that to another level for us. We have brought in more partnerships within the community. We are now working with Highland Valley Youth Custody Camp and their young residents are coming into the community and clearing areas, working with the TNRD and they are taking the debris out so we weren't even burning it. They were hand sawing everything rather than any power tools at all.

MD ... the fire department as well as our junior fire fighters – we have a junior fire fighter program – all helping to clear portions of land – to fireproof areas around ...

GF Reduce the fuel?

EB Reduce the fuel, yes.

MD There are a number of other partnerships.

EB So what we have done this year is we put on a real good information meeting through the summer when the fires were going on. We have put in more fire protection things in the community – like a newer, bigger, better siren. We've put in the hard wiring for generators and we recognize the need in the community to make our community fire safe as best that we can as a government. The residents, however, want to do more. They want to protect around their own homes. They want to be able to go into Crown lands and clear a larger section of it and we would like that as well.

So what we have recognized here on the map – this is our community – we are not very big but with the forest all the way around us, if it came in – and the winds normally come in from this direction here. If the winds are to come in and we have had fires coming in from that direction throughout the summer, we could just lose the whole community in no time at all. The houses are that close, there is that much timber that would fuel these fires and just wipe us right out. That what we have started to do is create a little fire break around in this area here and the students from the high school put in a larger number of hours and they really did an exceptional job. Then we started with local residents just cleaning out around their own properties – you won't believe the difference when you drive up the street and you look, and you can see houses all the way up, rather than bush – and yet the trees are still there. They have thinned them out a little.

MD The fires inspire people.

EB It has, yes it has.

MD And we don't want to lose that. We want to build on it using the tragedy of others to kind of promote what is probably the biggest risk to our community.

EB What we are doing should be done in all these other communities. You know, we all need to be prepared and to request that a fire can be put out the first day – you can't do that unless the fuel modification has been done, because those fires are just way too hot. So I think what we are doing is the right step and we have been labeled a model community with our process in these last two years. We want to raise it to the next level and what we are hoping to do, and we have written letters to Ainsworth Lumber and Weyerhaeuser and requested tenure of the tree area around our communities so that we can have some ownership of this.

MD A little more control.

EB A little more control. If we can have the trees and create some revenue from that, then we can pay for this interfacing project within our community. We can create employment through it, we can enhance our forestry school program; we can enhance our recreational opportunities out there by developing further trails systems and whatnot and it all falls into our economic

development study that we are trying to do. We are a mining community and Highland Valley Copper is set to close in 2009, so it falls within our whole vision of – you know our 2010 vision that we are going to promote to the community right after Christmas. This whole picture and I guess to be more fire safe and to instill in each resident that we have and the ones that we would like to attract to our community that we are a very safe community. I don't know any other communities in the province that can say that – that they are safe. And I think our actions are proving that we are – at least attempting to. What we need is that next level. We need some support in order to put this plan into place. We did speak with Minister Dejong ...

GF ... Dejong and he wrote to me and asked us to please make sure that we saw this. And we received a note from Lorna Chalmers too, the Chief Administrator of Armstrong.

EB What we put in this summer is in the \$30,000 mark – what the community had invested to protect themselves already this summer. To do this study which brings us to the next level is another \$35,000 so we are hoping to receive some financial support in order to do this. The province is going to benefit by saying look what Logan Lake is doing; we can all do this. You know, maybe they don't have a junior fire fighter program, but they'll have some other volunteer organization that, once the training has happened, they can go out and do the same practice that we have and we certainly don't mind being used as examples and having people come through and see, or training. We don't mind going to another community and showing them what they can do as well. I think it would just benefit the whole province. We need to be seen as a safe province, not just a little community here and there. It would instill more of the Spirit of B.C. that Gordon Campbell keeps talking about as well. You know he wants everyone to feel that – well they can't feel that when they are filled with fear and they don't want to be here if we aren't going to be a safe province.

Minister Dejong knows that we have requested this amount of money as well in order to aid our next development. I guess the problem is the timing. This is when we need this report to be worked on so that we can implement this plan come springtime. The people in the community are ready and I have already started discussions with Human Resources Development Canada to try and work with them on job creation programs and seeing who else we can hire to try and further this. But again I am not a professional in this and I need some professional help to be able to talk to it properly. And this type of person or this document can do that for us.

GF When did you first become aware of the idea ...

EB What prompted me? I looked out my kitchen window and I live at the top of a hill and I am in a log house and I have a shake roof, still. We don't have a lot of trees on our property but I looked down and I went oh my gosh, you know if

- we had a fire it's just going to come right up the hill and it could just wipe everyone else out right at the top here and carry right on through. I am watching and thinking that's not very good. We should do something about that. So I phoned our past administrator who then got in contact with the fire prevention centre and we initiated a number of discussions and we came up with this. Within a year we had the document and we had bunch of work done within that first year.
- MD Urban interfacing – isn't something new – we've been doing it for a number of years – this past year we have really accelerated it quite a bit. The next step is to make it bigger.
- EB We need fire breaks in there. We need some bigger space.
- GF How far – when you say you have gone through and reduced the fuel load around most of the houses – how far out approximately have you ...
- EB This is a fence line right here, I believe. Am I right? Yes, so they have gone just beyond the fence line and around. And I am trying to find here – this road right up here, the trees on most of these on this hillside, you can see the houses right up here very clearly without any debris underneath the trees at all. They took their rakes out and cleaned out all the little bits – you know the piles of needles – all by hand and they cleaned it right down so there is nothing in there. They did an incredible job as well as at the end of – in here, I believe – it's done just about to the fence line.
- MD Any plan we would develop would include a lot of green sticking out Crown land portions within in the community – this is all Crown land. There are pockets everywhere and we would have to include these.
- GF So the \$35,000 is for the plan?
- EB Right.
- GF And then is the cost of ...
- EB Implementing the plan and we hope to do that by gaining tenure from – you know – Minister Dejong had talked about this claw back of 20% from the – so we have already contacted them. We have letters of support from the two that are in our area saying yes, we definitely support your efforts in this and, on Logan Lake's behalf, we don't mind if a portion in whatever their operating areas were given back to, or given out to the community.
- MD Once the program is going, we think -----
- GF It's a fascinating self-help approach to this and obviously we are looking for ideas that make sense to achieve the goal of reducing the fuel and fireproofing as much as possible the areas, recognizing there is nothing

perfect – there is no perfect system. There are a lot of things which should be looked at and could be looked at in order to improve the current situation.

- EB I don't know we talked about fire breaks and where natural ones are. We would have to pull in our resident adopted forester, who happens to be my husband as well, to help us figure all that stuff out.
- MD This is the original fence line of the community and the municipal boundaries since then have expanded and we are actually a kilometer beyond this. So it's all within the municipality -----
- EB We were able to attract a value-added wood manufacturer to the community who will be setting up his business early this spring. So you know there is an opportunity to offer some of these trees to him to enhance his business as well. That just sort of helps sustain the community even further by doing that. There is another issue, though, while the fires were going this summer, we had an emergency operation centre set up in Logan Lake and we had a number of spot fires happening right around the community and the community was on edge for, you know, two whole months sitting at that level. And after we had a review with Rod Saylan(?) – I don't know whether he has been able to speak to you.
- GF Not to this point.
- EB He is with the Provincial Emergency team and he shared with us that – you know my concern in Logan Lake is to try and get everybody out of there – not to try and save things, but to remove the people that were in that situation. And he shared with me that when Barriere and out that way was on fire that buses were sent out from Kamloops – school buses were sent out and they couldn't make it there – they couldn't get through the fire so they were re-routed all the way up through 100 Mile House and then back down up Little Fort and down. And we have four exits or entrances into Logan Lake so it wouldn't necessarily be one route – but if it was that route and the time frame to get buses into the community to remove those that need to be, I don't think there is enough time. Not with the way that the fires behaved and that is a great concern to me. There are areas like Ashcroft that have 17 buses sitting in them and their population is less than ours, but their buses go out to all the outlying areas so they are the junction. We don't have one bus. We don't have a taxi service, we don't have Handi-Dart, we don't have Greyhound and you know a number of the residents don't drive and to get them out would be really difficult. I think it would be really difficult. And I have played this over and we've tried to work out a scenario as to how could we do this as safely as possible. And the only real way that I think we could do it is to have three buses sitting in the public works yard at the highest peak and that is not when schools are in session. Because schools are out during the summer, so could we not have them sitting there? In September then we have that opportunity for Valley buses to be accessible providing there is no fire up that road. If the

- fire is in that direction they are not going to allow them back into the community – that is what we have been told. We have been relying on Highland Valley Copper’s old buses and we can’t rely on them, not with the way that it is so unpredictable.
- GF Do you have a community emergency plan developed? Could you institute that as part of the plan that for the summer period you borrowed three buses from a neighbouring school division and have them parked in a central location?
- EB I do believe that they have put that in as a request – you know they have done an update report at the end of this so I do believe that they have put that in as a request. Where we fell short was that the fire risk was still way above extreme for Logan Lake and we get these ratings coming from the Fire Prevention Centre that Logan Lake’s fire risk was way above the extreme for the whole month of September while school was in. When we talked to the principals of the two schools, under no circumstances were they going to allow anybody to come in and remove any children. They wanted to have total control to move them all out in one great big body, but how can they move them without the buses there. So it just didn’t seem safe enough and I still feel I need to raise that – that it’s just not quite perfect yet.
- GF Well, you know – I don’t know what the process would be in British Columbia but we used to have bus replacements on the basis of the number of years of use and I think at one time it was up to ten years all the buses were removed. We found that there were some buses; in fact the vast majority of them were in perfectly good working shape if they had been maintained properly. There were other buses that were lemons inside of two or three years, so ten years was just an arbitrary figure. And yet it was a figure that they provided so it could be that you could get buses that are a certain age that are very, very well maintained and in perfectly good working order, fairly inexpensively and just have them sitting there – even from other provinces.
- EB I’ll work on that. One other thing that I’ve just tapped in to more recently is with the insurance part of it all that if we are to be as safe as we possibly can and we have done all this urban interfacing and we are going to keep it up on a regular level, then will the insurance companies look at our community with a positive tone and say – why don’t the rest of you guys do this as well, and we can give some breaks on other communities that have done some other things. So we have slowly started some of those talks with the insurance companies in our area and, provided people like myself change the roofing and things like that.
- GF I live in a log house with a cedar shake roof. The only thing is I don’t live in a forest, I live on a river.
- EB You’ve got a water source.

GF I've got a water source. But all of this is interesting because we haven't yet heard from the insurance industry and it would seem to me that the insurance industry would not only be interested in the rate adjustments that they need to make in order to cover you, but more importantly that they be willing to assess the risk just as, you know in the old days we all paid the same rates for our insurance, based on age and then they decided to give smokers preferential rates because they knew that – sorry – non-smokers – because they were obviously better risks. I would think there should be a way to engage them when looking at the risk situation has been done to reduce the risk. That may be an issue that we can raise with some of them within the insurance industry ...

EB That would be great. I think that's it. I mean the timing isn't perfect with this and that for Logan Lake's needs in order to move forward some financial help would definitely be the way to go for us. Otherwise we are going to be sitting in the same boat that we were this summer – a little safer for the little bit that we have been able to do, but certainly not with the breaks that we were hoping to have. I think that's where we're at.

Thank you very much. Can we leave this?

GF How recent is this photograph?

EB Three years I believe.

GF So you have done all the work since this.

EB Since this, yes. It does look quite a bit different now as well because Weyerhaeuser has been taking out a lot of the beetle trees, pine beetle and I was hoping that we can try to get another aerial photograph because it looks quite different up at the ski hill area and going up towards town. People thought, wow, Ella you are really moving forward on this and you've got even more people involved in this – way to go. And I said, no, they are taking out the beetle trees and then they said well you shouldn't have said that – it looks good. We are not a forestry community. I have to tell you that for any of the trees to be cut down and without fire risk or anything like that and for any forester to move in and start taking down trees would have created a great big controversy there in the community. They are welcome to a certain degree right now. It is difficult because they are in a ski trail area and we may lose that opportunity for us – that recreational opportunity unless we can get the right trees planted in there, quickly and still create some shade and whatnot. So in there that is a little risky, but they are welcomed in the community.

MD Just to mention a point about the pine beetle – this whole area south of town that we are interested in, it's all mature pine and it's all susceptible to the beetle as well. So that is another piece of the puzzle.

EB They are going to be taking those trees out anyway. Let us do it so that we can pay for this plan, and create – you know the other thing that we didn't mention was a community forest. We would like to be able to try and have that happen in the community.

No, I'm done. Thank you very much.

GF It's a great story and very intriguing. So thank you. Thanks for coming all this distance. I realize that you had to drive for $\frac{3}{4}$ of an hour to get here.

EB Oh, that's nothing. Thank you.

Okay now do we have anyone else who would like to present. Yes you did, Ruth, but please come forward.

Ruth Madsen

I don't think I even need the mike. I have friends and neighbours who have been calling me when they heard I was coming here, too shy to come themselves. But on television we have seen several times in Kamloops where people who have lost their jobs through the Tolko Mill and have lost their homes and everything they own who have been receiving Social Services since that time. They have also received some money recently from Red Cross and in fact what the government did then was to deduct it from their Social Services cheques. This was money for some extras because they had lost everything, but then got deducted from the Social Services and a family of three was left, for instance, with \$100 for groceries for a month. My friends and neighbours think that is unacceptable and they asked me to come here to raise that issue. To ask the government what is happening. Those Red Cross donations are donations from my family, friends, children, your family, friends – well maybe not yours – yes, money came from Alberta I know it. And so therefore how can this government deduct that from people's cheques who have no jobs, who have no homes, who have no clothing, who have nothing. People were very upset.

And so I am sorry to take extra time but I came home to two messages saying what did they say to that? And then I realized as I looked down my list of eight things which had slipped my mind when I made my presentation. So that's a question we would like to put to the government. When there is public money that has been donated, that's been given to people who are destitute – how can the government take that from the Social Services and have them back to square one, with public donations.

Thank you.

GF Okay, as I said earlier I don't have an answer for that obviously.

RM No, no, that's a question to the government please.

GF You have put it on record.

RM Thank you.

GF If there are no further presentations I just want to say thank you to everyone who participated. We had more than a dozen presentations today – excellent information and advice and we appreciate very, very much the intention and the comprehensiveness of the information that was shared with us today. Thank you very much.