

FIRESTORM 2003 – PROVINCIAL REVIEW

Public Meetings

Nelson

Part A

Gary Filmon:

Good afternoon everyone and welcome. It is a pleasure to see so many of you here and I just will begin with a few opening remarks to tell you a little bit about the process. We are going throughout the interior of British Columbia to all of the fire-affected areas to listen personally to people about their experiences and any recommendations that they have or ideas that they have about dealing with fires in British Columbia; because the idea of the process is to be open, wide-ranging, yet inclusive and focused on the issues of fighting fires and the experiences – the terrible experiences – that many of you had this summer in British Columbia.

It is not about pointing fingers, it's not about finding scapegoats, it's about assessing everything that you observed and were a part of and saying what things were done well and saying what things we can do better. A person who believes that in life as long as you live, you should be learning from your experiences and be able to apply that to doing a better job in the future and that is exactly what the mandate that has been given to me by the government is. That is to listen, to learn, to accept recommendations and convert them into better practices or better ideas for the future. And it is about the future. We are going through some very, very greatly changing weather patterns throughout the world. Weather cycles normally go in seven to ten year cycles. This is probably just a few years into a dry cycle because most of the '90s were a wet cycle and so we're probably early on in a dry cycle. It means that they are probably looking forward in the next few years to more of the same kind of weather conditions – extreme weather conditions that we had this summer. We only need to look at California and see that it was not an isolated incident here in British Columbia, the kinds of dry, hot weather patterns that have been there are in many parts of North America and are likely to recur for some time.

And so the government gave me a very short time line. They want a report by the middle of February and the only reason I accepted that short time line was because I am convinced that we need to learn from the past summer's events and be able to be in a position to apply the lessons that we have learned, and any recommendations that I bring forward as a result of these consultations to these next year's events, if next year happens to be another severe forest fire year.

In addition to the public hearings, I am having stakeholder meetings with groups like the Forest Industry Association, the Insurance industry, Tourism Industry, Wildlife people, various different government departments and agencies because there were many, many of them who had a role to play throughout the summer events with the forest fires.

At the end of it all we will have conclusions and recommendations to be able to make to government for the future. Although there are eight terms of reference, I won't give

you the whole detail of them. They basically fall into the whole gamut of issues to do with planning, preparations to do with response and recovery. So anything to do with the forest fires is part of our terms of reference and we are happy to hear from you within that broad parameter.

Thank you very much for coming and we have a list of speakers and I will just call them forward one at a time and I know that I am looking forward to your presentations.

I begin by calling forward Glenda Patterson from Cathedral Lakes Lodge.

Glenda Patterson:

Hi. Can you hear me?

GF Yes, good afternoon and welcome.

GP Thank you. My name is Glenda Patterson. I am with Cathedral Lakes Lodge. I supplied you with my report – shall I read it?

GF Yes. Whichever you prefer – if you just want to comment on it, that's fine – if you would like to read it and then have a discussion about it, that's fine too.

GP Well, I think I will read it.

Our family owns Cathedral Lakes Lodge Ltd., we are 100% B.C. owned and operated. We are located in the South Okanagan near Keremeos in a provincial called Cathedral Province Park at 7,000 feet. Our south border is Washington State. We privately own 32 acres within the park. We are a seasonal operation, starting June 1 to October 15th. Mainly hiking, fishing and relaxing. This is our thirteenth year of operation. Our maximum capacity is 56 guests per day. We provide transport for campers who want to camp in the park. We transport up 1,300 campers a season. We transport guests for day trips. We run almost full capacity for our season. We have a staff of fifteen. We have the largest Alpine hiking lodge in Canada. Our location is remote. We are one hour, thirty minutes from the nearest town and highway. We have one access bridge to the lodge.

Our fire season started June 25th, 2003. The Farewell Creek Fire in Washington State was moving north east towards the border. We were put on fire alert and standby evacuation notice was given. We rented equipment, pumps, sprinklers, etc. By July 23rd the fire was 15 kilometers from the border. No Canadian equipment or manpower was allowed to help fight this fire. By August long weekend, our busiest, the fire was still not under control and no Canadian effort was allowed to help. The fire was nine kilometers from the border.

After the long weekend, Canadian effort was given the okay to redirect the fire. Throughout this period the media was reporting the fire situation with our lodge name and park name front and centre. Throughout August trails within the park and remote areas of the park were either open or closed.

On August 29th, 2003 the Ministry of Forests announces the back country closure. Much confusion surrounded the announcement. It was made on a Friday afternoon, Labour Day, Long weekend. We were allowed to stay open but the park was closed. Finally, on September 14th or 15th the ban was lifted.

The Ministry of Forests and this is specific for the local ministry – general we felt the Ministry of Forests was very attentive and gave serious effort to the fire south of the border. The situation was monitored daily. We knew that we might be closed. We knew that once the fire crossed the border we would be closed. We had clear evacuation plans. Once the fire bridged the pass at the top of the water shed around July 30th everyone became very concerned. Although not in Canada yet, it was only nine kilometers from the park. This was a large fire that was getting bigger and bigger. We had only one route out from the lodge.

The Ministry of Forests decided not to close the park lodge at that time. Canadian effort was allowed to fight the fire and we were very grateful. The fire officer in Keremeos was very good. Now remember, we were the only fire burning at that time. Much effort and attention could be afforded to us. We had the full force of provincial fire fighters with us. Once the fire was redirected August 10th or so, confusion concerning the trail closures reigned. One week all the trails were opened up and the next week some would be closed.

This is specific for the Ministry of Forests in Victoria, although not completely surprised by the August 29th back country closure; we were certainly surprised by the method. No confirmed previous warning. We felt that a few days notice prior to the closure would have helped us in planning our closure. We were booked for a wedding on August 30th. No one wants to find out that their wedding is cancelled the day before the date. The announcement was made Friday before a long weekend. This was extremely poor planning. The announcement was difficult to understand. All government employees were unavailable until Tuesday. No exemptions or clarifications could be had until Tuesday.

The announcement closed the park but not the lodge. The Ministry of Forests decided to close the park and the access road but allowed the lodge to remain open. Our guests could come and sit in the lodge yet if they walked twenty feet from the lodge they were liable for a ten thousand dollar fine. Not only did this relieve the government of any requirement to compensate us, it blocked any form of possible insurance compensation. We were told to apply for an exemption but by Tuesday afternoon we had to get in a long line.

Recommendations and Questions:

This is for the British Columbia government and Tourism B.C. A massive ad campaign must be launched for the interior of British Columbia. It must be featured in every possible media. This must be initiated right away. With the Olympics coming we will need these few years to really gain any benefit.

The road access, as mentioned above, we are remote with only one road. Heavily treed, older forest, massive amounts of fuel are on that road. We have deep concern for the situation. Fuel management is necessary on our road.

Our guests, past and present were extremely concerned we were going to burn down. We believed they would understand the need for partial fuel removal.

This is to do with the media – right from July 1 the media reports were inaccurate with much inflated information. At one point CBC reported the lodge had burned down. If the media is just doing their job, then I ask why are they not doing it now? How come I continue to read about Los Vegas or Disneyland in the travel sections? How come we are not featured as a destination for B.C. travelers?

The International Fire Fighting Agreement – we were repeatedly told throughout July that the Canadian Fire Crews were not allowed to cross the border. The bombers were flying the border and were told not to go into the U.S. Why did it take so long for this situation to change?

Reinstate B.C. park information – guests and campers have no where to call for trail or park information. This has been the situation for two years. We are now the park information source, yet we are not compensated for any of this work. In particular this year was the safety issue this created volumes of work for us. This is a huge problem. We continued to see campers unprepared for camping at 7,000 feet.

MLA Dave Chudder(?) Yale/Lillooet – I had called our MLA in Merritt on three occasions. Although the staff did get back to me we never heard from our MLA. We never received a call concerning the fire, especially when CBC reported we had burned down. Why did he not help us? How come he did not take an interest in our situation?

Our year – we had a horrible year. The operational side of our business was a daily nightmare. The specific variables created from the fire were complex and interdependent. Right from the beginning in July our booked guests started to cancel. Sometime around July 20th, people just stopped coming to the Interior. We did half our annual volume for camper transport. We lost a wedding party. All totaled, we lost \$120,000. The back country ban cost our business \$60,000. We had to return all monies prepaid for reservations from July 29th to September 14th. Extraordinary expenses and lost revenue made up for the other \$60,000. No government program, no insurance policy and no fire fund will help us. The only source of money for us is to borrow from a financial institution.

We are struggling. Our reservation deposits for 2004 will start in January. We need help. Our biggest fear is if this situation is repeated next summer. A compensation plan must be initiated from this government for the small tour operators lodge owners. We are not getting ready for the Olympics. We will not be investing in improvements. We believe we are the silent victims of the 2003 fires.

We thank you for your interest and we appreciate this opportunity.

GF Thank you very much, Glenda.

It's a very sad story and it reminds me of when the Queen said Annus Horribilus ...

GP I was going to use that, but I didn't.

GF Not a very fun situation for you. You have made a number of points and the point about not being able to access the fire across the border – the Mayor of Keremeos was in Osoyoos actually last week and made that point. I guess ultimately there were arrangements made for people to go on a very circuitous route because they had to clear customs and all sorts of things. And they were dealing with federal state parks, all sorts of issues and so there was – I am not sure that it has been cleared up yet – so it will be something that we will look at and see if there is a role for this commission to play in making any recommendations. But certainly it was a confusing situation.

The issues about warnings, closures, and evacuation notices and all of those kinds of things – again that has been raised at a number of places with different impacts. Obviously everybody's situation is different and depending on who makes the call – but one of the things that certainly we are finding is that there doesn't seem to be enough local input to the risk factor and the judgment call that is being made. We found in one location that an evacuation call was made in the middle of the night by somebody a couple of hundred kilometers away with advice from somebody else sixty kilometers away and at no time were the local people on the spot contacted. In fact they had made the decision that things were safe for the foreseeable future and all went to bed. And in the middle of the night people were knocking on doors. And that's local officials who were in charge, presumably. So there are a lot of these things that are going to have to be looked at.

The issue of compensation – I can only say that virtually every small business and many of them are totally dependent, certainly in the Okanagan and other parts of the Interior totally dependent on tourism and they are certainly all in a similar position, having no access to compensation that we are aware of. Now I am from outside, so I don't know what else could be accessed but certainly The Disaster Financial Assistance Program from the federal side doesn't seem to cover and although there are some monies available through various charitable organizations, they are generally being directed towards individuals who have lost home and property and that sort of thing – so small business in particular doesn't seem to be covered. Again, we will look into it and see if there is any role for us to play on this.

With respect to media and other issues of contact and communication, that falls into a whole series of comments about communications at this point that ..

GP I had to put it in there.

GF Well, there seems to be a lot of gaps, that's all I can say. And one of the things that I think it is fair to say that there is a role for everybody to play, whether it is all of the various departments, agencies and individuals who were involved in fighting the fire, there are the people being evacuated, there are businesses being affected, there are the property owners who are looking for information about what is happening once they have left their property – and then there is the inter-relationship and inter-communications amongst all these different stakeholders. And at the moment I think it is fair to say that is an area that really does need to be looked at because comments have been made in virtually every place that we have been.

So thank you for bringing forward this. We will do our best to find answers for you where answers are available.

GP I would like to say that the compensation plan that we are looking for is not necessarily monetary. We are looking at a long range, multi-year advertising campaign. The Okanagan, in particular, is really hurting. And it's not just our business of course as a small tour operator, but I think it is unrealistic for us to believe we are going to get money out of this. We understand that, but I think the B.C. government must look at some long term plans for advertising.

GF I think those are reasonable comments. Thank you.

GP Thanks.

Randy Brieter:

GF Good afternoon and welcome.

RB Good afternoon. Thank you. Welcome to Nelson on behalf of the city and the Nelson Fire and Rescue and to your panel also.

GF I am sorry, I should have introduced Jim Sproul.

RB During the provincial fire state of emergency I assumed the Acting Fire Chief's position here in Nelson on the retirement of our current Fire Chief, or past Fire Chief Stubbs. So it was kind of getting thrown to the lions here. The Kerr(?) tunnel fire was at its full fury and a huge big mushroom cloud was growing every afternoon over Nelson. Just above us and settling in for a big cloud of smoke was the air got cool and descended down across the mountain at night time. So things were sort of very unsettling here in town. A pre-op centre had already been set up in Nelson at the Provincial Emergency Program office under the capable direction of Jim McAllister. I tried to attend at least one of the two daily briefings. I found the information useful for myself and the city. It was somewhat settling to me personally to know that I wasn't in this all by myself.

Through contacts and trusts that I was making the forest experts kept telling me that it wasn't the Kerr tunnel fire that had not yet reached a critical state to threaten the city and it never did, even though it was very visible and alarming to us all. I kept telling the Mayor and councilors and department heads and concerned citizens that were phoning and stopping me on the street that it's not the Kerr tunnel fire that worries me it's the one that hasn't happened yet that I am most concerned about.

We had several close calls this summer. In time frame of fire emergency of direct interface fire nature, two car fires, a small house fire, campers squatting in the bush with campfires, a mattress intentionally set in the bushes just outside the city – and probably the most concerning to us was a birch tree snag came over a high tension power line and caused a fire in the duff below that was starting to head up the mountain quite quickly. Thankfully these incidents were seen and reported and enabled us a quick response and extinguishment.

You've got to excuse me, I'm probably battling the worst cold or 'flu that I've had for ever.

GF Well, thanks for coming then.

RB Thank you.

GF Just stay over there, though, okay?

RB No you are right, you are sort of at a safe distance.

Nelson Fire and Rescue is a composite fire department. It's made up of a Chief, eleven career fire fighters and twenty auxiliaries or volunteers. We have a fairly new 85 foot ladder platform, but our two front line engines and tenders are past the age of insurance underwriters recommended replacement. I know fire service budgets are tight across the province, especially in smaller main regional centres such as Nelson. We need help to maintain the service levels that the citizens of Nelson and the surrounding interface residents have come to expect. Without outside financial assistance, be it federal or provincial grants, specifically designated to fire service, or better recognition from insurance companies for established career fire protection, our communities and ones like ours will be in a downward spiral of what protections we will be able to offer in the future.

The city of Nelson was able to supply three senior officers that assumed various command roles during the fire emergency this past summer. As the emergency deepened and the provincial resources were used up, it became evident to me the real danger was in burn-out of experienced personnel. The city of Nelson stepped in and offered support staff to the pre-ops centre at this time. The fire department had already committed as many fire personnel as we could and still maintain protection here at home.

Will we be able to offer any experienced help in a future crisis? I surely hope so but will we have the experienced and available help to offer down the road? Right now, given our budgetary situation I can't honestly say. If we are to maintain the fire infrastructure as we know it now and have had in place since the early 1900s, ours and communities like us are direly in need of help.

Thank you for your time.

I know we probably have some time left if you have any questions – I have some of the things that we did through the summer here – I was appointed Divisional Chief of Fire Operations under Chief Remple who was a District Chief over in Castlegar. My area went from Salmo, Beasley(?), Bluit(?), Nelson, North Shore, all the way to Proctor, Harrop. So I was directly involved with the situation when the pre-call went out for residential evacuation because of the area of Proctor/Harrop – it's landlocked and only ferry operation – so they started getting the animals off because it is a mixture of farm and residential, and with quite a big of grassland. So that was what the concern was – was as the Kerr tunnel fire reached the top of the ridge on a very windy day that the embers would blow over and fall into the grasslands below and set the grasslands on fire and spot fires around.

The provincial government through Gerry Remple sent in some extra fire department help. There were two engines and a large tender sent in to

complement the Balfour Harrop fire department. The citizens took them in very, very well and there were barbeques and all sorts of things that were happening. It was a very, very good sight to see that at least things were being done for them because it was a very, very scary sight. Some of these embers were landing in people's front yards in Harrop and any one of them – it never got to a critical situation, but things that weren't witnessed or noticed could have materialized into a major incident.

So we weren't like some of the areas, like Barriere, or Kelowna, or Cranbrook, but we certainly had our moments and we hope that in the future we will be able to rise up to the occasion. Do you have any questions of me?

GF Yes, thanks Chief Brieter, I appreciate your comments and observations. It sounds as though you had a good working relationship with the Ministry of Forests people (yes) and this Chief Remple, was he from the office of the Fire Commissioner, or ...

RB No, he is the Castlegar Fire Chief. He was appointed before my appointment. He was appointed as a divisional and as things progressed we decided that we needed to go down into a smaller structure so I was appointed a divisional chief, and the first thing I did was to call in the fire chiefs from the volunteer areas that we were involved with and to meet and to just interact a bit and decided to go to unified command. I wasn't going to go in and take over from their area, but I did think that I did offer some expertise that perhaps they didn't have. But they knew the area and their fire department far better than I did. So I wasn't just going to go in and take over.

GF Was there a relative flexibility about you being able to say goes out of your municipal jurisdiction and, like you say, talked about the birch snag that was on a hydro line and started a --- fire. Was that something that there was no question that you have authority to go and put it out even though it was outside your area? That happened to be in our fire protection area here in Nelson, but just barely. Just outside the city limits, but within our designated fire protection area. But you're hitting a key point that during the fire emergency when the two provincial fire departments were created, it created a situation where if we needed to we could call upon equipment without having the mutual aid agreements in place. It worked very, very well and if we could continue on that same type of thing that would be a plus. Right now we have agreements for tender operations only with several of the volunteer fire departments around, but it would be beneficial to us and I believe to both parties to have engine capabilities also – and not have to get into these agreements of who is going to pay or what's going to happen. If they're needed, they're needed.

GF It's an excellent suggestion and in a number of different locations people have given us that kind of recommendation, saying that the need for mutual aid agreements or for coverage in areas that aren't technically covered by either a

full-time fire department or volunteer fire department, or gaps within the whole regional district concept in which there aren't incorporated municipal jurisdictions that there is a question as to who goes out there if something happens, and in your case it seems as though there was an attitude that if you saw the fire you went and put it out.

RB Put it out – exactly – because it could move into our area – there is no sense waiting until it got to our fire protection borders.

GF Well that's obviously the way in which I think we would prefer to see the system work, and yet it didn't work that way in some other areas and so I'm glad to hear it worked well for you.

RB Okay. Thank you.

GF You're welcome. Thanks for coming.

Next we have Jim Lambrick and Wayne Farenholtz. Good afternoon, welcome.

Jim Lambrick:

Just Jim here. I'm with Kootenay Manufacturing Ltd. We are about 200 yards over there beside the airport. Thank you for letting us have some input here this afternoon. Like everybody else this summer, we were around and heard lots of innuendo and rumours about what was going on with the fires this summer – we are not going to focus on that because it's not helpful. Our focus is today – our presentation is based on the use or non-use, or ineffective use of heavy equipment in these interface fires and our particular experience this summer with our equipment.

First a little background – what our company does – we manufacture tracked vehicles – particularly tracked log skidders which are used for steep ground, wet ground, and specialty applications – we sell these from Nelson all over North America and all over the world. We made – use the same undercarriage in a base vehicle for a variety of different other applications including utility vehicles, manlifts, silvaculture, digger derricks, side row seeders, sprayers, and a whole bunch of different things. We have a new machine just developed specifically for fuels reduction work just coming on the market. We have it in California under testing right now. But our most important for this discussion is our KMC fire tracker vehicle. It's that machine right there.

We'll give you a little background on this machine. It is an all terrain high-speed steel track vehicle, purposely designed to work in severe off-road forestry environments. It can travel up to 15 miles an hour under load. It can traverse rough terrain with downhill capabilities of 60%, uphill to 40% under load. It has an on-board tank module that holds over 1,000 gallons of water. It has its own high performance forestry rated electric start pressure pump with multiple outlets. It has its own fill pump for filling from available water sources. It can refill in five minutes. It has a foam system including tank and blending valve. It has a four inch dump valve for filling remote forestry porta tanks and as important as that, the vehicle has the capability of getting to the places these tanks are set up. It has a power hose reel with 200' of hose. It has a six-way hydraulic angle tilt dozer blade and can build its own fire guard and access trails. It can be filled remotely by helicopter from the tops of ridges and hills.

The KMC fire tracker is a very effective wild fire fighting machine. It has the capability of getting to and directly working on fire fronts. It is an extremely effective machine to work with ground crews, greatly enhancing their production by providing water, foam and dozing capability all in one machine.

The KMC fire tracker was not called out or employed even once on any of the large interface fires in B.C. – that's this summer. The fire tracker was introduced in 2001. The machine was used directly and effectively on one large fire in Princeton. Since that one and only time, that machine has not been employed in B.C. Several times we have sent machines to fires in Alberta, there are 14 similar vehicles in just one small area of Northern

Montana and there are 40+ similar machines with contractors in the North West U.S. Next week I am heading to California – the California CDF rural fire departments are really interested in this machine. We had one KMC fire tracker on trials all summer in central Oregon, worked on five large fires. Fire managers there rated it the most effective ground based machine they had available. It was always the last machine released from these fires especially because of its effectiveness on expensive mop-up work. The U.S. hot shot crews were especially impressed with the fire tracker.

So our question as a manufacturer and supplier of this kind of equipment is why we have had no interest in it in B.C., naturally – and this summer we made diligent efforts to get these machines out on fires over in Kelowna and Barriere – lots of phone calls, lots of contacts – did everything we could – why not? There seems to be a lack of interest on the part of fire control people despite our best efforts. One problem seems to be the machine doesn't fall into any paperwork category therefore it doesn't seem to exist. There is no provincial-wide registration system for specialized equipment such as this except for helicopters. The machine has to be registered locally and stay there. So we registered it here or Castlegar and apparently you can't haul them away. They've got to stay there and can't be used elsewhere.

The last thing on that list that we've heard a couple of times – it's too expensive – compared to what – there is no established rate for the fire tracker in B.C. A truck tanker contractor unit as we understand it will charge out around \$150 to \$175 per hour. Our machine in Oregon received a rate of about \$230 per hour, Canadian. We had an entire armada of heavy lift helicopters based here in Nelson, flying a lot of missions this summer. As we understand it, some of these heavy lift helicopters charge out at many thousands of dollars per hour. They are a totally useful machine on fires, but for the cost of one per hour, for the cost per hour for just one of those helicopters we could have put anything up to two dozen of our units on a fire. Were the helicopters that much more effective?

But it wasn't just our particular equipment – we weren't directly involved in fires, but we heard from some of the contractors that we work with that there was a pretty ineffective use of heavy equipment generally on large fires this summer, not just ours.

What is the root cause, or what is the problem with this? I think if you look at it – you know I haven't been personally involved in fires for almost two decades, but things have changed a lot – British Columbia is developing an extremely high tech and effective detection and initial attack capability. Fire losses have decreased steadily over the past 20 years in both acreage and values lost. Large fires have become very uncommon. The secondary attack work used to depend very heavily on the logging workforce in the Interior, particularly in small communities. Forest service personnel now do not interact much with logging contractors on the work force, at least not to the extent that they used

to. They tend to have good training in specialized areas but not much practical training or worse, even interest in equipment or the actual business of how equipment is used.

Fires cannot be put out by clicking a desk top icon, or even aerial only attack. Things haven't changed at the ground level. You still have to get in there and get dirty and physically attack the fire. The results of this inexperience I guess is, as we have seen this last summer is once the initial attack capability was overwhelmed heavy equipment should have been deployed rapidly and directly on the fires, including night work. This, as we understand it, didn't happen, or didn't happen effectively. Equipment was called out and then frequently sat for hours or days on end waiting for somebody to direct its use.

How do we fix this? Make sure there is a core of forest service trained people who are interested in and understand heavy equipment and can call out equipment early and supervise the work on direct attack. Off-season these personnel should contact and work directly with local logging contractors to make sure their personnel are certified and available.

Next, we should develop a province-wide internet data base on ALL heavy equipment suitable for fire fighting, but especially a list for specialized equipment such as the fire tracker or helicopters, make sure that such specialized equipment can be called out and utilized anywhere required.

And finally, my last point, we should better utilize fire suppression contractors that we have begun to develop in the provincial and encourage them to develop their equipment capabilities and ensure their equipment gets hired when it is needed.

Thank you.

GF Thank you very much, Jim. I appreciate a very interesting presentation. I was going to ask how much these pieces of equipment cost, but you have already said that they are expensive, but then they have a whole lot of attachments and extras that normal equipment doesn't have and so one can understand – it's kind of like the heavy equipment version of a Swiss Army Knife – it does all sorts of things.

JL yes and also like – they can be converted from logging use for example to this use for seasonal – it's not a single-purpose vehicle. It's a multi-use vehicle. Fire fighting is just one of the applications.

GF So what would be the capital cost investment for something like this?

JL Oh, boy it can range anywhere from \$80,000 Cdn. up to \$300,000 US, depending on what – how new, or remanned, or – what we do with them. But they are comparable to other heavy equipment in terms of cost.

- GF What's a D-9 cost?
- JL A D-9? (Yes) About a million dollars. They are comparable.
- GF All right. Who are you attempting to sell this to at the Ministry of Forests because clearly they would be the client, I would think.
- JL No, the client probably is more our contractors, but contractors are employed to fight fires. You know, as we have – like labour supply contractors – so either logging contractors or fire suppression contractors with this capability and hopefully if they think about it, they can use this machine off-season for other work. There is a limited window of opportunity to use it in on the fires.
- GF So who is making the decision not to use it – is the contractors, or ...
- JL Well, at this level we have our own machines – we have an inventory and we tried to just put them on fires directly – and just don't seem to get any interest. They are – the forest people don't seem to be coming to us and saying okay, show us – let's look at this thing. But, when we take it to Oregon, they can't get enough of them. I mean, like there is a lack of interest here – I don't know – inertia of some kind. Or lack of it. But despite our efforts to market it, we have put it out several times on fires in Alberta with no problem at all, they want them right way. But over here it doesn't seem to get any interest. I can't figure out why not. Like I say, it's partly because we haven't had that type of fires until this year – you need this technical capability.
- GF I know that one of the challenges is dealing with these tremendous slopes and when you say that they can go downhill on a 60% grade and uphill on a 40% grade ...
- JL Well, they can get around. The thing that would seem to me – like the Kelowna fire for example, started way out in the boondocks and blew into town. The place to tackle it is out there in the boondocks. This is boondocks; this machine here is a boondocks machine.
- GF The McLure Fire was similar. It was on a steep slope and it was inaccessible because there were no roads.
- JL So you end up attacking it with helicopters and bombers and you still, somehow have to get people and water out there to actually put the thing out even at that level.
- GF Isn't this the time when somebody should be looking at it – because when you are in the midst of a crisis you don't start experimenting with new equipment.
- JL Now is the time, exactly.

GF Okay. Certainly your recommendations are ones that we have heard before about having a core of experienced trained people, knowledgeable about fire fighting. And having an inventory of all of the equipment available at an instance so that wherever something breaks out you have an inventory of what equipment might be available in the private sector, the contractors, forestry companies – all those options are there at your disposal. And utilizing local resources to a greater extent is certainly resonating with people everywhere we have gone.

JL Well the thing that was different this summer – I mean we have been fighting fires in B.C. for a hundred years. The difference was this year it blew into town and ...

(tape over)

... after that initial attack level and they seemed to have been ignored in a lot of cases this summer. We knew lots of fire – you know logging contractors sitting on their butts – they were available but weren't utilized. So ...

GF Okay, thank you very much. Can we have a copy of that presentation, Jim, please? Thanks.

And I should in fairness to Jim Sproul say that he is one of the administrators of the commission and part-time driver, but he is doing a wonderful job of helping me take notes and listen to all of you. So thank you very much, Jim.

GF Next we have Karie Garnier. You are representing Karie, right. Okay.

Karie Garnier:

That's right. My name is Karie Garnier and I am a local film maker. I've got a couple of documentaries on the go and the one that of course I am going to speak to you today about is a documentary that I have been working on for the past two or three months. It's called "*Out of the Ashes*" and I understand that the executive producer of this production that is a gentleman from the Coast – Genesis Films' President – Robert Nicole I think has contact you people. Apparently there was some interest he felt from your office and so he encouraged me to come here. I didn't have to come too far; I only live in the Slocan Valley. But, because of the overlapping and similar interests between the goals for the provincial review team and for the documentary, I just thought I would take this opportunity to tell you a little bit about *Out of the Ashes*, and maybe we can somehow help each other.

Out of the Ashes features the events leading up to the firestorms, normal reactions and extraordinary compassion triggered by the fires, the impact of forests and wildlife with an overview of lessons learned and new prevention measures. *Out of the Ashes* provides accurate information and insights into the disaster and also I have to say many first-hand accounts from mainstream residents and also Aboriginal people who are living far out – sort of in the boonies as they say – who were caught right in the centre of the fires. We also have local contacts and facilities that may be able to aid in your review. We are coming up with an overview of the lessons learned provided in some cases by the interviewees themselves and can also probably contribute to a discourse on new prevention measures.

So far we have put on hundreds of miles and interviewed all kinds of people that were really caught right in the centre of the fires, including some of my family members. I mean, that is how I got into it – I have two sisters, a mother and an aunt who were right there in the midst of it all. They were on evacuation alert and calling up and sending e-mails and saying you know there are embers the size of ashes falling down around here and we have everything that we think we need in the car, what to take and what to leave – and so we've gone out right into those areas. A lot of it is in the Shuswap of course and, by the way, our crew, our film crew is made up of Kootenay residents and Shuswap residents.

Out of the Ashes is also – here's a plug for Kootenay Film and Video Coop – I am an active member of that coop and this is also one of their projects in partnership with Genesis Films down on the Coast. By the way Genesis Films has made many, many films. Many of which I think you people have probably already seen. So I really questioned whether or not it would be appropriate for me to come today to speak to you about our documentary and also about some of our needs – it is so difficult to try to find funding to do a documentary like this. So I am wondering if there would be an opportunity at some point to talk with your office, or maybe with Jim Sproul, the Administrator, to see if

there might be some way that we could look at some sort of a mutual contribution towards the documentary and helping each other.

As a matter of fact, Robert Nicole was brave enough to say why don't we consider a joint production on this for a documentary that is already well under way.

So, I have given you, Mr. Filmon, a bit of information about our documentary project and hope that maybe we could somehow help each other.

GF Okay, this one is a little bit out of our terms of reference, Karie, but I certainly think that publicizing and having people appreciate all of the consequences of the fire experience is an important outcome of the review. As we found in a variety of different presentations there is a whole need for public education about preparation for the future, about things like prescribed burning, and forest management practices that people don't quite understand and in many cases have opposed in the past because of other impacts – like smoke effects on people with respiratory illnesses and all of that. Or, just the whole overall approach to maintaining a healthy forest and all the consequences of in-growth into grasslands, all those sorts of things are things that are coming up as a result of a perception that people who don't live in these circumstances don't really understand and there is a general predisposition to say don't cut down trees – preserve our environment – but by not cutting down trees we are not doing any favours because it ends up being an unhealthy forest that ends up in having the kind of wild fires that we had this summer.

So these are all issues that need the benefit of better understanding, more publicity, more public education and things of this nature will certainly open that respect.

Having said that, I go back to my original statement that it is not in our budget and it's not within our terms of reference so we will just have to think about it.

KG Great. Thank you very much for your time.

GF Thank you very much.

GF Milt Goddard. Thank you very much. Good afternoon and welcome.

Milt Goddard:

Thank you Gary and Jim, thank you very much participants, ladies and gentlemen.

First of all, I should explain to you what this is all about. In the back there is an addendum with some pictures and so forth and I want to make reference to those as we go along. In the first part of the addenda you will notice that there is a red page – there is a red cover and text which separates the addenda – so that kind of helps you find where you are at and so forth.

The prime reason for this presentation is because we live on the North Shore and we have been very much involved in the smoke and the fire and ashes and so forth. Most of August addendum A outlines my experience. I have a degree in Forest Management from the University of Idaho. I became a Professional Forester in British Columbia in 1988. I was with the U.S. Forest Service as a smoke jumper for a couple of years, the only reason I got through school. I was a Fire Warden for McMillan Bloedel, at Sooter(?) River Division right out on the West Coast of Vancouver Island. I have had much experience for the B.C. Parks Branch and I have been involved in a number of Forest Service planning committees, dealing with Sitcom(?) Creek and Alaska Creek. So I know these areas extremely well and because we live at 9 Mile, right across from Alaska Creek and right underneath Sitcom Creek where these fires occurred I thought it would be wise for me to make a presentation.

First of all because my wife and I are British Columbians, we have been on the North Shore for forty years and we are very concerned with what happened this year to British Columbia.

Just a quick – get into this presentation, 2003 from the aspect of the West Arm of Kootenay Lake, it was a nice spring. We had more sun than usual. Most times in Nelson here, June is a wet month. But we had no rain in June. The first part of May turned warm, sunny and June was exceptionally sunny. We probably have never – our place is called Kootenay Gardens at 9 Mile and we probably have never had such a fantastic bloom as this year – it was absolutely outstanding. Our garden was outstanding, and all that means is that we had lots of sunshine.

July arrived and it was dry and showed all the predictions about a major fire season ahead of us. The fellows in the forest service had been talking about fire season starting in June and it was getting worse and worse and worse. This season has probably been the 8th driest season we have ever had. Not number one – it's the 8th driest season we have ever had. So your statement about what is ahead of us is very like a true statement. The seasons are going to get drier and drier and drier. And so, we have to make – because of this season it is very important that we learn our mistakes, learn what went well, and so forth.

Now I will talk about – right now on page one there, I will talk about the Cotetle(?) and the Alaska Creek fires first and then I will talk a little bit about the Sitcom Creek fire. The fire started on Cotetle creek by a thunderstorm early on Sunday August 9th and was reported about 8:30 a.m. and again by my wife Donna at 4:45 p.m. All the pictures showing cooler smoke on Sunday August 10th as seen from 9 Mile – there is a picture in the thing about the way the smoke looked on August 10th. That was a Sunday. Now you will notice under that red tag, pictures E-1 and E-2 show fires and trees candling on the north slope of Cotetle Creek.

Now we flew over the fire on that Monday and we took these pictures. They are not extremely good pictures because we were in smoke and so forth and so on. But you notice that the fire in Cotetle Creek was at the headwaters of that creek within West Arm Provincial Park. If you go to the next set of pictures – where that red tag – and you go to E-2 – pages CD2 you will see a tree candling right in the middle of that picture. Now we tried everything to get that picture to smarten up, but it just didn't. Anyway that is a tree candling at 8:00 o'clock, about 7:30 in the morning on that date that we flew over it and so it is quite an active fire.

Go to the bottom picture of that and you will notice that there was two smokes over a ridge running through the centre of that picture. Those two fires – those two smokes are already in Alaska Creek – two days after the fire started in Cotetle Creek, the spot fires were already in Alaska Creek. Those two smokes, and there is a little one there with a tree candling there in the bottom of the picture – this is the start of the sixth largest fire in British Columbia. This was the start of the fires in Alaska Creek.

One could make a prediction, knowing the hazardous conditions of our forests and the fact that strong winds blow east and west in these valleys that these spot fires if not put out could eventually make massive runs which reached Nelson and its 5-mile watershed, or Harrop Proctor and its watersheds. This is a straight line distance between those two communities of 16 to 18 kilometers. On that flight of August 11th at 8:00 in the morning, there were no crews, no helicopters and no water bombers. On this same flight at 8:00 a.m. in the morning we observed three water bombers on the Castlegar Airport and numerous helicopters on the ground in the Nelson Airport.

Our second flight – we took another flight over Cotetle and Alaska Creek on September 4th. This was the day the fire was making a big run towards Harrop Creek – this was the same day the Forest Service had a community meeting in Harrop to explain the situation and calm the fears of evacuation. You will notice, you can pick up the blue tag on the pictures and that will give you some idea of the size of that fire. If you look at the bottom pictures there you will see that this a major, major fire – totally out of control – heading for the community of Harrop. On that day this fire reached the headwaters of Harrop Creek.

A month later, on October 4th, on the text – I am reading from the text again – we returned and flew over most of the fire-scarred areas of Cotetle and Alaska Creek, Five Mile and Harrop Creek. Most of the fires were out, but if you turn to the yellow tag – you will start to see some of the examples of the hot burns in Alaska Creek. The bottom picture shows a very hot fire, hot burn, and the top pictures – that ridge line was totally burned. There are several other pictures there – showing the hot burns on the ridge going over into Harrop Creek. I should mention also that at that time fire had reached the five-mile watershed and the fire bombers were along the east side of five-mile creek.

Park de community(?) had a form on fires this year. I am on page two of the text and one of the speakers at the fire was Dr. Martin Carver – he is a hydrologist and he told us that very heavy burns that we see in some of these pictures will have a cause and effect lasting five to ten years or more if significant soil damage has occurred. Major floods can result in Alaska Creek or Cotetle for the next twenty years. He also suggested that road building for fire guards could cause significantly more damage to the environment than light fires. So we need to be cautious about building fire guards.

Now I will talk about Sitcom Creek fire – Sitcom Creek probably started on August 23rd by lightning and reported on the 24th. It was encircled with fire guards and completely out by mid-September. And on the green tag there are some pictures of that fire. Even though this small fire probably had more retardant and water dumped on it than the whole Cotetle and Alaska Creek fire. It still refused to be extinguished and had several major blow-ups and burning hoses and equipment. The duration of the Sitcom fire was approximately ten days. And it was out. I'll talk about it in a minute.

The Sitcom Creek had a lot of bombers on it and three helicopters working on it almost every day, taking water out of the Kootenay Lake and dumping on the fire. The experience that we had at Sitcom Creek was that it was well fought and the boys did a good job on this fire. It had the potential of burning out a major watershed, a large significant area close to Kokanee Glacier Park, but they paid a lot of attention to this fire. One reason probably was because it was easily seen from Kokanee Park and the lake was always full of people watching the fire and the action on Sitcom Creek because it was right above us.

Now I will get into some conclusions. It is obvious that the sixth largest fire in British Columbia, if it had the same attention paid to it as the Sitcom fire, many, many thousands of dollars would have been saved and the integrity and the reason for establishing Creston Wilderness Park would have been preserved.

I am going to make some conclusions about tasks that need to be accomplished in the next few years, or very soon. British Columbia Parks'

immediate task is to complete a farm management plan which was started by Don Mortimer in 1999 when he completed a pre-attack fire plan review and interface fire protection plan for Westarm Provincial Park. That needs to be completed. There is more work to do on that. There are now several big burns with very large fringe areas of fire killed trees that are explosive and require emergency funding in 2003 fiscal year for fire assessment. That means – what I am really saying here is that in this fiscal year we need to pay some attention to doing fire assessments particularly in this critical area. Because there are large areas, as you will see from those photographs, large areas of fringe trees that were not completely burned, but they are very, very hazardous and if we go through another hot season and we are blessed with those lightening strikes that came from Idaho, we are in deep trouble.

Another thing, too, is that even though there were some massive burns and very hot burns in Alaska Creek there is a lot of timber still left there and there is no reason why a fire wouldn't make a big run for Nelson or a big run for Harrop. That can happen still next year.

What I am suggesting is the British Columbia Parks must have fire assessments completed within five years. Those near communities and highways must be completed in 2004. I realize that funding is scarce and in most places in Canada but if we are going to solve this cost of half a billion dollars, we need to pay some attention to the tasks that you are about. It is very important that this message get through to government that funding for these things is necessary. All British Columbia's wilderness parks having an interface with Crown land – Crown forests – municipalities – railways – highways and power lines – have fires extinguished immediately. These parks need fire management plans now. This is the only thing that the park managers and forest service fire bosses have a hope in heck of knowing what they have got to deal with.

Now I believe number 5 on page 3 is very, very significant. Regional districts, cities and municipalities must be held responsible for their approval of all construction, especially home construction and that their planners should be given the legal responsibility in their by-laws to request fire assessments. I think this is very important. No subdivision plan to be approved without a fire assessment report. Note that some of these actions are already being taken by various regional districts and cities.

The key to controlling home building and fire hazard areas is probably held by insurance companies and I believe you said that you would be talking to them about this. For instance, if an applicant does not meet their fire assessment guidelines they would be constructing a home without wild fire coverage. And, knowing what we know this year, this would be very dangerous in British Columbia. When forest fires reach firestorm size we have essentially lost the battle. Fire guards, back fires, retardant and water save some homes, forests, and some power lines. Our prime objective is to prevent these firestorms from

happening. A good example was the dangerous Sitcom creek fire. It was out in ten days even though it blew up several times. The bombers and helicopters flew this fire until crews and equipment could get it contained. And in one of the last pictures in there it shows you the fire guards that they had constructed and so forth. And we have to say that the forest service and the fire crews did a good job here. There was heavy equipment on this fire, major heavy equipment on this fire – built the fire guards and they got it out. This was an extremely hazardous valley and had a significant forest cover in it and it could have burned very easily. This was on a Crown forest.

Now I have been putting this together for some time as you know, I flew over it a couple of times and I have discussed and asked helicopter pilots, fire bosses, fire fighters, and many others who said that what lessons have we learned during Firestorm 2003 and most everybody gets quite excited. And here are some of the things they said to me:

It took too long for fire control centres to become established, organized and operating.

Some of these I am sure you have already heard about, most certainly in the Okanagan.

Helicopters and bombers waiting days for retardant. I couldn't believe that would happen.

Many helicopters waiting a week or more for instructions. I got this right from the helicopter pilots. That's not good.

Bureaucracy causing massive confusion. No one running the ship. Crews, machines and everyone standing around and being paid. Taxpayers don't like that.

The forest service control centres need to be meaner and leaner. I have heard that said several times.

Fire fighting teams and equipment arriving and getting no direction and some getting lost.

The system takes too long to get mobilized every day. I have heard that many times.

All have said, and this is still comments from the fellows in the field – *all have said that future success is an initial attack with a primary objective of putting out the fire. We need a crisis response system.* Not my wording, their wording.

Across this whole province now it is obvious that rapid attack and initial attack crews with their helicopters need to be expanded and several be stationed in every fire centre before the next fire season. More of them.

In all these things I've done, I've come across something new on page 4 – there is something new on the scene, as we heard a few moments ago – a new British Columbia initial attack machine has been developed for the California fires and has been contracted for the past two years. It has been very successful – so much so that Australia is seriously considering it as an option. It is a Sikorski 61 – they call it the flying fire truck – outfitted to carry 16 to 18 initial attack crew that can be repelled with all the necessary

equipment including all buckets and tanks for water moving. Now I have given you a reference there should you wish to contact those people. They are in Port Alberni, a British Columbia outfit and I think their comments suggest that no one in British Columbia seems to be interested. That's kind of odd.

This is another statement they made – *all fire control centres must be functional before the fire season start.* – a cost this province must accept if we are to save and limb, burned houses and eliminate the costly experience of 2003.

In the addenda I have put in an article from Saskatchewan, or from Canadian Geographic and you are probably very familiar with that item, and one of the very interesting things – the quotes that we made in there – says over the past two decades there has been a revolution in Canadian fire fighting. Mere response is now obsolete, replaced by a new model of predicting fires and putting people and gear in place before the fire breaks out.

There was one question I had about building fire guards in 5-mile creek and Alaska Creek – these are very, very questionable and according to Dr. Martin Carver they may present long term environmental damage. There is also somewhere between 60 to 100 loads of timber, or loads of logs sitting in there and they have got to be moved very soon because these present a bug problem next spring. And that also applies to 5-mile creek.

A final conclusion – the Auditor General's report – well you are very familiar with this report – in February 2003 the Auditor General released a follow-up performance report Managing Interface Fire Risks – what progress is the Ministry making on implementing the recommendations – and this was updated August 25th, 2003. Most important – and there is a copy of it in the addenda but Item 5 of his report states of his five directives, the most critical is number 3 which states Ministry should complete hazard mapping of unorganized areas of the province over a reasonable period of time with emphasis on high and moderate risk areas. Now that we've gone through fire season 2003 – this is reemphasized the emergency of completing this task now.

I am suggesting that in this fiscal year – by April 1st – that we can't wait until April 1st to get started on this task. I believe we should have some funding now – too bad the Deputy Minister's not here – we should have some funding now to get started on hazard mapping, especially in the Okanagan and Kamloops area, the East Kootenay and the West Kootenay. All of the south end of this province needs to have, before we get into the next fiscal year, some monies started on this task. This is a big task. I don't know if there are enough people and contractors in this province to handle that task but I believe we need to get started. Probably they can identify in the East Kootenay some of the most hazardous areas and so forth and cut down on the massive work load, but this is a very important task for the forest service to initiate.

I have finished my text. I thank you folks for being here. And because you most certainly in your – what you will have accomplished this year and your endeavours you will save us lives, you will save our forests and you will save our parks.

Gentlemen, I thank you for giving me this opportunity to make this presentation.

GF Thank you very much Milt and Donna for putting all this work into the report that you have provided, with the pictures and the historical lead up to all of the fires this summer in this area. It's a very well constructed piece and I thank you.

I like a number of your recommendations because I think they represent common sense and experience. And so I will say that we haven't yet heard from the insurance industry. It has been a surprise to me. I think that rather than just speak about increasing rates they should be sharing with us their views about some of the things that needed in subdivision planning and building in harm's way so to speak. And that includes materials that are fire resistant as opposed to what oftentimes is used in building or manners in which people can fireproof their own homes. This is all part of the building code restrictions, planning restrictions and other things that I think need to be looked at. But we are going to see the fire industry because they haven't come to see us – to try find out.

Certainly your perspective as a veteran in this whole forestry and fire fighting industry is one that is being echoed across the province about the – hitting them hard, hitting them fast and trying to keep them from growing. That's one thing that I can say doesn't appear to have changed. What's changed is that this year there were so many more and the conditions were so much worse. But generally speaking for quite a number of years now, as I understand it, the department has had a four hectare rule that they attempt as much as possible to put out fires before they reach four hectares in size and they believe if they do then they have a chance of keeping them from exploding. Over the past decade they had a review that was done by Price Waterhouse Coopers, of which the Saskatchewan government was also a part. They reviewed seven different operations within Canada and the United States immediately south of us and the B.C. Ministry of Forests figures consistently were above 95% of the fires being put out before they reached four hectares. And that figure was again achieved this year. The only difference was we were into well over a thousand fires and conditions that obviously exploded in some areas. So these are things too that can be repeated with respect to the manner in which they attack the fires.

You make the point that has been made over and over again – I don't have an answer for it. There has to be some answer or else some response to improve

but getting people mobilized and out on fires early. Many of the veterans have said you have the best chance if you get out from daybreak 'til about ten in the morning and that is when the temperatures are usually lower, that wind conditions are calmer and you have a real chance of making some impact and yet, time and again, we seem to be hearing that many of the crews didn't get out much before 8:30 – 9:30 in the morning., so there were several hours every day in which the impact wasn't has it should have been. We are going to have to look into that and hopefully be able to have some answers when I report back. But the fire assessment reports have to be done.

There are many areas of interface today that for reasons that have evolved over decades are now at significant risk if the conditions that we seem to be facing do come true.

So thank you very much, Milt, I appreciate all the work you have put into this.

MG I was just going to show you – after the red page, and after 'D' that's a picture okay, that's last – that is Alaska Creek and Cotetle Creek on fire from a satellite picture. Most certainly when you see – now that you can get them on the Internet, it is quite startling when you start seeing pictures that big. This is a picture of the sixth largest fire in British Columbia. If you flip the page, if you flip, go over to the next page, you will notice this is a view of our country including Washington State and it shows all fires – you will notice the fires in the lower right hand corner – that's all the fires that were in Idaho, and you will see how that lightening moved north and started all the fires up towards Cranbrook. You can see Kootenay Lake and the Alaska Fire and so forth. Look – you can see only to the left in the top left, sort of, the Kelowna fire and how big that was. So it's kind of interesting.

GF Pretty amazing.

MG We've had an amazing summer. Thank you.

GF Thank you.

Next, we have Tom Brach. Yes, please, thank you, thank you very much. Welcome.

Tom Brach:

My name is Tom Brach. I am The Fire Protection Emergency Services Coordinator for the Regional District of Central Kootenay, here in Nelson and during the provincial emergency I was appointed Regional Chief for south eastern British Columbia by the office of the Fire Commissioner.

I am here to make two submissions. First I was asked to present on behalf of the Volunteer Fire Fighters Association of British Columbia and secondly I am presenting as a former Regional Chief of south eastern British Columbia.

First, the Volunteer Fire Fighters Association of B.C. – the wild land fires experienced during the 2003 British Columbia fire season clearly demonstrated the need for structural fire fighters to upgrade their skill sets for facing this type of threat again in the future. Traditionally, structural fire fighters fight contained fire or a single structural fire that will burn from the inside out and strategies include anchoring trucks to water sources and attacking the seat of the fire while protecting outer exposures. In the case of large high-ranking fires burning around and through urban forest mix, these traditional strategies pose a high risk to fire fighters. Not understanding the limitations of our traditional skill set will eventually result in entrapment and possibly death for structural fire fighters. We are risking our members and being experts in one type of fire does not give us the ability to understand all types of fire and this is a point that doesn't seem to be appreciated by all players involved.

Fire fighting the urban forest mix requires specific equipment and skills and few departments currently ...

(tape 2)

... .. trained structural fire fighters with S100 wild land containment techniques, and we currently require all fire fighters to have a minimum of S100 training before deployment in any wild land area. While these skills are beneficial and are welcome, they fall far short of what is needed when urban structures are threatened by high ranking fires.

The second level of interface training, called S215 should actually be the minimum level of training required for B.C. structural fire fighters deployed in urban or forested actions. In addition, structural skills focusing on immediate mitigation techniques during burn over need to be developed. These skills should focus on safety zones, strategies and tactics, deployment during burn over, retreat and return techniques, entrapment survival and the use of unorthodox equipment and understanding the firebrand propagation which isn't well understood by structural fire fighters.

There is currently no NFPA standard for urban forest mix fire actions, but we do have local curriculum developers that have both the expertise and the experience from writing the S100 and the S215 for Forestry. While Ministry of Forests initiatives are appreciated, it has created somewhat of a dysfunctional

dependency where structural fire fighters are now looking to the Forestry or Ministry of Forests for wild fire education. And, as 80% of our rural fire protection areas are heavily forested, this seems to be an unrealistic expectation. I think it falls as a burden onto the forest service. Originally a portion of the British Columbia Fire Insurance Tax was to pay for education but it was never released by the province and has always been used as general revenue. This tax loss would go a long way to paying for education initiatives in the new curriculum development.

It is with a sense of concern that The Volunteer Fire Fighters Association of British Columbia offer the following recommendations.

- 1) That the portion of fire insurance tax originally legislated to benefit the fire service be reinstated and utilized for that purpose rather than streamed to general revenue. This was an excellent initiative but the benefits were never realized by those who it was really meant to benefit.
- 2) That minimum requirements for structural fire fighters be actioned on urban forest mix fires should really include the S215.
- 3) An additional course for urban forest mix fire fighters be developed and again focusing on safety zones, strategies and tactics, deployment during burn over, retreat and return techniques and entrapment survival all on orthodox equipment and understanding firebrand propagation. And I use it as an example because the S215, which is an excellent attempt at meeting this need, refers to safety zones over and over, but it doesn't really explain what constitutes a safety zone. You are just supposed to retreat to them when you get into trouble. So I think we need to clarify those in much clearer terms for structural fire fighters. I think that the Ministry of Forests guys understand safety areas fairly well, but I think structural people need to understand this before trying to mitigate in these types of high ranking areas.

Second, my comments as a Regional Fire Chief of the South East Region of British Columbia – during the 2003 fires I had the pleasure of serving the province as Regional Fire Chief for the South Eastern British Columbia. South east operations were quite successful, and much of that success should be attributed to the planning time we had prior to major events. Unlike our counterparts in Barriere and Kelowna, we were not overcome immediately by fire and we had the advantage of time. For planning, experimenting and investigating possible solutions to problems that were identified in the field. Luckily our only major burn over was Munro Lake. The utilization of sprinkler technology and other unorthodox methodologies prevented any structural losses and this should speak to the importance of emergency preparedness and the value of preplanning. The Munro Lake Community was saved by a very inexpensive technology, but it was a technology that we had the time to employ and that is what made it successful. There has been an inordinate amount of blame leveled towards different agencies for the results of the 2003 fire season. But I think it would be far more beneficial as a province to

accept the fact that forests burn. That prevention is not eliminating every fire in its earliest stages, but prevention is creating a forest that is resilient to fire, can survive fire and support sustainable renewable resources regardless of any fire season.

I am not suggesting that we abandon fire suppression as many communities are at a huge risk because of the surrounding provincial forests. But a community could be well planned out and still at risk because of surrounding overgrown Crown lands. Fuel reduction plans will take years to implement and are very complicated issues. This is a huge provincial responsibility for Crown lands and a problem that frankly I don't have the expertise to comment on any further so I am just going to leave that as a comment in itself.

We can, however, reduce risks at some other levels. I think that we need tax incentives for rural home owners to sprinkler their own homes, to upgrade roofing materials to Class A ratings, to replace combustible decks and siding, to improve water infrastructures and to clean ladder fuels and reduce stem counts on private land.

During the winter of 2004 the Regional District of Central Kootenay has committed to meeting in all areas to ensure the public is warned about what they can do to help ensure rural homes survive wild fires. We need to shift our immediate emphasis to surviving these types of fires. Fire smart methodologies for mitigating fire brand ignitions are well known to us but few building codes or building bylaws are making use of them.

Local government involvement with these issues is a challenge because of what I see as two reasons. First, there is no current provincial requirement for emergency planning in the rural areas and second, regional districts work on a ward system creating parochial attitudes toward bylaw or planning issues.

Until the province mandates regional district emergency plans on a region-wide basis which would include member municipalities, we will continue to suffer from a fragmented approach with little if any continuity.

From my experience this summer, I am making a number of recommendations for your consideration.

- 1) That the office of the Fire Commissioner be given the responsibility and subsequent funding to plan and oversee structural fire fighting operations during times of provincial wild fire emergencies.
- 2) That the concept of a provincial fire department under the direction of the OFC being given serious consideration as an answer to the current fire protection boundary issue. Australia uses this type of strategy and it is much to their advantage. If a provincial department is not created, it is hardly fair for the government to arbitrarily remove fire boundaries and extend protection to everyone only during those times of emergency. The

costs of training, equipment, trucks and the risks involved should either be a shared responsibility or it should not be.

- 3) We should utilize pre-trained prepared task teams using BCERMS such as the Ministry of Forests uses now. This way experienced personnel could be tasked as needed province-wide and this could be done very quickly as it is done with the Ministry of Forests. BCERMS training needs to be made easily available at no cost to all emergency services. If the province is requiring it, they should be willing to provide it and I think that to be honest with you my main concern as Chief of the Southeast Region was that there an acute lack of understanding of the BCERMS model so that the incident command structure did suffer because of that. I think the BCERMS model is very simple to understand if people have training previously to an action. So I think it only makes sense to provide it at some level.
- 4) I think that regional districts as well as member municipalities be required to prepare emergency plans on a regional basis. Again, I think that the parochial attitudes that come from a ward type system where we have areas that can actually work independently of other areas and create their own rules are a stumbling block to proper planning.
- 5) The province of British Columbia mandate minimum building requirements for rural areas such as Class A rated roofing and minimum fuel load set-backs before construction. Again I ask this to be done provincially because of the ward type system in regional districts which creates a much more difficult arena to actually come up with agreements for this type of planning.
- 6) Early a required implementation of unified command with Ministry of Forests crews when potential structures or losses are possible. This is something that we recognized in a number of different areas – our present model working with the Ministry of Forests doesn't lend itself to a unified command very early on in the process. Usually structures are imminently threatened or actually under incredible threat before a unified command structure is actually brought together. I think this would help concerns with evacuation triggers as well as better communication concerning notices, alerts and evacuations. I think that both structural fire fighters and the Ministry of Forests fire fighters could work a little better together if there was a unified command structure earlier on.
- 7) A provincial resource registry should be created including unorthodox equipment. One of the advantages that we did have over in the Cranbrook area this summer is we employed a number of pieces of apparatus or equipment that isn't common in structural fire fighting. We used skidders, we used Mercedes Benz Unimogs(?) –very short wheel based tractor type units that could navigate in rural areas. I think that right now much of the equipment that we have for structural fire fighting is inadequate to fight the type of fires that we would be expected to fight like Kelowna or Barriere in our experience.
- 8) Again tax incentives for individual homeowners to permanently sprinkler their homes prior to events. I think that is probably one of the most

important considerations that we should take a look at for anyone living in a rural area.

- 9) Clear definitions of jurisdictional responsibilities regarding fire. Currently we still have a number of people who would like to think that the Ministry of Forests is responsible for all forested lands, even though they might be part of an established fire protection area. I think that our responsibilities need to be clearly defined.
- 10) Minimum standards be created for required wild fire equipment to protect structural fire fighters, the cost to be paid for by the protection area unless a provincial department is created. Again, many of the departments we utilized on the forward staging areas of fire fighting did not have proper coveralls, eye protection, or the other type of necessary equipment that we would consider necessary for these types of fires. The type of equipment that we use for structural fire fighting is often times not suitable and would actually be dangerous in these types of conditions.
- 11) Timing of crews being deployed on wild fires should be daybreak. Again, you mentioned this earlier. The observation of crews starting at 0800 hours with a meeting before getting out on the line is unfortunate and I think missing hours of the prime cooler conditions for fighting fires, and you covered that.
- 12) There needs to be an emergency communications system that is province wide. We could possibly use existing ministry of highways repeater systems but we need a minimum of five tactical channels besides the OC frequency to be effective. A number of portable repeaters need to be ready for deployment in more remote areas and this is something that I am sure that other people have probably touched on this with you – the communications. But I know that right now we do have Provincial Emergency Program channels – there are a number of PEP channels, I believe five that area available – but 5 channels, or 6 including the office of the Fire Commissioner’s channel is not enough in terms of the type of fires that we experienced in Kelowna. The radio communication just broke down because there were just too many people on too few channels. I think this is really something that we need to take a hard look at.
- 13) There should be a provincial off-site backup storage for regional mapping data and exchange for using that data during provincial emergencies. We had serious challenges with obtaining mapping data during 2003 that would be useful to adapt legend standards to ensure compatibility. One of the greatest stumbling blocks that we had was actually obtaining mapping data on a timely basis. It was very, difficult to get the mapping data together and by the time we did get it together there were many incompatibilities that created challenges for our resource people to actually produce proper maps. I just felt that if the province could offer perhaps an off-site storage facility for backup it would kill two birds with one stone and in return they would be able to use that data during provincial emergencies.

So I don't know if there any questions about any of this, but –

GF Thank you very much, Tom and you have obviously thought about this a lot and you have the two areas of experience as a volunteer fire fighter and also as having been the Regional Fire Chief. So there are a number of excellent recommendations here, but what I would like to ask you about is the training that you referred to, the structural fire fighter training – throughout this process we have had structural fire fighters who have told us unequivocally that they don't feel comfortable in wild fire situations including the Chief of Kelowna, who is highly respected for his capabilities as a structural fire fighter, said my people aren't trained to go and do that work in putting out a forest fire and vice versa. Ministry of Forests people who are the experts in the forest field don't feel comfortable as they did in a situation experienced in Kelowna in particular where they couldn't come in to doing the protection of the houses that were ablaze. They don't have the training and they don't recognize the hazards in the same way.

So both sides have said they would like to be cross-trained in each others' capabilities. I think that's what you are getting at here and I think that's the kind of thing we've got to find a way of doing. That obviously involves developing training programs for people who already have a great deal of knowledge about fire fighting, but just not in that specific area.

An interesting thing, yesterday in Cranbrook was that this whole business of sprinkling roofs came from the Ontario fire fighters who were forest fire fighters but were trained in structural fire fighting as well and they immediately brought forward that idea to the people and said you can benefit from this, let's get on with it. And they gerry-made a whole bunch of sprinklers for roofs and, they believe, saved a lot of homes in the Cranbrook area.

So that's an example of how that could really be a great benefit to both sides, to everybody involved in the process. And I thank you for that.

TB Did I comment on the education program?

GF Yes.

TB One danger that I think we are caught up in right now is that we are cross-training with the forestry which is a great idea. The forestry is sharing their containment techniques with us and what we are doing is we are sharing our kind of structural fire fighting techniques with them. Really what has to happen is there is a new style of fire fighting that neither one of those parties is really very knowledgeable about and the type fire fighting techniques that I am talking about are used by certain groups in Alberta, they are used in groups down in Australia and in parts of Europe. These techniques are really foreign to both camps, both the Ministry of Forests and the structural fire fighters and really what they do is they allow these fires to burn over – high ranking fires come in and burn over an area because they can't be in there

when it burns over. And then what they do is they move very quickly into those areas and they focus on a different type of fire fighting that we are not used to. Structural fire fighters when they go into this type of environment, their entire world is on fire and they are training to put the fire out – so that is a problem in itself. They will go for the biggest flames every single time. If there is a guy's fibre glass boat on fire in the backyard and that is the biggest flame around, the structural fire fighters will run back to that fire and begin battling it. While all the firebrands that are accumulating on the wooden windowsills or the welcome mat that front door of the house will begin to burn down the house while their backs are turned to the house.

This is the type of fire fighting that I am talking about. It is an entirely different set of skills that we really don't understand – I think that Jack Cohen down in Montana has identified what burns down homes and its not high ranking fires, it's fire brands. And I think that we need to understand spotting. We need to understand the hit and run tactics. Fire fighters normally anchor at a house for hours on end trying to save it and we need to change our thinking, that if we can't do the job in three to four minutes, we have to cut our losses and move on to the next house to be fair to all the community.

I think that these type of tactics are so foreign to structural fire fighters and not really have they ever been a concern to the Ministry of Forests that I think rather than just cross-training we have to go beyond that and actually find some of these techniques from other areas.

So that was just a comment.

GF Thank you for that. The cost of training is an issue that has been raised, particularly by volunteers not fire departments saying we want to take this training, we are volunteering for our communities and we are giving up in many cases opportunities perhaps to be earning money, taking other shifts or doing other work and instead we have chosen to do this and yet it seems we shouldn't have to pay to be trained when it is a benefit to the whole community. So obviously you would agree and you've certainly made this recommendation that there ought to be a source of funding for it if we expect these people to be trained and they are prepared to give their time and energy to it, then we should find a way of paying for it.

TB I think that is fair on certain levels, I do believe that when a jurisdictional authority creates a fire protection service area that they do bear the responsibility of training their own members and I believe that the Regional District so to speak is responsible to ensure that their fire departments have reasonable curriculums that they can draw from. And I am sitting on the steering committee for the Justice Institute as we speak, creating a new volunteer type curriculum. However, that being said I think there are other opportunities that are coming up continually that should perhaps be subsidized at some level and I think this is a good example of that.

When most people signed on to be structural fire fighters it was with one thing in mind and that was to protect a single structure from an interior fire. We are now being put into a very compromised situation where we don't have the skills set or the equipment necessary to fight these types of fires. And, I think at this point we have to ask ourselves some very important questions whether we are needlessly risking people's lives. I know Gerry pretty well, and I do know that there were a number of compromises that occurred in Kelowna that I don't think we would want to see repeated.

There probably, I think that we need to be responsible for our own education at one level, but I think at another level – for instance the provincial government has declared that BCERMS is the emergency management system for British Columbia. I think it would be nice if we had that education available to us. I don't think that we should have to perhaps purchase training that we are required to use, province wide. So those are a couple of examples of a high-c kind of a mix there.

GF Also the requirement that every Regional District have an emergency plan in place is obviously a great weakness in the current system, or the fact that whole areas within a Regional District don't have a municipal government and therefore they don't have any fire protection system which is also a huge weakness in the system. And that has to be addressed.

Tax incentives for home owners to permanently sprinkler their homes – what about insurance premium reductions if – we now accept the fact that if you are non-smoker you get a reduction in your premiums – if you have properly protected your house should you not expect the insurance industry to recognize that in some way – I think so anyway.

TB I think it would be a wonderful way to do it – what I am concerned about is that perhaps local government might be able to say – well this is really being driven by private industry so we don't need to worry about it – that is my only concern. I think that it would be nice to – if we can get it done, any methodology – I would just love to see it done.

GF I sometimes wonder whether or not paying people to do something that is in their best interests is the right approach – but anyway. We'll find a way.

TB I agree.

GF The communications – emergency communications system, clearly there is a problem there and it has been raised on a number of occasions and the timing of crews getting out that and things of this nature – regional mapping data – all points that I think are resonating with a lot of people as we go through this process. So thank you very much coming, Tom.

TF You're welcome. Thank you.

We now have Simon Grypma.

Good afternoon and welcome.

Simon Grypma:

I am sorry I am late; I was tied up with some other issues that I had to deal with today. My name is Simon Grypma. I am the Assistant Fire Chief for the city of Nelson and I was involved with the incident in Cranbrook for two weeks and I would like to have the opportunity to discuss some of the issues and some of the items that I see may be improved for next summer so to speak.

I guess first of all you guys are the Review Team?

GF Yes, I am Gary Filmon.

SG Oh, I thought there was a bigger one, so I was going to say members, but I guess – member.

GF I am Gary Filmon, this is Jim Sproul.

SG Pleased to meet you. Ladies and Gentlemen. I see we have lots of guests from out of town and that was quite an act to follow after Tom, hey Tom?

Anyway, the two main issues that I would like to dwell on so to speak would be also related to the two other associations that I am involved with, and that is the Fire Prevention Officers Association of B.C., and the Training Officers Association of the Province of British Columbia, I am the vice president, first vice president for the Training Offices so I am heavily involved in training of fire fighters across the province as well as the zone rep for the Fire Prevent Officers, so I do – a lot of my job is involved with fire prevention. I would like to discuss several highlights and points that I particularly think were important in the summer firestorms that we had here in the province and more so the direct involvement that I had in the Cranbrook fire. So I would like to associate those specifically to Cranbrook, and I guess being one of the last speakers on your whirlwind tour of the province you have probably heard a lot of it already that I am going to say, so unfortunately you are I hope just going to have to bear with me and see if we can make some sense out of it.

I would just like to read the first part of the final report that I submitted to the Fire Commissioner's office as well as the Incident Commander over in Cranbrook when I was there. Like I said earlier I was the Deputy Incident Command First Structure during those two weeks I spent in Cranbrook. I would just like to say that the majority of the individuals that I interacted with were able to operate efficiently and effectively in providing the team leadership required to accomplish the tasks and objectives of the unified command at the level of structural command.

During my role as Deputy Commander under the command of Chief Fox I found that the structure in place ran smoothly for the most part however there were several serious shortcomings in the interaction and exchange of

information between positions that were taken directly from the other structures such as the EMROC and the office of Fire Commissioner.

These shortfalls resulted in decisions being made without the input from unified command. These decisions resulted in confusion and the direct compromise of objectives implemented by unified command. Some of these problems would not have arisen if daily briefings were held with structural incident command members which I will speak about in a minute. In addition, information overload was also a major problem in that too much duplication was taking place in meetings that were not necessary for all members of the incident command to attend.

So my recommendations or suggestions for review – there are fourteen of them: I am sure that some of these items were already brought up and just take them for the fact that I obviously didn't know the other recommendations that were made – so I don't want to waste your time but –

GF No, it is important, even just having it repeated is important to us because it emphasizes a point.

SG Okay, the fire service in general, and I will just briefly review each one of these topics as I go through – are great for drawing up operational guidelines. One of the biggest shortfalls that we had in Cranbrook when we came together as a group of individuals from so many different municipalities, communities, regional districts – right from Edmonton through to Ladysmith on Vancouver Island. We need to have operational guidelines and there were no operational guidelines in place for the positions in the incident command structure. So what was happening – there were a lot of people that were filling positions that they were given by the Fire Commissioner's office in that incident command position that had no clue on how to interact with other members of that incident command team. So we need to have a provincial-wide operational guideline put together for all the positions in the incident command structure and this will only fit together when I get to the very end.

Operational guidelines must include flowcharts for communications for all members. The big problem that we found in Cranbrook, especially when we working unified command with the Ministry of Forests that there was a lot of communication that was not happening between members of the incident command as well as there was way too much information happening. So you would end up – you would be getting information from so many different areas about the same specific issue that it was not only cluttering up the whole tabletop, it was wasting a lot of valuable time and the communications that should have been taking place between incident command, or deputy incident command, they weren't taking place. It was so bad – I shouldn't say bad, I want to take that back. It was so confusing at certain points during that incident in Cranbrook, the incident command wasn't even aware that there were fire fighters injured and in the hospital. So there was a real breakdown in

communications in that incident command that definitely needs to be cleaned up with operational guidelines.

It seemed like there were a lot of people from fill-in positions in the incident command that they didn't understand that the particular responsibility from that position with that incident command and they were either taking on too many other tasks outside of that box, or not doing the tasks that were supposed to be in that box. So the guidelines are really number 1 key important.

Again Tom mentioned and I am sure 90% of your other speakers mentioned the training, the level of training – members filling all incident command positions as far as I am concerned must have a minimum of the ICS200 certification. And there are different levels of certification and whatnot, but provincial standard and the ICS200 certification for anybody that is filling in an incident command position.

We need to develop minimum equipment standards. I am sure you have heard it before and Tom brought up some very interesting points about some being very creative in Cranbrook but there were a lot of fire departments that were being very uncreative and sending fire trucks with no fire hoses on them. So there was equipment sitting in that parking lot that was totally unusable and I don't if it was a money motivation for some of this apparatus being sent, or I believe if there would be some good guidelines in place it wouldn't waste the time of any emergency operation gathering centre to have to go through some of the equipment that was showing up that was not usable, and yet they were expecting to be paid \$450 or \$500 an hour for this piece of equipment sitting there.

Again, the development of minimum training standards for the fire fighters – for your information the Fire Training Officers Association of the province, and I have a document here I can share with you and give it to you. We are preparing on trying to develop a program, our association in conjunction with the Justice Institute – A train the trainer program – to have that in place before May of next year. Train as many fire fighters in the operation on both structural and on the side of wild land.

There were some interesting comments made about fire fighters wanting to be trained from structural to wild land and vice versa – being that I have been in the training business for the past twenty years, there are some very, very fundamental differences between structural fire fighting and wild land fire fighting and the whole concept of cross-training and the principals behind cross-training. They have to be completely committed to awareness. You can't take a structural fire fighter in the middle of fire fighting a structure and putting him in a wild land interface situation – just because of the equipment that's involved for protection of structural land, fire fighters and protection of wild land. You can't take a fire fighter that is wearing turn out gear SCVA 60#

worth of boots alone, and put him in an environment to fight a wild land fire where the normal type of gear worn by forestry fire fighters are no-mex coveralls. Just the equipment alone – is impossible to do either job. The same with coming from wild land, doing structural fire fighting – it has to be on a level of awareness and a level of being able to utilize each other together in a unified operation. Meaning that structural would support wild land and wild land would support structural.

We did some phenomenal things in Cranbrook. We had crash trucks that were from airports up on the side of mountains – delivering – because they had the capability of carrying two to three thousand gallons of water and the wild land fire fighters, I mean they would be stringing two miles of forestry hose to get water – to pump water from one creek to as far away as they could possibly do it. And in fact we were moving water, 2 or 3 thousand gallons at a time in some of these vehicles – they were just – they astonished us they worked so well. So there is that whole cross-training level, level of awareness and – how we can all best serve each other during a wild land fire. And I know that you guys have probably listened to many experts on theories of fire fighting both in preplanning and actually during the storm itself, and so on and so forth. But my main concern again is on that training of those fire fighters being able to work together prior to it happening. We had a very good working relationship in Cranbrook which was probably – from the people that I spoke to and that I worked with in Cranbrook was one of the fires – one of the very first fires that we had a unified command and that the Ministry of Forests fire fighters worked so closely with the structural fire fighters. Usually there is a big turf war going on. In Cranbrook we were able to work very closely, and I give big edit to those guys from Ontario. Very super crew that were flown in or brought in from Ontario that worked in the unified command, including with – I can't remember his last name – the unified incident command from the Ministry of Forests – Bob Bannersmith. Right. What a guy. Heck of a team leader.

Anyways, carry on. So develop standard – you that is another issue that we really had – we need – and the forestry – we can learn so much from the forestry – so much from those people from Ontario. I mean those guys have been doing it for years. And this is the first year that we have done it. To see their machine run is phenomenal. It's just a learning experience just to be able to work with those guys and to see the way they put together a city of 500 people basically overnight and be able to control and manage that and actually be of some good and put that fire out. It was quite an interesting concept to see that all work.

We need to develop standard forms for reporting and organizing to avoid duplication. And again, with the operational guidelines that's going to fall together in a little bit down the road here.

Another major problem that we had in Cranbrook was that all positions, they need to physically be identified for easy identification. We weren't wearing

vests that we normally would wear on an operational fire ground operation ourselves – the way we work in our own municipalities, or on car accidents on the highways – we wear a vest identifying – whenever we are working in groups, large groups, we wear identification so we can tell who is who. We didn't have that in Cranbrook and that was definitely a downfall that should be a part of what I am going to be talking about here shortly.

We need to review the Ministry of Forests operational guidelines for the purpose of matching positions and objectives. Again, this was one of the first times in the history that I believe we had a unified command. And there was such a learning curve for us to try and match our incident command to their incident command in the unified command, to match positions and objectives.

Again I mentioned this – explore the structural equipment potential with the Ministry of Forests in that doing cross-training with them, advising them, a lot of the people in the Ministry of Forests they didn't realize that we on a normal daily basis have apparatus that can carry 2,000# of water and some of them are 4-wheel drives – and they can drive up the side of a mountain, so there is a lot of equipment that we have that the Ministry of Forests don't realize that we have and vice versa as well. We were bringing in pumps – they would make a phone call – the ministry – I remember one particular case and it's only because there was a lack of information between the two groups – the Forestry Ministry of Forests unified command asked if we could come up with some pumps. Well I think it was in less than ten hours we had so many pumps that they didn't know what to do with them all. And they didn't realize that some of the pumps that we have – some of the equipment that we did have in Cranbrook actually had pumps on board that were usable, so it is really important for the two groups to understand the type of equipment that we can cross-use.

One thing that I found short, and again it will come into what my main recommendation is, is a package that would be basically like what the Ministry of Forests has, when they set up an operation anywhere in the province or basically it seems that they share resources interprovincially. They come in with a whole trailer – they unload the whole trailer and it's the entire package of what they need to set up and operate on that fire ground. And I think one of the things that we need to do is to have – which we weren't doing and has to be put into the operational guidelines – is that the daily structural incident command person just from the structural incidence command side – you have to have daily briefings. And it has to be – I should say that maybe in Cranbrook there were some issues that wouldn't have happened if it wasn't in Cranbrook. Being that the office of the Fire Commissioner was in Cranbrook. Did you guys hear this yesterday, in Cranbrook?

GF Sorry, what was that again?

- SG There was a lot of, I don't want to use the word interference because that seems negative, but there seemed to be a lot of cross participation between the office of the Fire Commissioner in Cranbrook and the incident command, the actual incident command for that particular fire. If the Fire Commissioner's office say had been in Nelson and the fire was in Cranbrook there would have been less involvement from the Fire Commissioner so you did hear some of what I'm talking about.
- GF Not necessarily in Cranbrook but we have certainly heard it in many places.
- SG Oh, okay, and it's not a negative thing that I am saying, but there was a lot of involvement from the Fire Commissioner's office that should have been through the incident command structure that didn't end up that way. And, like I say, we were on a big learning curve this summer so I am certainly not blaming any fingers, but if we have a package that was put together it would certainly stop that type of thing from happening.
- GF I think that was suggested that that was a problem initially and they worked their way through it.
- SG Yes. The other – one other issue that both Gerry Fox the fire chief of Cranbrook and myself thought that should have happened maybe, and that was eventually when we became unified command, that the unified command team were stationed at the same location. There was way too much time spent traveling and there were decisions that had to be made immediately that were not being made immediately and they were not being made unifiedly. The information was not getting back to the structural fire fighters or through to the wild land – just for instance one particular – it was not a big deal, but for instance, stopping of the trains, there were people that thought they could just stop the trains. Well stopping a train is a big deal. So by the time the information and the decision was made and how it got back – well you know how it goes – sort of – by the time it leaves the top and gets to the bottom, it's completely changed. So there are some benefits of having both commands unified together, working together – during that stage of unified command. There was a lot of time that we spent that we weren't in unified command but yet we were working together and the only time that unified command actually got to that point was when there were actual structurals involved with the fire. and that's when we became unified command.
- I think we need to develop and train structural incident command teams for further deployment. Meaning that the Fire Commissioner's office along with the municipalities and regional districts there be separate teams built – what I am looking at is the fellows from Ontario, there were teams of people that have worked together for the past six years and that's all they did was – they got the phone call that they were going to be setting up in – for instance – this one was Cranbrook and a team got together and a team consisted of X amount of people and certain people and they have all worked together so

they are the team. So I think that the province – if in fact we are going to be looking at summers in the future like we have had in the past, we need to have people in place and we need to have a team – so that in the event we need an incident command set up in Tukuyuktuk, because there is a fire threatening that community – that the Fire Commissioner can get on the telephone and call a team together and twenty people rush over to wherever and they are used to working together, they've trained together and they have the entire package with them to put that whole incident command thing together because the biggest thing that I have seen, once in Cranbrook was there were 200 fire fighters – 200 structural fire fighters I believe it was. At the very beginning the incident command structure was very not put together – within three or four days when we finally had that incident command put together it was an unbelievable difference in the operation of that created fire department in Cranbrook. Then we were able to work that much better with the incident command with Forestry.

So I believe all that should be put together in a package prior to it happening again so that you can bring in a team, they do have their desk, their table top, their forms, their paper work, operational guidelines, how they are going to bring in equipment, how they are going to bring in personnel, manpower, how they are going to deploy it – so on and so forth. There were a lot of questions – too many questions on – well can we do this ...

(tape over)

... guidelines. So those were my fourteen issues.

Just in conclusion this particular incident this particular incident was history in the making. Many lessons have been learned by every individual who played a role in bringing the incident to a positive conclusion. These lessons learned must be recorded and developed into a provincial resource manual to be used in the next incident of this magnitude.

Thank you gentlemen.

GF Thank you very much, Simon. I appreciate your perspective on it because of the experience that you had – the need for a lot of this kind of preparation ahead of time – whether it is training to certain levels – whether it's minimum equipment standards, minimum training standards, all of those are very important in ensuring that when a time of emergency comes everybody knows their role and fits in to a pattern and there is a team approach that is an integrated operation. That is difficult when you are melding people from different levels of government and also different areas of jurisdiction. I am not sure that it is going to be foolproof but I believe that it is possible for us to do a lot more of this prior organizational training.

The incident you bring out about stopping the trains was raised yesterday in Cranbrook and it's one of the places that I think demonstrates why there needs to be a provincial level authority and provincial coordination. You can't

expect local people to know who is the president of the CPR, who is the Regional Superintendent that makes that decision, you can't be going through the phone book and making a – you are wasting your time – there should be somebody at a provincial level who says the Superintendent for British Columbia is X, his emergency number is Y, and they make the call based obviously on a local decision that there is a serious situation here and you may have explosive chemicals or whatever in a fire zone.

Those are the kinds of things and that is where this whole relationship, where the office of the Fire Commissioner, although they don't have vast resources, they have the authority to operate at a provincial level and to go beyond your borders to seek access to resources or decisions that you couldn't ordinarily access. So I think that they are – we have got to work this through in some way to ensure that the office of the Fire Commissioner utilizes that authority to your benefit without getting in the way of your commanding the local situation. Because I do believe that as much as possible, the command of the disaster, the general so to speak who is in charge of the campaign is at the local level. But you still need a provincial wide authority to get certain things done.

So it's going to be an interesting review to try and figure out just exactly the best structure for that to happen. At the moment there seems to have been a good deal of confusion although in the end people worked things through, but in the beginning people were feeling out who was really in charge. Eventually it got worked out. In times of emergency, hopefully you should be able to know instantly – this is the way it works – this is the structure.

SG That's what we need.

GF Where all the responsibilities are clear.

SG One other thing in closing that I never mentioned that our Fire Prevention Officer's Association and the Training Officers, those are two very good venues, or avenues, to bring that training forward throughout the provincial because the majority of the fire departments do belong to those two organizations and both of them have been in existence for about thirty years each. So there is a lot of respect for those two organizations. This spring, in 2004 the Fire Prevention Officers Convention in Williams Lake will be focused on wild land urban interface fires as well for the preplanning and fire prevention aspects. I believe without a doubt that one of the biggest factors that is going to save our province from any other fire or from fires in the future is going to be fire prevention – fire prevention and preplanning.

So, in saying that ...

GF Okay. Thank you. May we have a copy of your presentation?

SG Yes, I do. It's the complete report that I submitted to Cranbrook and the last two sheets, one is the latest fax – e-mail from the Fire Prevention Officers on what I was just speaking about and the Training Officers. You can have them both.

GF Great. Thank you very much. Glad to meet you, Simon.

SG Thank you very much for your time.

Next we have Rick Drew.

RD (is it live?)

GF It is live! Welcome.

Richard Drew:

I would like to thank you, Mr. Filmon, for allowing me to speak to this panel. I will give you a little bit of my background so people know where I am coming from. I am going to touch on some areas that may not have been presented at some of these meetings. I have had 35 years with the Ministry of Forests and 14 years part time with private forestry consulting. In the forest service I started off, and when I started in 1953, everybody was more or less a generalist. There wasn't too much specialization, especially with the technical staff. So we did everything from timber cruising to logging inspections, grazing permits, Christmas tree permits, log scaling, railway right of way inspections, fire prevention regulations, prescribed burning, lookout servicing, air patrols, bird dogging air tankers, setting up and operating air tanker bases and portable fire retardant sites for helicopter bucketing, instructing weather courses and basic fire fighting and bird dog officer training. That is what I ended up doing. In the private part of my working life I did quite a lot of prescribed burning and interface fire hazard mapping, and instructing basic fire fighting courses. And I did a lot of that this last summer because everybody that went out there that hadn't been a fire fighter before was required to have this basic fire fighting course. I think that was a requirement of the Workers' Compensation Board. They didn't want people going out there and getting injured. That was one of their main concerns and it also gave them a fairly – a little bit of a window into what they could expect out there so they didn't go out totally unprepared, without the right clothing and attitude and what they could expect.

I have four main concerns. One is community involvement. Two is training – where are the fire bosses for tomorrow going to come from. Three is fire hazard jurisdiction and the fourth is logging and hazards in the interface.

I will speak to community involvement – since the onset of downsizing and centralization by the Ministry of Forests many communities in British Columbia have little or no contact with forest service personnel on a regular basis. Local residents are not relied upon nearly as much for fire control. Initial attack crews are now in and out with good results in most case, but when fires get beyond the initial attack phase and larger crews move in with little local knowledge, fire control efforts may lag in many areas.

I recommend that local residents and forest workers be organized before the fire season starts and used as often as possible in remote and interface fires so that they remain involved with local fire suppression. It is my opinion that communities will be better served if there is more local involvement. And there used to be lots of local involvement. We used to have honorary fire wardens in the smaller communities and they were given a little bit of training in the spring and they were sort of the forest service representative for emergencies until other fire crews could be brought in. And they worked quite well. Of course communication in those days was slower and roads weren't as

quick as they are now, and there weren't helicopters and air craft quite so readily available. So they served a very valuable service and I think there are people out there in these smaller communities that can do some of these functions and especially the people with logging machinery and a good knowledge of the area. I think those people would be much happier if they could contribute something to the fire fighting efforts.

In the area of training, I was listening to the former speaker and he was saying how different structural fire fighting was to forest fire fighting and he is absolutely right. I am kind of wondering where the fire bosses, the forest fire bosses are going to be coming from the forest services specialized to quite a degree and I don't know how many people they are going to have that are able to go out into the forests and take command of – it may not be a large fire – but eventually there are going to be some large fires and people get trained on small fires and work up to whatever their level of competence is.

But this past fire seasons emphasized the need to reduce the fuel loading in the interface and elsewhere. Conducting prescribed burns is an ideal way to train future fire specialists. By planning a control burn which entails building fireguards and removing hazards, developing water sources, setting up pumps, hose lays, sprinkler systems, recording weather conditions, using terrain features, having suitable equipment and adequate crew persons. And following a specific light-up sequence when local weather conditions are favourable, personnel can gain valuable experience. I had fought quite a few fires in my forest service career and I don't think there was any one that stands out where I did anything spectacular. It was a learning process, but I think in a lot of the learning I did with prescribed fire, I learned from my mistakes and I made lots of them. I have a great respect for weather and preparation and I think it gives – if trainees could be used sometimes for prescribed burning, it would give them an appreciation of what works and what does not work.

Successful fire control cannot be learned in the classroom and is a hit and miss proposition when trying to learn on actual wild fires. So I don't know where the province is going with their interface hazard reduction, I think it is a long – it's going to be a long and difficult thing to get all the interface under control around all these communities and if you look at that Kelowna fire, it didn't start in the interface, it started a long way from the interface and came to it like some of those other big fires did too. So it might have helped if everything had been nice and park like and no underbrush and access was good and everything south of Kelowna but it wasn't. So if there is going to be some more prescribed fire in the province it is going to create smoke but it might be better to have a little smoke than to have houses burn and people losing all their belongings. That's just one – that's my second recommendation. If there is going to be more prescribed burning I think the forest service fire bosses or potential fire bosses should be involved to some

degree so that they can get a good appreciation for wild fire. It's a really good learning area.

I have one concern here about fire hazard and jurisdiction. When forest fire hazards rise to level that threaten the interface the policy to extinguish or not to extinguish wild fires should rest with one authority. We cannot afford to have opposing views and delays when so much is at stake and there may be something that is already there, I am not aware of it, but I don't think we can have parks or environment saying well, we are going to let that fire burn because we don't think it is a problem and the forest service isn't able to take action. I think when the fire hazard gets up to a certain level, I think all fires probably should be dealt with. I don't think anybody thought that fire that started on Okanagan Mountain was going to do what it did and that's just one example. The ones up the North Thompson started like little fires and away they went too. I don't know if any of those fires were considered not important at the time, I think they were, but in future I think we have to know exactly what we want to do with fire.

I used to go to visit with the Americans in Montana and Idaho when I was working out of Creston and one of their foresters said you either want fire or you don't want it, and if you want it, you promote it. If you don't want it, you put it out. They had tried letting fires burn and say oh well, when they get to an area where we don't want them, we'll just go in there and put them out. But they realized they couldn't put them out. They didn't have the – with all the air tankers and helicopters and everything, they realized that when fires get to a certain size you don't put them out.

My fourth subject here is logging and hazards in the interface – logging and other developments on private land in or near the interface are in many cases contributing greatly to the fire risk. Excessive amounts of slash left on the ground endanger the adjacent properties and communities. Both homeowners and those who have commercial interests must be made aware of the need for following good fuel reduction practices. I live about ten miles out of town and have fifteen acres, and I have a 40 acre patch of slash beside my property that is, I think, very, very hazardous. It was logged poorly and all the slash is there. The landings are there, nothing has been treated and it ever caught on fire, I could see my place probably getting burned at the same time.

The forest service used to have a policy and I don't know if they still are sticking with it or not, but when I was in the forest service private land holders that created hazards, we could go on and look at their hazards and if we considered them excessive, we could instruct them to get rid of the hazards – to burn their slash, to pile it, to do whatever. If they didn't do it, it was done for them and they were billed. I have heard since that maybe they don't adhere to this anymore. I think if we are going to start to lean on people in the interface, that live in the interface, we can't ignore people who log in the interface.

Because, the logging probably creates a lot more problems than the people that live there, but I don't think we can have a policy for one and not for the other. But they need a policy through legislation or other means is needed if we are serious about preventing disastrous fires in the future.

That's the end of my presentation and I thank you very much for allowing me to come here today.

- GF I appreciate the recommendations. They are very clear and well thought out. The responsibility if a hazard is created by loggers, or private owners who leave excessive amounts of slash there in the interface, it is certainly something one would think there would be a policy to take care of and ensure that those responsible have to take it away. Or, as you say, if not that the Crown can do it and bill them for it. So it is your impression that in the case of the Okanagan Mountain Park fire, or other fires in provincial parks that there is a bit of a jurisdictional question as to who goes – how they attack the fire and whether or not they go in there.
- RD Yes, I know in the national parks they let a big fire burn for a long time in Kootenay National Park but of course the forest service doesn't have any jurisdiction there. But I don't think there can be any fumbling when it comes to fire when the hazard gets up to the levels of high and extreme – they've got to be dealt with and if you – I think we have seen what happens – now I don't know if any of the fires that started this year were left to burn for – you hear stories about them not doing much and air tankers sitting on the ground when people thought they could be bombing the fires – but all this is anecdotal and I don't know how much truth is in any of it. But, in my experience in the forest service usually the policy was you hit fires when they are small – you have a good detect system. We had air tankers and helicopters and rappel crews and if you can get your fires quickly then you can save a lot of trouble down the road. Now this last summer was very, very odd in some ways. And fires burned and did things that people hadn't seen in their lifetimes.
- GF I don't know the answer to that, but we'll say that it has been raised previously as well so we will certainly be looking into it.

Thank you very much.

- RD Thank you.

The next presenter is Gordon Zaitsoff. Good afternoon, welcome.

Gordon Zaitsoff:

My name is Gordon Zaitsoff and I guess my presentation is more towards the emotional nature of some of the situations that occurred in some of the small communities. A little bit of my history – I am a graduate of forest resource management – I spent a number of years working for the forest service and the provincial parks. Currently I am a Regional Director of Area J which is with the Regional District of the Central Kootenay. We in our area – basically Area J just for geographics is near the Castlegar area, lower Arrow Lakes, predominant south facing slopes, pine grass type areas. I think what I want to do with my presentation is just go through some correspondence which basically outlines the gist of my presentation.

Prior to the fire centres being established, we recognized extreme conditions in our area, send out a letter and this is a gist of the letter – due to the extreme high fire rating potential for enormous property and natural resource loss I am recommending to the fire departments of area J to exercise discretion in manning the fire halls during the day with trained personnel. I recommend that a minimum of two personnel are on standby at the halls for immediate response. I request the Regional District of Central Kootenay staff to explore the reimbursement or means to recover this proactive measure in this extreme situation in our area. The short term exercise of responsible coverage can potentially reduce the hardships and property loss of our area residents. I hope this difficult situation and alternatives can be reviewed at our Board meeting this weekend. It is my understanding that we are facing these extreme conditions in our area for approximately another three weeks.

So we were kind of preplanning with our volunteer fire departments ahead of these staged training centres. We have three volunteer fire departments in area J, Robson, Oodeshenya(?), Blueberry which consists of about 63 volunteers. Through this whole exercise the area – and this was a letter written by the area J lower Arrow Lakes/Columbia Advisory Planning Commission which represents about fifteen people at large from the community. ... *the Area J Lower Arrow Columbia Advisory Planning Commission APC is submitting this written request to the Provincial Emergency Program asking for special funding for our local area J firemen and women who because of the recent extreme fire hazard in our area have volunteered to man our fire halls on a daily basis for several weeks. Our area J director, Gordon Zaitsoff encouraged this proactive step. We the members of the area J APCC unanimously support this decision. We feel that this responsible action by our local firemen and women prevented the catastrophic catastrophe that Kelowna and the area is now faced with. Although our firemen and women usual work on a volunteer basis, these extra hours they have put in to ensure the safety of our communities deserves to be recognized and commended. The area J APC members ask for your support by way of special financial contribution to each of the firemen and women who worked above and beyond the call of duty. This action would*

demonstrate the value of the Provincial Emergency Program directors place on the safety of the local residents during the state of emergency that the whole province is faced with.

Once the Fire Centre was established and the staging area was established in the Castlegar area the volunteer fire departments continued manning the fire halls with at least two people during the day for a rapid response if it was needed. We had occasions where the two people were deployed and additional people met them at the fires. So we had probably, oh I would say six potential fires that could have grown into something fairly large in our area that we were able to act on fairly quickly because of the manning.

This is an article that just came out last week – you can see Santa on the front here – an article in our local Castlegar paper which I think is very important. *Local firefighters acknowledge for efforts. Sixty local fire fighters received recognition for going above and beyond their normal duties in the scorching summer of 2003. Gord Zaitsoff, Artie Ceekay(?) director for area J presented the fire fighters from Robson, Oodeshenya, and Blueberry Creek with \$10,000 worth of new jackets, bearing each department's name. The jackets are in recognition for all the extra effort they put in this summer in extreme fire conditions said Zaitsoff. They didn't get paid even though they manned the fire stations during the day. Even before the province set up its regional fire centres, firefighters from the Area J departments were at their respective halls on alert for any emergency in the area. Peter Yoffenoff(?), Oodeshenya Fire Department Chief said having fire fighters in the hall ready at a moment's notice paid off. His department received about a dozen day calls in August and September. They put in a lot of hours Yoffenoff said, recognition for those hours added the chief was much appreciated. It is really nice of them to think of us Yoffenoff said. Jim Postykoff(?) Blueberry Creek Fire Department Chief agreed, it was not expected.*

I guess through this whole presentation what I am trying to emphasize here is we have resources with our local volunteer fire departments, they are keen, they are eager, they want to help. In some of the situations with the staging areas there was a lot of equipment brought in. some equipment suited, I have to agree with that, suited – and there was some that were brought in and there was some boasting that was occurring as well that some people were getting X amount of dollars and hour and getting, you know, \$450-\$500 for a piece of apparatus and some of it was fairly old. We had resources right in this area that with good planning we could probably have reduced some of the cost that was put on the province for these fire fighting exercises.

I have a covering letter that pretty much covers everything, Gary, I won't read it all out, but in the end here I just want to say – *I request this new panel to recommend fair compensation to the volunteer fire halls which acted on a proactive and prepared manner which clearly reduced the extended loss of property and resources. Thank you for your responsible consideration.*

I think this has probably been echoed a few times throughout the province and I think it is really important not to lose fact of the resources we have right in front of us and sometimes we are blind to recognize those resources.

GF Thank you very much, Gordon. It is an important issue and I thank you for complimenting and recognizing the efforts of volunteer fire fighters. Obviously they did yeoman service. They gave many, many hours of free time and effort of their own professional efforts because they spent their own time being trained, they worked very hard to be just as competent and effective as full time fire fighters and in many cases they are. It's an issue that has been raised. It's a delicate issue and I am not one who is willing to stir up a problem, but it has been raised on numerous occasions two ways – one the inequities in which people were brought from long distances who had collective agreements and were paid for their travel time and time and a half for being here and they were fighting side-by-side with volunteers who were being paid nothing. An issue that I think in terms of fairness needs to be addressed for the future. There has to be a standard set and people's efforts recognized for the value that they have provided. Obviously that – I am sure you saw that and that is probably the genesis of your recommendations here.

The other thing about equipment – which was raised I think by a couple of earlier presenters. It certainly appears as though people sent equipment that wasn't up to the task and was not equipped with the proper equipment to deal with the job and yet were being paid \$450 or \$500 an hour standby to be there. I think that there is every reason why the – whoever is in charge, whether it is Provincial Emergency Program of the office of the Fire Commissioner can refuse payment. I mean there is no reason why people who deliberately sent equipment that wasn't up to the task and wasn't able to be used properly in the fire fighting effort should expect to be paid for it. That's just not on. And whether it's that, or whether it's – an obviously one of the reasons that will be argued is that there were no parameters. There were no equipment standards that could be identified to say well, it must have this and it must have these hose connections and other things – so it's a task for the future to make sure that we can properly identify exactly what the proper operating piece of equipment means and what standards it has to meet in order for it to be accepted. Those are certainly issues that are valid and I thank you for bringing them forward.

GZ Thank you very much for the time.

Next we have Dermot Hikisch. Welcome.

Dermot Hickisch:

Thanks a lot of having me. And I must say I am rather impressed that you got my last name correct. That's very rare.

GF That's my Ukrainian/Polish background.

DH I just want to thank you guys for giving me the opportunity to speak today. It is very rare that situations like this happen where we have an open public forum on things that could be modified and improved as nothing is perfect in this world. As people have heard, my name is Dermot Hickisch, I have been a fire fighter with the Ministry of Forests for the past eight seasons and without a doubt this summer was by far the busiest and most destructive season that I have been a part of today. For the past four seasons I have been fortunate enough to be a member of the Telkwa Rangers Unit Crew which is based in Northern B.C. In summers we spent most of our time combating the fires in Barriere and then in Kelowna. We were the only forest service crew working on the Okanagan Mountain fire on the nights of August 21st and 22nd when over 240 homes in the Kelowna area were destroyed.

My presentation hopes to draw on some of my experiences from the front lines of these fires in an effort to bring light to some of the issues that I feel warrant review. Before I begin this assessment though, I would take a minute and give credit to many of the things that went right this season. I found the support of the people in the communities affected by these fires and the efforts of many of the volunteers involved to have been outstanding and above and beyond the call of anyone's duty for sure. As well, I found the cooperation on the fire line between the agencies working together such as the Ministry of Forests, structural fire fighters, contractors and the military was very successful. That is from a person-to-person basis. I am sure I have read a few articles that said there was a bit of conflict on the higher-up levels, but I won't delve into that. As well I also would like to state the fact that there wasn't a single fatality or very few major injuries on the line of anyone working on these fires. It is a solid testament to the province being on the right track for dealing with emergencies such as forest fires. Because the B.C. Forest Service has a policy of safety being the number one issue and from that standpoint they did everything they could to properly affect it.

On the flip side though, I feel that operations didn't run as well as it should have. In both Barriere and Kelowna the chain of command was quite fragmented at time. Often direction was lacking or unclear. On more than one occasions our crew of twenty had to sit around for several hours before receiving marching orders. This was the case on August 21st, the first night that the fires were destroying Kelowna. We were scheduled for night shift and we prepared for movements at 7:00 p.m., however we weren't even given a target which was the Cedar Hills area until 11:10 p.m., over four hours later. That night our crew working with a number of structural crews saved several

houses from being burned to the ground, but according to reports from the media over 15 houses were lost that night, all of which were in the area that we had been working throughout the night. This leaves me to wonder how many would have burned if we had been able to get there even an hour sooner, or two hours. I realize that the fire activity was significant at the time but it hadn't really settled down much. The winds didn't change too much from 7:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m., and being able to get in there in daylight might have given us a chance to have a way better assessment of the things that were going on on the ground instead of showing up in the middle of the dark and dealing with flames on all sides of us.

In the past couple of months I have also heard similar stories from several members of initial attack crews and unit crews from around the province, with similar stories on Kelowna, Barriere, fires all over the place. The quality of leadership I found also varied significantly from fire to fire and day to day. I am kind of hesitant about bringing this issue up as over the past few years I have had the privilege of working with some outstanding and inspirational people as leaders. However, this season saw a group of sub-commanders that ranged from fantastic to incompetent. While in Barriere I had dinner one night with a division boss whom I knew who was also from northern B.C. and he confided in me about his frustration with the chain of command there and how he was given no direction or assistance whatsoever. When I pressed him on the matter, I was told how he and another division boss had waited outside the overhead teams' nightly meeting for 1-1/2 hours to get a chance to speak with their branch director in an effort to make plans and resource requests for the next day which is normal operating procedure. When the overhead meeting had finished however, the branch director decided to leave through the back door, knowing full well that these two division bosses were waiting for him, because he just didn't want to deal with any more fire issues that night.

These division bosses were left to make their own choices. They had no input from the higher-ups, they didn't know what the new strategy was for the next day and they just had to put things together on their own. I am sure the division bosses were capable of making and assessing for new plans for the day, but there is always an overall strategy for fighting every fire that comes into play and it is just not efficient that way. I'd hoped this was an isolated incident, however when we moved on to Kelowna a week later similar things happened which reiterated my problems there.

When we were in Kelowna we worked on our branch director there to demonstrate on a daily basis that he had no ability to judge fire activity and crew movements from the air which is the primary function of a branch director. Normal branch directors spend upwards of five hours a day in-flight monitoring their sectors, determining where buckets should be dropped and tanker action, etc. I found this a problem and to make matters worse he was quite unreceptive to input from people that were on the ground in front of

these fires and had face to face knowledge of the actual activity that was happening and whether or not resources are needed or further action was taken.

I feel the ultimate reason for this problem was in the fact that our protection program is bound by the BCGEU and it must hire people that are generally with the most seniority whether or not they are best person for the job. As a supervisor and member of the BCGEU I have seen many problems over the years with having a union structure when it comes to fighting fires. Problem employees are really difficult and costly to get rid of. Our wage rates are higher than they need to be to recruit the same quality of fire fighter, and many experienced members can and do use loopholes in the union agreement to their advantage. There is also little incentive for people to work above the satisfactory level except for the sake of pride. Fortunately there are a lot of crews in this province that have a high work ethic and strive to do all they can every single day. But on the other side there are also a number of crews out there that will just do the job solely for the money and just go through the day, just to get it over with.

Another problem I found on the same line as this, the crew leaders have the ability to set their own hours and therefore mark their own wages down and – which it should work properly however not everyone is honest when it comes to this when there is an extreme amount of money payouts to be made.

The amount of money that was lost due to people overbooking work hours is very small compared to the overall fire cost this season as I am sure you are aware. The fire costs reached over \$550M by the end of season and I am wondering how any ministry can spent ten times its annual budget without any major alarms going off. I know my brother kept me almost every copy of the newspapers and there was barely any publicity on the amount of financial expenditures going on. A number of years ago I was in the Faculty of Commerce at UBC and Gordon Campbell visited our classroom during his election campaign to speak for the need for accountability in government. When I look at the protection program I don't see any financial accountability at all. At times this year it seemed like were trying to smother the fire with money.

When the Kelowna fire began the province was strapped for resources and rightfully so because there were so many fires going on throughout the province, however several days after the houses had all burned, there were more resources than the chain of command could handle. We were having eighty people showing up for jobs that twenty of us could do easily. There was, like you have heard a number of times, heavy machine sitting idle waiting for direction and air ops was given the green light to bucket and tanker on any wisp of smoke that they saw, whether or not it warranted that amount of action or not.

To make matters worse, the media and the public hear the arrival of the Martin Mars, the world's largest water bomber – due to the sheer size of the plane, no one really bothered to question the effectiveness of a plane that was built during WWII and what many didn't know about on the Kelowna fire was that the Martin Mars is only able to fly for two hours in operation before it had to make the flight back to Port Alberni in a one hour plus flight to re-fuel. At \$33,000 an hour, I don't know if this is exactly cost effective from a sake of fire suppression factor.

From my standpoint it seemed like we were trying to appease the residents of Kelowna by displaying the sheer volume of our resources that were working on the effort. Unfortunately this came only after the fires threats to home and people had subsided. The whole size of the operation had become unmanageable – highly trained and experienced forest service crews such as the one I am on were given menial tasks because no bosses had time to properly assess where we could be best utilized on the fire line. There was a lot of overlapping between crews – different crews doing the exact same job and we kept bumping into each other. Independent machinery operators, many of whom had gotten frustrated with just waiting at staging for direction would start showing on our fire line to see if they could lend a hand anywhere. We had no request for them, they weren't sent there, but they just thought they might be able to do something. And all this time the protection budget was growing.

According to the most recent reports that you can see on the government website, there was nearly 2,500 fires this season which burned 265,000 hectares of forest. This is roughly 240,000 hectares more than B.C.'s tenures average. No doubt this season required more than \$55M allotted to it, whether it should have been as high as \$550M is completely another story.

In summary, I feel that modifications to the chain of command would be beneficial. Additionally the usefulness of a union structure in the area of fighting fires should be reviewed, and finally ...

(new tape)

GF Thank you very much, Dermot. Again the fact that you were there on the scene and have personal experience is helpful to us. You are raising issues that resonate with things that we have heard. I think it is fair to say in any time of emergency that the quality of leadership is paramount to getting the best results. It is absolutely essential.

DH It's just a chain reaction. One person has to make a decision and it has to follow all the way through.

GF We have heard over and over again that in a time of tremendous stress and great natural disaster, civil disaster, it brings out the best in people and unfortunately in a very, very small minority of instances it brings out the worst

in people. So what you are saying is something that obviously makes a lot of sense.

The issue of the manner in which safety was calculated into the equation is one that I firmly believe from all of the presentations. Many, many people have suggested that the zero tolerance of risk was not a good thing – that there should have been perhaps a little bit of risk taken under a judgment call. That's I think easy to say but certainly it is something that should be looked at – the policy should be evaluated, but the other side of the coin is what price do you put on a life if one life is lost because some small degree of risk is taken. And so I think those are judgment calls that I am not in a position to make, but it is something of course that the Ministry of Forests will have to look to and see whether or not there can be some judgment calls made from time to time.

Getting there earlier, is a theme that has come up on a number of occasions where people were sitting around waiting for direction rather than being out on the scene doing something that could have been helpful. The question of use of equipment, or shall I say having too much equipment around when we have seen the photographs of over fifty pumper trucks sitting on the parking lot at the Kelowna fire station. We know that at one time there were 23 water bombers in the air in the Okanagan and over 60 helicopters, but that having been said, you know the question is what were people expecting. And I think they were out there because they were expectations that no stone would be left unturned so to speak. That every piece of equipment available would be thrown onto the task and I do believe from everything I have heard that the government wanted to be in a position of saying that no resources would be withheld. That having happened, you lead then to the possibility that some things are wasteful. And again, those are judgment calls and I think the other side of that coin is that the government certainly didn't want to be seen to be withholding resources in coming back.

So somebody said in Osoyoos that it was the biggest air show in the history of the Okanagan Valley. But again you have to say well, if people were expecting that every ounce of effort would be put forward, then that is exactly what they got. And so there is always two sides to introducing accountability and controls needs to be done in a time of – when there is no panic and there is no emergency under way. They have to be done ahead of time in the planning process. Reasonable accountability, reasonable controls in terms of whether or not too much was being paid for all that equipment that was standing by idle; whether or not too many resources were just sitting there in case they were needed; whether or not the hourly rates that those comparisons that an earlier speaker made about volunteers getting nothing and others getting time and a half and all sorts of extra hours for travel and so on. Those are judgment calls but they are also organizational things that are going to have to be looked at and so hopefully we will get some long term view of it ahead of time, and not make those decisions in the middle of a crisis.

- DH Yes, this fire season should be a good benchmark for making new changes and whether the effectiveness of spending X amount of dollars on air support or the numbers of machinery versus the performance that was given. These are good benchmarks for the future that we can work off of. I know B.C. hasn't had a season nearly as bad as this – obviously Salmon Arm in '98 was a terrible year too, but ...
- GF Yes, nothing as bad as this and I think that is why this commission is in place, to be able to ask those questions and to be able to ask people to take a good hard look at those particular issues. So thanks for raising them.
- DH Good. Thank you.
- GF Do you have a copy of your presentation by chance? Thank you. Nice to meet you.

GF Is Elvin Masuch here, please? Not here.