

FIRESTORM 2003 – PROVINCIAL REVIEW

Public Meetings

Nelson

Part B

- GF Okay, we do have an indication of somebody who was planning on being here in the evening and I am not sure if she is here this afternoon – Anne Sherrod. Are you prepared to make a presentation, Anne?
Great – okay well we are happy to have that.
Nice to meet you and welcome.

Anne Sherrod:

I am glad you have taken on this burden. I represent the Valhalla Wilderness Society and I have come to talk about parks. I want to talk about – I – you are aware that about twelve parks had fires this year. And you are aware of some of the consequences of some of them and I needn't tell you that it is a very important issue how parks are managed. It is important to everybody.

I know that you have probably heard over and over again that people are upset that the recommendations of the Auditor General received too little attention by the B.C. Government and our observation is that they weren't only ignored, that what were the actions of the B.C. government in the period after that report was issued went exactly in the opposite direction and an irresponsible direction for what was the seriousness of the situation. The government cutbacks began after that report was issued – Ministry of Forests staff and budget were slashed, Ministry of Forests offices were closed down. B.C. Parks had its budget and its staff cut. Now I know that Ministry of Forests – these offices were not responsible for the fire fighting. You know, we have heard that from the government but some of the budget cuts did go to the Ministry of Forests protection budget and I'm sure that that did have consequences in terms of fire fighting. But what we are looking at is the consequences in terms of fire management, fire planning, fire prevention and we have heard someone say this afternoon that they think that the biggest thing that is going to save B.C. from fires is going to be prevention and fire planning. Well, the conservation of budget of B.C. parks was decimated and I would request if your team is interested for you to find out about that because Valhalla has reliable information that the conservation budget was just decimated. But no one in B.C. Parks will tell us by how much. We even called Victoria and tried to find out – Victoria would not tell us. Because everyone is afraid that the government will come down on them if they make it public knowledge how much to government raided that fund. So that conservation budget is responsible for fire management plans and such things.

We heard it said that well, Parks doubled and so that is why they don't have a lot of money – that does not explain why the government reduced the budget of parks. What was happening was that the government was turning control of the forest over to the Forest Corporations and it was privatizing parks. We know for sure, we have complete documentation that the government was undertaking shifting control of park operations to the private sector and people were told that – well, when we make the shift there will be more money left over for B.C. Parks to do conservation. Wrong. The conservation budget was cut. Now, Valhalla had a unique opportunity to experience what sorts of effects this might have because during the summer before 2003 there was a fire in Valhalla Park and there were public meetings with the B.C. Forest Service and B.C. Parks in New Denver and furthermore Valhalla had meetings with the whole team of B.C. Parks people and Forest Service people. Now the situation was this – they wanted to let the fire burn and I don't want to criticize them on that because their judgment was scientifically sound. And

the fire ending was successful but we did not know that when they started to let the fire burn. We wanted to know where their fire management plan was. They did not have one.

Well, so we were a bit upset about that and we wanted to know – well you've got some base studies here – what's the fuel loading, what's the fire history – what kind of forest type have you got over there. They have never had the funding to do those kinds of things. We said well wouldn't it be better if you did prescribed burning and try to burn some of the fuel load off – they said it takes studies to do prescribed burning – you just can't go out in the woods and light up a fire. You have to have science behind you. You have to have risk benefit analysis. You have to have an idea of what is the natural fire regime of this forest. You have to have all kinds of things – we don't have the money for that. And so we could see that genuinely they were between a rock and a hard place, trying to deal with what they were afraid was a fuel build up and yet not having the funding to be able to deal with anything.

We said well, how about we try to raise the money for a fire management plan because we understand the government isn't about to give it to you. You know – and they said well if you can – and we went about that and we were eventually told by a higher level Parks person – look even if we had a fire management plan, we don't have the money to implement it. A fire management plan has to be implemented year after year. You need staff for that. You need budget for that. And, what we determined was that there was an ongoing plan to cut, continue cutting budget and staff of B.C. Parks and Ministry of Forests at the same time.

Now, if we need all of this planning – where is this going to come from? Government practice right now is wiping out an institutional legacy of managing the land for the public interest. So, there is a disconnect between political decisions being made and the realities that managers are dealing with on the ground. And the dangers that people are being subjected to and we are very concerned about that disconnect. Now I'd like to look at how those circumstances came down in the West Arm Park here in Nelson. It is our information and I can't give you proof but we have heard this from four sources within the government that the West Arm Fire was not fought immediately. Like I say, I can't vouch for it – I don't have the proof, but at least four sources a great deal higher than we are told us this. The vegetation management policy of B.C. Parks state that where there is no fire management plan, fires shall be fought. And furthermore from the research that Valhalla has done on fire management in parks, we have learned that the size of West Arm Park, being 25,000 hectares more or less, is far too small for anyone to have ever thought or dreamt that it could contain a fire – especially in that kind of conditions where the drought indicators were at or near record high levels.

So we certainly agreed with the person who said that at the point where the drought indicators are extreme, you fight fires. Okay, as an environmental organization, we are trying to get more fire and we are trying to get the public to recognize the benefit of fire. And we are also starting to recognize that people and communities and governments and fire decision makers have to be willing to take risks, because if they don't take risks, the risks are going to get bigger if they just keep suppressing the fires. But, nevertheless there has to be a limit to the level of acceptable risk. Now, to me this is a problem of planning. Because if there had been a fire management plan, or you don't even need that – if there had been the appropriate base studies that needed to go on there, they would have recognized that fires needed to be fought in that park. Without a fire management plan decisions are made hastily, under stressful emergency conditions. They are made on the basis of site specific information.

So our experience was that they do go out and look at the conditions on the ground and do what they can, but planning would tell them the conditions over a broad geographical area so that they know what to expect if the fire should spread and get out of hand. Further, B.C. Parks is relying on the Ministry of Forests to do – for a lot of technical expertise and some decision making, I understand, and Ministry of Forests has no particular ecology expertise or interest. There needs to be fire ecology involved in decisions in parks.

Now scientists told us when we asked them – you know our park can't afford a fire plan right now because their budget has been cut to nothing – what do you recommend as the absolute essential that our park needs? They said risk benefit analysis, fuel loading assessment, ecosystem inventory, and if you don't have those things, you should fight the fire, especially under the kind of drought conditions that we had there. We suspect strongly that there is a direct line between the budget cuts to the Ministry of Forests and B.C. Parks, the fact that there was not the money to complete a fire management plan for West Arm Park and the fact that a flawed decision was made not to fight the fire immediately.

Now we are not saying at this point that the fire damaged the park. From what we have heard, it was not a catastrophic fire for the park. It was the kind of fire that can be expected in that kind of eco system. We are going to be out on the ground trying to look at what kind of intensity and severity that fire might have had, but we are concerned about the impacts of the fire fighting – if the fire had been fought immediately, there was certainly a good chance that it could have been put out. We don't like fire suppression, but fire suppression once the fire gets big is far more damaging and in this case fire suppression resulted in pushing the road seven kilometers into the park and they did not cut the road – they didn't blade the road – but there was seven kilometers times twenty-two meters worth of trees logged out of the park to get the equipment in there. We don't criticize that they did that, I mean they did what

they had to do. What we do criticize is all the way from the beginning when there was no fire management plan and when an erroneous decision was made not to fight the fire and we believe that there is a direct line between that and the failure to fund and give adequate staff and adequate scientific expertise to our land management agencies – both Ministry of Forests and Parks.

I want to reiterate that anyone even a little knowledgeable about fire management in parks knows that a park that small cannot contain a wild fire or should not be expected to contain a wild fire. In the U.S. they will not allow a fire to burn under prescribed conditions for a park less than 45,000 hectares. So, there may have been a lack of resources, maybe it wasn't a lack of expertise, maybe they just did not have the fire fighting resources to do that. But it was an erroneous decision and a decision that would not have been made had there been proper planning and preparation and resources.

It really disturbs us that the mistake that was made there in terms of cutting those budgets is continuing to happen. It's like the government decisions are going in one track and reality is going in another track. They have already announced more job cuts to Ministry of Forests and we are asking ourselves where is all this management and planning of fires going to come from as they keep reducing staff. It's gone thing to have a fine crew of fire fighters but they are cutting out from under B.C. the very people who would do that planning for us. Furthermore, as evidence of other ways that the province has not learned from the summer of 2003, we heard everywhere that one of the problems was the spread of homes into the forest which increased the interface area. It increased demand on fire fighter resources, we can't have fire fighters out in the woods trying to save one home when a whole community is at stake. So, that's one side of it.

The other side of it is our government just now announced more lodges in parks. Now they are going to put back country lodges out into areas that might possibly have had a hope of letting a wild fire burn, or having a prescription fire that would help to burn off fuel load. And instead the situation is being enormously complicated if they are going to put lodges into B.C. parks. All summer we heard about fire fighters trying to save lodges from fires. In Banff, in Jasper, in Kootenay Park, Whitewater Ski Hill in Nelson – we're not sorry that they're trying to save those places, but if we want to curtail the spread of human development into interface areas for heavens sakes, let's not go put more lodges in parks.

We are concerned about a growing misconception that more logging will help reduce fire risk and we hope that in whatever report the review team does, that they will emphasize what our legitimate criteria for mechanical means of reducing fire hazard because there are a number of reports we have read – scientific reports that document the fact that logging does increase fire

hazard because of the build up of fine fuels on the ground and for a number of other reasons.

Thinning for fire hazard abatement should be taking the small trees and leaving the large ones, logging takes the large ones and leaves the small ones. Even selection logging has been cited in scientific reports as not being adequate for fire hazard abatement. So we talked to many scientists during the summer. Valahalla consulted scientists in the U.S., in the Canadian Parks Service, the Provincial Park Service and what we were told repeatedly was do not go off thinking that the fuel can be reduced all over the province. The fuel reduction has to be focused right around homes in the immediate vicinity of the facilities that you are trying to save. So we hope that whatever is done about this will be scientifically credible.

Final recommendations: we think that the thing most lacking for rational fire management in B.C. is government for the public interest and we think that the continual diminishment of the land management agencies that are to look after the public interest is a disastrous mistake. We already heard this afternoon about the need to have Ministry of Forests people go out and inspect what private land owners are doing – who is going to do that when the control of the forests is turned over to the forest companies.

We believe that what should be done for parks is that fire ecology experts should immediately prioritize parks and interface areas for hazard abatement treatment for prescribed burning or whatever they need. That quick prioritization is so that the available funding can be concentrated in the areas of highest hazard – the parks with the greatest need. That to us is critical. We believe that every park with communities nearby should have the essential underlying studies that are needed for risk assessment and for fuel loading assessment and ecosystem inventory.

Maybe it doesn't have to be a big fancy state of the art report with GIS maps. The fundamental information has to be there. And furthermore, we are concerned about the hazard of forest fire smoke. What we notice – we agree that communities are going to need to be quite a bit more tolerant of smoke but British Columbians are going to be facing cumulative smoke levels from multiple fires from prescription burns, from mill smoke and logging slash burning. So that is a health hazard of the future. There is a lot of research going on in the U.S. about it and we believe that the province is going to have to become involved in trying to mitigate smoke hazard.

So that is just about it for a summary of remarks. We have a much more extensive report we'd like to give you.

GF Thank you, Anne. We would like to receive that report. We appreciate the view from the Valhalla Wilderness Society. It is important for us to get stakeholder

views and there is a whole broad cross section of different interests when it comes to things like parks, or obviously our forest resources.

I would just like to ask – if, in the course of coming up with a forest management plan, some selective thinning is to take place, would you have any opposition to that money being turned back to the parks so that in effect it is a self-financing operation?

AS Well certainly we do think that the money should not be used to run park operations. But if it is turned directly into the fire management activities themselves that would be much better. This brings up a really good point because one of the things we are finding is that there is – because there has been too little fire management planning and too little scientific expertise involved, there tends to be in government even in some surprising channels, a kind of one-size fits all look at what is needed. So we find parks, like these in the Kootenays being talked about in the same breath as parks in Kelowna. Well Kelowna has B.C.'s driest forest type and they have a forest type that has a natural fire regime of very frequent low intensity fires. The fire regime in this area is very, very different. With regard to the Kelowna area the fire hazard from what we have heard is so high that we have sort of sat back on that issue, environmental groups in that area are monitoring the flow of that situation and we would certainly support what they want. But with regard to the parks in the West Kootenays that have wetter forests, any area that has wetter forests – we don't believe the mechanical thinning belongs in parks. It's the – what is needed for those areas of very high hazard around communities – they should have what they need to prevent the homes from being burned. But where that is not needed, it should not happen. And we do not feel that it is needed in this area.

There is a very big difference between these forest types in terms of what you can achieve with different methods. For instance there is a big difference in the scientific community over whether fires in this area ought to be set by managers whether prescribed fires would even be right and the thing that is most favoured by scientists would be prescribed lightning fires. Where there is preplanning an area is identified where it is safe to let a fire burn – there are all sorts of parameters set out that have to be met and then if a fire starts and those conditions are there then you stand by and you let the fire burn. This has been successful many, many times in the States and that's what we favour most, but we recognize that sometimes that just cannot happen because the danger is too high. The community I live in is a sitting duck. And we wondered in that summer of 2002, you know because we live on a 30 mile long lake that's a mile wide and the park is on the other side of us and we wondered – can sparks from that park come over and start a fire in our community. We learned the answer was yes. So our answer is – we need science. We need to have scientists out on the ground. We need planners. We need government with a public interest here.

GF Okay, thank you very much, Anne.

Ladies and gentlemen, I think we have one or two other speakers who would like to come forward. We are just going to take a five minute break. If you would like to have a cup of coffee or just stand up and stretch, we'll be back in five minutes.

Okay ladies and gentlemen, I will call us back to order and we have a presentation now – first I will ask if Elvin Masuch is in the room. He had earlier indicated a desire to speak but doesn't seem to be here.

Okay then, I will Roger Oliver to come forward, please. Welcome.

Roger Oliver.

Thank you for the opportunity to be able to speak. My name is Roger Oliver and I am a resident of Harrop/Proctor.

Harrop/Proctor was the community which was underneath the Cotetle(?) fire for a period of four weeks summer. We are a community of 600 year-long residents and a couple of hundred people additional during the summer – two communities ten kilometers apart, each such that the people living there are no more than a kilometer from the water. We have many homes that are in the trees and therefore are a concern associated with interface fires. We manage lands behind us as a community forest and we feel a significant responsibility for the West Arm Wilderness Park adjacent to us where the fire was burning. The complication with Harrop/Proctor is that we only have ferry access. The crossing time including loading and unloading is about six minutes and the calculation was that to get all our people out in the event of a severe fire would take five hours. We had no emergency evacuation plan. But, as a community we are cohesive and organized and recently had experience with the inland ferry issue.

A plan was put together it was a question of horses and cattle first and they were evacuated. A barge and a tug were made available to supplement the ferry and also one of the Kootenay Lake ferries would have been made available to land on our side, downstream closer to the main lake because the ferry itself is closest to the fire. We organized and when eventually the fire was five kilometers away and strong winds from the west were forecast to bring it to us, the rains came for three days.

The first recommendation that we have is that coordination be provided to ensure that each community has a community emergency plan that is available, it is updated and is linked to other plans.

A month ago Harrop/Proctor Community Forest organized a panel which dealt with severe fire. The first speaker was Bob Grey, a fire ecologist. We had Tom Brach who was the Fire Commissioner for southeast British Columbia. We had somebody from the Ministry of Forests Protection Branch and we had a hydrologist. There were some interesting things and thus the second recommendation is associated with education.

One of the questions that was addressed to the hydrologist – was this an unusual year. He had taken rainfall figures for the last 80 years from Kaslo and Creston and this year ranked on average number 12 out of 80 years. So it was not an unusual year. The second recommendation then is that the public be educated about what residents can do to protect their homes, and sprinklers, the removal of close trees, wood under decks and things of that sort. And all those things that were done at Munro Lake associated with the Cranbrook fire, those are the sorts of things residents can do. There is a time

for education. The time for education is not right now, but there will be a time for education in July next year and if July is wet, then there will be time for education in July of the following year, or the following year whatever it may be. The second subject for public education is what communities can do and that is associated with the development of an emergency plan for each community.

And the third one is the causes and impacts of the severe forest fires that we are beginning to see. The Kelowna fire was quite extraordinary. The Auditor General in 2001 gave warning that these fires were going to come and it was necessary to deal with them. And what was the reason? It was the build-up of fuels in the forest due in effect to the high efficiency of fire suppression policies of the Ministry of Forests over the last eighty years. And what are the impacts? Well for us the impacts to a considerable degree are associated with water. Our community has 300 water licences. More than half of our community draws its water from the creeks. A severe fire destroys the soil, makes what is left impermeable and water then runs off over the surface, creating slides. As the slides occur the creeks are blocked and we may then have flooding situations and I believe some of that has already occurred in the Kelowna area.

So therefore public education then on what residents can do to protect their homes, what communities can do and third is the causes and impacts of severe forest fires.

The third recommendation is that forest fuels be reduced by fuel management plans that are site-specific. That one plan fits all does not work. The issue came up and was addressed at the panel that we had a month ago, what about a fire break – is it possible to put a fire break around Nelson that would be effective? Is it possible to put a fire break around Harrop/Proctor and the advice we seemed to get is – it depends. If it just put there and expected to work, it probably won't. Some years ago there was a fire on Kootenay Lake on the west side. The embers, burning embers traveled across four kilometers to the other side of the lake and started fires. So, what will a fire break do? Just depends.

The next suggestion, clear cut it before it all burns. And we have heard arguments from the Valhalla Society that clear cutting perhaps does not work, but so what is therefore necessary is good fuel management plans, scientifically based, such that they take into account tree species, rainfall amounts, the pattern in Kelowna or Creston is totally different, for instance, to what is here on the West Arm, and things like slope direction. So, therefore that final recommendation then, that forest fuels be reduced by fuel management plans that are site specific.

Thank you.

GF Thank you very much, Roger. I just want to question one of your comments about public education on self protection not being appropriate now, but being appropriate in July. If you are dealing with things such as thinning and reducing fuel build up and you just get started in July it would seem to me that the Ministry of Forests and all of the protection people are going to be so busy and you can't afford to go through a long process of convincing your residents at that point – July could well be the middle of a forest fire season. So I am of the view that it's got to be done when the memory of the disaster is fresh in people's minds and when they have time to do the planning, do the discussion and agree on a plan. And, I don't think we can afford to wait until July to take action on some of these things.

RO I would agree with you that the ultimate time when people are most listening is in July – certainly you start those efforts as has happened maybe eight years ago to convince people that are in that area where their homes were in the trees that it must be done right away and they don't do it. They haven't done it. They haven't listened. Probably they will listen much more right now than they did twelve months ago, but nevertheless I think for some people it will have to come to the hot weather again before they do very seriously listen. Nevertheless, the effort should be made right now. This is why we had ...

(tape over)

GF ... to keep their minds actively working on the self-protection things that they are going to need to do.

Thank you.

RO Thank you very much.

Now we have Don Mortimer.

Don Mortimer:

Am I the last one to go?

GF Not necessarily.

DM Okay – I have about twenty minutes of discussion and if you wish to break for dinner at the juncture I would be quite amenable to appearing afterwards.

GF Well, we have a long way to go tonight to get to where we need to go, so we would rather have you do this now. Okay? And we will take a break for dinner eventually but ...

DM I heard about your mishap on the way over on the CBC 5:00 o'clock news and so I gripped the wheel extra tightly to make sure the same thing did not occur to me.

GF I'll remind my driver of that.

DM

My name is Don Mortimer. I am a wild land fire fighter with a career spanning close to thirty years of operational fire suppression and management work in most areas of Canada. In 1989 I established a consulting business – Fireline Consulting – specializing in wild land fire issues. I have worked extensive with, and am well-known among B.C.'s wild land and interface fire protection specialists.

This summer I worked with a variety of type I and II incident management teams in a safety officer position. In forty operational days I worked on over twenty major fires throughout the south east fire centre including a significant involvement with the Cranbrook fire complex. I am the principal author of the *Fire Smart – Protecting Your Community From Wild Fire* manual, a national interface fire protection standard that has been adopted by virtually all of Canada's provinces and territories. I am the principal designer and author of both of B.C.'s Structural Fire Fighter Interface Fire Response Training Programs. My fire protection consultation work is primarily with wild land and structural fire protection agencies, however I also work with the office of the Fire Commissioner Provincial Emergency Program and serve a broad base of forest industry municipal/regional district and private clients.

I have had significant opportunity to observe and consider the province's response to this season's fires first hand. I have been able to engage in extensive discussions with persons present at the fires that I did not directly observe. I am not surprised that much was done right, in thirty years of fire fighting I have come to know that British Columbia's Fire Protection organization works reasonably well under most circumstances. I am not surprised that some things were done wrong. Fire breaking out on any landscape is a dynamic and highly problematic event, with a wide variety of

challenges facing the personnel charged with its containment and control. Black and white decision making is required. There is no room for the grey maybe's of what might delicately be entitled administrative backside coverage.

In this operating environment some decisions will be right, some decisions will be wrong – particularly in hindsight. Few experienced fire fighters will have difficulty with this analysis. And much of the criticism leveled at the Provincial wild fire response is targeted with constructive intent for improve preparedness. This is a good thing. The next season is almost upon us and even the most critical of armchair incident commanders will note that the combined factors of climate change, forest health issues and settlement trends are pointing the way to a future of more challenging fire seasons.

So where can we improve our preparedness. How well prepared were we as responders? What about our big picture response – how did our emergency response programs function in managing local fire emergencies with centralized regional and provincial operational centres. Coordinating incident resource requirements which are extensive and developed well above the operational norm is one of the most important functions of a centralized operational centre. The 2003 fire season provided fires that were numerous, difficult to suppress and geographically dispirit – the perfect proving ground for our B.C. Emergency Resource Management System.

To pass judgment on the efficacy of that system will certainly be a key function of this review, and I eagerly await my opportunity to contrast the review outputs with those of the June 2001 Auditor General's Report on Managing Interface Fire Risks. Of relevance is a precedent that has been established by the military having faced organizational challenges of this magnitude since the dawn of history. Soldiers have developed a rather descriptive catch-all phrase that recognizes the significant challenges involved in establishing a functional centralized command and control organization. It goes by the acronym SNAFU. If you don't know what the means, ask your grandparents.

Any discussion on responder preparedness will ultimately take us to the subject of wild land urban interface fire response. This public discussion would probably not be taking place if the fires had remained burning in our provincial back forty – as they have with few exceptions been historically known to do. Although one could argue that the public expenditure of half a billion dollars on something quite definitively outside of the lower mainland might get the attention of and generate significant discussion amongst program directors and fiscal authorities.

Preparing for and ultimately fighting fire in the interface is a complex subject involving forest management, rural urban planning and development issues, public perceptions and attitudes; as well as emergency response capabilities.

B.C.'s fire protection professionals have been proactively involved with interface fire issues for around fifteen years now and have developed a number of tools to assist them in responding to interface fire emergencies.

Some of the most powerful tools for successful management of interface fire operations involving multi-agency responders include an emergency management system call the Incident Command System, and a middle level supervisor training package the S215 Interface Fire Operations Course which prepares fire fighters to safely and effectively manage developing interface incidents. Unfortunately the Incident Command System varies from agency to agency in the degree in which it has been meaningfully implemented.

By meaningful implementation I mean can an agency's operational personnel establish or function effectively under a management organization built around the principles of ICS. A similar problem might be assessed in that the S215 Interface Fire Operations Course was only released in March of 2003 and the training had not achieved wide uptake prior to the 2003 season.

Criticism of any emergency response organization and there has been much should be tempered with an understanding of the challenges our fire professionals face. Rural structural volunteer fire fighters are challenged by member turnover, maintenance of multi-discipline competency and training or equipment funding issues. Career structural fire fighters from larger centres are unlikely to have wild land interface fire operations training or experience and will certainly lack local knowledge. These constraints can compromise well-intentioned assistance initiatives.

Wild land fire fighters were challenged with the ongoing nature of fires that were particularly sticky and difficult to contain, resulting in a forest service organization that was often resource challenged. No emergency response organization manages resource levels for worst case scenarios. They could, but the fiscal realities would soon sober advocates of the best defence is a strong offence school of fire preparedness.

So we default, most logically to mutual aid, using resources from out of province, contract fire fighting personnel, forest industry staff, general forest service employees, and military personnel. These resources vary widely in the degree to which they are prepared to work with the fire protection organizations they are joining. Integration of these resources into established fire complexes rarely occurs seamlessly. Problems range from expediting the incoming resource to the fire requiring that resource – not as simple as it may sound, apparently – to recognizing and responding to differences in tactical capabilities that stem from training, background, equipment, fitness levels and perhaps surprisingly, attitude.

During the 2003 fire season relatively few of the responding resources were capable of operationally implementing the principals of the ICS Emergency

Management Organization I spoke of earlier. Give that time. ICS is a powerful tool and like the wheel very much worth any of the teething pains associated with its introduction.

Resources responding to interface incidents did so largely without the critical training and interface operational strategies and tactics – also mentioned earlier. Add to these resource management challenges additional issues such as deployment issues due to various agency policies, quasi political considerations and fatigue. Remember that while mutual aid resources rotate out on tours from four to nineteen days in duration, our core group of B.C. fire professionals move around the province, often service four back-to-back rotations of fourteen to nineteen days, minimum fourteen hours per day.

Each of these resource management factors contributed significantly to overall operational effectiveness. Improvements without question can be implemented over time, but all in all I think we did okay. To summarize the fire season with a reliable Canadian metaphor, you can tie up the game when you are playing hockey with only one skate. You have done very well indeed. The trick of course will be to figure out where the other skate went and get it on before the third period.

To this point I have been speaking about how we can improve our preparedness, in particular fire emergency responder preparedness. I would like to switch now to public preparedness. As I review our successes and failures in the ongoing grind of motivating interface residents in their communities to adopt fire smart principles and become more wild fire prepared, I observe that interface property owners have in many areas failed to grasp a critical message component to our interface fire protection programs.

That message is, simply put – apologies to Smokey – only you can prepare for forest fires.

In addition, the public has to come to a better understanding of how a wild fire works. Wild land fire does not move like an avalanche, obliterating everything in its path. Fire is opportunistic, burning only where fuels are available. Obviously then, to have control over fire we have to manage the fuels it can potentially burn through; principally trees and houses. The basic idea that forest fires do not always approach interface homes as raging infernos, and even if they do the likelihood of losing an interface structure to them is very low where basic interface fire protection standards have been implemented. It seems to be a hard concept for people to grasp.

Generalizing is often dangerous, but urban residents locating in fire prone areas on the community interface take the prize for being particularly resistant to grasping this fundamental concept of community fire protection. As an interface resident you have minimal control over how your government

chooses to structure its forest management and fire suppression policy and thus, by the extension, the likelihood that an uncontrolled wild fire will be coming to a town near you soon.

This is unfortunate, but not really all that relevant to whether or not your home is vulnerable to a fire burning in that managed or mismanaged forest. In fact if an interface structure is lost to wild fire it is testament to one thing only – that structure and the fuels or vegetation around it did not comply with the fire smart principles that our interface fire protection programs have been promoting vigorously for the last fifteen years.

In our business as interface fire protection specialists we recognize that an ignition in what we call the home ignition zone, an area which includes the structure and everything within say 30 meters of that home, will more often than not result in the loss of a structure and surroundings. And here's the crux of that reality. No fire fighter or government officer working for an interface fire protection agency has the mandate or the capability to ensure that the home and forest vegetation surrounding it in the home ignition zone is constructed or maintained in a manner which will prevent it from being vulnerable to wild fire.

Fire protection authorities can advise interface residents on what to do but they can't do it for them. What needs to be done is relatively simple and painless but believe me, oh so critical in ensuring a structure-surviving outcome to that inevitable wild fire passage that all interface communities will sooner or later experience.

So, outside of maintaining a fire smart home ignition zone, where does the public have to get to at a community level in being better prepared to respond to interface fires? On a landscape level it would be nice to see the awareness of a need to manage forest and landscapes with fire in addition to harvesting continue its progression to becoming an accepted fact of life with our citizenry. The public figures into this as significant attitudinal shifts will be required to permit the uncompromised use of fire as the powerful forest management tool that it is.

Uncompromised is a requisite qualifier because due to forest health issues our society has some critical cards to play in rebalancing the health of our forests. Any person, particularly a resident of a forested community imagines that one can enjoy forest without fire and by extension smoke, is engaging in a fantasy as frivolous as imagining a human organism could survive in a world without rain.

Part of the attitudinal shift is going to come with the public recognizing that the real cost of fire suppression has to include budgeting for forest management through fire use; controlled ignition of prescribed fire and more frequent use of natural ignitions to effect prescribed fire outcomes. The

current practice of funding suppression focused fire management programs and marveling at how relatively inexpensively fires can be suppressed is about to role into the hard reality of the fire cycle.

Smokey the Bear and his traditional – fire is bad – prevent it and kill it – manifestation will be seen by history as simply a lucky card player. And everyone knows the odds favour the house. Welcome to the new millennia.

My earlier reference to Smokey’s byline was not a slip of the tongue. Interestingly Smokey the Bears motto has recently been changed from – only you can prevent forest fires to – only you can prepare for forest fires. Somebody knows when they’re licked.

Fire then, if it is an inevitable component of the forest in and around our communities can visit us basically in two ways – one as a regular low intensity phenomenon with some attendant but low consequence inconveniences such as smoke and ashy landscapes, or alternately as an irregular high-intensity and uncontrollable wild fire with very high consequence and possibly disastrous manifestations.

The choice seems simple and probably is if we drop the gloves that conflicting interests would have us don – and recognize that our species alone has developed the ability to use fire. It’s a big responsibility and it is not going to go away regardless of how much we would like it to.

My final point on where the public and by extension their communities and by extension their politicians and planners have to get to in being better prepared for interface fires concerns the importance of supporting proactive legislative supported planning principles. Some of our fire smart program is targeted at reactive measured which seek to reduce existing interface fire hazards within previously established interface communities. Some of our fire smart program is proactive and applies to recommended planning and design principles for use by communities spreading into forested areas at this very moment.

Believe it or not, there are fire smart communities of homes constructed to by-law required fire smart design standards. These homes are shaded by forests maintained to by-law fire smart vegetation management standards and are serviced by a by-law required infrastructure capable of supporting evacuation requirements and access for well-trained fire emergency responders. The people residing in these communities sleep very well during extreme fire danger. We should and can all be so fortunate.

I have covered a lot of ground in this ranging discussion and I thank the panel for the opportunity to speak today.

In summation I note that we have discussed the preparedness of responders, visiting the effectiveness of centralized command and control, and organizational issues with resource capabilities and availability identified as key items. I note we discussed public preparedness in terms of the need for greater recognition of the importance of maintaining a fire smart home ignition zone. We also noted the need for the public to encourage their officials to start, or in some cases continue the adoption of more proactive approaches to establishing fire smart communities.

All of us as members of the public or as fire professionals have to recognize the requirement to involve fire, both natural and prescribed in our land and forest management strategy. Simple sentences full of vast implications for all of us as residents and workers in the provincial of British Columbia. I indeed look forward to working with my peers on the challenges presented by the issues I have discussed today and will await with great curiosity the outcomes of this review and the various program mandates and structuring issues that will settle out of the smoke from this summer's fires.

I thank you.

- GF Thank you very much, Mr. Mortimer. If I can just ask, you refer to bylaw required construction standards in land use design. Where does that occur in British Columbia today?
- DM There are some communities in the Thompson/Okanagan that, some regional districts that have implemented bylaws and they are working in reducing the fire hazard that exists in those interface areas.
- GF I have been looking for those examples and I haven't found them yet.
- DM Kamloops was one of the first ones that we had come up with a bylaw and the Okanagan/Similkameen Regional District has something on the books and I believe the Northern Okanagan Regional District has also got something along those lines.
- GF This is for construction in an interface setting?
- DM It is for new developments so it is very much proactive. It's not going to do anything for our existing hazard but it's a start for the future.
- GF Okay, thank you. You said at the beginning that you will judge our results by comparison with the June 2001 Auditor General's Report – does that mean you support the report in its entirety?
- DM I studied that report fairly extensively when it came out and I recall that I think the auditor general had pretty much hit all of the issues that were pertinent to the interface fire response capabilities of the various agencies and it will be

interesting to see how that is – how some of the solutions that were proposed by the various agencies in responding to that report are used to deflect or absorb any of the criticisms targeted from this season.

GF What's your view then as to why it hasn't been fully implemented?

DM I think that time is an element that is required in making any of the fairly large scale changes that are going to be required to deal with the fire challenges we face as a society. Nothing is going to happen in two or three years. We are moving slowly but surely towards where we want to be, I believe. This season certainly pointed out some of the weaknesses in our current positioning and approaches and I think will actually be viewed as a constructive sort of watershed point to be at in terms of fire response to fire in our forests in British Columbia.

GF Why for instance have there not been more municipal jurisdictions or regional districts moving toward land use restrictions and or land use parameters and building code restrictions that would create fire smart subdivisions?

DM Well I think that we always have to keep in mind that interface fire is just one issue and a small issue in some cases, a large issue in others, but it is only one of the items that is on the table facing planners and politicians. There is also some fairly significant lobby initiatives mounted by people who are not at all interested in having any sort of government intervention on their ability to develop without constraint.

GF Okay, thank you very much.

DM Thank you Mr. Filmon.

GF Could we have a copy of your submission, by chance?

DM The copy I have right now – I will get it to you.

GF Okay, thank you.

Is Elvin Masuch here? Okay. Then is there anyone else who would like to appear? Okay.

Just on the off chance that somebody might appear in the evening who hasn't signaled that they would like to appear, we will take a break, we will come back probably around quarter to seven and we'll see if there are any other presenters. I thank all of you who have been here this afternoon for being a part of the process and especially those who have presented, I appreciate very much the contributions that you have made.

Thank you.

Just in case anybody out there is wanting to make a presentation, we could get started early, if you like. No? okay.

GF Thank you for coming back, those of you who were here this afternoon. We have one presentation this evening. Bob Rutherglen. Would you come forward, please.

Hi, welcome.

Bob Rutherglen:

I've just got a couple of questions more than anything.

Is, I guess, are you going to look into getting changes made from the way they deal with Parks and deciding when to put a fire out and when not to. The way it is now, when you report a fire, like this one we had here, this Cotetle(?) fire is oh, well, we'll let it burn until it gets on the outside. Well, they make it sound like its an educated fire, it knows where the outside boundary is and it's going to go out all by itself. Well, as we all know it doesn't happen.

So then you end up with this huge fire that nobody can get out and because it rained when it did, we are probably just lucky that the town is still here and so is the rest of the community, all the way out to Kaslo.

I was on the forest fires in the '60s. Things were fought a bit different than they are now, with a bit more common sense used and people weren't – forestry officials weren't so worried about what so and so was going to say or what someone else was going to say. They went and did the job and when it was done we worry about everything else later. Let's just get the damn thing out.

You've got another case here where the Mayor has stepped in and stopped them from taking machinery up here to build a fire guard. I have a friend that dropped the machinery off to go in there and the Mayor talked to somebody in the Forestry and he asked which is going to make the biggest difference here, or the worst mess – building a fire guard or letting the fire burn in the watershed. Who the clown is in the forestry that told him that the biggest mess will be from the fire guard and not the fire – I don't know who the guy was – but I've got a couple of questions:

Number 1. Who is the mayor to stop somebody from going in there and building a fire guard to protect the whole area. And who is the clown in the forestry that went and listened to him? Now this same thing happened out the opposite end of that fire with the people that don't want you going into that park because they wanted this park preserved. Well, if you go up there now, it won't look too preserved. Nobody can log it and there's not much point in going in there because it's all burned. Because of the same thing – equipment was stopped from going in. Somebody in the Forestry needs to start looking at – we are going to do this and we are going to go in and we're going to get the job done and we'll worry about things later.

In the '60s when I fought with these guys they went in and did what absolutely had to be done. They had training. They knew what to do. You've got guys in there now that haven't got a clue. They went to UBC or Simon Fraser and read a book. I used to log. I dealt with the same kind of people telling me where to build a road and how to do it. None of them had ever been on a caterpillar or

a skidder or fell a tree in their life and here they are telling you how to do things. And this is what's going on all across the province with fires and anything else the Forestry does. It's inept, the whole system, the way they operate. In most cases most guys who've worked in the bush will tell you anyone working in the Forestry should have had to be a logger or have something to do with it at one time themselves. Going to a school and reading a book is not the same as having a hands on deal. I know this time and time again. I logged for ten years and just watching, and the other thing was I found that the Forestry themselves are probably one of the biggest fire hazards in B.C. They seem to pick the days to light backfires and burn brush when nobody in their right mind would think about doing it. And, invariably most of their controlled burns are not controlled burns, they are out of whack and into the bush – they are everywhere. I have talked to guys that have been on them with trained crews where you've got forestry officials telling them where the fire is going to be lit – the next thing you turn around and the guy's lit the fire behind them somewhere down the hill, nowhere near were it's supposed to be and the darned things take off.

Well, up to now, in a lot of cases it's burned a lot of timber and they've been able to control it, but last summer – you get a summer like that you can't control it. Something has to be – rules have to be set up that somebody who is in charge of the Forestry decides – we are going to go in here, we are going to build a fire guard, we are going to do this and whoever is around on the outside, they stay on the outside until we've got it done. Because I'd talked to helicopter pilots the same day that this was done with this Mayor and they said nobody knows how close that fire is to town. They are not telling the truth on the radio. I talked to three pilots here. There were above twenty-five people from different organizations in Nelson that were just up in arms about this – that the Mayor could actually convince them not to go in there.

Well, if the fire goes through your watershed it's going to make a mess, if you build a fire guard it's going to make a mess, logging makes a mess – everything makes a mess, but it does come back to its own later. But, he wasn't just going to risk the city, on the north shore of Nelson, a fire hasn't gone through that area for well over a hundred years. My dad's been here since 1920 and he is 87 now and he remembers a couple of fires in these draws here that they thought – and he lived out at 15 Mile – he thought the whole countryside was on fire and he packed up and went to the lake – and the fires burned themselves out at Groman Creek and a few of these other places. But the face has never burned, who knows when it last burned. I have logged through there and you can see old remnants. Well if that fire came across the lake, which it can do, as you can see how the flames can go, it could be burning all the way to Kaslo, you'd never get it out. It'd be gone. Because somebody doesn't want a fire guard across there – and you can't build fireguards on the face of a hill, it has to be in a valley. And those pilots told me that those guards should have been done two valleys earlier. And, because of fooling around with Forestry guys, wishy-washy and not making up

their minds and nobody knowing who's the boss and listening to, like I say again, the Mayor telling them that they can't do it, well they're just damned lucky it rained when it did.

We had another fire that was out here at Sitcom Creek – the same thing and this is a guy that's been in the Forestry a lot of years – had absolutely no idea what he was doing. I watched bomber after bomber coming in there trying to make a fire guard and every time they gained some thing on it, he supposed to bring a piece of machinery to go and work, he'd send it away and bring one from somewhere else. None of them ever got there until it was almost too late and the fire took off on them twice. Helicopters came to bring water and he said he never ordered them. He sent them somewhere else and the damned fire came down the mountainside. It was only a mile from the closest houses.

All the old guys, the old timers of course are retired now and they've gone. But the knowledge has not been passed on because nobody has thought it important enough to learn. Well, by all reports it sounds like we can expect the same kind of a season next year. So somebody better get the bull by the horns here and start taking – paying some attention to getting training done for it.

My other question is, has anyone checked out the story on the trestles being burned? I have talked to four people who worked that fire who said the first couple of trestles, the last couple of trestles were burned by the fire. the middle ones were burned by some damned fool in the forestry who decided to build a fire guard – or a backfire at 3:00 o'clock in the afternoon which you never do. You always burn them in the morning. That thing took off. These are four different people who don't know each other but were all there and told me this. Somebody should be fired for burning – for doing that. You just don't build back fires in the afternoon because you can't put them out – it's too late.

So that's the only bad new I have for you.

GF Thank you, Bob. Bob thanks for raising the issue. I can tell you that with respect to parks there is a perception out there and I don't know if it is true or not, but there is a perception out there that if its in a park, they let it burn, and that there are all sorts of interests in the park – whether it's environmentalists or Park people who say that every tree is valuable and they don't – so they don't allow for prescribed burning. They don't allow for thinning, they don't allow for anything, the fuel builds up and if a fire takes place within the park, they don't want the Ministry of Forests to come in and put it out. So I am not sure if that is accurate, but it is a question that we will have to get to the bottom of as it has been raised.

The second thing is the response to outside interests – there is no question that issues of controlled or prescribed burning have been influenced by local

opinion. In some cases it has been municipal or regional administrators, other cases it has been environmental interests or tourism interests that have prevented the Ministry of Forests from doing some of the things that they wanted to do. So we will have to examine that too as a policy issue and deal with it.

The final thing, the story on the trestles was raised when we were in Kelowna and it is one of the questions that we will have to find out about.

BR Okay, well I say good luck to you and thank you.

GF Thank you, Bob.

We now have Alan With, would you like to come forward, please? Good evening.
Welcome.

Alan With:

Good evening. Thank you so much for coming to Nelson. I have some concerns that I just wanted to bring forward and some of them were touched on by Bob there. One of the things that I see in the protection forest service is that there tends to be a lack of diversity of background. That was one of the things that Bob was touching on there, that there aren't the people there with the experience now in things like the heavy equipment and it's a very important part of fire fighting and it's disappearing from the Forest Service, from the regular Forest Service, as well as the Protection Branch side of things, too. And because Forestry itself is changing that experience is disappearing from the traditional way that one used to be able to access that kind of experience from the bigger forest companies, like Slocan or others – Kalesmakoffs(?) so there is a hole appearing in the fabric of fire fighting there. And I also see that the entrance gate that is being used to bring new people into fire fighting appears to be a very narrow gate. Again something Bob was touching on and education is tremendously important, you can do a lot with it, but there is also a tremendous amount of education that people learn through working and that seems to be a difficult kind of experience to bring into the Forest Service because of the gate keeping that they have chosen. And, I think that possibly the Forest Service needs to look at that and say university is great, but there are other talents out there that are required – heavy equipment being one of them, air people being another group – air is a very important part of fire fighting, but how do you bring that talent into the fabric of fire fighting. Fire fighting through government cut backs seems to have become a very small group of people where at one time it was much larger and its getting smaller and smaller all the time. And training is a very difficult thing because the money just keeps disappearing. So when you want to train volunteers, or train casually employed people there isn't the money there to pay them to come out and learn. And there isn't the money even to train the sort of part-time – what are called auxiliary people – in the forest service. The Forest Service I understand employs in the neighbourhood of 800 auxiliary people to do the fire fighting, but the money isn't there and the time isn't there to train them in areas like heavy equipment, in areas like air – in all areas – the financial side, the communication side. They are all areas that need to have a wider pool of people. Eight hundred people is not enough. The province is very lucky this year, we were able to draw from other areas, but that may not always be the case. Other areas could be busy, other provinces could be busy and the opportunity is not always going to be there to that. So that is another concern that I see.

Something that I am aware of was a problem that occurred over in Cranbrook where there wasn't the cooperation between ministries in an event like this. The Premier had declared a state of emergency and yet when there was the fires over at Cranbrook, the Lamb Creek Fire, the Plumbob Fire, a fire camp sat on the side of the road for three or four days and could not get to Cranbrook because of other Ministry rules and regulations that didn't seem to be working in cooperation with the concepts of a state of emergency. So they

sat. I was listening to the CBC radio this morning and – not a plug for them – but that people in Cranbrook were upset and understandably so. But sometimes Ministries become very territorial and picky and they can sort of lose sight of the bigger picture and you end up with the tail wagging the dog. And so certainly I would like to have this looked at, that there is more cooperation and less of that territorial feeling between Ministries – that little power tripping that shouldn't be there.

Another concern looking toward the future is the changing of demographics of the population. As we are getting an older population we are having less and less younger people entering the work force there is going to be greater demands for their skills. The Forest Service needs to provide something to attract people to the Forest Service and to that kind of work. Another little thing is that the province has changed the rules around driving. In four or five years time, the province may find itself in a situation where its fire fighters, the age group that are presently fire fighters aren't going to be able to drive the Ministry vehicle, and for that matter aren't going to be able to drive to work because they are going to need to have somebody with them – an adult with them to get there. They are going to have to put in like three or four years of driving experience. How are they going to get to work, let alone – like I say drive the company truck.

So there are things that I don't know – when you make a change somewhere, it seems like a real good idea to protect the population from younger drivers, but all of a sudden its going to backfire on you somewhere else.

GF I thought you were referring to protecting from older drivers – but –

AW Well, I'm getting pretty close to that myself so I don't want to tread too heavily there. It's a little demographic thing that can sometimes get lost in the shuffle of something bigger like we had this year. So those are my main concerns. I do see the Forest Service becoming a sort of a manager and a supervisor, and it's sort of losing its fire fighting ability to some degree just because of that shrinking base and there is one other thing that sort of impacts on and that is attitude. And to some degree there seems to be an an 'us' and 'them' attitude in the forest service between it's managers and senior people, and their auxiliary staff, their what are called time certificate employees, and even the contractors that they hire. There are complaints about the attitude that is shown to them and that doesn't always create – or make for an efficient working place and for good relationships. And if the main Forest Service work force is going to be downsized I think that they may need to lose some of that attitude and get into more of a team attitude that may ...

(new tape)

... and are not going to stand the Forest Service in good stead during the coming years. Young people are becoming better educated. There is going to be more opportunities for their skills and if the Forest Service doesn't treat it's people well, and doesn't give them incentive to stay, doesn't give them

opportunities to progress within the organization, they are going to have a hard time keeping good people with skills and experience that are going to be critical to fight what may likely become a more common occurrence, and something that is going to have greater intensity as the years progress here.

So that's my second ending.

GF Thank you very much Alan. I appreciate your views about the need to have some experienced people, particularly with heavy equipment and it's an ideal opportunity actually for the Ministry of Forests to take advantage of people who work in the Forest industry, loggers, ranchers and other people who are used to working in the environment and with heavy equipment and are knowledgeable about a lot of the issues or techniques that are used in forest management. So I know that there has been a general call throughout our hearing process for more use of existing people within the local communities. You spoke of bringing in people from across the country and that is a mixed blessing, one is that they usually do have the skills that you are looking for, but the second thing is they don't have local knowledge and they often don't know where the back roads are, where the water sources are, and so there is a need to have local people with them at all times to supply that kind of knowledge in order to make them more effective.

An interesting point you bring about utilization of 800 auxiliary people in the summer time. It seems to me that the Ministry of Forests is probably one of the few departments of government who can get exactly the type of people that they need – young, eager, healthy, energetic people on a short term basis – university students and they certainly utilize them well in the rap attack people, you know – repelling themselves from helicopters and all those kinds of things – almost a paramilitary approach. And it's fortunate that they have these people available to them and these aren't people that you'd want sitting around all winter twiddling their thumbs either. So there are some ways in which it works to their advantage. But the other side of that coin is that it needs a significant group of experienced trained people who are 100% forestry employees to guide and direct and run the show so to speak.

So those are all things that are going to have to be considered when we look at how they make best use of all these things that they have to deal with.

AW The concern around that that I have is that as there are less of those people, there are going to be companies and other businesses who want them and that as the demographics change the Forest Service needs to change to keep those young people being interested. Certainly some people enjoy going 100 miles an hour with their hair on fire and they will always be there, but the Forest Service needs to attract other people as well ...

GF Who make it a long term career.

AW Yes.

GF Yes, that's a good point. Thank you very much, Alan.

Okay, I think we have come to the end of the road, so to speak – ooop. Yes, come on up.

Bob Rutherglen: (again)

Just one more rant. One of my friends is a danger tree faller. He worked on this fire at the top here and he said that they came to a situation where they needed more of them and he had three or four other fellows here that know the country. And like you said, you've got to know the back roads and know the areas. And the official, whoever he was running things, said no – we've got a crew coming from Atlantic Canada or Quebec – we're going to use them.

He said well why should local people that are in industry here sit down on the side of the road while these guys are in there. Oh well, we get a group rate. Well, it turns out talking to other people that were in trained – there were two or three trained wild fire companies here – the guy told me they sat here in Nelson while they brought guys out of the Prairies who in all intents and purposes are trained to a point, but they don't have the stamina for climbing these mountains. This is probably some of the most rugged country in Canada here. And unless you have been running up and down those side hills most of your life, by the time you walk in there you are worn out. I know from packing saws and stuff myself that – I couldn't do it now – but that sort of idea is that you are going get a group from here because the travel across here – use them where they are best suited. Use the locals where they are best suited and not because it happens to be in a certain group or something. If the guy is a faller and he is trained in this area, that's the guy you want. And that kind of thinking has to come about to make it work.

Okay, thanks. And thanks very much for coming.

GF Well, thank you all of you who have sat through these presentations and discussions as always we have learned some new things and gained some insights that haven't necessarily been put forward by everybody in other locations. Reality is, it's a different experience in every location and there some are things that vary from place to place. So it has been valuable for us to be here and we thank all of you for coming today.