

FIRESTORM 2003 – PROVINCIAL REVIEW

Public Meetings

Osoyoos

Good afternoon and welcome, everyone. My name is Gary Filmon and I have been appointed by the Government of British Columbia as a commission to review the devastating forest fires of 2003 in the Interior of British Columbia. I began the process around the First of October and have been here to Osoyoos by air, having gone over it both with fixed wing and helicopter early on in the process, just to get a sense of the destruction and devastation that took place.

I am now in the process of going to visit various communities that were affected by the fires to listen to the people who had personal experiences that they want to share about the forest fires this year. The process is intended for me to review the entire aspects of how the forest fires affected people and how they were handled, and that is everything from planning and preparation to response and recovery. The intention is that I will learn from all of you and from the various stakeholders that I will be meeting with – perhaps some experts in the whole field of resource management, particularly forest management and other parts of the process, emergency management those kinds of things – and then, prepare a report based on that information, making recommendations for the future.

I think everything that we are seeing and understanding says that this is the early part of a dry cycle. Weather patterns go in cycles and we are perhaps only a few years into a dry cycle that may last for seven to ten years. And so, under those circumstances we certainly are concerned that you may encounter – as bad as things were this year – you may encounter similar circumstances in the years ahead. The government wants to be prepared to deal with that as well as it possibly can.

The commitment that the government has made to this commission is that it will take the recommendations that we provide and implement them. Whether it is a matter of finances or whether it is a matter of organization, or whether it is a matter of legislation and regulation, or whether it's a matter of process, the government is prepared to look at the recommendations, take them seriously and deal with them after we present them.

I just want to thank all of you for coming out today. I want to say in particular that this is not a process of attempting to just find scapegoats or point fingers. The process is one of learning from people who have had direct experience with the forest fires. I know it has been a devastating experience for many, many people who have lost, in many cases, homes, who have lost livelihoods and certainly it is something I know nobody wants to repeat. Regrettably these are acts of God. These are things that happen because of circumstances in Nature and we only need to look at California to know that it is not an isolated incident. It happens everywhere in the world and a lot of it has to do with geography, climate and everything else. So, all we can do is learn from these things and be prepared to do better in the future and that's what this is all about.

Everyone is welcome to present. There are some who have registered ahead of time and I will call those forward, but if anyone else wishes to have their name added to the list, I invite you to leave your name with Andrew Yow(?) who is at the back of the room and you are most welcome to come forward and make a presentation.

I am joined today by Jim Sproul and Jim has had a great deal of experience in a variety of different government agencies and organizations and he is one of the administration staff with the commission. I would also like to recognize in the room today the Honourable Bill Barisoff(?) who is your MLA and we are very delighted that he could join us here today.

Welcome to all of you. Our first presenter is the Mayor, His Worship John Slater.

Please come forward, Your Worship.

His Worship Mayor John Slater

Good afternoon. First I would like to say thank you to the Honourable Gary Filmon for providing the people of Osoyoos the opportunity to share with you their issues and concerns on the recent fire on Anarchist Mountain. As Mayor of the Town of Osoyoos I am providing you with a brief summary of the debriefings that we have held with Emergency Operations personnel and volunteers.

These sessions have proved invaluable in providing answers to the key questions of what went well, what areas do we want to improve, and what are the recommendations.

In response to what went well, this is what we have heard: Good volunteer support – the reception centre response was excellent – the ESS and the EOC got high praise, and this was a good learning experience.

What areas do we want to improve? Improve intercommunications – update of our emergency plan and undertake regular training and exercise schedule. Clearly define roles of our emergency plan and include other organizations in our plan, such as Victims Assistance and the Interior Health Authority. Also to improve plan familiarity.

Numerous recommendations have been made reflecting the issues identified as requiring improvement. The key recommendations are review and update the current South Okanagan Emergency Measures Plan and PEP Regional Manager give a presentation to the Regional District Board outlining the benefits of emergency management planning at the regional district level. Municipalities in British Columbia must, under the Emergency Program Act, establish and maintain an emergency management organization to develop and implement emergency plans and other preparedness, response and recovery measures for emergencies and disasters. The same requirement must be placed on regional districts so that neighbouring communities can assist each other in emergencies through coordinated established emergency response plans. In order to regularly update our plans and keep our volunteers trained we need to have appropriate levels of funding from senior levels of government. The PEP program has been in place for many years but does not have sufficient funding levels to allow communities to bring their emergency preparedness in line with today's expectations. Increasing funding levels to prepare B.C.'s communities for emergencies and disasters will pay significant dividends in the safety of people and property in the future.

Attached we have the minutes of both of our response meetings. We had a local one on September 15th, reviewing our local involvement. As well we also had the EOC operation review on November 5th, 2003.

I think it is no surprise with all the fires that the Interior had this summer, Osoyoos was the first and we were very lucky. We had lots of response, both

air and on the ground and it would have been a lot different, we feel, if the equipment that was available to our fire wasn't available because they were fighting Barriere or the Kootenays or the North Okanagan. I think a list of all the equipment that is available to communities such as Osoyoos, Oliver, Penticton and north is very paramount because, as I say we were lucky. We were first, there were no other fires in British Columbia at the time and all this equipment was available to us at a moment's notice. The helicopters were here within a matter of minutes and if they had been fighting a different fire at the time, it could have been a lot different.

I thank you for your time on this and I encourage you to read our report and any of the recommendations that come out that will help our community will be greatly appreciated.

Thank you.

GF Thank you and thank you very much for the copy. I just have a little bit of discussion I would like to engage you with Your Worship. So you are obviously a city or a town with municipal jurisdiction. You are an incorporated municipal jurisdiction here but you are part of the regional district as well?

JS The member municipalities in the Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen include Summerland, Penticton, Oliver, Osoyoos, Keremeos and Princeton. Outside of these municipalities are the rural areas that – let's face it, most of the fires on the interface zone are in the rural areas.

GF Did the Regional District play a coordinated role, or a directing role, or were you dealing directly basically with provincial agencies and departments?

JS When the fire first broke out, it was pretty well all the town of Osoyoos staff as well as the volunteer fire department, the Fire Commissioners' office in Kamloops, as well as Forestry of course.

GF And so the regional district wasn't really engaged in that, it was just you and directly dealing with provincial agencies?

JS That's correct. The regional district – we have a plan for Oliver, Osoyoos and the two rural areas and the regional district doesn't really get involved that much in the actual action plan that we implement through the EOC as well as the provincial emergency program. It is all laid out quite clearly on the roles and responsibilities of each jurisdiction.

GF So you have an up to date emergency plan that is reviewed periodically and it responded adequately, or at least it met your needs adequately?

JS I think in my opinion the plan was good. There was a little bit of burn-out at the beginning of it because, let's face it, when – you don't practice these kinds of

things, you hope like heck that your plan is in place and that you identify people to use as resources. I know our EOC coordinators were on the spot instantly and they started implementing the plan and, of course, everybody has a different role inside that plan.

The first 24 hours are obviously going to be a lot more chaotic because you don't have the resources from the provincial emergency program, as well as the Fire Commissioners office and Forestry. But it rolled out very quickly and in my mind I don't think you could prepare for that first four or five hours adequately enough. It is something that is thrust upon you. Let's face it, municipal politicians are the temporary help, so to speak, and our roles as council were fairly substantial. I know one of my councilors, he never left the place for more than 4 or 5 hours a day, he was always at the EOC. In small communities you don't have resources behind you to say – you know, tap them on the shoulder, it's your turn, I'm going home for dinner – and I think that needs to be addressed in any plan for small communities so that there is support behind you to come and help.

GF But in the end, it is an accepted responsibility that the administration run the show. In effect that council is policy-make arm – was there an expectation for you to be involved in communication, public communication – or how did you handle it?

JS I think nobody wants to talk to staff people. They want to talk to the elected politicians that are there that are speaking for the communities. That does put a burden on everybody. The actual operations of the Town of Osoyoos did carry on business as usual and when you are wearing two hats, sometimes you have to drop some certain items for the town. I think our council – we are all volunteers in this instance, we are no different than the volunteers that come out of the woodwork and operate the EOC and information offices as well as supporting the ESS program.

GF Was Anarchist Mountain within the town's land base, or was it outside?

JS No, the fire actually came within the town boundaries. It was all in rural area A, and a little into area C which is the rural area around Oliver. It came real close to the Osoyoos Indian Band lands but 95% of it was contained in area A which is the regional district.

GF As I recall from flying over, there were a number of smaller fires in the Oliver area that – there was some suggestion that they were man-made, I think.

JS That's correct. If any of those – the Oliver fire department was on top of those very quickly. They were on red alert once the first one was set. They were ready to go at all times and it's just lucky, as you say, that none of those man-made fires got out of control or it would have hurt the whole area.

- GF A couple of your recommendations have to do with emergency planning and how often do you believe that the emergency plan for a municipality or a regional district should be reviewed and updated?
- JS Well, I think that the plan has to be dynamic. I think that it has to be reviewed on a regular basis, whether it is once a year or once every two years. But I think more important the volunteers that do the positions in our emergency plan need to be made aware of issues, brought up to speed as to what their responsibilities will be and I think that is why plans like this need to encompass not just town residents, but rural residents and the RUS as well.
- GF Is there an issue with respect to training because in many cases you would have a full-time permanent fire department, but in many of the rural areas there would be volunteer fire departments. Is there an issue with respect to who pays for the training?
- JS Well our rural fire protection district includes the town of Osoyoos and a good portion of the regional district area A. Where the fire was located, or where it started, was actually outside of our fire protection district borders. There is a protocol agreement or mutual aid agreement that we do have to allow some of our fire equipment to go into these areas to help outside of our jurisdiction and I think that is why – that’s the main reason why this should be a provincial matter because fire doesn’t know any boundaries. Whether it goes from the town of Osoyoos to the Osoyoos Indian Band lands, or to the regional district, we can’t have – because it crosses a certain line we have to stop there and bring in somebody else – and I think that is why the province needs to take a little more proactive role in determining some of these plans and make them more regional rather than individual municipalities and regional areas.
- GF And you wouldn’t see any difficulty in accepting provincial direction or jurisdiction in the development of these plans and training programs or any of that?
- JS Well I think the direction from the provincial emergency department is very good. Our PEP coordinator has been involved with the emergency plan that we do have in the South Okanagan and his expertise is invaluable. I think we also have to remember that it is not just forest fires that we are dealing with, it could be a spill at the bridge or something like that, that is inside the town boundaries that could affect it. So I think the expertise is out there. I think the various ministries also need to get involved. I think the Interior Health Authority needs to be a part of our plan so our communications are done a little bit better as well. Part of the problem with the fire season of course is that it’s in the summer and at any given time at least 20% of your staff is on holidays. That’s a huge issue and when the Health Inspector goes away, or our CAO goes away, or our Treasurer goes away, it does put a burden on other issues. I think that also needs to be considered and when you are doing your

plan if you've got a back-up person that is knowledgeable and trained right behind the initial person that will really help.

GF On the issue of equipment, you say virtually all of it came from outside – obviously the province had the access to the helicopters and various other pieces of equipment that were essential in the fighting of the fire. Is there an inventory of equipment, like if that weren't available, if you were in a situation as you say where they were trying to fight fires in the Kootenays and they were trying to battle the McLure-Barriere and all of that and you had to rely on resources that were at hand – is there an inventory available that you would know where the equipment was and how quickly you could access it?

JS Well, I am sure the Ministry of Forests and the Fire Commissioners Office have a list of equipment. Locally, we know that Joe down the street has a bulldozer or water tanker. I think it is important that everybody knows, not just the Fire Commissioners Office and the Ministry of Forests that who has got what equipment. In a small community you know where these guys are working – whether it is on one construction job or another and I think the local fire department probably has access to that list as well, but again it is communication – making sure everybody knows what is available and stick it in the emergency plan in case there is a breakdown in communications between Forestry or the Fire Commissioners Office.

GF But a current, up-to-date data base would be essential.

JS Absolutely, and also in these rural areas because the town is growing and the rural area is growing as well and there was a little bit of confusion on some of the addresses – some of the mapping that was available instantly was substantially old. I think that was an issue. We weren't sure where there were houses and where there weren't houses until we got the actual maps from the regional district. So, I would suggest that in those plans up to date mapping is done of the rural areas – especially some of these dead-end roads. It's very difficult to get into some of these areas and usually, like I say, they are a dead-end and if the fire is coming in the wrong direction it could be catastrophic.

GF Thank you very much, Your Worship.

We have now Garth Kunz, Garth would you come forward, please. Welcome.

Garth Kunz:

Thank you and thank you for the opportunity to talk to you. Just regarding your last discussion, the first thing that the Fire Commissioners people did when they landed in Osoyoos was inventory our fire department. Other inventory is at dispatch and I understand the Forestry has inventory for the helicopters and a lot of the heavy equipment inventoried well in advance of fire season, so I don't know that that would be much of an issue.

What I would like to talk to you about is the response that a fire department such as Osoyoos makes to a situation such as we had in Osoyoos. It is actually outside our fire protection district. That then falls on the shoulders of our Chief to decide whether he can or can't send equipment out. We have enough equipment that we could let a bit go, which we did and we did it as quickly as we could. However, under the current situation that we had at the time, Forestry has to be notified and they are supposed to give us an okay before our equipment leaves and goes to a fire like that, and this is what I would like to talk about.

In the past and it goes back a few years, we had a situation where we went at the discretion of our Fire Chief. We were reasonably successful at times in squelching or holding a fire at bay until the Forestry could respond, because I don't have to explain to you, you have obviously flown over an awful lot of our province. The Forestry – I have no problem with what they do when they get there, but they can't be expected to respond as fast local fire departments can and you can appreciate that there are hundreds of millions of dollars worth of good equipment and well-trained people out there who can respond probably faster than the Forestry, and until they can get there we are able sometimes to control or even hold back a fire, which helps. I think we could reduce a lot of costs if we were to bring back a policy like that. That would require the government to be prepared to reimburse the local communities for that. But I think that it would be money well spent because you have already got trained personnel, you have already got good equipment there. The other thing about a fire department – these guys work together all the time – some people are on the fire departments for 20 years, 30 years, and longer and fire departments can work well together. Most of their members can do any job that is required. They are not just a one job type of thing.

Having said all that, I really don't want to leave the impression that I am unhappy but I would like to just use the Osoyoos fire as an example. Two of our firemen were up at that fire before anyone else probably got there and I don't think they were five minutes getting there. Had they taken another five minutes and picked up a truck, it would have taken them ten minutes then to get there. So they would have been fifteen minutes longer. I watched from my house when that fire call came in and that fire kind of hesitated for a small period of time and I am saying 20 minutes maximum, probably more like 15 – given those time frames I felt that had we responded as soon as the call came in we might have had a 50/50 chance of doing something with it. We may not

have got it out, we might have been able to restrict it for a short period of time and it may not have gotten as big as it did. Bearing in mind, having said all that, everything was in favour of that fire. There was heat, there was fuel, there was wind, everything was for it. It was on an uphill incline too, so when it did finally take off it just went – nothing could stop it for a period of time.

Thank you.

GF Thank you, Garth. I would just ask you a couple of questions. The two fellows who were there ...

GK One is back sitting in that row; he is the one who is sitting next to me.

GF They were there but they couldn't action the fire.

GK They didn't have the equipment; they just jumped in their own truck. I guess that's what it was, aye Rob? Because it isn't policy that we go out the minute we see it. That's what needs to be changed.

GF Okay, so that call can only be made by the Chief?

GK Yes, but that isn't the problem either. Because his policy, the fire department's, or our fire department is aware of what his policies are. There is a bit of a time lag between the Forestry and us. We used to have it so that we would just go and do it.

GF If he ordered you to go on that fire, you wouldn't necessarily be paid for it – is that what it is?

GK Oh no, the firemen are paid for it, yes. But the Forestry – there is a bit of a hesitation – you have a man here from the Forestry, maybe he should get into it. Because I think it is time that this thing – we have talked about this, this isn't new and it hasn't just happened and it isn't being dealt with.

GF Okay, I am actually not going to call forward Dennis ...

GK That's fair.

GF Just simply because I think we are gathering a lot of information and I think there will be a lot of recommendations and I think we have to – once we've got it all together, sit down with the Forestry people and find out either what can or can't be done and why. So I'm sure there are answers for all of these issues, but if they involve a policy then we may have to look at that.

GK The thing that I neglected to mention, the other thing a small fire department like us can do is we can crew up with some extra people ahead of time for the summer. Because the mere mention that there tends to be people taking

holidays and whatnot and we have to think about that too, as a fire department. If we had a policy that we knew that we might be out on more of these closer in Forestry jobs, it would be the easiest thing in the world to pick up a few younger people and train them with our crews.

- GF Well certainly I know that throughout the MOF much of their crews in the summer are summer students, frequently with the RAP attack and those, so that is not an unusual thing. There is also the issue of the possibility, I suppose of having retired people who – not unlike the military have reservists people who have done this before and continue to take training from time to time just to make sure that they keep their knowledge base active. You could do – I suppose there are many different ways in which you could look at it. But you said earlier in your very first statement and I may have misinterpreted it – you said that we should bring back a policy of having local community being the first responders – the local community forces. Was that policy in existence before, is that what you are telling me.
- GK Yes. It was at the discretion of the Fire Chief. If it was something that we could attack in a reasonable length of time, we did it. More than once we would be out there – the Forestry would come – and we'd pull back and go back into town.
- GF The reason I am probing is because a similar, I guess recommendation was made in Barriere saying – and the allegation being that the fire in McLure should have been actioned sooner and that sort of thing. Okay I appreciate that very much. Thank you very much.

GF Now we have Doug MacLeod. Welcome.

Doug MacLeod:

It's a tough chore to follow an illustrious man like Garth Kuntz – he is famous in these parts – I have watched him respond to fires since I was a baby. And here I am in a Seniors' Centre with him for the first time. I don't know what the means, Garth, but ... usually I only see him at funerals.

Just to introduce myself, I am Doug MacLeod, a volunteer firefighter with the Keremeos volunteer fire department. I am a forestry contractor and I am a fire warden for the lower Similkameen for the Ministry of Forests.

To just comment on some of Garth's issues, we run into similar problems with the Keremeos volunteer fire department – the main concern is always people assuming liability responsibilities that they are not going to be covered for. And so far we haven't had a real problem with that liability and WCB – if the firefighter gets injured outside their area of responsibility there can be some question of coverage. So far it hasn't been an issue for us and we have been supported by the Ministry of Forests every time we have gone outside our boundaries.

The other comment I would like to make regarding Garth's comments about volunteer fire fighters and the set of skills they bring and what they can achieve and go onto and some of them can even become successful politicians – as they grow in life.

What a wonderful place we live in and how fortunate we are to live in a society that has a system built into it and a large number of people who will show up to help when things go wrong. The efforts I witnessed this summer were heroic. People, both professionals and volunteers, took great risks and expended tremendous amounts of time and energy trying to help those who needed it. What I actually witnessed this summer makes me think there is probably some hope for the world. But, there is room for improvement.

As I said, I am a Forestry contractor. I fight fires for the Ministry of Forests and I have seen a lot of fires in this countryside. I was on the Anarchist fire starting on day one and then was here for a month and then I proceeded to the Okanagan Mountain fire where I worked until mid-September. I just finished doing rehab on the Anarchist Mountain fire, putting it to bed for the winter.

I am the training officer for the Keremeos volunteer fire department and one of my biggest accomplishments of the summer – I wasn't even there to witness – but members of the Keremeos volunteer fire department that I trained saved houses in Kelowna and I was pretty proud of that.

I was born and raised in the Okanagan and have lived here for a good portion of my life. I have worked and played in the hills around here and watched, often with dismay, as development progressed into the hills. I have noted the change in the forest in the area, most recently as it pertains to forestry fuels.

My neighbour in Keremeos is the Lawless family and their father ranched in the hills up here and he told me that he used to herd cows to the railhead in OK Falls – it was a 3 or 4 day trip and it was a park all the way – huge trees, larch and pine scattered 30 to 50' apart. The crowns touched 50' in the air and the cows arrived fatter than when they left. There were no trails, it was just herding them through this beautiful forest. Now you can't walk through half that forest, it's too thick, it's diseased. What has been logged has a moderate to heavy fuel load left on it and I think that is where the major concerns of the summer, the major problems originated.

So fuel loading and human activities in the forest and wild lands. The fire activity and associated catastrophes of the summer have been a hundred years in the making. Any response to the fires was the best we could do. Who did what when, what went right, what went wrong, why did events unfold as they did would all be unneeded discussions if the fuel had not been allowed to build up to the current catastrophic levels. On managed forest lands, in parks and on private property. The weather that produced the kinder dry conditions of the summer is not uncommon and this could all happen again.

Suggestions – the Ministry of Forests and Environment should ease and streamline the planning of the whole process to facilitate reintroduction of fire as a management tool. Introduce and fund a fuel management program with the focus being on low and middle elevation forests. I am suggesting the province do this. Protection should be the lead agency in developing this program with district, environment and industry input. The province should work with insurance companies to limit potential liability for any company, agency or individual conducting prescribed burning and they should inform the public of the benefits of such a program through an information campaign.

Fireproofing homes, subdivisions and developments – I arrived on the Anarchist fire at about 2:00 in the afternoon I believe, and we were directed to go to Observatory Road. There were two houses in immediate peril from the fire, one directly above the other. The first house we actioned the residents were still there and were quite worked up, they were refusing to leave. The house had proper construction, it was stucco siding and metal roof, but there was brown grass right up to the walls and later on we were told that the lady liked that because she could watch the deer graze in her front yard. We worked and with a bit of luck we were just barely successfully in saving that house. We got water on the fire just as the flames hit the wall. We steered it past the house and sent it up the hill towards the second house. So we went up the hill a little worried we were a little too late, we saw people up there and we weren't sure what we would find.

We came over the hill and the occupant of the house, the owner, was sitting at a picnic table with a cooler of beer. He said you look hot, would you like a cold

one? And we really did but we couldn't. We did a reconnoiter of the area, a size-up. We found a house made of stucco with metal roof, all closed up. The porch was closed in, the soffits were closed in. There was green grass immediately adjacent to the house. The rest of the property was mowed and watered. The structures had no fuels adjacent to them. He had taken all the precautions, he had a small tank in his pickup truck and a small pump. When I asked him where he had learned to do all that he said it was from the Ministry of Forests meetings and the pamphlets and information they had been handing out over the years.

So the two attitudes to me indicate the kind of people we have living out there. We have those who live in denial that this is ever going to happen – if it does happen they think somebody is just going to be able to come and put it out and if they don't that someone is going to pay them for their place whether they have insurance or not. I think that we have to do a little more work on that one type of attitude.

Experience to the south shows us that fuel modification hazard, good by-laws and building codes drastically reduce the effects of wild fire on human habitation and the cost of fire suppression. Prevention and preparation are far cheaper than suppression. The figure commonly used is \$1 spent on prevention, preparedness or abatement is \$5 saved on suppression.

So I am suggesting that organized areas should have by-laws requiring hazard assessments, fuel modification hazard abatement projects, and detailing building materials to be allowed. They should encourage field modification projects with insurance companies by encouraging insurance companies to reduce premiums for homeowners and developers that conduct such activities.

Fire responders should be trained in recognizing when fuel modification and projects have been done and that buildings are constructed of resistant material and priorities should be given to those buildings and structures. The places that have no improvements done should be gone to as able.

Incident command – my experiences for the summer were varied. I can tell you that in all my years of experience in fighting fires the expected state of affairs at any fire and on any large fire is controlled chaos. The complex and dynamic situation, incomplete information, poor communication, large and remote areas, the high number of agencies and workers and dangerous working conditions form a managerial nightmare. As complexities and values at risk increase, the stress level on managers increases and we all react differently to that stress. I have seen everything from guys that go to full bureaucrats where they fall back on policy and procedures and regulations and I have seen guys turn into Napoleons and Patons. Everyone reacts a little differently every time.

Several years ago the Forest Service separated functions from the district staff and protection staff and in my experience as the years are progressing a lot of the Ministry fire fighters are progressing into management positions and they have very little of the old range skills or district forestry skills. For instance they have little experience in road layout, project management, timber cruising, harvesting or silviculture. I think that became apparent this summer as we saw some guards laid out that were redundant. We saw a lot of things done where there were some questionable skills involved. For instance, the value of the district staff up here, we worked with locals for the first several days on the Anarchist fire, district and local staff and things went pretty good. They knew the area, they knew the people, they utilized old logging roads for guards. They did a pretty good job and things kind of deteriorated when the overhead team started to take over – people from out of town.

Early in both fires, the Anarchist fire and the Okanagan Mountain Park Fire – local people were in charge. The managers know most of the local crews and contractors and have worked with them for years. There is a good working relationship and a high level of trust in each others' judgment. This led to safe and effective responses. Zone Manager Jim Ottashaw(?) did a great job the first few days here on Anarchist. As the overhead team took over the Anarchist fire, things deteriorated for our crew. Our local knowledge was ignored, and skills rejected when offered.

The tail began to wag the dog as camp times and transport restrictions led to alterations in strategies. The day would start with a meeting to discuss objectives and assignments, delaying the actual start of work for up to two hours. I am still unsure why we did a 100% mop-up on the fire. Heavy helicopters were bucketing in the middle of the fire at great expense weeks into the fires, when the chances of an escape were minimal. Crews and equipment were driving all over the ground and extensive amounts of redundant guards were constructed. Large segments of the guard were poorly located, leading to high rehab costs and unnecessary damage.

In contrast, local Ministry and staff and Forestry industry supervisors stayed in charge of the south division of the Okanagan Mountain Park fire for the majority of my six weeks there. The high level of trust in each other and previously established good working relationships led to a high level of success and effectiveness even though we were constantly short of required resources. Aggressive operations were conducted successfully and goals and objectives met, due in large part to this established relationship with local supervisors.

Objectives and assignments were decided on the night before so work could begin as soon as possible in the morning when it was most effective. The production-oriented Gorman Brothers and Riverside industrial supervisors contributed greatly to any success we achieved. Leo Gillick(?) and Murray

Henry of Penticton should be especially commended for their work on days 3 and 4 of the Okanagan Mountain Park fire. I think their decisions kept the fire from moving into Naramata and probably saved some lives on the north side.

My suggestions as far as incident command on a fire, the operations section should be the lead section in all considerations at any incident. Other functions must adapt so logical and required operations can be carried on. The operations director should be a local. At the very least local staff should be auditing these overhead teams – preferably on a daily basis.

Local staff should be utilized wherever possible and objectives and assignments should be developed and distributed prior to the next working day – hopefully the night before. This is very important for machinery – so that if they start work at 4 or 5 in the morning they can accomplish a lot before they are pulled off a fire when it takes a run at 11 or 12 o'clock.

Finance and admin – the timekeeping and payment methods of the Ministry of Forests are the most complicated and slowest of any of my customers.
(tape over)

... have commented they will never work for the Ministry of Forests again and I know of a third who took his name off the list in Princeton last year. Their complaints are agreed-upon rates and terms and conditions are changed after the work was performed and the invoice submitted, delays of up to 90 days in payment. Equipment rates were set without recognition of required accessories and deductions on equipment for breaks not taken were made.

My suggested improvements – if a Ministry of Forestry officer has authority to sign an invoice that should be enough to spend the money. They should get spending authority. This would help in processing invoices and any unexplained changes. The invoice form should be changed so it is a lot simpler to use and maybe even go electronic. The invoice processing time should be shortened to two weeks so that contractors can deal with any discrepancies while the supervisor is still in the area and Ministry of Forests should develop and implement an audit system to ensure contractors are invoicing honestly and accurately.

On the Okanagan Mountain Park fire, on the south division I would say that 95% of the crews were logging contractors that went over and above what anybody expected of them. And any success we met there was directly attributed to their production oriented work ethic.

Types of crews. We've got a lot of choices when you work on a fire. There could be Ministry crews, some observations of them are they are young, fit, specialized, they are well-trained to Ministry standards but they have limited experience in other jobs. They tend to be non-productive at non-fire times and from my observations recently there is a fair bit of turnover – so you tend to be dealing with some inexperienced workers.

There are contract fire crews, results-driven. They have lots of experience in other aspects of forestry work, are production oriented and they display a feeling of ownership to their section of the fire because they have to keep their boss happy or the phone won't ring again. They work well with other types of crews.

Industry crews, loggers and the likes, usually machine operators – very experienced, production oriented. We had to get a rein on them, they were too production oriented sometimes and the buddy system and accountability were a problem. They would see a situation developing and they would just go and deal with it and not always check in, and we had some accountability problems but they accomplished a lot.

A thing I saw done this summer was logging of fire guards ahead of the fire, where they actually went in with their machinery and removed the trees, took away all the fuel and the rehab on those guards has been substantially smaller and the guards were successful in holding the fire as well.

Perhaps my favourite form of crew is the fire warden. They have a pre-arranged hiring agreement that gives them authority to action fires. They work on an as-needed basis. They don't cost the taxpayers any money unless they are actually working on a fire and there is a range of skills and experiences they bring and they work with a variety of crews pretty successfully.

Structural fire fighters – paid and volunteer – they are very well trained and experienced. We used them a lot in the Shoat(?) Lake area. We took them away from the structures and up into the bush. We had done a large burn-off operation with a minimal amount of support and there was a forecast wind change. We wanted to get a hundred foot strip cooled down along the edge of our burn-off, which was Shoat(?) Lake Road. We used them to hose 100' down with their monitors and high pressure hoses, just driving up and down, and got that 100' strip cool and black. No mop-up, it was just cool and when the winds did swing around that guard held and it never did jump. They were a tremendous help.

We also used them for pumping stations, to supply water trucks with large volumes of water in a very short time. There again, the problem was they were too keen, they did not recognize all the hazards involved in working on forest land.

So I am suggesting that various government agencies and industries should coordinate and provide enough work to keep a core group of contractors and/or fire wardens busy during non-fire times. Projects would include salvage logging, fuel management projects, site prep and habitat enhancement. These contractors and equipment could be made available for fire suppression as fire conditions dictate but still be productive in non-fire times. They would be

production oriented, bush trained and ready for all types of forest work including fire suppression. By providing long term local work, fire managers would be able to develop, enhance and utilize the type of working relationship between all types of crews which proved effective in the South Division of the Okanagan Park fire. This type of arrangement would also provide enough work to develop an affordable, well-trained, versatile and experienced contract work force.

The Ministry of Forests initial attack crew leaders should receive cross-training in structural fire fighting to increase crew comfort level and safety when dealing with interface fires and structural fire fighters, volunteer and professional, should receive increased training in wild land fire suppression with the focus being on hazard recognition, water conservation and mop-up techniques.

Did you get all that?

- GF Thank you very much, Doug. That is quite a comprehensive review of your experience and very, very helpful to us. There are a whole lot of these areas that I'm interested in pursuing with you. You expressed dismay at seeing houses built into the forest and that involves, I guess, an implied restriction that municipalities would basically say through zoning laws that you can't build into the forest unless you provide fire guards, other kinds of protection and other things. Do you think your municipalities are ready for that?
- DM I am not sure. The insurance companies, I think will be recommending it in the near future and perhaps making it mandatory. I know in the operation of the fire department in a municipality the only thing that makes it feasible is it reduces the insurance rates for the residents. Otherwise, they wouldn't pay taxes for the fire department. So I think the insurance companies will be making that decision for us.
- GF We haven't heard from the insurance companies yet, but we have invited them and they are going to be making some presentations to us over the next while so that is a question that we will ask them, because it ties into your other suggestions and that is more flexibility and perhaps a little more sharing of the risks so to speak of the insurance company for doing controlled burns. The traditional concern is that they will get out of hand and there will be huge losses then and who is going to pay for it sort of thing. Do you think the insurance companies have learned from the experience of this summer that – I think they are up to \$280M or something like that in losses for British Columbia – would it be cheaper for them to be a little more flexible in their insurance rules to allow for a little more controlled burning.
- DM It'd fix an awful lot of their problems for less than that, so I think they will buy into it shortly.

GF We all know that there is risk involved, there is always a risk. Winds change, conditions all of a sudden flame up and so that's part of the thing. It's a matter of sharing the risk then. They have to be prepared under certain terms and conditions to support you.

DM And the province, you know if industry or private contractors or land owners want to do a burn, if they meet the standards of the day in trying to ensure that it doesn't escape – you know, weather forecasts and good assessments of the land and all the other considerations – things sometimes just go wrong. There should be some provincial help in covering that as well. Because it would be achieving so much.

GF What about – you also referred in terms of construction up into the interface about building materials.

DM Again, I think insurance companies will be the ones that dictate a lot of that. I am not an expert in municipal politics and government, but watching the fires in Los Angeles on TV, there seem to be new subdivisions that have been built to certain specifications that survived with very little damage. Some of the older ones suffered greatly. Who does that and who dictates that I'll leave to the experts, but it needs to be addressed.

GF I am told there is only one municipality in British Columbia that has building code requirements for building in the interface in terms of construction materials.

You say that you are suggested that the MOF and the Environment department ease restrictions on controlled burns. Is it your understanding that they are the ones who are restricting control burns.

DM The planning process, when the Forest Practices Code came in, the planning process for any activity in the forest became very, very ponderous. As well public opinion is very much against burning. Fire is bad. A lot of that is from the way we used to do it. We did bring a lot of this problem on ourselves as a forest industry. There was a lot of abuse in the past and we lost fire as a management tool. The pictures of the burnt-out stumps and smouldering clear cuts, where the environmental movement did a good job of using them and we have lost it as a tool. So to get permission to do burns now, it is a huge review process and it's one of those processes that if one person comes up with a negative, the whole thing goes back to the planning review process. It is very difficult to get permission to do broadcast burns right now.

GF There certainly are some legitimate areas of concern I would think, people with respiratory illness – if there aren't provisions for doing it under certain wind conditions and things of that nature.

DM Yes, we do debris burning for industry in the fall where we burn their debris piles on landings and you have to try and limit the spread through normal means, but one of the things you have to consider is venting and you are not allowed to light up when the venting is going to be poor that day, or moderate the next. But one of the changes that has come about in prescribed burning is most prescribed burnings are done in the spring now. So you can monitor the ground moisture and control the depth of the burn and it's far more difficult for the fire to spread out of the cut block or the area of concern into standing timber. But even wild life burns, a lot of them are done early in the spring now instead of the tradition fall as it was done in the past.

GF The whole issue of local people being in charge – I have heard this before, obviously – in a summer like this where I guess everybody looked upon it as a blessing to have crews come in from basically all over Canada – is this something that is possible, to always have local people in charge?

DM I am hoping that the summer like this will be the exception. We had so many big fires threatening so many towns that resources were spread very thin but we do get big fires every year, not always as concentrated as they were this year. To me that is one of those whenever possible on the wish list.

GF The issue of the hours of actioning fires has come up just about every session. Was it a question of exhaustion or – it does seem as though everybody says we should have been out there starting the work at 4:00 o'clock in the morning. And, in order to do that, you can feed the crews at three, you can wake them up at 2:30 or whatever. Yet we are being told regularly that they weren't getting out 'til 8:30 or 9:00 and sometimes even later. Do you see any policy issue behind this?

DM Once a camp is set up it is amazing how much the camp dictates what happens on the fire and transportation on the Anarchist fire I think was an issue because we had out-of-province crews. They didn't have their own vehicles. Again, going back to my last suggestion of local crews, there is a lot more versatility because the first three nights of the Okanagan Mountain Fire my crew and I slept in a park near Naramata and just got up and went back to work. We slept at the fire base one night in their bunkhouse there – put in twenty hour days and just slept where you could. You can do that for about 3 or 4 days at the maximum and then you need a good night's sleep and a place to rest.

Once you get past that initial attack phase, you've got to be pretty opportunistic when the weather presents an opportunity to meet with some success, you've got to be able to seize it. And the fact that the trucks are there and the food is ready at camp – maybe that has just got to wait for 4 or 5 hours so that you can get done what you feel is needed. Local crews are more versatile that way, but they just weren't available in large numbers this year.

One thing the Anarchist fire did this year – I forgot about this – is they staggered starting and quitting times about mid-way through the fire so there was better coverage. Some crews started at 5:30 in the morning and some started at 8:00 so that there were always as many people on the fire as possible. There was probably only about six or seven hours of downtime in the middle of the night.

GF The cross-training between structural and wild fire fighters – again, I guess you see that as a global provincial responsibility?

DM To me that should be the Fire Commissioner and the Ministry of Forests getting together and providing that training. Again the volunteer and professional fire fighters we used this summer – we had to rein them in – they'd see fire in the woods and they would be out of their truck and dragging hose in and there was dead trees hanging over and windfall and ash pockets and they got it out and we didn't have any major issues, but I am only 17(?) years old and I used to have a full head of brown hair. There were some pretty scary moments this summer as those guys did a great job but just weren't trained in recognizing the hazards and the supervisors were really worried several times.

Conversely the wild land fire fighters almost are afraid of houses that are on fire. They back off and I have even seen them not help volunteer fire fighters pull hoses because that is a structure fire that those guys are working on and it is almost as if they are sometimes just afraid of what is going to happen – is it something different. And there is a unique hazard to structural and motor vehicle fires as well that I think would be very easy to cross train in recognition of dangerous situations.

GF Thank you very much Doug. We would like a copy of that, please.

DM I've got a copy right here.

GF Okay, thank you very much.

GF Now ladies and gentlemen that is the extent of people who have registered with us, or indicated that they wish to speak. As I said this is certainly an open process and we would like to hear from anyone who has information or ideas to share, so if there are any others here who would like to come forward, you are most welcome to do so.

GF Yes?

DM Ross just mentioned to me that he thought that maybe I didn't make it clear enough to you that right now for us to go out into the forest we have to get forestry approval first.

GF That's what I assumed, but – that's what I assumed.

We are just going to take a break for a cup of coffee and if no one else shows up then we will adjourn until this evening. I am not sure whether there are people who weren't able to come this afternoon because of work commitments and we will have an evening session as well. We will come back at seven, but I will just have a cup of coffee and ask again at the end of that coffee break whether there is anyone else.

Tape 2

GF ... welcome to others. We will carry on with our public presentations that began this afternoon and I have two names for this evening and as I indicated this afternoon, you are welcome to add your name to the list if you would like to do so and have not registered that is quite all right – we would certainly be happy to hear from you. So we will begin this evening with Mr. Simose(?). Welcome.

Joe Simose(?)

Good evening, Mr. Filmon it is a pleasure to be here in front of you and your commission. My name as you stated is Joe Simose(?). I represent the residents of the Anarchist Mountain which is the location of our fire back this last July. I am also the Fire Chief of the Anarchist Mountain Firefighting Society.

We have for the most part a lot of praises for the way that our fire was handled. I think the people involved did an extremely good job and we all feel very grateful and thankful for their efforts. There are a few people that we would like to – an organization that we would like to thank, such as the Town of Osoyoos, the Mayor and the staff, the administration, the senior centres and pretty much all of the volunteers that helped us through a very hard time. We would also like to thank the Osoyoos Volunteer Fire Department and the Oliver Volunteer Fire Department that provided an invaluable service and help to us. And, of course the people from the Forestry, they are hardworking extremely dedicated people that provided us with the support necessary to protect our homes, our lives and our properties. We believe, and we experienced that their work goes beyond the call of duty. They are certainly a whole lot of dedicated people and we thank them for that.

There are a couple of concerns, or call it suggestions, that we would like to offer as experiencing the fire first hand. We as a just newly formed volunteer fire department, actually at that time we were not even an official fire department, we were just a bunch of people dedicated to the preservation of the mountain and our homes and we had been so for many years, with no official status. As luck would have it a week before the fire Dennis Gaudry and Jim Mottishaw outfitted our fire truck with equipment which was pretty timely and very lucky. So we did work very hard in the first four or five days of the fire and we believe were instrumental with helping them to protect some homes and saving some and, unfortunately, we lost two and some outbuildings. But nevertheless we were there in the middle of it pretty much all the time.

In some of the things for the most part we have seen an extreme amount of dedication and hard work. There were some things that we would like to offer some suggestions to you and the government and the forestry. One of the things we experienced first hand was somewhat of a lack of communication – things kind of fell short we believe in that area. Not communication between the crews and the supervisors, I believe that type of communication was proper. There was some lack of communication between the tenders, the people supplying the water to the fire crews fighting the fires and the fire fighters. On several occasions we experienced water tenders being at a location thinking that the crews were there, but the crews were far, far away from them waiting for this valuable resource that wasn't there for them.

We offer a suggestion – in the scope of things and considering how much money it costs to fight these fires, it may be a very small cost to provide these

water tenders with radios that they can communicate with the fire crews on the ground.

There are some other areas of concern and this is to the future, not to the past. We have walked and driven and for the most part played around this beautiful mountain that we enjoy and we live in and we find that some government actions in the past have probably contributed, if not contributed have certainly made a difference in the state of the forest and how vulnerable it is to fires. Some of those actions we believe are a vital service that has been provided by salvage logging has disappeared. We do believe that needs to be reinstated. Salvage loggers are small groups, small outfits mostly in the small communities that go out and harvest timber that is certainly not commercially viable for the big outfits, such as windfalls and small areas of bug kill and stuff like that. We do believe that to have a viable forest that type of fuel should be harvested and the taxpayers of this province can benefit, the local economy can benefit and the environment can benefit. Why do away with it?

Another area of our concern is not the fire itself, but what happens after the fire. Again this was a very unusual year, a very terrifying year. What we saw when the larger fires started to take place, the residents of the Anarchist Mountain where some of them did suffer major losses and some like myself just financial losses – loss of timber, no real – not really material. But people that lost their homes and we did have two homes that were lost on this mountain and they became forgotten, completely forgotten when the larger fire in Kelowna and elsewhere started. Somehow there has to be a continuity. People cannot be left behind and these people feel and we do feel that we were left behind. In a one-hour documentary entitled “Firestorm” that was put on by CTV I believe, the Anarchist Mountain fire wasn’t even mentioned at all. And I think it all goes back to information.

Finally the other area of concern that we have is not the fire itself but again after the fire. We have just – I have just toured the fire area after the rehabilitation program was done and it’s good, my own land was rehabilitated and a good job was done on it. In Crown land I was quite disappointed. I and some of the other residents had the opportunity to walk by and walk through and our concerns are that we see what we perceive to be waste. We know that some of the local smaller logging outfits offered and asked to harvest this timber that had been knocked down, necessarily so, to build fire guards. Some of this timber is beautiful stuff, old growth Fir, Yellow Pine, Tamarack. They were denied access to harvest this precious resource that was dead already. Instead what happened to these beautiful, wonderful trees was they all got crushed and piled as debris all over these fire guards to make them inaccessible. While we can certainly think of a lot of other ways that a fire guard can become inaccessible without destroying these trees to put them on it.

We do believe that some practices need to be changed, that is a valuable resource. The province, the taxpayers could have obtained some stumpage fees from these trees and instead we are paying somebody to go and destroy them. Somehow it does not make a whole lot of sense.

Thank you, gentlemen. That is our submission. I appreciate the time.

GF Thank you very much Joe, and we appreciate not only your comments but all of the efforts that you made in your part in the fighting of the fire.

Any idea what the cost of radios is for ...

JS Very low these days. Probably a couple of hundred dollars. And the cost of not having the water is far greater.

GF Yes, for sure. You say the salvage logging should be reinstated. It was done in the past then, I take it?

JS Yes, it was done. The government suspended that program in February of 2003.

GF That recently. Have you talked to the MOF people about that?

JS Not myself, personally, but some of the people involved in that type of operation have and apparently there is no chance that it will be reinstated. The government apparently looks at it as an unprofitable venture. It costs more to administrate than what the revenue is. While I feel that there is a greater revenue and the greater revenue is to keep a healthy forest, especially around the interface.

GF So it was done under contract for the MOF in the past?

JS No, as I understand it, it was small salvage logging operations would bid on a certain area, such as windfalls, like when a strong wind comes along and knocks a bunch of trees down. The area is too small for people like Weyerhaeuser and the larger operations to go in, then the small salvage loggers will go out and bid on these areas and applied to have – they actually don't bid, they just make an application and support that application by the facts – you know, how many trees have fallen down and so on and so forth. And they go in and they take those trees and the government profits, they take stumpage. But I guess the administration costs has been outweighing the revenue, so that was suspended.

GF The forgotten people who had losses is certainly something that we heard in Barriere where they, too, felt that they were left out of the attention and the concern. As you know, quite a few lost not only their homes but their jobs there. So, there are some similar feelings. No question about it. I am not sure

if we could influence the media, but certainly I think the government will be aware of your concern.

JS Thank you.

GF Well thank you very much, Joe, we appreciate it.

GF The next person that we have on the list is Mr. Erickson(?). Welcome.

Ken Erickson:

I will keep mine very brief. Joe is – I am part of Anarchist Mountain – I own Regal Ridge – it is a 6,000 acre development that the fire basically was adjacent to and two months prior to that I had purchased a fire truck and had a bunch of local people trained – or we were just starting our training – so we fought it all three times which just kind of kept it off our property and saved several homes.

My reason to be here to day is more of an overview of just some things that in my many years in business and fighting fires with helicopters and crawler tractors in Northern Alberta and Northern B.C., and certainly a little bit down here. It's just an overall thing of trying to somehow – the resources, like the Forestry in B.C. has incredible fire fighters. I mean I put them ahead of Alberta in my experience – I mean don't say that to Alberta, but they are surely excellent people. It's just trying to get the resources utilized to try to stomp that fire out before it becomes a campaign where it is – all of a sudden the efforts were put into organizing the food, where are people going to try to stay and all this thing and trying to somehow put the same efforts into stomping it out. And, to that regard I am saying we spent a lot of money – you know had more attack bombers with fire retardant, having somehow the resources to hire them more. I mean I know that the B.C. Forest – it goes without saying – I know just from dealing with the guys, I mean they are in contact with everybody in Canada, with all the resources. It's not just what's in B.C. and of course if you've got Ontario heating up at the same time as B.C. it's a real problem. But trying to get those resources, and they manage it very well I know that, if there was just the ability of somehow as a collective – you know we are talking federally – if we say look, if we had another ten or twelve attack bombers that are strategically located with retardant on, if somehow we had more Sikorski 64s, I mean you can sit there and bambi bucket from a light helicopter and it really doesn't do much good. If you have the ability to have the size of aircraft necessary to drop enough retardant or enough water fast enough and I mean that costs a lot of money to have those things on standby, but so do fires cost a lot. So it is my – it is utilization of resources more to try to somehow hit it harder, hit it faster so we don't have all the money spent on trying to fight the fire that becomes a big campaign. As it spreads you've just got a huge, huge, huge perimeter that you have to deal with, with more and more and more resources instead of trying to concentrate somehow – and I mean the Forestry here has done more than an admirable job – I know quite a few of the people dealing with it, they are first-class people.

The other issue is crawler tractors. Crawler tractors can do a tremendous amount of work of basically trying to just – the trees, you very seldom when you are on a fire line, you are knocking a straight line – it becomes an intrusive scar for years to come. I mean it winds here and it winds there. Afterwards you salvage that timber that you knock down, you re-seed it, you do this and you do that and it really enhances even the wildlife. It actually becomes a permanent fire guard and it just – you've got so many factions,

especially in B.C.'s very beautiful province. You have so many factions that protect the trees, don't go into that – and if a person, if a forest officer out there makes a decision to unleash a cat and knocks down 400 acres of pristine area or pristine timber, he could lose his job over that. But if he just let it burn he is not going to lose his job over that. I mean that becomes the big issue of somebody not afraid to make those decisions before it is consumed anyway by fire.

So I mean a crawler tractor – I am talking 7s, 8s of that size, two crawler tractors in one day can create so much work and create such a big fire guard and there were times there was 140 – 150 sitting around idling. I mean that is – somebody's got to – the Forestry has the dibs on every piece of equipment around and as it heats up their resources are unlimited – not unlimited but they have a lot of resources. They are stretching themselves personnel-wise, and I believe that they should certainly look at more local contractors – those kinds of foremen to do some of this kind of stuff. Those guys – they are not trying to stretch it into a job to last three months. It's their own land, it's in their own area. They have pride – they are not going to let that fire burn. They are going to try to put it out. And, in that thing comes a big issue which is safety – I mean I would chastise and our people were chastised by the Forestry for endangering ourselves. I've fought fires all my life, I didn't go to the head of the fire – I flanked it. Would I do it again? Absolutely. Think about it? No. You do it. You do what you have to do. It's the same as crawler tractor operators some of them just go, they are not afraid – I mean they realize that you've got two crawler tractors working together, if you ever did get caught in somewhat of a situation you just start making an ever-widening circle and pretty soon you got yourself a pretty safe zone pretty fast. I am not saying you put yourself right on that edge, but you certainly – it's going to burn anyway, get some – get out there and make some proper fireguards. Don't be afraid to knock trees down. That is a big issue that I see all the time, that they are afraid to utilize the resources they have for the repercussions.

And it comes the issues with, you know, safety, Ministry Transportation regulations on how many hours between – and maybe it means that the government has to – you know everybody is in a situation of trying to balance budgets – I mean everybody is – and they may have to invest the extra money on double-crewing, having those things available so that the planes can fly at first light when there are hot spots and start hitting them before 10:00 when a wind comes up and all of a sudden, well gee, we'd better get flying. It gets into that routine and I know we've got to do this and we've got to do that, but at the end of the day, I mean, do it when it can be effective. The fires are very effectively fought from 8:00 at night to 8:00 in the morning. I mean let's face it, that's when you want to be fighting – I mean not flying at night, but flying much earlier and if you've got a double crew you can do that. But fly early at the crack of dawn. You can do something.

Other than that, my many thanks certainly to everybody concerned. Especially the Forestry and it was – I've fought a lot of fires but when you've got an aspect like the south-west and you've got slopes like that, I mean that thing moved fast. But anyway, it was trying to the biggest thing – trying to kill a fire before it becomes a month-long campaign. Don't be afraid to incur the wrath of the people because you knock down a whole bunch of trees. You can always restore it. And that's a problem, and I really sympathize with the forestry because I'm sure they've got all kinds of facts they have to deal with. They can't just jump in and do what should be done.

- GF Thank you very much, Mr. Erickson. You are probably aware of the standard, and I read the report that was done by Price Waterhouse Coopers a couple of years ago on the MOF and the standard that they worked towards is, I believe it is four hectares, if they can stop the fire within four hectares then they believe they have been successful on the fire protection side of it. I am trying to remember, probably Dennis could correct me, but I believe it was 93% of the fires that were started this summer were stopped within four hectares or less, so they – very significant.
- KE We don't hear about those.
- GF Unfortunately the ones that went beyond that and that is one of the reasons why they sort of set that standard is that if it's much larger than that then your chances of getting hold of it before it gets out of control are much slimmer – slim and none and slim just left town.
- KE When that happens – a lot of the fires they fought the access was just really bad. That's just the way it was. Sometimes there is access – don't be afraid to use crawler tractors. Don't be afraid to knock the trees down. They'll burn anyway.
- GF Well, there are a lot of issues certainly, and you are raising matters that have been brought forward by others and that is that it seems as though a lot of knowledge and information is out there. People with experience like yourself and the question then becomes – why is that the best plans, the policies, the goals and objectives that are out there – even by the departments and agencies of government don't happen. So you have to ask yourself the question and I guess the question is – who is it that doesn't want people to go in there with crawler tractors. Would you say it's the MOF or would you say it's other interests, other stakeholders.
- KE Well, I think it is other stakeholders but I think it is just basically – and Dennis could probably certainly assist me on this – I believe it is just a perceived – people are just afraid to knock down a healthy tree. If fire guards are being built, they are told to build them quite narrow because again, if it burns and it burns beyond, nobody is going to lose their job – these guys that's their job. They work for – that is their living and nobody wants them to lose their job

over making a decision that is going to help put that fire out. But that is one of the – and I think there has to be some very strict guidelines, but a chain of command of what can be done. I mean the Okanagan Mountain Park, probably nobody knew whether they were even allowed to go in there with crawler tractors or whatever. I mean they may know, they may not, but there are a lot of issues and it just – after this year, I think – you know B.C. has always been – it's a beautiful province. I mean it is absolutely beautiful and nobody likes to see trees knocked down – but I mean if you can knock down a thousand trees to save a hundred thousand, you do it. You don't think twice about it.

GF Well I think the provincial parks would be a whole new set of issues. That for sure is not something that is within the control of the MOF, the whole parks branch would have their own set of rules and protections for – certainly it is my impression that there is a basically do not touch policy with respect to those areas.

KE:

Crawler tractors are very limited on access. I mean there are good cat skimmers that can – essentially they are limited, there's got to be a few helicopters are much more but a crawler tractor can do a lot more than a helicopter. If you can get at the fire – you know, on those hot spots and stuff like that and get a decent perimeter and get it now.

GF The whole issue of equipment – I have been astounded to find out – I think in terms of water bombers there were at one time 23 in the province. It's exactly the situation that you describe and there is the inter-agency coordination centre in Winnipeg, as a matter of fact, that brings the equipment from anywhere in the country where it is not in use and takes it to the place where it is needed. And so at one time I think there were as many as 23 water bombers, plus something like 60 helicopters in the province. It was an enormous task as you know. So the question is, how much is enough, and it would vary with the season, wouldn't it. You couldn't have 23 water bombers and 65 helicopters sitting around every year.

KE:

Where they are stationed, they are stationed with fire retardant. That's the big difference. You don't have retardant pits set up all over the bloody province. I mean it's where they have to land and re-fuel and take on retardant. And that's the one area I believe that taxpayers money we should be spending. The other issue is again, don't be afraid to use crawler tractors they will do a lot. But they've got to be unleashed.

GF Okay, well I really appreciate you coming and thank you very much for your presentation. Thank you Ken.

KE Thanks.

GF Okay, well we do not have any others who have registered, but as I indicated earlier you are welcome, any of you to come forward if you have information to share or a presentation you would like to make. Is there anybody here who would like to come forward?

GF Okay, well firstly I would like to say thank you to everyone for having participated both this afternoon, some of you have been here both for the afternoon and this evening, and we certainly appreciate some excellent presentations that have been made and a good deal of information that people possess that is of value to us in looking at the whole picture.

I have a series of ten days of these public hearings and will probably have then quite a number of days of stakeholder meetings with various agencies, departments and organizations that have an interest in the whole issue surrounding the fires. The main thing that I want to emphasize is, the intention for us to listen and learn. The intention is to look at areas that could have been done with improvement, but as has been pointed out today I think very, very clearly and eloquently by many people, reality is that for the most part people were heroic in their efforts. People did do a great deal that was right, but I am a believer and I think the government believes, and that is why this commission is sitting that you can always improve. It doesn't matter how well you did under any circumstances, you can always look and say what things can we do better. And that is the whole idea of this process – to look for the things that we can do better in preparation for the next time. Because there will be a next time regrettably – there is nothing that we as humans can do to prevent there being a next time.

Thank you for contributing to that effort and it has been a pleasure to meet all of you.

Sir, this is a change of protocol, but I would like to ask a question of Dennis here – if, in anticipation before the fire season started here, in your area and your budget you were given \$5M – what would you have done to prevent fire. What would you have done? How would you use that? \$10M, \$10M in the South Okanagan, what would you do?

Dennis

In this public process I plan on having my opportunity to talk to Mr. Filmon.

Okay. I am curious. How is it best spent?

Dennis

A fire that doesn't start doesn't cost any money. We can't do anything with lightning, but some 60% of the fires that we have in this area are person caused – we are doing as much as we can. If I had a wish, the biggest wish I would have is more understanding in the general public of the fire

environment that we live in, the need to prevent them leads to fuel management, the need to build houses on Anarchist Mountain that are fire safe. All the stuff we have been talking about for twenty years.

So the stuff up front. But now you've got money for only if a fire starts.

GF I appreciate what you are doing but I don't want to put Dennis on the spot and I know that he is spending a lot of time going through a great deal of information to make sure that when he presents it will be a comprehensive presentation and not a series of thoughts. So thank you for doing that, Dennis.

Thank you everyone.