

FIRESTORM 2003 – PROVINCIAL REVIEW

Public Meetings

Penticton

(Part A)

Good afternoon everyone, we'll just get started. If you'd like to take a seat and don't be shy to come up front, we are not going to take a collection like in church. You are welcome to sit as close as you can to the front. Thank you for coming out. This is the fifth day of public meetings that I am holding. My name is Gary Filmon and I am the commissioner who has been appointed by the government of British Columbia to review the forest fires that took place this summer in the Interior of British Columbia and to report to the government by February 15th.

The process is intended to be a very open and inclusive one. It will be as wide-ranging as people would like it to be in terms of the thoughts, ideas and observations you would like to share, yet it should be focused on the events of the summer of 2003 and the forest fires – those devastating forest fires that all of you experienced.

I am not here looking for scapegoats. I am not interested in pointing fingers. I am interested in listening, learning and receiving information that would tell me what things went well and ultimately what things we can learn from the experiences of this past summer. Although I have formal terms of reference, there are eight of them, eight items in the terms of reference, it basically falls into the whole area of planning, preparation, response and recovery. Anything to do with the way in which people, all of us collectively, because there were many, many departments and agencies of three levels of government involved in this and of course thousands of volunteers and others in the community. So all of these people obviously played a role in this and we want to take a look at those roles and understand just exactly what things we can learn from them and make recommendations as to how things might be done better in the future.

Of course, the future is one of those things that is significant to talk about because I did accept a relatively short timeframe when I agreed to take on this responsibility, the 15th of February sounds like a pretty short time in which to come up with a report and do a comprehensive job. But reality is that we are looking forward, and all the information would suggest that we are early on into a dry cycle, weather patterns and cycles generally run seven to ten years. We are probably only three years into a dry cycle, so there are probably several years ahead in which we might be facing just as serious circumstances as we experienced this past summer. You only need to look at California and the experiences there just very recently to know that these weather patterns are out there and dry cycles and extreme conditions are things that we are going to have to deal with and they could impact us again very, very quickly.

After this series of public meetings I will be having stakeholder meetings at which I will be meeting with the forest industry people, the insurance industry, tourism industry, Wildlife Federation, government departments and agency people who had mandates and responsibilities throughout this process, or were affected as a large

group by the forest fires of this summer. After that I will then be spending the time to come to conclusions, make recommendations that will ultimately form the report to government.

So I thank you for coming out to be a part of this process. We have quite a number of people who have registered to speak today and I will call you forward. Some have requested to be a little later and so I will call forward people who I know are in the room and begin with Mr. Walter Despot, the Mayor of Keremeos. If you would come forward, please, Sir.

Thank you and welcome.

Mr. Walter Despot
Mayor of Keremeos

Thank you very much for giving me this opportunity. I would like to speak concerning the Farwell(?) Creek fire which you probably haven't heard about yet. This fire originated in Washington State in mid-July and was working its way north to the 49th parallel south of Cathedral Lakes Park. It was a fire by early August that was about 80,000 acres and it was expected to cross the 49th parallel and then get into B.C. basically just south of Keremeos. This is what my concerns revolve around.

I will go first to the point that I have in the report:

Point one, access to B.C. Parks Land being threatened by fire must be resolved so that access to the fire scene, be it real or possibly real must be in place well in advance of the fire threat, i.e. the availability of having heavy equipment onto parks land. On that particular fire, Sir, we had a briefing every morning in Keremeos at the EOC centre and from my perspective as a Mayor, it seemed to me that there wasn't a clear understanding of how Forestry was to handle the fire if it got into the park. I was led to believe that the Parks B.C. would give authority to Forestry if and when a crisis arose.

Now with these fires, when the crisis is there is too late so my concern, Sir, is that well in advance arrangements are made between Forestry and Parks B.C. as to how these issues are going to be addressed.

My second point, Sir, the American and Canadian governments must get realistic and work cooperatively, quickly and effectively on any fire threatening to cross the border. Cross border cooperation fire suppression plans should be utilized in a spirit of common goal controlling fire. And again on this issue at the EOC briefings every morning the two senior governments had not resolved how they were going to allow fire fighters, equipment and coordination of planning on this particular fire as it approached the 49th parallel. The fire did get to within three or four kilometers of the 49th parallel when it was contained and I felt that senior governments should be capable of resolving these issues early in the season for the season. It's a little ridiculous when an aircraft cannot cross the 49th parallel or a Canadian chopper cannot go in and land on American soil when they are fighting a common enemy.

My third point, Sir, the news media handling of the Farwall(?) Creek fire was very poorly done in its early days. The Farwall(?) Creek fire was, I believe, the first major fire that was potentially a problem for B.C., commencing around the 15th of July. The initial sensationalism used by the press conceived a very potential disastrous scene for the Keremeos area when in fact the fire was over thirty kilometers away, still south of the 49th parallel. Once our operations centre became operational this exaggeration of the situation was addressed and partially reversed, but the damage was done to the industry within our valley and the main industry is the fruit industry at that time. People from outside the area were led to believe that Keremeos was on the verge of being

burned when in fact the fire was still three to five kilometers south of the 49th parallel, which was 30 kilometers from Keremeos.

The news media must be kept informed of accurate information directly so the public is dealing with fact not with perception. Cooperation and respect between the media and government agencies must be paramount in these situations. I think that speaks for itself. The problem was resolved as the event unfolded. The relationship did become much more positive and much more accurate, but to commence with it was not a good scene for anybody.

I don't think, Sir, I have anything else to add at the present time, except that watching the Emergency Operations Centre work, as a Mayor I was very impressed with the B.C. Forest Service, very impressed with the Emergency Operations Centre and how it was handled. I also – besides being a Mayor, I am a thirty-nine year fire fighter volunteer veteran and I had spent four days at Barriere in early August and four days in Kelowna in very early September. So, I do have a little background information and I think that's all I have to say this afternoon, Sir.

GF Thank you very much, Your Worship. May I ask you some questions then, please?

WD Certainly.

GF Thank you. The reference you make with regard to the Ministry of Forests – it's your impression that they cannot go in and do preparatory work with heavy equipment – for instance into the parks – unless they are given that authorization by the Parks people themselves, the administrators.

WD That's what I was led to believe at these sessions, yes. They were attempting to put in roads, attempting to improve the barriers to the fire, I believe, along the 49th parallel although the Americans did have lines south of the 49th parallel. But, once you hit the park boundary from the discussions that I observed, they did not have permission before the fire became a real serious threat to enter the park. Now this particular provincial park has an awful lot of beetle kill in it. We are going to have a disastrous fire in there at some time soon if the situation continues as is and I feel there must be better cooperation.

GF I think we have been told similar things about Okanagan Mountain Park and other parks, so thank you for that. You say that the senior governments should resolve their issues about cross border sharing, whether it is of equipment, resources, crossing, and all those issues before the season. Wouldn't it be better to have a long-term protocol so that whenever it happens whether it is 2003 or 2004 or 05 or whenever – that there was an understood protocol as to handle these things on a cross border basis.

WD I would definitely agree, but I would buy the year by year to start with and then work up from there. But, yes, I would definitely agree. Just to give you an example, Sir, when the fire was still out of control approaching the 49th parallel, the first Canadian crew that went in, instead of choppering them in from the Canadian side, six kilometers into the American side, they had to go through immigration and customs at a crossing point, go south and then be driven up to the fire from the American side, which I believe took them just about all day – whereas, they could have been choppered into the fire scene in a matter of twenty minutes if they had gone in from the Canadian side. That is just one example, Sir.

GF With respect to the communication side, certainly a theme that we have been hearing a great deal about and I think the only conclusion that we can arrive at is that if people are not kept informed, rumours become stories and they are not based on fact, but in fact they are based on rumour and in some cases prove to be false and harmful. We are way better off to keep people properly informed using the facts at our disposal.

WD Definitely and this is what I think we want to see, Sir.

GF Okay, thank you very much. We appreciate your presentation.

WD Thank you.

GF The next presenter that we have is Mr. Terence Condon. Terry. Welcome.

Terence Condon.

Thank you. My name is Terence Condon, I am a retired vice president of ICBC and that is my only claim to fame. I don't represent any particular group, or organization. And my perspective is purely that of a Peachland resident. I would like to just give an account of some of the things that happened on that first Saturday. It may prove helpful, it may not and I am sure you will have heard it before. But if I may, I would just like to read this into the record.

On the Saturday evening of the outbreak of the fire my wife and I together with another local couple drove from Peachland to Summerland, past the area of Antlers Beach, opposite Squaley Point, the genesis of the fire. We passed that point at about 6:30 in the evening. We observed that the fire had not crossed the ridge and it was still well south of Rattlesnake Island. When we returned at about 8:30 that same evening, we observed that the fire was now over the ridge and directly above Rattlesnake Island.

As the evening progressed, we watched the fire move at an amazing speed. It was absolutely alarming. It moved to a point on Okanagan Mountain approximately opposite the connector between 8:30 when we returned and about 11:15 that night. In that short space of time that fire went right across the Okanagan Mountain Park from Squaley Point or Rattlesnake Island, right to the connector. The advance of the fire once it had crossed that ridge north of Squaley Point was clearly beyond anybody's control.

My observation is, and I make this observation in the ignorance of any knowledge of fire fighting, that had the fire been attacked early and aggressively at Squaley Point it might have been contained. My personal observation is that in the early stages it was not taken seriously, judging by the absence of sustained air attacks that I would have thought necessary.

That's all I have to say.

GF I am not familiar with all the place names that you have used. Did the fire begin within the park area?

TC I understand that the fire was as a result of a lightning strike at around 2:30 a.m. on Saturday and it was on the – as the lake comes down from Kelowna, it makes almost a right angle turn to the left about half-way between Kelowna and Penticton. That left-hand turn, if you excuse the phrasing, is Squaley Point. The fire had struck on the Penticton side of Squaley Point and that was where the initial conflagration took place. It was that point that we passed at 6:30 in the evening on that day and it had still not rounded the ridge and now on the north bound path towards Kelowna it was still south of Squaley Point. In the 3-1/2 or so hours of the evening from 8:30 onwards until about 11:30 it came past Rattlesnake Island which is sort of a few hundred meters off Squaley Point on the same side of the lake. It went from Rattlesnake Island

what has to be about 6 or 7 kilometers all the way up to a point almost opposite where the Okanagan connector 97C, comes out on the other side.

It advanced at an amazing speed. It was really quite terrifying and nobody could have done anything at that point. It was clear that any efforts as valiant as they were, were just being thwarted by the rage of this fire.

The issue that I think you will find most casual observers, as I class myself, the issue that most of us would have is that from 2:15 or 2:30 in the morning when the initial ignition took place following the lightening strike, until well into the evening on that day, 15 hours or so later, it had still not burned more than a kilometer from its original point. There was activity during the day in terms of fire suppression being dropped from various and sundry aircraft in various attempts to keep the fire under control through aerial bombing, but it wasn't a sustained effort.

Now I have no means of know whether or not the weather conditions were now poor enough that it was unreasonable for them to continue flying. I am not skilled in any of those areas so I can't comment on that. I can only comment that as a casual observer I would have expected to see a much more sustained aerial attack on that fire in its early stages because I do believe in my ignorance that it might well have been contained still south of Squaley Point. Because once it turned that corner, it was just gone. It was terrifying.

GF So to your knowledge there was no issue with respect to access. There was access available and this wasn't part of a provincial park issue.

TC No, I don't think so. I can't really speak to those kinds of things and I am sure there are people here who can. What I can tell you is that from Antlers Beach the Peachland and other volunteer fire departments were taking Zodiacs over to Rattlesnake Island and the area of Squaley Point to see if they could maintain some kind of control from the ground. But watching those guys come back from there, it was apparent they were fighting a losing battle.

GF Okay, thank you very much.

TC Thank you.

GF Now we have Dolly Pishette(?) – (DOUG) – sorry, Doug Pishette – I'm sorry!

Doug Pichette:

Thank you Mr. Filmon, my sex is still male, I guess it's probably my writing. I am the municipal amateur radio coordinator for the City of Penticton. We are a volunteer group who put together emergency communications, back-up emergency communications. To give you a little bit of background on myself, I was a twenty year member of the military and I retired from there in 1970. Two couldn't live on \$325 a month, so I went back to work. I worked in the logging industry for 25 years and retired at age sixty-four. I have worked in the Emergency Communications since 1990. We have dealt with a number of emergencies on the coast of Vancouver Island and have also participated in fighting forest fires. My thoughts are not on what happened with the forest fire, devastating as it was, my concern is being able to set up emergency back up communications within a community and this stand for any community that was involve din the fire. The problems that we encountered, and I do have recommendations as well as how to resolve them. I will read from this and I will give you my little spiel after if it's okay?

GF That will be great. Thank you.

DP The problems we encounter was – although I am part of the emergency program, no formal request was ever made from the emergency operations centre to myself as municipal amateur coordinator to set up our amateur radio operations. We were about three days into the fire, into the emergency where the EOC was running in Penticton before we were informed that we were need. By luck I was driving down the street when a call came in and said “the phones are down and we need communications between the hospital in Penticton and the hospital in Kelowna, can anybody help me?”

Knowing that the fire was around, I had in my car an antenna and a radio and I called the person at EOC and said I'm on my way to the hospital right now. Within five minutes of getting the request I was in the hospital with the radio station up and running. Unfortunately, because of the lack of antennae I could not reach the hospital in Kelowna, so I came down to our emergency radio here in Penticton and I got a higher powered radio, took that up to the hospital – all of this took about ten minutes – and within fifteen minutes of first being asked I had emergency communications between Penticton Hospital and Kelowna Hospital. The ins and outs and technicalities I don't think you are interested in. I can get quite complicated, or it can.

Communications within the EOC or the Naramata amateurs were moved from Naramata into Penticton and asked to set up an Emergency Communications Centre for communications. They did the best they could. They were given a room in the fire hall which was excellent. The unfortunate thing is that with the communications, the radio and antennae set-up that they had, they could not talk except to local people. So we manned that station with two amateurs and we also had to put in one of our big stations on the air and had to man it with

two amateurs throughout the course of this fire. So we are using four people at all times for twelve or fourteen hour days, whatever it was.

We managed to get the radios working and we had – after we were asked to fire it up by Kamloops, by the Provincial Emergency Program operations in Kamloops had to ask us to fire our radio station up. Nobody else did. That is ridiculous. We are in Penticton. It should have been Penticton. I am not pointing fingers at anybody, I am saying that this is the way it should have been. Penticton should have asked us to set this station up. We shouldn't have had to be asked by Kamloops, by any means.

One of our people attended one of the daily briefings in the fire hall and I don't know who did it, but somebody who was in charge, I assume it was whoever was running the EOC, came up to this amateur radio person and said – you don't need to be here, you don't need this information. Well, I'm sorry, but that doesn't cut ice with me. It doesn't cut water. If you are a part of the Emergency Program and you are talking to other amateurs and giving them information, then you have to have the information that is coming out of that EOC. You can't fly by the seat of your pants. It's nice to let your people know what you are doing. So we need the information as much as the press needs the information.

The Naramata Amateurs who came in and set up the station, the radio station first in the fire hall did the absolute best they could. They wanted to set it up at our amateur radio stations – we have two in town by the way, one at the Seniors' Centre on Winnipeg Street and one at the Search and Rescue building up on Dawson Avenue. So we have two fully equipped amateur stations. Unfortunately they are not in the fire hall and that is where the radio should be. So they did set up in the fire hall and eventually they got us on the air and they had to relay from the fire hall to us and then we had to go to Kamloops. With the proper equipment in the fire hall we could have gone direct from the fire hall to Kamloops. We would need two people instead of four at all times. We are all retired people. We give gladly of our time and equipment. Individual radios are \$700 plus – the antennae are over and above that. It is not a cheap hobby, but we are glad to give the equipment and the time.

At ECO personnel, whoever was running didn't seem to know what in hell the function of the amateur radio operators were. At one point they were ordered out of the meeting so they could hold a meeting in the room. They were ordered out of their station so a meeting could be held in that room. If you are going to have an amateur radio station, if you are going to have communications then you have to have somebody manning that station at all times when it is necessary.

The EOC decided they required more radios so that they could have some to have communications around town and I agree this is not a problem, I don't

have a problem with that. BUT the problem arose, they went to B.C. Communications, they rented radios, they were very, very short range radios, they were what we call 400 band and they are strictly line of sight. If you can't see the antenna you can't talk to it. So they got them in and when we got them in we tried them out and they worked fine as long as we were looking each other in the eye. They sent a repeater, which is an instrument that gives us a longer range on these radios. We put it up on the tower on top of the fire hall and that gave them a little more range, EXCEPT the antenna didn't work. There was a technical problem with the antenna.

Fortunately we had technical people that could repair these problems, but – we needed parts and parts had to come from Vancouver – this is where the radios were rented from. My argument is very, very simple. Somebody didn't know what was available in the city of Penticton because a phone call could have got us operational radios and technical support within four hours. We had to wait a day for the radio, we ordered some parts, we got those parts in and we found out we needed more parts. We finally got the other parts in and it was four days before we got that radio station running.

That's no good. If you are going to bring a radio station in and set it up it has to operate efficiently when it is first set up.

No clearly defined role for the amateurs was ever established by the EOC. Requests for any information disappeared in the bureaucracy and most of the time we never got an answer.

Meals. We were separate from the EOC. The EOC ate very, very well. My amateur radio operators had to wait for their meals and then they sent up some kind of – I don't know if it was good health food or not, but we are all retired and all we asked for was box lunches – a salad, a sandwich and some desert and something to drink.

Finally on the last day, the day that we were told to shut down I got a phone call at one o'clock in the afternoon saying that our sandwich problem had been resolved, we would get box lunches. We were called at four o'clock that night and told our shift was over at 8:00 and that was the last they would need us. We got meals, but boy it was a day after we should have had them. We had to fight with them all the time. That's no good. If you've got people who are separate from the EOC then we should have meals delivered to where they are. And meals that the people can eat. The meal that they sent up to us, I don't know what it was, but it had tough bread and by gosh with my after-market teeth I couldn't chew it. And you know, most of us are in that state that operate up there.

Recommendations: Those were the problems. Now for every problem there has to be a recommendation or a suggested solution and this is what we are at now.

It's fairly obvious that an emergency plan for the City of Penticton must be implemented and funding for training of key personnel within that plan be made available. The past attitude that it will never happen here is not acceptable. The fires came within 15 miles north and 17 miles south of Penticton. It could just as easily been on the west side of the lake and come right into town. If we are not prepared, we are in trouble.

Amateur radio must be part of the emergency plan. We can take our radio equipment anywhere. I can go up to the top of Apex Mountain. As a matter – I shouldn't say that because I can't get up there now, there's snow. I can sit in my car with my radio outside of this building, talk to a repeater on Apex Mountain – we've got a range from Penticton up to Craigaloch(?) on the Trans Canada Highway from one radio station. I can do it from my car. That's the kind of range we have, that's the kind of range we didn't have from the fire hall. The fire hall couldn't catch any of these repeaters that would do the job for them.

Telephone companies do not build their plant systems to allow for emergencies but rather to maintain operations during normal peak periods. If the telephones go down, they're down. We provide communications when they are down. It doesn't matter where it is. And the systems will fail because of overload. The amateur radio bands can't be overloaded. There is a big wide portion there that we can use. I can send a message from here to the East Coast of Canada and have it there tomorrow morning. I can send a message to New Zealand or Australia and have it there tomorrow morning. That is the kind of things we can do on amateur radio.

A communications supervisor who has a communication background should be appointed to oversee all communications within the EOC. We had two different peoples as communications supervisors – neither one of whom had a radio background. I don't think they knew what the radios could do and certainly they listened to us, they listened to our suggestions and they carried them out as much as they could. They had no authority either – somebody up above them kept the strings tied so they couldn't talk to them – at least get any answers from them.

This communication supervisor would include land line and cellular phones, hand talkie radios for key personnel and amateur radio circuits – should have the responsibility for advanced planning for communications requirements within the EOC and the authority to order equipment as required during an emergency. Right now we have to go out and we have to use our own equipment. There is no equipment that is owned by this city that we can use in the amateur bands. And we need that and we need it so we can send message out. If we have to put an amateur out in Naramata, for instance, to relay messages to a fire fighter out there who has lost communications, we can do that.

Would include possible evacuation locations – we could set up stations in the hospitals and the ESS locations and we can communicate then with the EOC as to what the requirements are at any of these locations. We assume that the telephone is out and that is where the means of communication – and it can come to that. It has come to that a number of times in Ucluelet when the power lines and the telephone lines went down and we fired up the EOC and we used amateur radio to talk to Victoria and get things done.

The EOC should have a communications centre set up in advance of any emergency situation. This would include amateur radio within a secure area. Funding for radio station equipment may be available from the federal government through the joint emergency grants – JEP grants they are called – Joint Emergency Program Grants. I know that the city of Penticton did get a JEP grant to have an emergency plan made for Penticton. It is now being formulated and written up, so we are getting somewhere.

Hospital and ESS locations should be surveyed and space pre-assigned for radio communication in the event of telephone system failures. The people at these places should know where we are. It doesn't matter who we are, but they should know where we are. The antennae and associated feed lines should also be pre-installed. If you are inside of a concrete building that's got a bunch of rebar in the concrete, your radio does not work very good from inside, so you put an antenna outside, run a coaxial cable line inside – it's sitting there – if you need it you bring your radio in, you hook it onto the line and you are in business – just that quick.

If you are doing a survey and you are getting these things done, then I as the municipal amateur coordinator, feel I should be at least – and I have been assured by Matt Lockhart(?) by the way that I would be consulted if this comes about.

In summary, the amateur operators who were involved in the event were pleased with the communications they were able to establish with other EOCs within the valley and the Kamloops provincial regional emergency operation centre. We could talk to Kelowna, we could talk to Vernon, we could talk to Kamloops, we could talk to Osoyoos, we could talk to Keremeos, and anyplace in the valley we were able to do that. We were frustrated with the lack of direction from the Penticton EOC and I don't know who was running it, but they had no idea, no idea what amateur radio can do.

Amateur operators regularly take part in daily and weekly emergency radio nets throughout the valley and the province and find it exasperating not to have their expertise utilized. If and when a new emergency plan is formulated for the City of Penticton, it is our hope that the amateur radio operators will be consulted and thereafter be an important part of that plan. We have some expertise and certainly some technical knowledge that we can pass on. Many,

many, many of our amateur radio operators have a long history of being in the communication business.

Thank you, Sir, for listening.

GF Thank you very much, Doug. I appreciate all the various things that you have put forward. In fact this is the first time that we have heard from somebody on the amateur radio side and you make a lot of good points and a lot of good sense with respect to the resource that's out there that is set up to assist when normal telecommunications and other forms of communications are down – you are there and you have got an infrastructure there and people throughout all of the community, amateur radio enthusiasts and have the equipment. This is an interesting perspective. Pretty evidently, when there is no communication, especially in emergency locations like hospitals or fire departments or other kinds of emergency locations, I would suppose where they have the ambulances and other things, that we would need to have these kinds of communications on an urgent basis. I think the point you are making – have you had contact with other amateur radio people at other part of the province who are perhaps more integrated and utilized.

DP You bet! Would you like to hear a little bit about it?

GF Sure.

DP The boys from Summerland were called out and they were stationed in Peachland at the fire hall. They were given the run of the fire hall. They put up their antennae on the fire hall. They put their radios in at the fire hall in Peachland. They were taken on a helicopter tour of the fire so they knew just where everything was.

GF So they were right in the loop, in other words.

DP They were right in the loop. Now, since that operation, I have been talking with them. The Summerland fire department has given them a room that they can set up their radio equipment. The City of Summerland, or the Village, whatever it is, has given them money to put a radio station in. They have applied for and I don't know if they have received it yet, a \$10,000 JEP grant sponsored by the City of Summerland to put their stations in.

Peachland has done the same thing. They have a hundred foot tower there that is sitting beside their fire hall that the boys have got and they can put their antennae up on the hundred foot tower, or however tall it is. They are getting money to put it into the fire hall.

Kaleden has got their station in a fire hall.

Naramata has got their station in a fire hall, where the EOC is.

All of these stations are in the EOC. That's where they belong. We shouldn't be a block away, we shouldn't be half a block away, and we shouldn't be five blocks away. We should be within the EOC with a station that is ready to go at the drop of the hat. If the station is there, we come into their room, open the station up, turn it on and you are in business – just that quick. From my house to the #1 Fire Hall Station on the air within ten minutes. So in the other communities the amateurs got an awful lot of support from the powers that be – basically city council.

I gave this presentation to city council and they referred me to – what did they say now – they referred it to a de-briefing on the fire situation. Early November – that has yet to transpire. I thought I would take this opportunity to bring forward.

The other communities, I am sure they had some problems but they were not as apparent as they were to me in this community.

GF Sure and I would assume that the city of Penticton has an emergency plan that they keep up to date for any emergency – is that your understand?

DP I became the municipal amateur radio coordinator two years ago. Just as the fire chiefs changed. I saw the fire chief, spoke with him and he brought out an emergency plan and said, yeah this is one, but it's outdated. Now, two years later, we are getting one written. That's not performance as the saying goes. If you are going to have an emergency plan it has to be one that is in place and workable – not an outdated one.

GF This is an issue that has come up before. How often would you say that an emergency plan ought to be updated?

DP They are supposed to be, I believe, by provincial law updated every year.

GF Every year. At least reviewed.

DP At least reviewed within the emergency people in the city.

GF Do you know if amateur radio is included in the current emergency plan for Penticton?

DP I have never read the emergency plan for Penticton. I only saw a binder with papers in it. I don't know what is in it as far as emergency communications are concerned. I have been assured by Chief Lockhart that when the new plan is finished, which should be early January, I will be included in the planning. And I have to take his word for it, he is a gentleman.

GF Okay, thank you very much, Doug. I appreciate it.

DP Okay. Thank you.

GF Thank you and we would like a copy of your report, please. Thank you very much.

(Tape over)

GF Welcome.

No introduction

Is this Lloyd Miskiman?

Lloyd Miskiman

Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to be here today. Let me give you a brief bit of history. I am from the friendly city of Summerland who welcomes the ham radio operators to start out with and I am the Fire Chief of Summerland. I have been in Summerland for thirteen years and I have been in the fire service since 1973. Our fire department was involved in the Kelowna Firestorm and with the Naramata Fire Department at the South Okanagan Mountain Fire.

My role was to share the responsibilities of District Chief for the South Okanagan area under the Regional Fire Chief Gary McCall(?) for structural operations in this area. I shared that responsibility with Chief Matt Lockhart who left to go on a well-deserved holiday. That's when I stepped in.

Our two major fires were the Okanagan Mountain fire south in the Naramata and the Vaseux Lake fire near Okanagan Falls.

I'd like to start out by giving credit for a job well done by all involved. I think that is very important. It would be very easy for me to use this time to talk about all the things perceived to have gone wrong, but I hope from my experiences this summer and my most recent opportunity to participate in a three-day review conducted by the office of the Fire Commissioner that I can share with you some of my observations and hopefully answer any questions that you might have of me in my role as the District Chief.

Number one on my list is legislation needs to be enacted to require all regional districts to have an emergency plan in place, very similar to the requirements for all cities and all municipalities. Many regional districts throughout the province have no plans in place. When an emergency breaks out in these areas without emergency plans, fire departments and elected officials are left standing, not knowing which way to turn. An emergency plan of course is a valuable resource tool for any emergency. Operational guidelines, plans of action, contact are but a few details of a good working emergency plan. All local governments and I emphasize must be required by legislation to have a working emergency plan. It is not good enough to arrive in a regional district and open up the phone book and turn to the Yellow Pages and look for help, because without an emergency plan that's what many of us were forced to do. Try and find contacts and try and find people and although it may be somewhat of an exaggeration, without those emergency plans, without those key contacts, without those key plans in place, it is like opening up a phone book and looking to the Yellow Pages.

I believe that the office of the Fire Commissioner needs to play a major role at the operations level rather than at the current governance model that follows. If the fire commission is to become the provincial fire chief under a state of

emergency, the office itself needs to be restructured. Perhaps we should be more aligned with the provincial emergency program.

In the office of the fire commission staffing and funding needs to be increased to levels to allow the fire commissioner to train personnel and ensure those performing the tasks are qualified to do so. The office of the fire commissioner must put in place guidelines and standards, and sufficient funding must be in place to ensure continuance of any training programs initiated as a result of this review.

Municipalities must not be held responsible for all costs involved related to the operation of the province fire service. We must look at ways of sharing these costs, looking at all options so that although I do believe the provincial government has a responsibility for the majority of the costs, we must work together to try and fund this service.

One does not have to look very far at models that do work in our province. The Ministry of Forests who has a great working relationship has an excellent operational plan in place, albeit that they too are stretched to the maximum each summer. But they have crews, they upsize their crews in the summer, they have strike teams, they know how to move people around, they have the operational guidelines, they have the training, they have the expertise. It's right there if we only open the door and look inside it.

The provincial emergency program also has trained strike teams which travel around the province for many other types of emergencies. I am sure we could learn many things from these two agencies. Why don't we do this for structural fire fighters.

Under the direction of the fire commissioner programs and funding needs to be put into place to job-shadow these various agencies or organizations. We can learn much from each other. We do not have to reinvent the wheel. A lot of it is already there, we just need to put a plan into action and that's what we were lacking this summer – was a plan.

Let me go down another road for a minute from one of my colleagues – in 1921 the Province of British Columbia enacted the Fire Marshall's Act creating the office of the Fire Marshall – today known as the office of the Fire Commissioner and the Fire Services Act. The Act contained provisions to defray costs of implementing the Act through the Fire Insurance Premium Tax. In the early days the Fire Marshall and later the Fire Commissioner provided a host of services like field training, fire investigation services, investigation coordination and fire safety programs to name a few.

The office of the Fire Commissioner was once directly under the Fire Academy – now it is the responsibility of the Minister of Advanced Education and its programs are provided on a full cost recovery basis. The provision of fire

services in B.C. communities is coordinated and funded by local government at an estimated cost of \$327M annually. The provision of fire services, unlike police and medical services, and B.C. ambulance services is at the discretion of local government and is totally funded by the local taxpayer.

In the 1980s government severed the taxes' historical link to the fire service. This was done by combining it with other insurance premium taxes while using the mode of pressure of fire protection as justification to impose the tax on the whole premium, not just the fire insurance portion. Tax on automobile fire insurance which is mandatory and provided through ICBC also became payable at the rate of 4% on all auto insurance premiums issued after March 31st. All reference to tax on insurance premiums has now been deleted from the Fire Services Act and collection under the Insurance Premium Tax Act, Ministry of Finance has been increased.

In 1999 this tax represented \$152.3M in revenue to the government. The budget of the office of the Fire Commissioner in the year 1999/2000 was \$1.9M. The remaining \$150M was absorbed into the provinces' consolidated revenue fund, also known as the budget of which none has been directed to the municipalities who currently pay the full cost for fire protection for their respective communities. This situation continues today.

We need to redirect a portion of these funds that are collected back to the use for which they were really originally intended.

In summary, there were over 2,400 wild fires and 10,000 people from emergency response agencies across B.C. involved this summer and, in addition, significant support from other provinces and the federal government. Fire crews and equipment responded from communities all over B.C. Forestry personnel were augmented by additional staff in the Canadian Military to fight wild fires. Many volunteers and community agencies worked to provide help to evacuees.

Let us not lose perspective. This summer was not just about the Okanagan Mountain fire. It was about many fires throughout the province and thousands of people helping people. Let's put the many recommendations this review is receiving from across the province into action with leadership from the office of the Fire Commissioner and appropriate funding from the provincial government to ensure fire safe communities and a fire safe province.

Thank you.

GF Thank you very much, Lloyd. I appreciate your presentation and also a number of excellent points that you are making. I appreciate the positive commendation that you are giving to many people who participated in the forest fire fighting of this past summer. The emergency plan that you are asking for to be in place – clearly you are pointing out a gap that has been

pointed out by others which is that many municipal jurisdictions do have an up-to-date community emergency plan for their municipal area, but there are gaps. There are places that are not governed by incorporated municipalities and do not have a plan for vast areas. So that has got to be something, obviously, that needs to be looked at.

Is it understood – you referred to the Office of the Fire Commissioner being the Provincial Fire Chief in a time of emergency. Is that an understood role, or is that a role you are recommending?

LM That is an understood role and it is in the Act now.

GF Okay, and that is the role that was played this summer by the Office of the Fire Commissioner?

LM Yes.

GF But you were saying of course that on an ongoing basis that there needs to be a great deal of training. We have heard from volunteer fire fighters that there are good courses available. There is good training available but often times the money is an issue. Volunteer fire fighters who do this on their own and perhaps even spend some money in order to be volunteer fire fighters aren't willing to spend more money in order to get the training no matter how good it is. And you are recommending that this ought to come out of funds that are made available, and you are taking it the step of saying that those funds are available from the Premium Tax. That's an interesting thing, because I am familiar with the Premium Tax because it exists obviously in other provinces and it has been treated differently in various provinces. In some cases it has been a direct application where the requirements for it are put directly in – in other words the places where it is to be spent are put directly in the Act so that it covers various different aspects of what you have put forward in terms of training and developing the expertise and continuing to upgrade so that people throughout the province are in a position to act quickly under an up-to-date emergency plan and all those sorts of things.

A point was made at another presentation with respect to training of structural fire fighters and the point that was made that I found interesting was that there ought to be cross training because in the instance of this summer and wild fires being basically merged into structural fires as they hit the interface and there were buildings involved and that the fire fighters are trained for different things. The suggestion was that they ought to be cross trained, structural fire fighters ought to be trained in wild fire fighting, maybe not as completely and as thoroughly but so that they are conversant with a lot of the issues that the wild fire deal with, and vice versa – that the wild fire people ought to be trained in structural fire fighting, not necessarily because you'd throw them into that, but because they should be aware of the different issues that are at play on that side. Do you agree with that?

LM Well of course I agree with it but interestingly enough there is a Workers' Compensation Board requirement now that structural fire fighters, if they are involved in any type of interface fire or wild land fire must receive adequate training. And adequate training I believe is currently at an S-100 level, I believe that is the name of the course and it would be a basic requirement. So fire departments around the province that are dealing with any type of interface fire should be taking that training now and should be taking an ongoing annual update. Where some of the issues may have arisen is, with all due respect, perhaps fire crews coming from some of the lower mainland municipalities may not have that training because they may not feel it is necessary or required. But I would beg to differ and say that if you were fighting a fire in Stanley Park or some of the forested areas within the District of Surrey, to use those as examples and I like those two fire chiefs, but that they are now obligated to provide that type of training. Where it does work the other way is that forestry fire crews, although in certain areas and in certain regions there is an effort by the regional Forestry people to familiarize themselves with the local fire chiefs and their operations, I am not aware of any requirement in the Forestry fire fighters regulations that ensure that they do receive some structural training. Although, as I said, Forestry has taken the initiative in areas that I am familiar with to at least endeavour to try and give some of their members some cross training.

Of interest, you had mentioned the insurance tax and I know my friend from Surrey will be happy that I did, but interestingly enough that tax that is not recognized as a fire insurance premium tax, that on January 1st, 2004 there will be an increase to that tax of 0.4% and that specific justification from the government that that increase was required to fund forest fire fighting. So that is happening on January 1st now. So maybe we can look at, again, a small portion of that tax – some portion of that tax going to help the office of the Fire Commissioner. Funds are being collected. It just needs to be redirected.

GF You know, in fairness to government and I spent twenty-five years of my life in that environment, we have all sorts of people that we have to satisfy and one is an Auditor General. And, I am not sure whether the Auditor General here has taken the same position, but the Auditor General in Manitoba took the position that there ought to be no dedicated taxes that all monies should go into general revenues and that government should choose its priorities out of those general revenues and allocate them as such.

The difficulty with this is that money is coming from a very specific source. It's the insurance premiums that are calculated to be assigned to the risk that people are covering and if the risk for fire and structural damage to, in many cases dwellings, or objects like cars and all of that sort of thing that are susceptible to fires, there is a direct relationship and if you choose that as the source from which to get your funds, then you should be able to justify that

you then use that money to mitigate the risks so there is a reason why people are paying that additional premium on their coverage.

We went through a great deal of this and I am not saying that Manitoba has all the right answers, but we eventually did put the direct relationship together and meet periodically with the insurance industry to show them where the money is being placed. We have a Fire Academy too and it comes under the office of the Fire Commissioner and all of the training for volunteer departments and all of the work that is done in that fire college in Brandon has a direct relationship and comes out of the premium tax. There is a whole series of things that include all of this emergency preparation and training. As I say, we don't have all the answers and we have had to essentially tell the provincial auditor that we had a very strong reason for doing it this way. Because the provincial auditor still doesn't agree that you ought to take and put taxes directed to particular things – the provincial auditor believes that you choose your priorities based upon the global reach of everything that government is responsible for.

There are debates there and I am not sure exactly where it is going to lead, but I certainly must say I understand where you are coming from and I think that there are good and valid reasons that you put forward so I appreciate it very much.

LM Well now that you have that experience from Manitoba, I am sure you will be happy to make that recommendation to our Premier.

GF I think that is called leading the witness, but thank you.

LM Thank you.

The next person I have on the list is Chris Pond. Welcome.

Chris Pond:

I come from a different perspective, I am one of those lonely old workers and I volunteered for many different areas. When it broke out in Anarkis Mountain, I again looked at the Forest Service to provide me with a job and I knew there was a need for fire fighters out there. The situation came up – where do I get the training and how difficult was it going to be. After the Anarkis fire, Kelowna blew up and there was an opportunity to go to the Nicola base and get that training. The training was again the same style that I had when I was over in Princeton. Fifty-odd slides talking about fire behaviour and a little bit of time spent on hands-on.

Today I wanted to bring to you guys is that we need to look at the training to be more extensive to the physicalities of fire fighting, not just the fire behavioral side of it. The other thing is that I made my notes here – a data base of people. Next year if there was a fire emergency again like this summer at Kamloops, I would have to phone Kamloops – Kamloops would not phone me and say are you ready? Are you prepared – are you ready to go? I know that puts a huge burden on Kamloops fire centre but many of us have the time and the effort and are willing to go out – not only as a volunteer but also as a fire fighter. I take a great pride in that. Eventually I did go out to Revelstoke as a fire fighter because of a unit crew that took me on. Kamloops direction was basically I needed a unit crew. I was just one individual – so they couldn't really do very much with me. The only thing I have seen out there that was anything like this is the military. If you had a military example, once you go through basic training you automatically go and be on a reserve list.

I think with the fire storm that happened this summer, we definitely need – maybe an idea is to look toward reserve personnel and again that goes back to that data base. Do you have the background – briefly I was over in Princeton and I worked on the Lawless Creek fire over in Princeton. I had ten months of structural fire fighting because I was in Princeton and I moved here and I made the rounds and phoned around and still there was no – really – hey, you are a valuable person – give me your resume and we will see what we can do.

I know again resources are always stretched and I live in Summerland. People like Lloyd – it's nice to have people like that in your community, but when there is a Barriere fire and the next day Anarkis fire, and before those two are out he had Okanagan Mountain Park fire and before that one even got under control really, we had Vaseux Lake. And that was the other thing, we lost one town which was Barriere, and that area, say. We had Kelowna going pretty bad. Is there anything – and this is more like a question to you guys – is there anything that we need to look at in future to make sure that we have done everything possible – have we made sure the ham radio operators are ready – have we put together those networks that are needed? So that's a recommendation I think more than anything else.

Because I was involved in Princeton, one of the other notes I have – and I have watched CNN and all those kind of things – what I am coming to in a minute – I was involved in a snow storm over in Princeton, I was involved in a flood in Princeton. I was involved in a fire over in Princeton and out of those three experiences I know there is province emergency services out there – a wonderful organization. I know there are dedicated law enforcement agencies, hospitals and all that, but they know at the time that it is critical who to talk to in each of their communities and each of their bodies. Is there one person or one group of people that you can phone in and go – hey, we are having this emergency – and if tomorrow it gets down into another community, can they link up and just keep moving that mass around.

I think one of the scary things during the Kelowna fire that I thought about is what happened if it came around and hit Kelowna and took out the middle of Kelowna and Naramata at the same time. Were we ready for that? And unfortunately in the day and age of the terrorist attacks and stuff, I looked further to this whole thing and go – are we ready for a national disaster.

Hopefully the commission today and the subsequent following ideas will address those needs.

That's basically it.

GF Thank you very much, Chris.

CP I appreciate it.

GF I appreciate you being here. I just want to start and say that you referred to having lost a town – Barriere – and I just got my ears boxed over that one in respect to communications and it wasn't obviously directed at me ...

CP No.

GF There are very strong feelings in Barrier because I gather that early on because of a lack of communication it was suggested that the town of Barriere had been destroyed and I think it was ten or twelve dwellings that were ultimately destroyed and they are still very much alive and well and rebuilding right now. So they took great exception to that in many presentations. There were 21 presentations and many of them referred to the fact that that communication had gone out across the country and they were getting worried calls from friends and relatives and family all over Canada, saying what's happened, I hear the town is destroyed. So they want everybody to know that the town wasn't destroyed.

CP No, I didn't – I ...

- GF It's not a serious issue, I'm just telling you that those are the kinds of statements that they get very upset about.
- CP To rephrase that, maybe the core part of the town was substantially –
- GF Some serious losses, no question about it. Anyway, getting to the issue that you say of training – I was curious – did you get a call or did you put yourself forward and ultimately were engaged in a lot of the fires.
- CP Yes.
- GF Okay, so the question then is do we have a data base in which in the future they would have your name and location and if this were to happen again next summer, presumably your name should automatically come up as somebody who is trained, experienced, and has been involved both in structural and in wild fires and obviously would have a great deal to offer.
- CP Yes. I think that is important – that you are ready to go and they know that you are ready to go. I mean a lot of us go and sign up and ...
- GF And you make the point and again it has been made by others – a concept that the best parallel is military training – people have had certain basic training and they then are on reserve status. But the one thing I am familiar with because, again, while I was in office the military reserve people, the militia asked me if I would take a leadership role in having those who were on reserve status and worked for the government be given a certain allotment of time every few years to go and update their training. It is a process of updating they go through and in order to keep their reserve status they have to take certain courses – I don't know if it is every 24 months or every 36 months, something like that. And of course there are very few employers who will allow them to go without loss of pay. Obviously, they have to take their holiday time and if they've got families that is a real sore point.

We did take a leadership role and became, I guess the first and largest employer to say that reserve personnel would be given the time off with pay in order to take their training courses and keep updated. And we urged all other company employers within the province to do similarly and that did result in many, many companies joining in that effort. So they are doing that on an ongoing basis. I would think that this is the sort of thing too that in order for people to remain valuable resources out there in the community they would have to take periodic upgrades and certainly be in touch with the whole process – whether it is structural fire fighting or wild fire fighting, that they can't just sit out there for ten years and then expect that they are going to be in a position to help again. It's a matter of keeping updated and so on. So this would have to be part of the data base, I would think.

The overall preparedness for any disaster I think – it would be asking too much of anybody through all sorts of involvements – I know that I wonder and worry about what we would do in Canada if we had a 911, a terrorist incident. There are certainly many other ways in which terrorist attacks can take place, whether it's on a pipeline or a nuclear plant or a municipal water supply, or other things. I am not sure that there is anybody anywhere in the world that is totally prepared for any disaster. But within that context I think we should say that reasonable preparations and reasonable plans are absolutely imperative for anybody and nobody can be prepared for everything. That's sort of where you are coming from, isn't it?

CP Yes, I have often looked at this as a training ground and a weeding-out process of where those things are and there are some great recommendations obviously that have come out by that.

GF Well, thank you very much, Chris.

CP Thanks Gary, I appreciate.

Okay, do we have Gray Barkwill here? Good afternoon, welcome.

Gray Barkwill:

I have a bunch of maps here. I don't know how familiar you are with the area. Have you had a chance to look at the maps closely and know where everything is yet?

GF Well, I must admit that I have maps like that on the walls of my office in Vancouver and I am still not familiar with the areas I went through yesterday from Kelowna to Osoyoos and then back today. I am still learning where everything is on the ground. I flew over it as well, but you have to spend a fair bit of time to just know where everything that everybody refers to is. So, go right ahead.

GB Okay. This one – Kelowna there – the fire was there – this shows the Wild Horse mountain road ————— canyon through here ————

GF Now, I've got all the maps and all of you are going to have to imagine it. But you know where it is anyway.

GB Okay, before Okanagan Mountain was turned into a park there was a road through Wild Horse Canyon. I went through there as a kid before it was turned into a park. It was quite a neat road. That's just east of where the fire started. When that mountain was turned into a park, the road was closed and in the intervening years the road has grown over and become impassable. Now if that road had been left open, the forestry crews could have had better and quicker access to the fire, quite possibly preventing the major crisis which Kelowna faced.

Now, the Trans-Canada Trail Society has blocked the abandoned Kettle Valley Rail Line west of Summerland in an area known as Falder(?). This is putting the residents of Falder and the water supply of Summerland at real risk. Remembering that the prevailing winds are from the west, we would have precious little time to react to a wild fire or similar emergency. A wild fire unchecked would roar down Tropic(?) Canyon, devouring Falder in no time flat and pollute 90% of Summerland's water supply. The main reservoir for Summerland is only 4 kilometers downstream and downwind of Falder. A fire of any magnitude in this area would have catastrophic results for the town of Summerland.

Then I refer you to the map of the watershed of Summerland. Summerland is over this way – Falder is in this area here. This is the reservoir in Summerland. It is four kilometers down stream from Falder. Now this is where it has been blocked – there is an abandoned railway line along here. Now this is our entire watershed and it all funnels right down through here except for 10% that comes from Garnet(?) Valley Dam. Ninety percent comes from this area – right through this area. I'll leave that with you.

GF Thank you.

- GB It is therefore imperative for the safety of the residents of Falder and Summerland that the Trans-Canada Trail Society remove their road blockade so as to allow the road to be kept open, maintained and available for immediate access to a rugged and crucial area of Summerland's water shed. Let's let the fires of 2003 be a strong warning and very real lesson. Access is vital. And that is through the canyon is dry grassland and it's just like gasoline in the summer.
- GF Okay. That's an interesting point that hasn't been raised with us. The Trans-Canada Trail Society – that's what that is? (Yes) and now that's not the trail that included the trestles is it?
- GB It is the same train line – KVR
- GF Okay, but it is further away from where the fire was, is that right?
- GB It is across the lake.
- GF So this impacts – they blocked off access there because it is now a trail that can only be used for hiking or cycling?
- GB Exactly.
- GF And so the result of that is that you can't get in there with any vehicle and you are saying ...
- GB They do have a bollard(?) there with a key on it – who knows who has the key. If there is a fire they've got to get in there right now. If that catches in there it will come through Falder so fast that ... see it's too late for Wild Horse Canyon. If that road had been kept open they may have had a chance or may not have, nobody knows. That will never be known. Here we have a chance to do something about it.
- GF How are you going to resolve – this is one of those issues of stakeholder – conflicting stakeholder requirements. It is similar to people wanting to have parks kept in a pristine natural state – no equipment involved, no manmade processes to remove trees or reduce fuel loads – all those things are in conflict with other people's desire for recreation.
- GB There are thousands and thousands of acres of forest land with no road on it. Okay, let's not push new roads in, but as they are already there, a special – especially in areas such as this where it could be hazardous – let's keep them open.

- GF So you are saying obviously that the water supply for the town of Summerland as well as the interests of protecting Falder are put in jeopardy and therefore this is a policy that ought to change.
- GB Anywhere in B.C. I believe that road closures are a bad idea. If the road is already there, leave it. Let's not make new roads, but if it's already there, leave it.
- GF There was some reason why it was built in the first place.
- GB Yes, if they were logging or whatever – mining, whatever happens to be the reason – the abandoned rail line in this case. It just gets the crews in there faster that way.
- GF Well, clearly there were issues of access at various times in various places throughout the summer with the forest fires. Issues of access that resulted in fires not being able to be actioned quickly and so this is just one of those instances. And you are pointing out the jeopardy that both Falder and the water supply are in.
- GB This is a sticky one because I think any proud Canadian would support the Trans-Canada Trail as a trail – it's just blocking it off at this particular point doesn't make a lot of sense. And in any place in B.C. where roads are blocked off for access, through parks or whatever.
- GF Yes, I think many of us send money to preserve and enhance the Trans-Canada Trail and so there is a whole area of interest there that involves probably millions of Canadians. A very interesting point, Gray and I thank you very much. And thanks for the maps. They make it much more able to be visualized for us. Thank you.
- GB Thank you.

We are progressing ahead of our schedule and so there may be some people who have registered to come later who aren't here yet, so I will just check and see whether or not Catherine McDougall is here? Would you like to come forward, please? Hi, welcome.

Catherine McDougall:

Okay. My name is Catherine McDougall and I live in the Darke Lake Valley, north west of Summerland on a 260 acre ranch, surrounded by Darke Lake Valley, which is 95% intact, covered in a dense growth of Ponderosa Pine and Fir trees. This summer we felt like we were in a state of siege when the fires were happening because we are surrounded on three sides by Darke Lake Provincial Park and several times when, right when the fires were happening, there were people with kerosene torches burning in the campground and camp fires.

Twenty years ago, when we moved to the Darke Lake Valley there was a fire that happened in the summer that was started by an abandoned camp fire at the end of Darke Lake and so we have experienced fire first hand and we have always been concerned. Our family is horse loggers and we have been using selective methods in our own wood lot and in other places as well on other properties.

We were looking for a way over the twenty years of making sure that we were fire guarding our homes and our barns and stables and this sort of thing and I had the opportunity this summer of receiving a bursary from the Silva Forest Foundation out of the Slocan Valley. You have likely heard of it, maybe, I don't know if it has been brought up yet, but I am sure you will, traveling through Nelson you will hear about the Silva Forest Foundation. They are sort of the front-runners in Canada. They have been awarded, or Herb Hammond who is one of the founders and his wife Susan has been awarded the environmental prize in the sustainable management category and they are considered the front-runners in sustainable ecological ways of dealing with restoration of our forests.

When I went to the workshop, Herb gave some wonderful insight in some of his workshop material and he also had a co-facilitator named Dennis Martinez who is an indigenous expert in indigenous management systems and

(tape 2)

... and when Columbus came in 1492 he found a completely altered landscape. The indigenous people for ten thousand years have been using fire to keep their grazing land in good shape, to provide all their food materials and their goods – like for cordage and basketry and to keep the wild life healthy. So these people, these human beings for 10,000 years have been living within their eco system fulfilling a function there that includes humans. And Dennis talked about the fact that when we began setting aside parks and reserves they were to be used by the wild life and by all the other parts of the eco system, except the humans. And the humans have been excluded and even the Wildlife Act of 1964 in the United States says that these areas are to be set aside for the community of life that lives there and untrammled by the foot of man. They don't want humans in there and meanwhile these ecosystems have existed and evolved over actually millions of years to actually require fire in order to maintain the health of the ecosystems.

So Dennis talked a lot about this, he gave examples of how it was known that this was going on and that this had happened. History is very sketchy about it, at least European history. But anthropologists – there is so much information now that it cannot be denied that these forests that Columbus came to were actually altered by a hundred million people and that what the Europeans found was that when the European disease came up from the south, from the Spanish coming over into the south of Central America and south North America that they sent the disease that knocked out all the tribes in the eastern seaboard, knocked out 90% of their population. Actually settlers and people that came to this country settled in abandoned settlements and that most of these things have been going on and so virtually all of the North American forests have now, with the exclusion of human beings and the fire regimes that they had and the cultivation practices that they practiced – as well as the elimination of natural fire has left these eco systems in a terribly stressed condition and they are degraded to the point where fire that happens, happens in the form of a firestorm.

But, not to be totally negative, the whole workshop was wonderful because they have come up with a regime called EcoForestry, or Ecological Ecosystem Based Forestry. And with this system that Herb Hammond and a lot of other ecologists and professional foresters who are working in an eco system based philosophy, have come up with a combination of combining western scientific forest management with the aboriginal forest management systems on an equal footing – to place them on an equal footing. These were people who managed these forests for 10,000 years, and passed this information on down through generations and generations of their families to the point right now where even on the Penticton Reserve, where we don't hear about it, because I think it's been kept quiet simply because of – you know – because a lot of these practices that they had were prohibited. But we have families right on the Penticton Reserve who are traditional fire managers and I hope that they are going to come here and talk to you. They were at a meeting at the Land Conservancy of B.C. last week and spoke eloquently about the practices that their traditional people have used and their elders. I am actually going to give you a copy of some information that the elders on the Penticton Reserve put together about their fire regimes that continue today. There have been fires every year since we moved here 25 years ago that have been managed by the Native people.

Let me just go back to my notes here – so what we also learned was that there are ways of planning and implementing these restorations and they are all site-specific. It all has to do with dealing with specific areas, with specific terrain, with specific diversity of species and different ecological situations. The forestry is the practice of Silva culture, thinning, management of the under stories – it involves going into a forest, looking at the history of fire in the forest, the history of the forest itself. And on several occasions we were taken into the Glacier National Park and taken to places and had to decide

what had happened in this forest in the past. It involves examining the old growth trees that are left, seeing if there is fire damage on them. Seeing what species are there, what under story species are there in whatever small amount that they are now since when the over store of these trees begin to close in, the under stories become very sparse. By going through and deciding what the history of the forest was, we can see why it is in its present state now.

And that was the next thing that we had to do in our observations was decide what state is the forest in now, and what had to be done to restore it to its pre-fire suppression state. And Herb and Dennis came up with a whole regime of different ways of handling it. At one point Herb told us about – he was asked to make a submission about the Jasper Fire Smart Program that they have in Jasper. He gave a good talk on it and he came up with an eight-year program for restoring forests which involve – and I will just get it out – and I am also going to give you a copy of the ...

GF Thank you.

So in the first year you are going to be doing evaluating of the ecological character and the condition of the landscape and the stands. Also in the first year you are going to make restoration prescription. Then, in the second year you begin the restoration thinning, and you thin – there are different ways of doing it so that you are assuring that you are not going to be taking out too much. You are only going to be taking out enough so that you are accounting for just normal death of trees from all sorts of different things. Then you monitor and evaluate that over the next two or three years and you can continue your thinning and at some point you are going to start reintroducing fire.

What happens there is that with this forest plan you go in and you decide what trees you are going to keep. Sometimes there are 12 inches of duff(?) around those trees and so you have to remove the top couple of inches of duff, haul it away from the trees you want to keep. You want to keep all the old growth trees, you want to keep all the old snags, and you want to keep any great big logs that are lying on the ground. This is all to make the ecosystem diversity to the absolute utmost of its potential.

This is very abbreviated. There is a lot of prescription that goes into making up a plan to do this sort of thing, but the important thing about it is I realize it is a terribly big undertaking to begin to talk about going in and manually pulling the duff away from certain trees and everything. But I am saying that it is of such importance to begin this work somewhere, that where we should be beginning it is in the interface of our communities and it should be a community program of some sort. That's how I see it, I see it as a community motivated program. People in the community know the very best about their forest situation and ecologists, amateurs, professionals can all get together

and decide on a regime to fireproof our interfaces. One of the big things that would be included in this, who would be included in this would be the indigenous people.

In the case of Summerland where I live we would respectfully ask for the input of the indigenous people on an equal footing with the scientific community. This is their land. This is the land that they have managed and their forefathers managed for thousands of years and they know, they know – and when you talk to their families, the fire manager families, you can see that they are speaking from a place of great knowledge and wisdom. And, it is wisdom that ought to be incorporated into our planning for our communities and our forests and our own rural homes, out in the interface of the wilderness.

Being surrounded by Darke Lake provincial park, I truly – when I moved into the Darke Lake Valley I was a protectionist, I wanted to protect it. We, in the 20 years prevented logging coming down from the Bald Range, which is above our place and has been clear cut of lodge pole pine, large clear cuts – always thought that the park should be managed, self-regulated, no input from human activity. Now, I travel through the park and it is so infested with insect damage and standing dead snags and undergrowth that is just impervious to even be able to move through, and all affected by Spruce budworm and Pine Bark Beetle and dead and waiting to burn – all it would take in the summer that we have just had now is somebody just going out and just throwing a match and the whole thing would be up. It would just go – there would be no stopping it.

So now I am coming around. We have an infrastructure of roads already through the park, already through Darke Lake Valley actually there is an infrastructure of roads and so now we are beginning to think in a way of – perhaps we could use those road infrastructures and do this restorative forestry on either side of the road for so far and make these fire breaks that are really there right now, make them wide enough, but still maintaining the ecosystem of the park. There are ways of going in without clear cutting or doing huge slashes through the middle of the forests and so that is what we would like to begin to talk about – actually getting in and doing something with our parks because otherwise we are going to end up with the same situation as Okanagan Mountain Park – only it is going to affect a whole community of people who also live around, within the park almost, and a whole ranchland community and a suburb of Summerland, Falder.

That's what we would like. We would like to be able to sit down with all the people who have expressed interest, who have an interest in the area and come up with some really concrete plans to start right away to prevent our interfaces in our communities from being devastated by fire. I think that this is a plausible, reliable source of information for finding out how to do this.

I am going to give you a few selections of papers to take with you. On December first I am also giving a presentation at the OUC in Penticton about eco forestry, about indigenous management of the lands and I am going to be presenting a copy of that presentation to you. I will send it in the mail after the presentation and it will sort of give more of a clear outline of what I am talking about. I am sort of rambling here, I realize.

GF You are doing very well.

CM So that is all I really want to say. I know that there are ways of making this happen and making a change for the better and I think that if we look to our First Nations people for advice and knowledge that we can come up with some good plans for managing our forests on an eco system based philosophy. Thank you.

GF Thank you very much. We have had presentations from a variety of different stakeholders over the course of the last little while, Catherine, and it is my impression – in fact we have had First Nations discussions and presentations and they certainly would confirm what you have said, that they believe in managing the forest and using fire as a tool to ensure that they reduce fuel loads and the risk of wild fires and they say it is a traditional practice that goes back generations – all throughout their oral history. We have heard from Wildlife people who see it as absolutely essential to maintaining wildlife habitat in our forests as healthy, wildlife habitat must use the tools of fire and proper controlled burns to ensure that there is a proper protection and health in our forests. And it certainly is my impression that the Ministry of Forests preaches this. Is that your impression?

CM Preached what?

GF Using fire as a tool of proper forestry management.

CM I think actually at one point in our short history with them that that was actually a policy – was to try and have controlled burns and my impression was that – well even myself at that point I was sort of balking at it, but now I have come around to realize that's likely a – it can't be done – you can't just go out and light a match, but it has to go through this whole Silva cultural thing. But I think the impression was that there was such a stink about public opinion about the smoke and everything ...

GF That's what I want to get at. If all of these stakeholders agree, who do we have to convince then?

CM Well, I think that the fact that these catastrophic fires make far more smoke than a good controlled burn does at the right time of year is one thing, and that – human beings have an innate fear of fire and we come from a whole western philosophy that we entered pristine forests in North America and

somehow we have to try and save them all. I have myself thought like that for a long time. But now I can see, you know, I can see living in my own eco system out there that it is suffering. It's suffering all the under story that we live in a winter range and all the under story is in terrible shape. Over the 20 years that we have been working on it we can see great changes, as well as in the fire that happened just north of us – the first few years it was used by Unglet(?) it had grasses and shrubbery that was just wonderful and moose and deer moved in there right away. Even now, 20 years later after that, they have moved out again because it has all built up again and it's all getting to thick for them to move around in – and it needs more fire. And so ...

GF I think you are absolutely right. I am not underestimating the fact that fires, if not properly considered in terms of the weather conditions, the wind conditions, and all of those kinds of things can cause serious problems for people with respiratory illnesses. If we are doing it in the interface adjacent to where people live, there are people's lives that are at stake – from children with lung conditions and all of those things. So there has to be, obviously, a consideration to timing, to weather conditions, to moisture content and so on.

CM But right on the interfaces of communities you likely wouldn't be prescribing burning – actual burning anyway. You would likely mimic fire in a way to provide the best eco system you can without actually setting fires that might endanger homes or ...

GF Have you seen the initiatives that Logan Lake has taken?

CM No, I haven't.

GF They have essentially, on a volunteer basis, on a community action program basis, attempted to do all of these things to fireproof their community. Using very little fire and a lot of selective cleaning out of the underbrush and fuel buildup and all of those things.

CM Jasper is a beautiful example of that, too.

GF Yes, okay. So, there are ways.

CM But anyway, I would like to suggest also that this syllabus would be a real useful tool for you and your – it's by the Silva Forest Foundation. It's called Ecocultural Restoration and it's available from them. They are in Slocan Park, their office.

GF If I can just see it and take down the details, we will try and get our own copy.

CM Sure, all right.

GF Thank you very much, Catherine.

CM Thank you. I will get it together for you and bring it up.

I think we do have some other presentations but I am just going to propose a break for either coffee or biological reasons, whichever you may choose and I will come back in about ten minutes.

Welcome.

Morrie Thomas:

My name is Morrie Thomas. I didn't realize that you were hearing here until about 11:00 o'clock this morning and I have had some kind of qualms about even coming forward, but we were impacted quite severely by the Vaseux Lake fire. I wonder if I would be afforded to make a few verbal comments to you here this afternoon and present it in writing in a more coherent form and present it to you later on.

GF That would be just fine and we would appreciate anything you put in writing as well.

MT We operate a ranch in Okanagan Falls and we graze on the Crown Land range which encompasses, I believe the complete tree farm licence of Weyerhaeuser at the Okanagan Falls. Contrary to a lot of the media reports about the Vaseux Lake fire, there was a huge sigh of relief after about the second day that the fire was just burning in the hills where there was going to be very little impact on anybody. We had 900 head of cattle directly in the path of the fire. We have one other neighbour rancher that was quite severely impacted with his private property. Our private property was not affected, but the Crown grazing land was.

We lost our entire fall grazing for this year. We have lost next spring for next year, and possibly next fall for next year. It has been a little disturbing to hear continuous media reports about the financial aid that has been poured into the fire area, particularly in the Kelowna area. There was no end of opportunity to make donations to help the fund and I was very impressed by the money that did come in. But, after hearing that there was financial aid available, it's amazing how quiet the phones got and nobody seems to be answering them anymore when you are phoning to inquire about the aid packages.

We have had – the fire has played a role in all our life and I think it does for most ranchers, it's kind of a double-edged sword. It has benefits and it has its hazards. The benefits, of course, are that over the years fire has been responsible for a lot of the good grassland throughout the country and of course the hazards are the damage to your personal property and particularly to the grasslands that we suffered this year. We have been through many fires, but this is the first one that really devastated us. I think there has been a lot of talk about controlled burns and doing studies on these controlled burns. We had a very effective control burn program and if Dennis Gaudry(?) would just give us our matches back he took away twenty years ago, we will resume that program. But I'll talk directly to him about that.

We became involved with Dennis and we are very much involved with the Forest Service people and we have a very high regard for the way they conduct their business, particularly in the Penticton district. We have had a long history of good relationships with them. I think, as in the case with most ranchers, we

understand the workings of the Forest Service and how they do because we deal with them on a regular basis with our grazing permits.

We became involved back personally in 1955 on the ranch and in those days the forest ranger came around and the ranches in the area were kind of their first – their ears and eyes for fire fighting. I remember very clearly Emory Scott, who was a ranger at the time, came to our place and issued us I think with about six shovels and six pick axes and a couple of water cans. What the instructions were – if you see smoke, head for it and put it out and we'll talk to you later. That's kind of the basis we worked on.

In the early 80s when we started getting equipment and protection business, fire protection got more important, they continued that same program but a little more sophisticated. They would put us –at that time we had a small bulldozer – and they would put us on a stand-by in the critical fire season. And that is really the issue that I want to talk about here today because we have really been on a stand-by program since about 1955 with the Forest Service.

I don't want to be critical of the program, but I have some frustrations that I see as being involved in the program over the years. Until they started – in all our earlier involvement was with no remuneration at all except if we did – if the ranger did catch up to us on a fire a few days later, we did get on the payroll, we got paid for actually fighting the fire. But the watchdog part was a volunteer system that worked very well we thought.

If you went into the equipment part of it and the policy is as I understand it the same as it was then and I would be certainly open to be corrected from the Forest Service if what I am saying is not correct. But we register our equipment every year. They send out an ad in the newspaper – anybody with fire fighting equipment register. So, we send our registration in and we register our equipment and we are called, I understand on a rotation basis. They have a list and they go through the list and they call us. It's rather a hit and miss system. My impression of it is that it is a very important part of the fire fighting – it is the first response team. If they are going to put a fire out it is that first response team that is very important – not only what equipment they have, but the expertise of what they are doing there.

2002 was a year that – well good or bad, but there wasn't any fires. We never got any work in 2002. In the previous years we had got called out as we were needed and at first we got quite a bit of work, but I suspect that as the list got longer and the rotation times got longer that you know the work got less and less. Unfortunately, our costs of keeping this equipment have gone up and up and up. Government regulations state that now our low-beds got to be certified every six months. Don't matter if you use them for a week or if it's got a million miles on that or a hundred miles. They've got to be taken back and certified and updated, which is a cost. Your equipment has to be maintained if

you are going to go on a fire they expect you to have a piece of equipment that is going to work.

After we register our equipment we have no contact with the Forest Service. Now I don't know whether that is that they think we are so competent that we don't need to be contacted, or ... But, it is very upsetting to find that on a Thursday you get a phone call and they expect you to be on standby Friday morning at 10:00 o'clock. One, you have to have a certified truck, you've got to have a licenced truck, and you have to have equipment that is ready to go. And, you have to have a qualified operator. We have been very fortunate that we've got the same operator that started back just almost after Dennis took his matches away from us. He started and he has been – they don't have to tell him where to go. They phone him and say there is a fire – he is there, all ready to go and he doesn't have to stand around and be told by anybody what to do. So we think that is a key part of this early response team – to have some good equipment and some good operators.

Now I suspect that maybe what drives this program is somebody up above telling them to keep your costs down and don't spend any more money. And, I think we have contributed a lot because we are concerned about our own fire protection. Our ranch encompasses about 1800 acres of — land and we graze on about 150,000 acres of Crown Land. So we are really focused about fire because it has been our worst nightmare, like it was this year. If that fire gets going and we've got our entire livelihood sitting up there on the range with no protection and no insurance, it's uninsurable. We were very fortunate this year that the Forest Service were well aware that we had cattle in there. They provided us, our agrolgist was there, their fire fighting crews and their helicopters were watching the cattle and we were able to, with their help, keep those cattle out of the fire and we didn't really lose anything. They provided a good service to us.

We think that this fire – this standby equipment policy needs to be reviewed and particularly with those of us who are taking part in it. Technology has changed with the fire fighting. We felt that we were an ideal response team in this area because we have a small mobile tractor with an 8' blade on, which is very mobile in these rocky areas and I think they have probably got a good mix. They have got some bigger machines that, after the fire has got away or taken – our small machine is probably not giving the advantage it had on the initial response.

As the needs of fire fighting techniques have changed, we got thinking maybe we don't have the right machine for initial response. You know, if we are going to be part of this initial response program, and it is really important, maybe it should be given a higher priority and maybe Dennis and his boys should have some funding to put into an initial response for standby equipment rather than saying should I wait for another day and not phone them – or should I have them on standby now. I think that's really what I wanted to bring up to

you because hopefully your review is going to get to some of the people that make some of these decisions and it may make it easier for our local people to operate with.

And I guess one of my observations of this fire – and I was really impressed with the management of the fire fighting team – I think that they have gone a little bit overboard on their safety requirements. And I am sure there are things like the Workers' Compensation Board and things like that that maybe has their hands tied. You know I think it is a little disturbing to say you can't go up and put that fire out because you don't have the proper boots on or you don't have the proper hard hats on, or you don't have the proper tools. I think they have gone a little overboard on their danger tree policy. And having been through the fire after the danger tree crew had gone through, I hoped that afterwards the people that had to go in there still took a little bit of responsibility on their own and had a look around because maybe those guys might have missed one or two trees – which became very apparent as I rode through. I heard a few trees crashing down after the crew had gone through. I am not sure whether that would be very high on my priority or not.

Another thing that's certainly going to add – after this fire went through and we saw how they operated, it's going to add to our costs. Our cowboys used to ride from home, and they'd go to the thirty miles at the back end from home. As we progress, they now take a pickup and a horse trailer and truck their horses most of the way in. Now we end up with a bunch of fat, under-conditioned horses. After they started flying in these portapotties, and I don't know how many they had in there but there were several of them, now our cowboys are suggesting if that is what is required for these fire fighters, and these forestry guys, that maybe we should have a mobile one that we could hook behind the horse trailer so they could take it with us.

We are really concerned about the costs of that fire put on us. We are talking with – we have been asked to submit a list of our costs to the government, which we have done. We have had to modify that list because initially we were told that – we have about six miles of fence that went on this fire, along with about I think it was 3700 hectares that fire was – and it was probably 3000 that was our range. We were initially told that there would be no funding for fences that were burnt on the fire. They would repair the damage done with the fire guards, the damage that they had done. We now understand, so we put that total cost of burnt fences into our estimate but that has got to be revised because now we understand that there is funding for fences. We are very pleased to hear that most of the fire guards have been rehabbed and reseeded and now that there is funding, they are going to do some helicopter seeding on some of the burned areas. So we feel that probably in a year or two we are going to be much better off than we were before the fire in that one particular area. We have a real concern about weeds coming back – I think they have a good weed control program that they may be able to put into place.

So it is certainly not all doom and gloom, but I did want to come forward and express some of my thoughts and concerns about the program.

GF Thank you very much, Morrie. I guess it's pretty tough to be a rancher these days what with the Mad Cow Disease and the loss of all of your range and all that. I appreciate the various comments that you are making. Are you getting any faster financial aid for the Mad Cow disease than you are for the fire damage?

MT Well, if you listen to the press, we certainly are. I had three phone calls this morning about people who are really feeling sorry about us, saying oh, you are going to get \$128 a head for your cull cows. Which is – the BSE thing – you know affected different parts of the ranching operation. It really wasn't as bad as it looked like for the calf market because it did kind of straighten itself around and actually we hit a pretty good market. But about 30% of your farm income on a cattle ranch is your cull cows and cull bulls. You know, in the fall you've got to cull probably 10%. If you are going to keep your cow herd within a reasonable age you've got to cull 10% a years. So you know, if you've got 400 cows, you've got to take 40 or 50, 60 head of those cattle out of there. Of course that market went right down the tube because when we started ranching there were seven major packing plans in British Columbia – Burns, Swift's, Canada Packers – the whole works. Now we have none. Our last plant went broke last year in British Columbia. Almost 100% of our cull cows and bulls were exported across the border. That was shut off. So we have our friends in Alberta that have the packing plants and they are a very benevolent group of people, but they have a lot of their own people to look after too. They haven't got the capacity to kill all those cows.

Anyway, they announced the program that we are going to get \$128 a head for the cows and our neighbours are just feeling really great – we should almost go and have a party – but they didn't read the fine print in it – it says you have to have a slaughter certificate for those cows. And we don't have a slaughter house in British Columbia. So I think the provincial government can be very – I mean, I don't think they are going to worry about making very many payouts because under the existing program I don't think anybody in British Columbia will qualify. They would only have to make a very slight, and we are hoping they will see the light and make a very slight change to that. What they are afraid of is that somebody is going to wreck the system – you know and collect on those cows a half a dozen times. They have already put a clause in there that you can only collect on 8% of your basic cow herd – which goes back to what our normal culling rate is. If you've got 100 cows, you can collect on 8, and you have to be a rancher to collect. So the dealers can't fiddle with this one, because they are not a bona fide rancher. We sell our cows through our local auction market here. They go to a dealer and then he trades them to another dealer and then they go to a dealer in Alberta and then they go to the plant out there. But if they would just modify, allow us to take our bona fide

auction slips as proof, then the system – we hope it will work. But at the present it won't.

GF I would just like to ask a little bit about your involvement in the overall management of the forest and the lands around your ranch. In the past you were involved with controlled burns. It was contracted out to you was it?

MT No, no.

GF Okay, I didn't get your reference when you said give you back your matches.

MT Well, I think it is referred to by one of your speakers that fire was a tool and my dad – like when we were kids, I mean any time after the fire season was over – late in the fall, I mean you never went up on the hill without a box or two of matches with you. In some of these thick areas where the excess of beetle kill were down, you set them on fire. and you lit the south slopes and you let them go because there was snow at the top and they weren't going to go anywhere. You could light the whole country on fire and it didn't go anywhere. At the advent of the helicopter and new educated university fire fighters, protection people, my brother got caught lighting a fire – and a helicopter flew over and when he got back to the truck, there was the warrant officer with a ticket for lighting fires. You know, things did change because the timber became important and so we agreed that we wouldn't light any more fires so that's why we were making reference of Dennis not giving our matches back.

That was kind of standard policy and I think was pretty typical with all the ranchers throughout British Columbia. All you have to do now is start driving through the Cariboo and look at some of those good big open grasslands and you know there are little trees coming up all over and –

GF Yes, I saw some of it west of Kamloops, I guess it was north in that area.

MT A controlled burn, I mean we – now – our society has changed here. The Okanagan – they say we are going to get another 500,000 of these people that are old retired people – I shouldn't talk about old people – I am almost getting there myself, but you know – they don't want to see smoke. They come here to see the clean air and they want it 24 hours a day, 12 months of the year. I don't know how we are going to do some controlled burning, but you know the cost of doing is now to keep them under control so the people don't complain. I don't know – and then if it gets away it's the Forestry's fault. It's a very delicate situation ...

GF It's a very delicate situation and in fact I think it is going to require another stakeholder group to be involved in the solution, and that is the insurance industry because, as I see it they want to take a zero risk approach. And that leaves somebody else holding the bag.

MT Well, if I talked here long enough, I'd fill a whole red-neck calendar, but you know we've got a group of our society that's – they're politicians pushing for more and more parks and more protected areas – more preserved areas – and nobody to look after them. We just got another brainwave to create the whole southern part of the province into a park – down here – Oliver to Osoyoos – and they can't look after what they've got now. And we see these parks. I guess if you are going to manage these parks and keep the fuel down, I mean somebody is going to have to get in there and do it. I haven't seen a plan that they've got to really solve this problem, until we get a disaster like this.

It's done a wonderful control – like a lot of area that burned was area that was planned to be controlled burned – on the Vaseux fire – and it's burned now and they are doing some wonderful restoration in there now on that. So I say, in a few years, the crises and the problems of the fire are probably going to be over with. But it's a little tough to deal with them when it affects your pocket ...

GF Yes ... (tape over) ... utilizing your equipment on an ongoing basis. You said in 2000 you got virtually no work – sorry 2002 you said you got virtually no work – 2003 you were probably busy the whole of the fire season I assume?

MT Well, no, we didn't I think we got on standby about a week or ten days and then we were taken off and that was right in the critical time, that's when they were hot. We kept that – because we had our low-bed available – we do a little logging contract too, but they were shut down because of the heat. So we had the low-bed there, we left that cat and the low-bed on there for our own protection because we were just scared to death that this was going to happen. The week that the fire started, we were not on standby. I saw the smoke, I saw the fire start. Our operator was there and I said run in and phone the Forest Service and see if they want you, there's a fire. So we went in and phoned and they said no, we have already dispatched our standby crew. Now, I don't know whether it would have helped, I doubt in this case whether we could have done very much because of the wind that was blowing, but we were kind of paranoid now about going anywhere because, you know – the way we understand the policy is if you are not designated to go, then you are not on the payroll. You maybe could get in trouble for going there. So I think that policy maybe should be reviewed in some areas and people that are on standby, qualified people, maybe should be given a little more leeway to go ahead and do something instead of having to wait. And, in this case they very well may have had the whole situation covered adequately. But I would like to see a little more – somebody come around from the protection before the fire season and – say let's have a look at your equipment and maybe you'd better upgrade it a little bit, or maybe it's getting too old or, you know. Just maybe be recognized a little bit that what we are doing is kind of important. The way we are now, it's kind of like wetting yourself in a dark suit, it gives you a nice warm feeling, but nobody notices.

- GF You said earlier that you thought they went overboard on safety requirements. It certainly is my impression that there is a zero risk policy with respect to putting the fire fighters in harm's way and the result of that is hard to argue with because, aside from the tragic accidents of the pilots that were killed in the process, none of the other fire fighters were killed in this process. And, when you consider how much was going on and how many different locations and how many different very, very dangerous circumstances, it's hard to argue that they shouldn't be taking risks with the fire fighters.
- MT I agree. But I guess it is our long history – what we used to do before. And you know I don't think anybody really had any concern about our health or actions and I am sure they have Workers' Compensation and people like this and while I am critical of it, I guess I would hate to see them relax and have somebody get hurt. But it looks like maybe they have gone a little bit overboard.
- GF Times were different then, Morrie, I think – I was telling someone a little while ago that the first pay cheque I ever got from a government in Canada came from the government of British Columbia. I was working in a motel in Radium Hot Springs and they had a fire in the local landfill and they came running through and any able-bodied people were just thrown on the back of a pick-up truck. I think I had a pair of running shoes on and a t-shirt and shorts and ended up fighting the fire for about six hours. I think they paid me about 75 cents an hour, but anyway those were the days when we didn't exactly have the kind of crews that we have today, well trained. I think there are a lot of things that are being done differently and better. I think it is fair to say that.
- MT Well, of course it is, and you know I was involved in the very first air drop, the first plane that dropped on a fire and we were out there along with the ranger with no hard hats nor nothing, and somebody hollered look out, here comes the plane! We jumped behind a tree and there were big chunks of mud – 50# of it coming out of that thing and bouncing off. But we all just jumped behind a tree and let it go.
- GF I'm glad you are here to tell about it, Morrie. Well thank you very much. I really appreciate your presentation and you do provide us with a perspective that we haven't heard before.
- MT Where would I send my presentation to?
- GF Do you want an e-mail, or do you want to just have a fax?
- MT A fax would be fine.

Now we have a presentation from Tom Chapman. Is Tom here? (Good afternoon)
Good afternoon. Welcome.

Tom Chapman:

Thank you. So I am speaking to this issue I guess primarily as a resident of the Glen Fir area which is on the south side of the Okanagan Mountain fire. and also as the Area E Director for the regional district but primarily as a resident. The regional district I think has had or will have a spokesperson here.

I am reasonably familiar with fires. I guess I did a stint fighting fires and working as a faller in the 80s and some prescribed fires, some wild fires and in reflecting on this situation as a whole, I would like to say that I purchased property in the interface in 1990, right up on Okanagan Mountain, adjacent to the park. I set to clearing an area around my house, a fairly significant area, primarily because I was aware that that park was going to explode one of these days. I had ridden into it actually 35 years ago on a horse with my family and numerous other people. At that time you couldn't get off the trails the brush was so thick. My neighbour actually had hiked from the top of Okanagan Mountain down to one of the little lakes below 45 years ago and had said that at that time the dead falls were up to his chest. So it was a disaster on the ebb and – just so I get my thoughts in order, I am going to refer to the little sheet I have here.

I have to say that I am a very, very strong advocate of prescribed burning and having done numerous wild life studies in the south Okanagan over the past fifteen years, I am cognizant of the benefits to wild life, particularly the species that exist in this valley. It is a fire-maintained ecosystem, or at least it was a fire-maintained ecosystem. Through the course of history, our brief history here I suppose, particularly in the last fifty years we have become very effective at suppressing fires. We have developed a mentality that you have probably heard over and over again – the Smokey the Bear mentality that has sort of left us in the position where we have to put them out as soon as we see some smoke. That is probably why we are in the situation we are in now, more than any other reason.

A few years back in going to public meetings and shocking the hell out of many people when telling them that we had to do some burning in order to benefit wild life, I came to the conclusion that in fact wild life was really not the issue. Public safety was the issue and that we had to start to sell the idea of prescribed or controlled burns to the public in a big way. We have to go about it as we would go about selling a new model of car, or selling a public railway to the private sector. We have to go about it in a very, very aggressive manner. We have to hire a private marketing agency if that is necessary, but we have to get the message across. We have had some great advertising this year, of course, about the negatives of leaving the forests in the state they have previously been and still are in many areas. But, wild life will benefit secondarily and I came to this realization years ago.

One of the areas – and I will give you an example of this just briefly – while venturing down this wild life path we did a study on big horn sheep in the

south Okanagan and the east Vaseux area where the largest population of big horn sheep were, the home range of that sub-group was 22 square kilometers. In the Ellis Creek Canyon, where we had a small to medium-sized sub-group – incidentally the sub-groups don't interact that much – there had been a fire in 1994 – the Garnet fire, quite a famous fire in the history of things – and the home range of that sheep population was 1.66 square kilometers. So everything that that population, that sub-population required occurred within that 1.66 square km area, whereas the Vaseux population had to have this huge, huge range in order to satisfy its requirements from a population as a whole.

So, now back to the fire situation, I think it is crucial, we have to dispel and to some extent discredit the Smokey the Bear myth. We have to develop some sexy new entity that will help us to promote and to carry out prescribed burning. Okanagan Mountain five or so years ago – Jim Ottoshaw(?) from the Forest Service came to a group of residents from my area and asked us what we thought of prescribed burning and in fact had said that the Forestry would really like to get one going in the park to promote – to get a fire going in there to start to reduce these massive fuel loads. All of the residents in our area were fairly well informed and agreed to it. We had a meeting at the parks office in Summerland. In the end, CORD, the Central Okanagan Regional District absolutely adamantly refused to allow the smoke. They did not want the smoke. I think that what we have to promote to the public at large is smoke and fire or vice versa at a time of year when venting is good and when burning conditions are relatively safe, in fact very safe – often times as the previous speaker had mentioned, burning into the snow. There are certainly many areas in the south Okanagan where you can literally light a fire at the end of February and burn into snow at 45 or 5,000 feet of elevation. The south slope of Vaseux Lake is a perfect example. I have captured sheep in there in January where there was four feet of snow on the north slope of that Blue Grouse Mountain and on the south side absolutely bare and you could probably have lit a fire at that time of year. So we have to consider conditions, we have to consider areas on a micro-scale in order to be able to carry out safely prescribed burning.

Now, from a personal perspective I would just like to say that having seen what occurred with the Garnet fire, to some extent a very poorly informed public – basically everything that could have gone wrong did go wrong. And, as you previously mentioned Mr. Filmon, this fire season was tragic, it was quite horrible overall, but there was no loss of life locally and as you mentioned there were some pilots that very unfortunately lost their lives. But, locally, given the state of the fires, the severity of the fires, and having been right in the midst of that Okanagan Mountain fire, we were extremely lucky that no one lost their life, or that no one was seriously injured.

What I saw was a tremendous amount of support, as an individual for my personal property, my wife and my children were able to get out the day

before the fire got very close to us. We got our livestock out and dogs and so on and ensured that our neighbours were all clear and we – I went back. I was actually asked by one of the industry officials if I could help them cut a fire guard through from our property along with one of my neighbours down to Paradise Ranch in the Indian Rock area. So that's what we did on the morning of the firestorm breaking in our neighbourhood.

In the afternoon the fire, after having cut the guard in and assembling at the bottom of Shoat Lake Road, which was sort of a marshalling area, we waited for the helicopter and waited and waited and waited – a very painful experience – I think there was some delays due to some equipment failures. That is something that needs to be brushed up on. I think maybe the Forest Service again did an excellent job but that kind of equipment failure is – if that is in fact what happened – is just something that has got to try to be avoided in the future in the fog of fire – I am not going to use the George Bush fog of war expression – I will call it the fog of fire.

We arrived back at our house at about four o'clock, myself and about twenty fire fighters, six of whom I think were contract forestry fire fighters. Ed Brower and his crew, called 'the sons of thunder' – a tremendous group of people, hardworking, diligent, brave; a couple of skidder operators, cat operators, again brave and very good – hardworking. We watched the fire come down the hill at us against the wind, against a moderate wind. The fuel load was so great that fire was traveling downhill against a moderate wind. The only thing that slowed it was a number of cliffs that are above our property, but I have to say over and over again that the extraordinary thing was the amount of support that was available for myself as a resident. And that is partially because of the fact that my property was used as a sort of a prong of attack, an area of attack to access that prescribed burn fire guard.

Volunteer fire fighters, again tremendous – everywhere along our small, sort of interface area in which there are eight or so residences, everyone felt that support. There were actually only three of us that remained with our properties. I am glad we did because we were able to help out, but I think the only real complaint that I would have is that I think we need local knowledge, we need fire wardens that are localized and in fact we did have that and they were excellent. The contract fire fighters and their wardens were extraordinary for the most part. There may have been one or two crews that maybe weren't up to the level of some of the others, but for the most part they were extraordinary. Well trained, confident, hardworking and on and on and on, I can't say enough good about them.

Volunteer fire fighters were a little lost, in the sense that they weren't used to this type of fire fighting but from a structural perspective again they were confident, they were supportive, they were prompt in getting houses gelled and everybody helped one another out. I think one complaint I might have, there was a non-local Forestry staff member there who was keen to light

proscribed burns, I think just for the sake of lighting them, and didn't know the country, didn't know the weather conditions and was going to light a proscribed burn in fact one evening when the wind was coming right towards the house. It would have been, probably it would have been a disaster and I think he was maybe a little arrogant. I think that maybe he shouldn't have been in a position of authority over the local contract fire fighters and wardens. But for the most part the effort was tremendous.

Now next in line, the gelling of houses. I am very much in favour of that. It was a costly experience for me, however. It did a significant amount of damage to my house, it's a log house. I think there are ways to mitigate that and I don't know who I would speak to about that, but probably the insurance professionals. The gel is, I think, effective in fact I owned some of my own prior to this. I also installed a 3,000 gallon fire hydrant with a gravity feed line to my house, knowing full well that if the fire went out we would have no water. So I actually had my own fire hydrant. I had installed that about six or seven years ago. Again, these are issues that people who live in the interface need to address. They absolutely need to address these issues. Whether they do it collectively or as individuals, it needs to be done.

Regional fire fighting is essential from here on in. We have got to support a regional fire fighting type of mechanism. It worked extraordinarily well here and there is no reason why it won't work well in the future. I heard John Slater's comments and I very much concur with what he said with regard to the lag time between phoning the Fire Commissioner and having firemen sitting on site not being able to approach the fires.

I think that as well knowing that bureaucracy is a very unwieldy tool, that we need to give contract fire wardens, particularly those who are proven in a localized way, a little more authority. Perhaps even a little more – yeah, I guess authority is the only way I can describe it – maybe they should be given the opportunity to go in and nail these fires on their own to some extent. I am not saying that to discredit Forestry – again, they did an excellent job, but I do think that there are some extremely qualified people out there that could work in a coordinated way with the Forest Service.

Lastly, I do have an issue about proscribed burning, or rather my personal property which was damaged extensively, it could have been damaged and destroyed completely I suppose – but the back burn fire guard cut across about the middle of our property – we lost about 15 to 20 acres of timber, probably ten or 12 loads. The landscape is changed significantly and when a site rehabilitation process began I was given Schedule A Site Rehabilitation Plan – the form number I don't have on this form because it is a copy OFS129 – I am assuming that means Forest Service number 129. Under Section C it says burns for fire suppression – remove merchantable timber, bucking, skidding and decking, dispose of slash, re-vegetate and repair/replace damaged infrastructure. Essentially mine and several of my neighbours'

properties were damaged, one neighbour lost about 250 acres and certainly about 75 acres of logs. The value of those logs is diminished significantly. He had no choice in that matter. I had a little bit of choice in that I could have, when the guard came through to the edge of my property, rather than taking it across the middle I could have cut to the edge of the Crown land which was about 50 meters or 75 meters away. But I think that I and my neighbours did this for greater good of the community at large and to get this fire out, to help in any way that we possibly could. Our machine guards that went across our property and access roads and trails were in fact rehabilitated, re-vegetated by an excellent contractor, a fellow named Pat Harris -- he did a great job, and an excellent equipment operator who initially I didn't have confidence in, but I certainly did at the end of the job, a fellow named Rob Heinrich. These were all done beautifully as well as could have been done. But I do have concerns about the fact that we lost the property value and we lost timber value and for the greater good of society we are the ones that are bearing the cost of that. When I presented this form, this Schedule A to the local Forest Service officer I was told that this was no longer in effect. However I was told by the contractor that this was being explored by the Crown to re-implement this type of compensation for damage that occurred to private lands and I would like to see that done. I think it is only fair and I would question why I did receive this form. I am just a little curious about that. In fact the form that I did end up filling out in the heat of the moment was somewhat different from this and did not have provision for loss of property value on it.

That is my only real concern and complaint. Otherwise, again, it was a tremendous effort and I was there for the entire thing.

GF Thank you very much Tom. One of the things -- if you have notes that you can share with us we would like those and that form just so we can try and track it down and find out about it. (Certainly). You have certainly given us many different perspectives. I am interested in you suggesting that a marketing agency be hired to sort of get the word out on prescribed burns. It is interesting that to this point we have had nothing but support for that, including earlier today and in many other locations, and there seems to be a broad coalition of people who understand and are supportive of it. In fact I guess it was in Kamloops that the Wildlife Federation did an excellent presentation historically. They said we have had it from Aboriginal First Nations groups and obviously individuals and environmentalists. There is no question where the MOF stands on the issue and so on.

It appears as though at this point there is a natural process of education taking place as more and more people understand the consequences on both side of the issue and so I think we are in a -- shall we say a perfect storm time because of the consequences, the memories that people have are very fresh and very stark as to what happened this past summer. And so I am not sure we need a marketing agency, but we certainly need to ensure that this information is carried through to the public to ensure that in the -- and the

times in which decisions have to be made in the near future – that people are reminded as to why these policies are there, were there in the past and then, as you say, were by a whole a variety of different organizations were turned down. The Central Okanagan Regional District that you referred to – I am not sure if they are going to be presenting to our commission, but I will certainly attempt to find out whether or not they have changed their position on that and being opposed to prescribed burns.

The local knowledge aspect has certainly been repeated everywhere. But as good as the efforts were, as dedicated as the crews were, it is felt that there wasn't enough local knowledge often in the crews and that was a loss of opportunity. The gelling of houses – I would like to know a little bit more about that process – not one that I have heard of, although in some brief discussions that I have had, I am trying to engage the industry – the insurance industry people and I think they are going to be making a presentation tomorrow in Kelowna, but there has been a concern expressed about sprinklering and gelling and the fact that this results almost in as large a cost to the insurance people as burning of the house. So, maybe you can tell me a little bit about that.

TC Well, I think thus far the – I think the insurance industry is going to have to pay around a maximum of \$50,000 to clean up our house, but, more than likely around \$25,000. It does peel the finish off of a log house. It does present a very challenging clean-up job. Very difficult to clean up, especially if there is any moisture in the air, it re-hydrates and it is just like something that was stuck to your shoe that you can't get rid of in the barnyard. But the cost that could have been dealt would have been a lot more. The insurance industry could have been paying out a half a million dollars for our property, as opposed to 10% or less of that. So I think that – I think it is still very beneficial and as I had mentioned earlier, there are ways to mitigate. I think – it seems to me that in the US and Dennis may be familiar with this, or maybe Chris Blan(?) if he is still there – they have been using heat blankets as well as gel. My thought would be that where there are overhangs, covered decks, things like that, if a person could get a heat blanket around those, close those in and still gel the rest of the house – maybe heat blankets over the soffit as well – and whether it means just getting in there and stapling it on and getting the hell out of there – but that is usually where the damage occurs as well. The gel tends to collect in those areas and it is very difficult to get it out of those areas. So overhangs, covered decks, things like that. If they can be blanketed in with a heat resistant blanket and then the gel put on subsequently, or even at the same time.

GF Are there any long term consequences, like mould or anything like that?

TC We don't know yet. We have some concerns. I think the method of getting it off houses has to be addressed, certainly with vinyl siding it can be sprayed off relatively easily. But with our house I didn't want them spraying it off with a

pressure washer because it was getting on late September and that moisture would just hold in the logs all winter long and then it would freeze up. And also, we have what is called a full scribe log house – there is insulation that sits in a v-notch between each log. If that got soaked, which in fact I think it may have during the process, it would ruin the insulation integrity of the house. It does seem to keep reappearing whenever there is moisture, so it's a real challenge. Apparently it's got about an 18 month life.

GF Okay, thank you. Thanks very much, Tom

TC Thank you. Oh, just one more thing now that the Naramata Fire Chief is here I have to take my hat off to he and his crew for a tremendous job of coordination and aiding all the other crews including Forestry in getting food to people, in fact in helping with some of the forest fire fighting and many of the volunteer fire departments that came from all over British Columbia and some from Alberta. Just a tremendous job.

GF Thank you very much.

TC Thanks.

Okay, we have a couple more presentations and I will just ask if Neil Campbell is here. – if not, then do we have Mitch Black, of the Naramata Fire Department? Hi, welcome.

Mitch Black:

My name is Mitch Black I am the Assistant Fire Chief in the Naramata Fire Department. This is John Crone, he is the Assistant Chief also at the Naramata Fire Department. We've got fire fighting Chris Blann and our Fire Chief Graham Baker back there too.

Before I start, do you know where Naramata is? (Yes) Okay that helps quite a bit.

GF Flew over it.

MB My experience throughout the Okanagan Mountain fire is mainly positive. In this letter you will hear a mainly positive point of view that you may or may not use in your report.

Early Monday morning, August 18th, we realized this had the makings of a huge situation. Myself and Chief Graham Baker went out of our fire district and made a plan for the Indian Rock/Glen Fir area. We counted structures, we noted water sources, checked the egress and tested radio communications. From there we transferred onto a large operations board and we made handouts for everybody in our department. We briefed everyone should by some change the fire come our way.

Well, the wind shifted and the fire came our way. The pager went off and almost everyone from our 25-member fire department showed up. No one had thought of monetary gain or personal gratitude. Everyone was worried about their community as well as our surrounding neighbours. We had sent our engines to stage at the bottom of Shoat Lake Road, all of our members armed with months of training in Forestry and interface practices. All of our trucks were prepared for this exact moment. We were poised, prepared and anxious to start work.

That day we talked to the residents of Glen Fir, we phoned every house. We set up sprinklers and kept a watch crew there over and around the clock. The next day trucks started rolling in from everywhere. We first sent up crews with a gel truck from Nelson. They are called Mad Burn. It took four hours to gel the first house because of mechanical problems. You will hear more about this as the letter goes on, but we will call this problem number one. We had a mechanic who spent, a mechanic in our fire department, who spent hours doing mechanical work for this and several other trucks that could barely make it to our fire hall to sign up so they could get paid.

At approximately 1300 hours we sent to a stage area to await the next plan of attack, which was the back burn. At approximately 1530 we were sent in and we used a command structure that worked very well. Chief Baker was called the south supervisor and he was stationed at the staging area. He presided over myself, who was called the task team leader, and I was on the fire scene.

With all of the trucks arriving, I sent one of our members with one of our radios, and radios and communication we will call problem number two, with each truck and had them staged at five residences along the line.

We set up a pumping station at the creek which is on a pre-fire plan and filled up tankers and skidders. I was amazed at the cooperation that I received from the tanker contractors, the Forestry personnel and the members of the arriving department. I was in contact with Forestry through the silver channel and all units through the Naramata fire channel, as long as our hand-held radios were holding out. I ran an accountability with all the trucks and I checked in every few minutes.

As the trucks started rolling in, we set up a routine. We had a twenty-four hour dispatch operator. We had two office managers dealing with several things like signing fire fighters in, preparing these people with proper gear, which we will call problem number 3, garbage, receiving, fuel, cleaning and too many other things that I just can't mention.

We had briefings prior to every shift – we discussed safety prior to every shift. We had medical check-ups prior to every shift and after every shift. We gave everyone a safety orientation prior to going up the mountain. We opened up our bay and we used it as a rolling car wash after every shift. We asked for pre-trips to be done every day and we had the trucks turn them in. We had a safety officer and we made him do reports and fax them in. We provided everyone on the line with refreshments constantly and we set up an accountability system on our operation board. We transferred it onto paper. We kept in dispatch, we gave one to south supervisor, one to task team leader, one to the safety officer and we faxed one to operation OC. We also broadcast the weather reports as they came in.

Our goal was to turn this fire hall into a first class operation. We were aware the 20 year fire fighters, officers and chiefs were coming from all over the province and they did not give us their respect this operation wouldn't work. This wasn't a problem, but we can call it problem number 4, because this worked very well.

Should this happen in our area again, there is not a lot from the Naramata fire department side that we would change. We would practice and prepare and expect nothing less than 100% effort from everyone in our department. But with this said, I would expect the Fire Commissioners office, or whoever that would be running the operation to look at improving a few details.

Number one would be vehicles. All types of apparatus were showing up. Departments were setting up trucks that hadn't been used in years with little or no equipment on them. Some set up large pumpers with all sorts of city gear that was totally useless in this application and some departments just sent up members in a street van. In my view any department wishing to

charge out their trucks should be responsible in making it viable for the application it would be used for, whether it is a bush truck with picks and shovels and forestry connections, or a pumper with draughting and foam forestry capabilities.

Number two all trucks should have a common radio frequency that we could communicate from. Hand-helds were not powerful enough and in most cases we relied on relaying messages from dispatch to one of our own trucks. Maybe a more sophisticated system such as one the army uses could be looked at. It is very clear to me that we had one member and one ex-member working full time in our hall which we used as operations command. Without these two it would have been a complete chaos. Dozens of fire fighters, media people, citizens, receivables were all coming in. Staging, receiving and accountability rules were very vague. No one came in with a system, so these guys made it up as they went and they did a great job. But, as the fire went on we had delegates from the Fire Commissioners office come by and change the system, sometimes improving it, sometimes perhaps not. Many questions regarding pay, vehicle expenses, equipments were asked and we had to come up with some kind of answers. Should a member of the Fire Commissioners office been there to set up and check in for all the trucks, let us know who is getting paid for staging, waiting for the trucks to get fixed, travel time, also they could have been there issuing and charging all trucks and personnel with the proper gear and equipment.

The officers of the Naramata Fire Department were in command of this operation side. That was never in doubt. This was due to our structure and training. We have received feedback from several departments amazed at our structure. It is to be noted that it is not the size of the department, or if they are a paid career that makes a proper command system work – but it is the people and the preparation and training that made this fire a success from this side. We had some, very few, fire personnel with some reservations about working under us but because the system was flowing so well they would have stood out so they chose to go along.

In closing, Mr. Filmon, you would do well to come to the Naramata Fire Department, talk to the members who were working on the line. Should you accept this invitation, call myself or Chief Graham Baker to set up a meeting under short notice.

GF Thank you very much for an excellent summary and report. I can't make a promise that I will come and see the fire department, but it sounds as though it is a very well organized one and I congratulate for your efforts in having yourselves very professionally trained and organized despite the fact that you are a volunteer service. That is a very great credit to you.

I have a few questions if I may. The equipment that came to you that wasn't, in essence, operable or equipped for the task, where was it coming from?

- MB Everywhere basically, I don't know whether we had too many vehicles that came that were 100% equipped with all the gear that was required.
- GF I saw some photographs and I think they may have been at the fire hall at Kelowna with like about fifty pieces of equipment parked there at one time from all different places in the province. I guess different fire departments throughout the province. You are not the first one who has told me that a lot of it wasn't prepared to be operated. Why would somebody send equipment that wasn't in condition to be operated?
- MB Well I think when you are charging out \$500/hour for your truck it makes economical sense for you send out a truck that has been sitting in a hall somewhere that hasn't been used in seven years. It makes sense that way.
- (Tape 3)
- ... does come and most of the local departments out here do the same thing. When you get people coming from West Vancouver and Surrey and Langley, this is all new to them and so I don't imagine they would have that kind of equipment and preparedness on their trucks. It is totally different from what they are used to.
- JC And some of the trucks that they are bringing aren't operable in the mountains. They are all city trucks. Some of the people who came, they didn't even know how to draught their water from the lake.
- GF It appears here as though you too charge and that you said there was no question as to who was in charge – that was never a problem. In some cases we have been told that people weren't certain who was in charge and there was, I guess, a confused leadership. You are saying that was not the case here. What was then the role of the office of the Fire Commissioner in the case of this fire?
- MB They didn't really have a role in the operations level. When it came to our department we were set up as a structure where we had a cell supervisor and in some cases we had a task team leader which would be like your foreman. He would be the person in a fire department pickup truck and he would be the foreman that would be overseeing each unit placed at strategic places on the mountain. And he would take orders from the south supervisor and then above that the Fire Commissioner was involved. But where we came through with all the people coming into our hall we set up a command structure that worked very well.
- GF Earlier today, I think it was the Fire Chief from Summerland who said that it was understood that the Fire Commissioner was the Fire Chief – was the Provincial Fire Chief overall in this emergency. So although that may be the case, they stepped aside and let you run the show, basically, you are saying.

MB On the operations level we had – like I said, we had fire chiefs and officers coming from out of town – when they reported to our hall, and talking from the south supervisor down, they went under our leadership.

GF In your view that is the best way for things to happen – that as long as they are competent to do so the locals should take charge and the only time that you need help or intrusion from above is if you are not competent to take on the task.

MB It worked very well for us. We were prepared for it, we planned for it and planned months in advance for it. We planned and prepared for it the year before.

JC We also knew the area, too.

GF So local knowledge is really paramount in this case, in a time of crisis especially.

MB If things started breaking down I'm sure things would have gone awry, but it didn't happen.

GF Well it's a remarkable story and I'm very appreciative of you coming here and laying it out for me because it certainly paints a picture of a job well done. So thank you for coming.

Thank you.