

**MINISTRY OF FORESTS, LANDS, NATURAL RESOURCE OPERATIONS AND
RURAL DEVELOPMENT
INFORMATION NOTE**

Date: October 25, 2018

CLIFF: 243853

PREPARED FOR: Honourable Doug Donaldson, Minister of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development

ISSUE: Status of ministry specific recommendations from the Abbott Chapman 2017 After Action Report

BACKGROUND:

The Province committed to developing an action plan by October 31, 2018, to address the 108 recommendations included within the Abbott Chapman after action review of the 2017 fire season.

A project team, led by Emergency Management BC, (EMBC) and including the Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development (FLNRORD), has developed a plan which outlines actions taken and underway and identified the high level next steps to address the report's recommendations.

FLNRORD is leading or providing significant contributions to 67 of the 108 recommendations. At least 22 of these require new legislation, regulations or represent substantive shifts in policy.

Immediately following the 2017 wildfire season BC Wildfire Service (BCWS) undertook internal reviews and implemented changes to improve operations for the 2018 fire season. FLNRORD staff identified areas of primary concern and took immediate steps to address the highest priority items. Upon receiving the Abbott Chapman report in May, FLNRORD staff began to focus efforts on areas of improvement to support the implementation of the recommendations.

DISCUSSION:

The status reporting undertaken as part of the development of the action plan has identified the following elements for consideration:

- Many recommendations in common between internal to government reviews and the Abbott Chapman review, that do not require significant policy or legislative changes, are well underway.
- A high degree of cross government project management and coordination will be essential to realize the full opportunity of the recommendations.
- Recommendations requiring policy and legislation to implement will require thorough analysis and consideration before decisions are made on acceptance and implementation.

As many of the recommendations are interrelated and interdependent, updates on the status and approach have been grouped into themes with updated actions taken or underway in 2018;

Strategic Engagement: Industry and Stakeholder Engagement and Relations

- Considerable outreach occurred by fire centres, districts and regions including early engagement on seasonal outlook, partnering with industry to pre-organise response capacity and evaluating potential tenure changes.

- BCWS meets annually with the Provincial Forestry Forum to provide the seasonal outlook for the approaching Fire Season.
 - Industry association meetings began in April with senior staff.
 - Industry forums were held by each fire centre starting in February in Prince George. These meetings transitioned into weekly stakeholder update calls during the active fire season.
- BCWS and other branches engaged early and often with stakeholders, including groups such as the BC Cattlemen's Association and Guide Outfitters. This included stakeholder specific meetings, attendance at seasonal readiness meetings (usually held in March and April of each year), plus associations were invited to attend daily situation calls (EMBC led) during the event. BCWS will continue to focus on coordinating these activities, developing minimum standards for engagement and developing policy for partnering with industry to provide response capabilities.
- The Kamloops, Northwest and Southeast Fire Centres worked with industry to define the most appropriate and effective areas for containment lines and information on local values.
- BCWS will be reviewing the option of embedding industry liaisons, similar to First Nations and agency liaisons successfully utilized during the 2018 fire season.

The ministry is looking to partner with industry and stakeholders to realize benefits related to the use of local knowledge and to increase prevention, preparedness, response and recovery. This also includes working with industry and tenure holders to help determine how they can best work with communities and First Nations to conduct harvesting/fuel treatments. Modifications to how we work with industry and stakeholders provide the greatest opportunity for change.

Strategic Engagement: Community (local authorities) and Indigenous Engagement and Relations

- Operational staff engaged with First Nations communities to review plans and approaches to managing fires. Examples include Snowy Mountain fire with Lower Shuswap Indian Band, Telegraph Creek fire with Tahltan Indian Band.
- First Nation community liaisons were successfully embedded into BCWS response operations (Fire Centres and Incident Management Teams).
- Kamloops Fire Centre contracted First Nations members to undertake archaeological assessments of cultural sites during response. This significantly benefited the information flow between fire operations and communities.
- Formalizing these approaches, including developing templates and guidelines for operating agreements will be the focus of work leading to the 2019 fire season.

BCWS and district staff will continue to develop policy and protocols for accessing local and traditional knowledge through formal mechanisms such as liaisons and expansion of the Joint Hazards Management Teams. BCWS, EMBC and Indigenous Services Canada are working together to support First Nations to build capacity in Emergency Management through a MOU with the First Nation Leadership Council.

Response: training, capacity and volunteerism

- In March 2018, BCWS and EMBC management staff held a workshop to identify priority tasks for the coming freshet and fire seasons. This included confirming roles and responsibilities, use of Joint Hazard Management Teams, internal communication protocols and use of agency liaisons within the provincial and emergency operations centres.

- Incident Management Team (IMT) rotations were modified to provide greater continuity of staffing and knowledge. When possible, IMTs are not moved between fires, and Incident Commanders are addressing public meetings with BCWS Information Officers.
- Evacuations: BCWS and EMBC provided additional supports to individuals that requested to stay and defend in 2018. For example, the Shag Creek fire was located in an isolated area with no reliable land access, residents remained in place and BCWS supported these persons by flying in fuel for Structural Protection Units (sprinklers) and keeping in regular contact during the event.
- Evacuation Alerts and Orders were extended to livestock in 2018, and new processes were introduced to allow for ranchers to access and transport livestock.
- Cariboo and Coastal Fire Centres employed First Nations Type 2 crew under contract and deployed them in multiple fire centres in 2018. BCWS will be working with First Nations Emergency Services leading up to 2019 to implement their training strategy to have more First Nations Type 2 crews trained and under contract for 2019.
- In 2018, BCWS trained and employed both First Nations and non-First Nations Community Fire Fighter crews to add much needed capacity.
- The Nadina Burns Lake Zone runs a junior fire fighter program in conjunction with the high school to provide training and work experience for firefighting. BCWS is looking to replicate this successful initiative in other rural and remote areas.
- Examples of operational changes implemented for the 2018 fire season include: Transferring Structure Protection Specialists from the Office of Fire Commissioner to BCWS, modifying days off eligibility process to minimize fatigue and staff transition and implementing a new, science based process for implementing fire prohibitions.

Response capabilities were stretched beyond capacity in 2017 and 2018. The opportunity to increase firefighting capacity through partnerships is a strategy for BCWS. Recommendations to provide supports to individuals, who stay and defend, training of non-government firefighters, modify volunteer firefighter capabilities and provide equipment will require changes to legislation and policy due to life safety, supervision and liability considerations.

Research and Innovation (including predictive services)

- BCWS and the Water Management Branch (WMB) identified tactical and technical improvements for predictive services for flooding and fires (e.g., freshet modelling, weather and fire behaviour forecasting) including the creation of a one stop data hub in 2018.
- BCWS tested new technology throughout the fire season. In the Caribou Fire Centre, drones were tested for night flying and identifying of hot spots and mapping. Mass water service delivery was also used and tested on the Snowy Mountain and Babine complex fires.
- BCWS developed a new interagency agreement between BCWS, Office of the Fire Commissioner and Fire Departments to allow for the efficient movement of staff between the agencies.
- Protocols are being developed for the standardization of data collected and the sharing of information between agencies. Increasing data availability will allow for risk based decisions on investments and better response capabilities.
- Improvements to the standardized mapping platform developed for the 2018 fire season that enabled/improved our ability to share information both publicly and internally.

Public Communications:

The after action review recommendations reflect how public expectations are changing.

- In response to learnings from 2017, BCWS expanded its efforts on communications, introduced new messaging and expanded the use of alternative methods for communicating (e.g., social media) during the 2018 fire season.
- Based on 2018 successes and learnings, BCWS is developing new standards for communications (internal and external, during response and as part of preparedness) that include the expanded use of social media and enhancing the public web portal.

Community Resilience Investment Program Implementation (CRI):

The Prevention Program within BCWS is expanding to increase awareness, education and to provide additional supports for communities and individuals to participate in CRI and fire prevention.

- BCWS is developing high level risk assessment guidelines for fire centres to inform local government and First Nations investment decisions for prevention and mitigation.
- Organisation changes in BCWS are being made to support CRI with extension and support to applicants across all 6 Fire Centres.
- Materials are being developed for training and awareness based on the 7 FireSmart disciplines to support communities and applicants.
- BCWS is pursuing other avenues (e.g., matching federal funding) to increase prevention and mitigation projects, including the CRI Program and the BC Forest Enhancement Society.
- BCWS is working with Districts and land managers to develop policy to address landscape level mitigation and management. This information will inform investments in fuel treatments, water infrastructure and improve response capabilities.

NEXT STEPS

- FLNRORD focus on priority recommendations in preparation for the 2019 flood and fire seasons.
- Project planning and reporting on progress in partnership with ministries under the leadership and coordination of Cameron Lewis, Executive Lead, Emergency Management Review
- Integration of after action review recommendation priorities into the 2018/19 budget process.
- Canadian Council of Forest Ministers co-lead development of recommendations for the ad hoc federal committee province/territory funding consideration in January 2019.

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