

Prince George & Area Community Wildfire Roundtable

Meeting Summary

October 29, 2024, 10am – 2pm
Prince George Civic and Conference Centre

Purpose: *Convene a proactive multi-party table to assist with wildfire preparedness across the Prince George Region*

Meeting Objectives

- to provide organizational and/or interagency updates on wildfire preparedness activity
- to conduct a tabletop exercise for an emergency response scenario

Participants

Andrea Rainey (MoF), Anita deDreu (RDFFG), Heather McCrae (EMCR), Adam Ethier (LTFN), Colby Molcak (RDFFG), Jesse Labatiuk (CPG), Kenna Yonkman (RDFFG), Shannon Krause (City of PG), Eric Depenau (City of PG), Clayton Sheen (City of PG), Che Elkin (UNBC), Melissa Steidle (Woodlots BC), Dan Scott (Carrier Lumber), Dave Wilson (Celtic), Meghan O'Reilly (HEMBC), Andrew Steele (HEMBC), Rebecca Bowler (MoF), Bryant Kemble (FTVFD), Tory Ross (MoF), Katelan Eistetter (MoF), Eileen Kostian (MoF), Kim Harmison (MLIB), Mark Clark (Woodlots BC), Brad Shauer (Enbridge), Esther Winder (Enbridge), Dennis Young (Enbridge), Mitch Sorensen (BCWS), Adam Lloyd (BCTS), Lauren Scott (MOTI), Tony Fiala (EMCR), Kyle McGhee (City of PG), Tanya Spooner, (City of PG), Terry Robert (FBC), Kim Menounos (FBC), Bettina Johnson (FBC), Patience Rakochy (FBC)

Roundtable Updates

A round of organizational updates was held, allowing participants opportunity to share on their wildfire preparedness planning and activities, and the sharing of funding updates, funding sources, resources and collaborations. Comments included:

- *Colby Molcak, Regional District of Fraser-Fort George* - started development of Community Wildfire Resilience Plans (CWRP's) for each of the 7 electoral areas, for communities or jurisdictions wildfire resilience following 7 principles of FireSmart, have finished public engagement sessions and provided opportunity for feedback with each electoral area, end date is Feb 2025
- *Jesse Labatiuk, City of Prince George* – applications approved under CRI program, for FireSmart coordinator fulltime role and phase 1 structural protection unit; applied for CWRP (to update 2018 CWPP), and for upcoming fuel management prescriptions
- *Melissa Steidle, Woodlots BC* - received grant from BC Wildfire Service to do wildfire prescriptions for fuel load, have more money coming from FESBC for more treatments next year
- *Dan Scott, Carrier Lumber* – Log purchaser
***NOTE to all: if doing fire mitigation work and have logs to sell, contact Dan Scott in regard to buying logs**

- *Dave Wilson, Celtic* - currently running wildfire training school in remote areas in BC, helping First Nations develop wildfire community protection plans and support the development of wildfire fighting capacity
- *Andrew Steele, HEMBC* - preparing health care facilities and strengthening their response structures for responding to emergencies
- *Rebecca Bowler, MoF* - supports research into looking at fire resiliency, soil moisture, and that data is being shared with federal wildfire agencies to improve their ability to assess risk in the spring
- *Bryant Kemble, FTVFD* - have put 50 home sprinkler kits up in community (Ferndale Tabor), hall is open for community to stop by to access support for fire mitigation
- *Kim Harmison, McLeod Lake Indian Band* - looking at doing FireSmart in the community; have done fuel mitigation, did a mock evacuation and drills
- *Mitch Sorenson, BCWS headquarters* - mastication (mulching, chipping) is now a fundable activity province-wide (another tool in the toolbox); saw profound drought impacts especially in North Eastern part of the province this year, led to overwintering, incl. holdover fires in the north; this years river forecast showing a lot more green and yellow, compared to all dark red last year; 803,000 hectares burned in PG fire centre, while over 1 million hectares burned province-wide, had assistance from other jurisdictions, incl. Australia, NB, NS and Yukon
Action* Patience to send maps out after meeting Complete
- *Tanya Spooner, City of PG* - the City's program receives evacuees for 2/3rds of the province, anything north of 100Mile, closed the doors on reception trailers in Sep, set up group lodging and health clinic facilities, preparing for events of fires in-community

Review Wildfire Scenario- Drill

(see related documents here: [Wildfire Scenario Drill](#) – scroll down to the October 29th session date)

The group went through a fire drill tabletop exercise going through the various response steps in a wildfire scenario. The goals were to practice and share and identify gaps and room for improvement in process and communications. The exercise provided an opportunity for questions and discussion around the table pertaining to possible roles and responsibilities of others in the community when responding to a wildfire situation.

Patience noted that the group will additionally roll out the exercise in December as an actual event on the ground.

The wildfire scenario exercise was led by Andrea Rainey, Wildfire Prevention officer for the PG Fire Centre and Heather McCrae, Regional Manager at EMCR.

Initial Call

- **BCWS gets the Initial call:** the fire report is called in to provincial wildfire reporting centre in Victoria (via phone or app, *5555), is then sent to the regional fire centre for response

- **Determine if legitimate concern** (get calls about cigarette butts, dust, campfires, etc)
- **First resources on site, providing initial fire report:** as response arm of the MoF, crews, by road or helicopter or air tanker – they will provide initial fire report incl. size, location, information from the ground, the values at risk, etc
- **Incident command structure** is used, everybody has one job and one boss, the incident commander is responsible for those resources and tactics, forecasting weather and what the fire may do
- **Values on the landscape** - roads, highways, trees, habitat, oil and gas, etc, they will connect with agencies as appropriate (BC Energy Regulator, MOTI, etc)
- **Incident stabilization** - while operating across the 4 pillars in general, at the time of incident the primary focus is incident stabilization to limit impacts,
- **Limited resources** - when facing resource shortages, they reach out to other regions or even internationally, Nr. 1 priority is human life and safety, if public safety at risk that's where resources are going

Priorities – 1. Human life and safety 2. Property (public and private assets, 3. High environmental values (watersheds, etc) 4. Resource values

Recommendations Call

- **Call from BCWS to EMCR** - BCWS calls EMCR to report on the wildfire risk and that a recommendation is being made to put areas under evacuation alert/order.
- **Determine LG and FN to notify depending on approximate area** - Based on the impacted areas, EMCR will determine which local governments/First Nations need to be notified
- **Virtual Recommendations Call** – EMCR sets up a call with LG and FN representatives, MOTI, FNESS, the Ministry responsible, and 1 agent (provincial duty manager from provincial headquarters, if broadcast alert needed for phones), EMCR and BCWS,
 - **BCWS provides brief update** - including on resources on the ground, where fire is suspected to go, suppression or control intentions, wind or storm conditions, if recommending an evacuation order or alert BCWS will outline the recommended order/alert areas
 - **Discussion** - each representative gets opportunity to engage directly with BCWS, they'll know the on-the-ground layouts, and can discuss with BCWS what's at risk,
 - opportunity for very frank conversations, so Local Government's can make reasonable decisions based on the available information,
 - Each representative is given an opportunity to ask questions before deciding to issue an order/alert and if so, defining the boundaries
 - Legal authority to authorise an alert or order falls to the Local Government or First Nation; alert or order is enabled by EMCR
 - EMCR helps coordinate, with the Ministry depending on the emergency, no Ministry has the legislation or ability to evacuate people, it's the local authorities
 - It is the Local State of Emergency Declaration that grants the authority for a community EOC to enact powers under EDMA which include entering onto private property to manage danger trees, protect homes etc.
 - Every Local authority is required to have a plan, including 24hr availability to be reached in an

emergency (have a 1st call and 2nd call of every local authority in the province)

- All traditional territory holders are also involved in decision making with Local authorities (new legislation with EDMA)

-EMCR comes in with coordination piece, drawing in all the interested parties

STANDARD RESPONSE GOALS – 8 Priorities

- 1. Safety and health of all responders
- 2. Save lives
- 3. Reduce suffering
- 4. Protected public health
- 5. Protect critical infrastructure
- 6. Protect property
- 7. Protect the environment
- 8. Reduce economic & social losses

Local Authority Response/EOC Activation

RDFFG - Anita deDreu, Colby Molcak, Kenna Yonkman

- when order, need to first issue a state of local emergency, (SOLE) authorized by the chair of the board, it states electoral area's impacted, what the issue is, they submit it to EMCR and they pass it up the chain on RDFFG's behalf

- previously could only declare a SOLE for 7 days with legislation change now can issue for up to 14 days, (good improvement to have a 14 day SOLE, especially if multiple and different types of emergencies)

- SOLE gives RDFFG special powers, e.g. the power to evacuate people from their homes under the order

- when tactical evacuation is required, BCWS and RCMP could be knocking on doors telling people to go, could happen before the SOLE is issued (can request to have search and rescue, and fire depts to assist with tactical evacuations)

- **Rounding up teams:** they start calling in their staff based on the emergency, prefer to ramp up and bring in everyone
- **Map development - Joint call with Lheidli T'enneh and City of Prince George** - to decide on joint map and messaging, RDFFG would likely offer to start maps and messaging (to see 1 shared order vs 3 orders from 3 jurisdictions, to help for clarity for the public)
- **Define who will be impacted** – RDFFG's GIS dept manages the maps, have learned in the past if map is not so good, that people question whether they're in the alert or order area (typically do a birds eye view, and a zoomed in view)
 - GIS team has developed a system where residents can punch in their address, however the map needs to be finished and on the website first
 - 1st priority is to get the map out to first responders; have to determine early on how many residences are impacted, and where they should go

-**Quality of the messaging matters** in an alert or order (can affect evacuation hesitancy), the more detail in the initial send-outs, the easier to clean up afterwards

- all the information is posted the RDFFG website, social media, and news releases

- use the same system as City of PG for public alerting (*encourage everyone to sign up, can do all or

only a certain area, can also sign up as visitor with start and end dates)

- **Provincial Funding for livestock producers** – BC provides funding to assist livestock producers with livestock relocation in an emergency situation

Lheidli T'enneh First Nation – Adam Ethier

- the work by the City of PG and RDFFG is appreciated, including the help with mapping and information sharing

- the plans are very broad guidelines as to how the nation will respond, while partnerships are also engaged, as a family oriented and self-resilient community, their focus is protecting their community

- First Nations are different in terms of SOLEs, Lheidli T'enneh only needs the chief to sign off with a standard form to activate EOC (BCR not needed), the FN's SOLE doesn't have limitation period, expires when the chief says we're done

- every band has their own options, they can mimic the SOLE process, or BCR, or have an internal process

City of Prince George - Tanya Spooner

-would ensure joint messaging, while look at the directions the incident is going, and if becomes a larger event for the City they would need to do their own individual paperwork,

-will be talking to their FOCC as they will be inundated with 911 calls, will chat with fire response, have a structural protection unit in community that could be deployed at this point,

-City of PG is experienced with at ESS in Prince George, would be looking to BCWS and EMCR as experienced regarding wildfire response, as haven't had many wildfire events within PG city

-would also reach out to volunteer fire departments, those who have S1 training, and would do joint IC and liaising to ensure on the ground resources are reached

Broadcast Intrusive Alerting Call

Alert Ready is a Canada-wide system that allows government officials in each province and territory to issue public safety alerts through major television and radio broadcasters, as well as compatible wireless devices. This system is only used during large-scale disasters or emergencies where loss of life is possible or imminent. The Alert Ready system is tested twice a year across Canada, in May and November.

- people around the cell tower areas will also get the alert, even if outside their area

- anybody coming close to this area, entering into the hazard area, will also receive the alert, for 24hrs

- we have to physically describe the boundaries of the alert area, (have to be very descriptive so it's clear who is in the order area and who is not)

- should be approx. 20min process, to get initiated the Local Authorities have to put in a form, can be done jointly or individually

Operations Call

EMCR organizes this call and invites:

- Primary EOCs (Local government and First Nations)
- Affected Ministries
- Impacted Utilities
- Impacted Rail and O&G organizations
- NGOs that could support the Primary EOCs

- Host communities for evacuees

This call is to bring all those that have an operational function in the evacuation of a community together to discuss supports and next steps related to the First Nations or Local Authorities affected

(in this wildfire scenario case, would be inviting FortisBC, Enbridge, BCER, BC Hydro, Rogers, Telus, CN Rail, Nav Canada, Shaw, MOTI, Lheidli T'enneh, RDFFG, EMBC, Ministry of Agriculture)

- this could be up to 30 people, it's a coordination call

- *HEMBC* - would gather info on health impacts, incl air quality and impacts to watersheds; for any patient transfers would also look at influx at Emergency centre and triage, and working closely with FNHA and Northern Health, supporting communication with home supports, and connecting patients
- *Enbridge* – they would link with boots on the ground to know where to cross, even in emergency it's an unauthorized crossing, BCWS would need to engage someone in Enbridge planning dept (1800 number for Enbridge, it goes to Calgary and then the on-call person, filters to a pipeline tech on the ground to ensure the pipeline is protected), Enbridge incident management team would also respond
- *City of Prince George* - would be welcoming any trained ESS responders or cultural supports ready to support and help receive people, would also be reaching out to FNHA and FNESS asking them to provide support on-site,
 - within ESS there's a mechanism for billeting, can provide funds to families for supporting evacuees costs, (on a busy weekend in PG could be possible to have less than 100 hotel rooms available)
- *BC Woodlots* – their involvement is more with BCWS and tactical planning, knowing which roads are opening, where spots are to get water, etc. (we want to know you won't make a backroad through a woodlot, etc)
 - Missed CANFOR, missed looking at private listing beyond government listing, would need time to shut down mills (conversations on how Woodlots can support are generally happening at the local level)
- *Enbridge* - Question: how will our technicians get past the roadblocks, is that thru MOTI or RCMP?
 - A: RDFFG could set up an entry permit process, could be RCMP or a security company which would come through RDFFG
- **Entry and Exit permits** - security for evacuation area's, extending through City of PG or Lheidli T'enneh, would have to work together, with a sign in sheet
- **Access to wildfire restricted area** - for people who are looking to get access to wildfire restricted area, if BCWS requested the road closed due to impact, the jurisdiction still rests with MOTI, but BCWS would liaise on important transport that needs to go through,
- **Area restriction** - BCWS has one other toll in the toolbox, if want to keep people out of wildfire area, can put in an "area restriction" that you can travel through but may not remain in the area, there's an application process if you want an exemption for a specific activity and time, will also use sometimes if there's no civic addresses to help alert public

- **Air restriction** - 3000ft above ground and 5 nautical miles radius around the fire, would suggest the airport join the operations call
- **Route closures** - would be updating DriveBC to inform travellers of route closures, and let traffic control know, or engage with Forestry about other routes not within our jurisdiction
- **Dynamic messaging boards (DMS)** - across the highways can be done quickly, within 30min – 1hr; confusion noted from recent Jasper wildfire event, as evacuees were directed by incorrect messaging on DNS boards to go to Prince George
- **Forest service roads** - if sending people down Forest Service Roads, make sure to drive the route first before you send out (e.g. an evacuation route road could be washed out)
- **Locations of Roadblocks** - BCWS would collaborate and be very specific about where the highway will be closed, communicating if the highway closed as actively working and can't have public there, vs if the highway will be impacted generally, and then it's up to MOTI as to where they'll have roadblocks

Information Call

EMCR organizes this call and invites:

- Local government and First Nations
 - Emergency Management personnel in Ministries, Agencies, and Organizations, and
 - Subject Matter Experts from event specific Ministries
- this is BCWS providing the information, but to a broader group of people, almost 1000 contacts (anybody listed in the database in emergency management)
 - it's all information not coordination, boots on the ground, what is happening
 - hosted by BCWS information officers
 - **Action* All interested agencies can contact BCWS to be added to the database**
 - RDFFG would only speak to the info they own, not what BCWS is doing, and BCWS is also careful not to speak on other's behalf either, will refer to City of PG or others e.g. for evacuation
 - For specific information on the fire, go to the BCWS website, to avoid taking questions around the actioning of the fire
 - City of PG has specific webpages set and ready to go, RDFFG also has, our information officer would be one of the first people to involve to make sure messaging is cohesive between the 3 Local Governments
 - best tool is the website, any updates there, BCWS has information officer at the Fire Centre
 - all of the BCWS social media is monitored provincially, they respond to public inquiries to help take the pressure off the regional organizations,
 - Data warehouse, the BC data catalogue is public information, can download the kml or shape files (for information on wildfire boundaries)

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM EMERGENCY COORDINATOR TEAMS

- ❖ BCWS makes recommendations to limit wildfire impact to values, but we have no jurisdictional authority

- ❖ While as a program, we operate across all four pillars of emergency management (Prevention/Preparedness/Response/Recovery) during an incident, BCWS focus is incident stabilization/response
- ❖ During a wildfire, the RD takes on a supporting role – support for the responders (equipment, personnel, etc.), support for the community (evacuations), and support for individuals (food, shelter, etc.).
- ❖ Alert & Order boundaries are set with an abundance of caution and guided by BCWS recommendations
- ❖ RDFFG responsibility: the well-being of residents (people and animals) – we don't action wildfires (BCWS are the experts!)

- **Volunteer Fire Depts** - biggest concern is traffic, people coming in who know the side roads
- important to keep the **MOF district staff** involved, engineering staff can assist, and are the ones who would close forest service roads, and the district staff typically have relationships with tenure holders and others, and can make those connections quickly
- **Marathons, not sprints** - especially bigger events, we may have members wanting to come back to PG to help, communication would be please don't, (this is only part of a much longer journey, be aware when thinking of response, what it's impacting now and what it could be impacting)
- **There's always gaps and errors** and things missed, no matter how many times we prepare, what's important is to own errors right away and fix it moving forward
- **Information is key** for emergency events, also planning ahead for the next steps, what could happen next and how to prepare for it in case they happen
- **Structural protection** - comes through from incident command for request for structural protection resources, those resources will be moved as appropriate and are coordinated with BCWS
- **Volunteer fire depts** get involved, are on a provincial list listing equipment each dept has, will usually call people who are closest, but need time to set up sprinklers, usually a day or 1.5 days ahead
- **Development of a Flowchart at a community level?** – suggested for training and information purposes, to show how communication flows
- **Highlight the Importance of FireSmarting now and all year** - structural protection crews assess, so will drive by homes that are not fire smarted as resources are limited