

WILDFIRE MANAGEMENT ADAPTATION

Government Still Short Sighted

Comment – Bill Bourgeois, PhD RPF (Ret)

The *Government's Action Plan: Responding to wildfire and flood risks* <https://tinyurl.com/ycukqovc> was recently released in response to the Chapman-Abbott May 2018 report recommendations, *Addressing the New Normal: 21st Century Disaster Management in British Columbia*. The *Action Plan* focuses on reducing impacts and mitigation of expected future wildfires and floods and recovery from the recent events. These community assistance actions are welcomed. However, the plan does not take action to strategically reduce the extent of the wildfires and floods across landscapes other than in areas immediately around communities. **What is wrong with this scenario?** Are we dedicated to being fire fighters and not willing to take action to adapt to the expected increased frequency and magnitude of fires by trying to reduce their size and impacts? If this is the case, say so and if not, assign responsibility and leadership in developing adaptation actions as part of long-term forest management.

BC needs to create forests that can adapt to the expected wildfires caused by climate change as outlined earlier in <https://tinyurl.com/yd2yp3eh>. There have been no public comments on the proposed integrated forest management adaptation plan or the concept, even though:

- The Chief Forester supports integrated adaptation actions,
- The industry supports adaptation actions,
- Communities support adaptation actions,
- First Nations support adaptation actions, and
- Wildfire ecology experts support and have consensus on the essential adaptation actions.

Government seems to have forgotten or not acknowledged the importance of strategically reducing the potential impacts of large fires across BC landscapes outside the urban-forest interface areas. This is not the leadership we would expect from our elected officials and Ministry staff. What are the deterrents to taking this approach? A major one is the organization and apparent preference of FLNRORD Divisions to operate within silos. If BC is to adapt to threats of wildfires, an integrated approach is needed. This **MUST** be done by the Deputy Minister identifying the leadership role and direction to one individual with a mandate to generate a team approach involving key Victoria and Operations Divisions.

The Chief Forester is responsible for long-term forest stewardship and climate change integrated planning, which include addressing wildfire management as a key component. The Chief Forester is the logical person to take the leadership role, given her mandate and support for an integrated approach to adaptation. In addition, she has also previously encouraged the development of landscape unit plans which are the fundamental tool to achieving the wildfire adaptation outcome. All of these factors suggest a willingness to make things happen, if given the direction and responsibility.

It is time for Government leadership! There is support from industry, communities, First Nations and wildfire experts. There is also a senior Ministry person who has shown the appropriate mind-set for the approach. **Minister Donaldson and Deputy Minister Allan, let's get on with it!**