

Coordination, Planning and Preparedness for Wildfire Events: Field Day and Knowledge Transfer

Islands Agriculture Show

Summary Report

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Cattle in barn, Cowichan Valley

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Project Overview

The Islands Agriculture Show Society (IASS), in partnership with the BC Agriculture & Food Climate Action Initiative, has administered this project as a part of the Cowichan Adaptation Strategies implementation. The IASS received funding from the federal-provincial-territorial *Growing Forward 2* program to deliver the adaptation project presented in this summary.

The project entitled “Coordination, Planning and Preparedness for Wildfire Event: Field Day and Knowledge Transfer” was identified among the next steps of the Cowichan Adaptation Strategies and was selected as an implementation priority by the Cowichan Agriculture Adaptation Working Group.

The project scope encompassed coordination, planning and preparedness for wildfire events that impact the BC agriculture sector, with a focus on knowledge transfer. The primary audience was producers on Vancouver Island, and included participants in the Islands Agriculture Show held on February 2-3, 2018.

The project was designed to transfer information and tools evolved from past projects and experience with wildfires in BC to producers on Vancouver Island. This project addressed the following objectives:

1. To raise awareness and uptake of the Farm-Level Emergency Plan template and other relevant farm level tools and practices.
2. To share information and lessons learned from the Cariboo and Thompson/Okanagan wildfire response experience.
3. To facilitate dialogue among Cowichan and other Vancouver Island agencies engaged in wildfire response and with producers.
4. To identify and document collaborative next steps in wildfire/extreme event preparedness for the Cowichan region.
5. To develop and test an approach that could be shared in other areas of the province.

1 Participants

1.1 Participant Summary

A total of 24 participants attended the Wildfire Field Day on Thursday, February 1, 2018. The Islands Agricultural Show Wildfire Panel conference session on Friday, February 2, had 19 delegates in attendance. The Field Day registration was filled to capacity and indicated strong interest in the wildfire preparedness and response within the agricultural community. Participants came from the following communities: Duncan, Ladysmith, Mill Bay, Courtenay, Kelowna, Nanaimo, Parksville, East Sooke, Victoria, and Nanoose. Their reported sectors included Forestry (3%), Farmers (95%), Media (1%), and Government agencies (1%).

The Executive Director and Board of the Islands Agricultural Show Society heavily promoted the two-day event, including the Wildfire sessions, in various media, such as its website, email, Facebook and Twitter. CTV ran a series of advertisements to promote the Show. Juice FM, a Duncan radio station, also ran promotions leading up to the event.

Print media also was used to promote the Islands Agricultural Show. Victoria's *Times Colonist* delivered 47,000 show guides. In addition, the IASS placed five advertisements in the newspaper before the February 2-3 event. The Show was promoted by *BC Holstein News*, *Cowichan Valley Citizen*, and *Island Farm and Garden*, which ran a 2-page spread. In addition, *Country Life in BC* ran a series of advertisements in its November 2017 to February 2018 issues.

2 Field Day

2.1 Field Day Overview

The project included a half-day field session that invited participants to visit two farms in the Cowichan Region. At the farms, participants heard from an expert in wildfire management on available measures to protect livestock and farm structures. The Field Day session was scheduled to complement the wildfire discussion session during the Islands Agriculture Show.

To prepare for the Field Day, the project team reviewed existing materials from previous work in the Cowichan, Cariboo, and Okanagan regions. The agenda for the Field Day discussion included key topics of interest to local farm producers. The Field Day session was held on the afternoon of Thursday, February 1, the day before the beginning of the Islands Agriculture Show.

The Field Day also required identification of two area agricultural producers willing to offer a site for demonstration. Two adjacent producers on McLay Road near Duncan offered to host the Field Day, and shared their stories of past events and measures to prepare for future wildfires. The project team met with the producers to check details, such as key areas of the farm to visit, parking, and wet-weather options.

Primary Speaker on the Field Day:

- Dimitri Vaisius, Wildfire Technician, Cobble Hill Zone Base, BC Wildfire Service

Additional comments during the Field Day provided by:

- Breanne Ellison, Producer and Farm Host, Cowichan Valley
- David Tattum, Producer and Farm Host, Cowichan Valley
- Monty Crisp, Facilitator, Risk Reduction Strategies
- Samantha Charlton, Project Coordinator, Regional Adaptation Program, BC Agriculture & Food Climate Action Initiative

The Field Day reached its maximum registration and included 24 participants, mostly livestock producers who were also attending the Islands Agriculture Show in Duncan. The Facilitator moderated the Field Day session, introducing the speaker and producers, and managing questions and answers from attendees.



Farm Field Site Visits led by Dimitri Vaisius, Wildfire Service Officer

2.2 Field Day Observations

The Wildfire Field Day encouraged attendees to consider wildfire mitigation and response principles as illustrated on these two field sites. These farms represent many 'mixed farm' operations on Vancouver Island. However, observations and comments were specific to these two farms and did not fully represent wildfire behavior or management actions (i.e., FireSmart) that could be applied to other farms of various types, sizes, and locations.

Wildfire Service actions in response to wildfire threat at a farm:

- Crews typically observe a farm by helicopter and assess what they can save, applying a form of *triage*.
- They assess what equipment and water sources that may be available they can use.
- Crews then choose what to defend.
- For general defense of an area, Wildfire Service crews may install fire guards by hand or using heavy equipment, then burn back to the main fire to enlarge the guard.

Notes on fire behaviour and factors that lead to rapid fire spread:

- In general, forests on Vancouver Island have a longer wildfire return period than in the BC Interior, 300 to 500 years. However, climate change is increasing that risk factor.
- Hay that is dried in the field can burn very quickly, especially with wind. It is better to bale the hay and remove it from the field. Green hay fields that are irrigated reduce risk.
- Logging slash and debris can lead to crown fires, especially in cedar and Douglas fir.
- Slope is a factor. A structure at the top of a vegetated slope is particularly at risk.
- Wind has a direct effect on fire behaviour and spread, increasing the risks.

Livestock producers can reduce wildfire risk ahead of time by considering:

- Remove lower limbs on conifers within 30 m of a structure and remove conifers within 10 m. Oak and other hardwoods are better. If time allows, farmers can remove trees next to structures as fire threatens.
- For trees that cannot be removed within 10 m of a structure, limb the conifers up to 10-m elevation; branches should not touch the roof.
- Green grass next to a structure is okay, if it is mowed regularly.
- Metal roof and metal siding provide much better fire protection than combustible materials, such as cedar shakes.

- Remove piles of combustible materials (e.g., firewood piles) near structures where sparks could land and spread flame.
- Construct a fire break with a width of two tractor blades around structures, and lay down gravel.
- Provide a water source. Even 14,000 litres (3,000 gal) of water for 4-5 hours could help.
- Sprinklers work well. Wildfire Service recommends roof-top spraying outward to create a donut of spray. Do not direct spray toward the siding, but wet down the perimeter. CVRD offers help with acquiring sprinklers for residential buildings.
- Electrical supply may be interrupted in a wildfire, so consider portable generator to run water pumps.

Comments and questions from the Field Day participants:

- Q: Does Wildfire Service talk with local fire departments? A: Wildfire Service meets regularly with local fire departments on the Island and arranges cross training and sharing of equipment.
- Q: What can you do to speed response to wildfire? A: When Wildfire Service receives several reports of a wildfire, they will send a tanker right away.
- Q: What is the fire risk of cedar hedges, and does a local bylaw that restricts cedar hedge size to four-inches in diameter at chest height help? A: Removing cedar hedges would reduce fire risk and would be FireSmart, but it is a local government issue rather than provincial.
- Q: Are local fire departments working on mutual aid with the Wildfire Service? A: Yes, the province allows mutual aid callout, with liability protection.
- Q: What role does the Min. of Agriculture play in wildfire response? A: The Ministry of Agriculture helped with livestock relocation and the provision of emergency feed in the 2017 wildfires.
- Local fire departments need trucks that can pump and roll at the same time.
- I am dependant on my community. I will be talking with my neighbours; we need to build our community. Neighbours helping neighbours will be important.

3 Panel Discussion

In the second task, the project team organized and coordinated a Panel Discussion at the Islands Agriculture Show, in coordination with the Islands Agriculture Show Society. This session, with the title “What We Learned from BC’s 2017 Wildfire Season,” was held on the afternoon of Friday, February 2, at a conference room provided by the Islands Agriculture Show at its Exhibition Park venue.

To support the Panel, the project team developed the session objectives, including key points for discussion. Based on these objectives, we identified six Panel members who could offer specific insights on wildfire impacts and protection for livestock producers. The Panel specifically included responders and a Cariboo beef producer whose ranch was directly impacted by the wildfires that affected the BC Interior in 2017.



Wildfire panel discussion with Derek Masselink, Moderator

To ensure the Panel Discussion proceeded smoothly, the project team developed a timeline to ensure all topics receive the appropriate amount of time, and consulted with the Panel members to confirm the topics they would cover. The project team also developed a list of possible questions from the Moderator, if the Q & A period lacked sufficient comments or

questions. Attendees enjoyed robust interaction with panel members, so these questions were unnecessary.

The audience for the Panel Discussion included 19 participants with an interest in the subject of wildfire. The Facilitator introduced each Panel member, and the Moderator directed the question and answer period.

3.1 Panel Members and Presentations

The Panel Session was facilitated by Monty Crisp, with Derek Masselink as Moderator.

Each panel member began with brief attention to key points:

Brent Barclay, BC Ministry of Agriculture

- The 2017 wildfires in BC offered many lessons for producers and government agencies.
- One key issue is the temporary access by producers to evacuated areas to care for livestock left behind. Areas are closed due to concern for public safety and property security, but there may be opportunities to allow access for livestock protection. Local authorities adopted different approaches based on wildfire risks and availability of responders. The Ministry's Premise ID program, while not mandatory, helped farmers gain temporary access to their livestock.
- Feed is another issue. As range burned, producers had to move livestock back to barns but had no feed. The Ministry arranged for \$1.6 million in hay to provide time to make the decision about where to put their livestock.
- Recovery emerged as a third important issue. Recovery does not mean returning farms to conditions before the fire, and it is a long process. The AgriStability AgriRecovery programs were expanded, and established, to support producer recovery in 2017.

Brian Carruthers, Chief Administrative Officer, Cowichan Valley Regional District

- The CVRD has prepared wildfire risk assessments, including a map that shows where threats and risks are greatest. This can also be used to prescribe fuel modifications in the region.
- The CVRD is engaged in outreach to the community, and agriculture is a unique sector. FireSmart will be an important tool as an additional resource to help local producers. The CVRD has prepared the *Farm Emergency Planning Template and Guide*, which are available online at <https://www.cvr.d.bc.ca/2843/Emergency-Planning-for-Livestock>

- The issue of temporary entry to evacuated areas was one of the biggest issues in the 2017 wildfires. It was emotional, based on weather forecasts, and very stressful for producers who were waiting for permits.
- The CVRD is communicating with the South Island Forest Management Team for further planning. Planning includes outreach to specific representatives in the agriculture industry in the region.

Cordy Cox, President of Cariboo Cattlemen's Assn., and producer (call-in link)

- Ranchers were aware at the beginning of the summer that conditions were hazardous, with dry weather, heat, deadfall on the ground, and many trees lost from beetle kill.
- The scale of wildfire in the region was unprecedented. The Wildfire Service basically said they could not respond to everything, so some producers were on their own.
- Most producers in the Cariboo Region were prepared, and have large equipment, pumps, hoses, wildfire response training (S-100 course). Some producers have worked for the Wildfire Service in the past.
- But this wildfire season exposed holes in their plans, especially considering:
 - Road blocks, with no supplies available for weeks, even food and fuel
 - No permit system at the time to allow producers access to their livestock in evacuated areas
 - Need to remove cattle from range immediately, but not being able to rely on liners, especially with roads closed
 - Need to determine a safe place to take livestock before moving them
 - How to feed livestock
 - Major power outages, and communications interrupted
- Many producers lost fewer livestock than expected, but range was affected. Some areas were burned so badly that nothing will grow for a long time. Other areas may regenerate from the fire and see enhanced growth.
- The BC Cattlemen's Association sent staff to the Williams Lake EOC to help develop the permitting system, so producers could access livestock. Once in place, the permit system relieved stress and allowed food, fuel and mail to be delivered to farm personnel who stayed behind.

Dimitri Vaisius, Wildfire Technician, Cobble Hill Fire Base, BC Wildfire Service

- 2017 was an exceptional wildfire year and broke all records. This threat level is now becoming the norm.
- Fuel types are different on Vancouver Island than in Chilcotin (cured grass), where one fire ran 42 km in a 24-hr period. A similar fire on Vancouver Island would have run 300 m in the same time period. The recent California wildfires were driven by winds, and this characteristic can cause fire to spread very quickly.

Don Hatton, Hatton Insurance Agency, Duncan

- Insurance is the last line of defence, after everything else has failed. But farmers need to understand the details of coverage and conditions.
- Farmer steps in loss mitigation are important, not only to reduce the chance of loss but also from an insurance perspective. Under some circumstances, policies require farmers to take reasonable action to protect livestock and not simply leave animals to die.
- Insurers judge every situation. If wildfire threatens a farm, call the broker or agent. They may be able to help.
- We have heard about the frustrations with being barred from returning to livestock that have been left behind in an evacuation. But remember that evacuations are for personal safety, and they prevent looting and robberies. It is important to sign up for the Premise ID program if a temporary pass may help to care for livestock remaining at the farm.
- Producers should understand the details of their Insurance policies. Hay may be covered if it is already cut and in the barn, not in the field. Talk with an agent.

Derek Masselink, BC Ministry of Agriculture and Moderator

- The 2017 wildfire season highlighted the need for all of us to be better prepared.
- The Ministry's "Premises ID Program" helped. The Ministry noted that more than 300 farms signed up for this program during 2017 wildfires. It allowed a GIS team to produce an interactive map showing farms, helping other agencies with data, and identifying where livestock could be relocated. Premises ID was important to the mapping function.
- In an emergency, the normal power structure in a community becomes reversed. Individuals on the ground are in charge, in that they can ask for help and requests filter up to support levels.

3.2 Audience Discussion

Following the presentations by panel members, the audience participated in a group discussion which covered a variety of topics including:

- FireSmart walk-around training sessions are effective. At the Wildfire Field Day, farmers related directly to Dimitri's presentation. The farm visit walk-around was successful. Visuals such as water systems on roofs of residences and farm buildings were effective. The field day brought up much that some attendees had not considered. Reference by the speaker to the 2017 wildfires was good motivation. FireSmart definitely helped farms in the Interior with the wildfires. Farm emergency management should also

address flood and other risks. If there is a major disaster, it is important have someone outside the district as a contact for all in the family. During a 'hazard hunt' assessment, consider walking through your farm with a friend, who may have a 'fresh set of eyes' and see items you could miss.

- The wildfire risk is increasing. Climate change is having an effect. The trend in BC forecasts increasing rain events, resulting in more vegetative growth that dries during hot months and creates fuel. The potential for extreme events is increasing. We need to focus our limited resources. For most producers, their plan is based on past wildfire behaviour, but we need to consider future forecasts. These next years are going to be shocking.
- Affordable insurance is at risk. Global warming has surprised insurance companies, and insurance premiums are rising. Producers can assure eligibility for coverage by implementing emergency management measures on their properties. Everyone benefits by working together to mitigate risks, and working with associations, industry, and government. Rising interest rates in the US will have an effect on premiums here.
- Fuel management programs can reduce wildfire risk. Prescribed burns can help reduce risk, but must be carefully managed. The public is rightly concerned about smoke from prescribed burns and its effect on people of all ages. If we allow prescribed burning, the public needs to be educated.
- No lives were lost in the 2017 wildfires. No lives were lost during the 2017 BC wildfire season, despite several population centers impacted and considerable resources mobilized during the response, including 4,000 people and 150 aircraft. California was not as fortunate during its 2017 wildfires.

4 Project Findings and Next Steps

4.1 Project Outcomes

The Field Day and Panel associated with the 2018 Islands Agriculture Show provided a good opportunity to expose livestock and others producers on Vancouver Island to wildfire risks in an age of climate change.

The primary findings from this project include:

- Further education of the agriculture sector in emergency management would be valuable, specifically in protecting livestock from natural hazards. The producers who attended the Field Day and Panel demonstrated their interest in taking steps to protect their farm operations, and in encouraging governments to collaborate on their behalf. These discussions will directly shape the next steps within the Cowichan Valley Regional District, as well as other partners among the BC government.
- Exposing non-agriculture specialists to the questions and concerns of the producers also helped highlight the need for multi-agency coordination during a major emergency.
- Multiple comments were made by participants in relation to multi-agency coordination for fuel mitigation to reduce wildfire risk. Participants noted that future panels should have a representative from the Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development, who can speak to forestry practices, wildfire risk and mitigation opportunities for the agricultural community.
- Producers repeatedly requested assistance with farm wildfire management, including fuel modification practices, FireSmart measures for structures and livestock areas, emergency preparedness, and disaster recovery, as well as insurance. Much of this interest was triggered by the extreme wildfire damage of 2017. This interest suggests there may be value in repeated and expanded sessions, especially in areas of the province with high risk.

4.2 Next Steps

- Facilitate Public Education. All producers and the general public would benefit from ongoing public education about wildfire risks, including fuel modification measures such as prescribed burns. Producers in the Cowichan area can help by taking the wildfire message to their agricultural associations or groups, and working with the CVRD. Some topics suggested by attendees that would be useful include: Procuring kits and setting up sprinklers to protect home and farm structures; efficient pile burning practices; removing livestock for small mixed farms; establishing a “buddy”

farm system to have assistance and relocation plans in place with farms in other locations; and, biosecurity concerns in livestock relocation.

- Share Farm Emergency Planning Template. The CVRD offers an on-farm Emergency Plan tool, including a Template and Guide for filling out the document. This tool is useful for all farm hazards, including wildfire. All producers would benefit from completing a Farm Emergency Plan tailored to their operations. The Plan is available both as a MicroSoft Word and a PDF file online at: <https://www.cvrld.bc.ca/2843/Emergency-Planning-for-Livestock>
- Distribute Agriculture Emergency Plan for BC Local Authorities. The BC Ministry of Agriculture has developed a Template for an Agriculture Emergency Plan that emphasizes livestock relocation and EOC procedures during a public safety emergency, such as a wildfire. This Agriculture Emergency Plan anticipates agricultural specialists joining the EOC, such as assisting in Liaison, Operations, and Planning functions. The document guides the EOC decision-making process for livestock relocation based on BC legislation, policies, and agency responsibilities. In addition, the Climate Action Initiative is expanding the materials for specific regions, such as crop protection in the Okanagan, which will be available soon. The Template for the Agriculture Emergency Plan is available at: https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/farming-natural-resources-and-industry/agriculture-and-seafood/farm-management/emergency-management/relocation/900600-5_local_gov_em_plan_ag_appedix_template.pdf
- Communicate CVRD Local Emergency Response Neighborhoods (LERN) program to producers. The CVRD supports local community emergency planning that includes rural agriculture communities and complements individual farm emergency plans. More information about the program and the CVRD providing a LERN presentation is available at: <https://www.cvrld.bc.ca/235/Local-Emergency-Response-Neighbourhoods>
- Encourage Wildfire Risk Assessments. FARSHA (now AgSafe) is able to perform wildfire risk assessments for individual farms. The AgSafe Safety Consultant for Vancouver Island is Ken Lacroix and can be contacted at: ken@agsafebc.ca.
- Host additional Wildfire Field Days for Agricultural Producers. The local Wildfire Service is willing to performing more walk-around sessions for agricultural producers, as time allows. Walk-arounds on the farm are the best way to transfer practical information to the farmer. However, it is also resource intensive. Interested groups of farmers should contact their Regional Agrologist within the Ministry of Agriculture, who can help coordinate sessions with Wildfire Service.
- Promote FireSmart. FireSmart is the foundational program to mitigate fire danger in BC. FireSmart documents are clear and informative, and cover the principles of 'FireSmarting' home and property, including farm operations. Additional information, including a residential sprinkler video, is available at: <https://www.cvrld.bc.ca/2517/FireSmart-Information>

- Develop Temporary Access Permit System in place in EOC. Local governments, the provincial government, and RCMP should plan together for a permitting system that would allow producers to care for livestock during evacuations. A feasible re-entry permitting system should be worked out in advance of the next emergency. Producer enrollment in Premises ID can support this permitting process.
- Promote Premises ID Program. Cowichan and Vancouver Island producers should be encouraged to enroll in the Premises ID program. Producers should understand that Premises ID is not an invasion of privacy, and that the Ministry of Agriculture does not share this information. It is a useful tool that can support the re-entry permitting process for BC farmers and ranchers. Further details, including on-line enrollment, can be found at: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/industry/agriculture-seafood/programs/food-safety-programs/premises-id>
- Advance multi-agency coordination. Cooperation between several agencies is necessary for a successful management for a rural emergency such as wildfire. These organizations should be informed of the specific needs of producers before and during a wildfire event. Stakeholders should include, but not be limited to, agriculture sector associations (i.e., BC Dairy Association, BC Cattlemens' Association), local authorities, Emergency Management BC, RCMP, and BC Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations & Rural Development (FLNRORD), which is knowledgeable of wildfire behavior, agri/forestry interface, and wildfire risk mitigation.
- Expand Wildfire Sessions for Agricultural Producers in other regions. The usefulness reported by attendees of the wildfire sessions in the CVRD suggests that similar sessions should be hosted in other regions of the province, especially in areas with a high wildfire risk. The Ministry of Agriculture, BC Wildfire Service, EMBC, and the local authority should partner toward success of this initiative. This recommendation is reinforced by the increase in both frequency and duration of disasters impacting BC agriculture due to climate change.

5 Project Evaluation

Although the Moderator requested that all Panel Session attendees complete an evaluation form, only eight forms were collected. The results are summarized in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Summary of responses to Panel Session evaluation questions (Excellent = 5, Very Good = 4, Good = 3, Average = 2, Poor = 1) (n=8).

Questions	Ranking
1. Please rate the presentation speakers.	4.38
2. How well did this speaker/topic meet your expectations?	4.38
3. Overall were you satisfied with the content and organization of this event?	4.38

4. Will the knowledge gained from this presentation help improve your business?	4.38
5. How did you hear about the session? (multiple answers allowed)	
Email	5
Mail	3
Facebook/Twitter	2
Newspaper	5
Radio	1
Internet, Web	2

5.1 General Comments Included in Evaluation

A few respondents provided written or oral feedback on the two sessions. Overall, participants appreciated the practical advice they received on the Field Day, especially in walking around the two farms with a FireSmart expert. Several producers suggested that this education feature be offered again, in different areas and at different times. The Panel audience members noted that the panelists were knowledgeable and willing to share their experiences with the 2017 wildfire season.

5.2 Recommendations for Future Events

The project evaluation provided some useful feedback for informing the development of future similar projects. This section addresses the potential application and rollout of these types of events to other areas of the province.

Recommendations for future activities include:

Field Day

- The Field Day walk-around should become a regular feature among the agriculture association operations in wildfire risk areas.
- Although any of the stakeholder organizations could organize and advertise such sessions, the success will depend on the availability of a FireSmart professional. Such specialists may be found among the Wildfire Service personnel and private contractors.
- Develop and distribute an Evaluation Form, useful to improve future similar events.

Panel Discussion

- The limiting factor on the success of the Panel was the number of producers in attendance, which was lower than expected, despite widespread advertising. This was likely due to the program timeslot that ran simultaneously with an armyworm session,

which attracted the attention of most producers – possibly because it is seen as a more immediate threat.

- Although the speakers were diverse, they offered consistent messages on the need for emergency preparedness and the value of wildfire mitigation through such tools as FireSmart.
- The inclusion of an insurance representative on the Panel added an important voice to enhance the message to producers. Managing wildfire risks is important to the cost of insurance premiums.
- Three producers impacted by the 2017 interior wildfires were contacted but unavailable to be present at the Panel discussion due to logistical and scheduling constraints. In the end, a producer shared her story and questions via a call-in link. This mode of communication worked very well and should be considered in future sessions.
- Develop and distribute an Evaluation Form specific to wildfire management, for use in improving future Panel Discussions.
- The conversation would have benefitted from having representatives from FLNRORD and the local forest industry, who could speak to forestry practices and the impact on wildfire risk levels. This would help encourage a multi-agency approach to wildfire risk reduction.