

February 19, 2018

Via email: FLNR.minister@gov.bc.ca

Office of the Honourable Doug Donaldson
Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development

Re: Community Wildfire Protection Plan / Wildfire Related Issues

Dear Minister Donaldson,

We appreciate that as the new Minister of a very large Ministry you have multiple issues calling for your attention, however we hope that you will give the requests in this letter your timely attention, as the 2018 wildfire season is fast approaching and we do not want to see our community left unprotected and ill-prepared to deal with what you, your Ministry, and fire experts keep referring to as our “new normal”: annual, uncontrollable, widely dispersed, high impact forest fires that put rural communities at risk.

Last year we worked diligently to renew our Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) and were fortunate enough to obtain funding from both UBCM and the Cariboo Chilcotin Beetle Action Coalition (CCBAC) to undertake this onerous task; a task required by the Province before we can access the nominal funding available to protect our community from forest fires. As you know, the process of developing a CWPP requires municipalities to hire specialists to design plans for fuel management treatments on Crown land that is outside our municipal boundaries. If we had not acquired funding from CCBAC to supplement the funding provided by UBCM to develop our new CWPP (through an overly bureaucratic and onerous application process) we would have had to spend our property tax dollars to develop this plan.

Now that we have a new CWPP we are confronted with the reality that we have to spend our limited property tax revenue to fund very expensive fuel management prescriptions and then treatments on Crown land in the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) in an effort to proactively protect our residents’ properties and our community from the increasing threat of wildfires. The previous CWPP for Quesnel

Mayor Bob Simpson

Councillors Ed Coleman, Scott Elliott, Ron Paull, John Brisco, Sushil Thapar, Laurey-Anne Roodenburg



and the surrounding area identified over 2000 ha of Crown land that needed treatment, but over the ten years it was in place less than 20 hectares of fuel management treatments were actually undertaken. Our new CWPP identifies 2700 ha of crown land in need of priority fuel management treatment and recommends that we attempt to treat 20% of these areas (or 540 ha) each year over the next five years – or 27 times as much, per year, than was accomplished over the entire ten years the previous plan was in place.

Our question to you is: why are municipalities required to lead and partially fund planning and fuel management treatments on Crown land in order to protect our community from forest fires? Shouldn't your Ministry be the lead agent, either through the local FLNRORD office or Wildfire Branch? The consultants we hire are first second-guessed by consultants hired by UBCM and then by FLNRORD. Wouldn't it be simpler and more cost effective for the Crown land manager, FLNRORD, to take over this responsibility in consultation with communities?

As a municipality we have one source of funding, property taxes, and our residents rightly expect that their taxes will be spent on public infrastructure and programs within the municipal boundary. But, the current provincial model for protecting communities from forest fires requires us to spend property tax dollars treating provincial lands outside the municipal boundary. This is why so few hectares were actually treated over the last ten years and why our communities are so vulnerable to forest fires under our "new normal."

We respectfully ask that you move expeditiously to address this fundamental structural problem. We ask that you incorporate the responsibility for protecting communities from wildfires within FLNRORD local offices or the local Wildfire Branch and provide either agency with the necessary funding to undertake the identified fuel management treatments as soon as possible (20% per year is not acceptable given the increasing risk we face).

We understand that this restructuring may take some time and as an interim step we request that the Strategic Wildfire Protection Initiative (SWPI) be immediately transferred from UBCM to the Forest Enhancement Society (FES). We also request that communities be provided with 100% funding from FES to undertake actions identified in their CWPPs until such times as the responsibility for this function is assigned to the appropriate provincial agent.

The unprecedented fire season we experienced last year demands an unprecedented response from the provincial government. We believe that immediately restructuring the CWPP and WUI treatment process is foundational



to mounting an unprecedented response; it is also a critical first step toward protecting vulnerable communities like ours from the threat of becoming the next Fort McMurray or Slave Lake.

We welcome an opportunity to explore this matter further with you and your staff at your earliest convenience.

Yours Sincerely,
Mayor Bob Simpson and Quesnel City of Quesnel

Approved by resolution at a Regular meeting of Quesnel City Council; Feb. 20/18

Signed original to follow by postal mail

Bob Simpson

John Brisco

Ed Coleman

Scott Elliott

Ron Paull

Laurey-Anne Roodenburg

Sushil Thapar

cc Union of British Columbia Municipalities & Members
 North Central Local Government Association
