



Coastal Fire Centre

hot topics in Wildfire on the Coast

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Wildfire news

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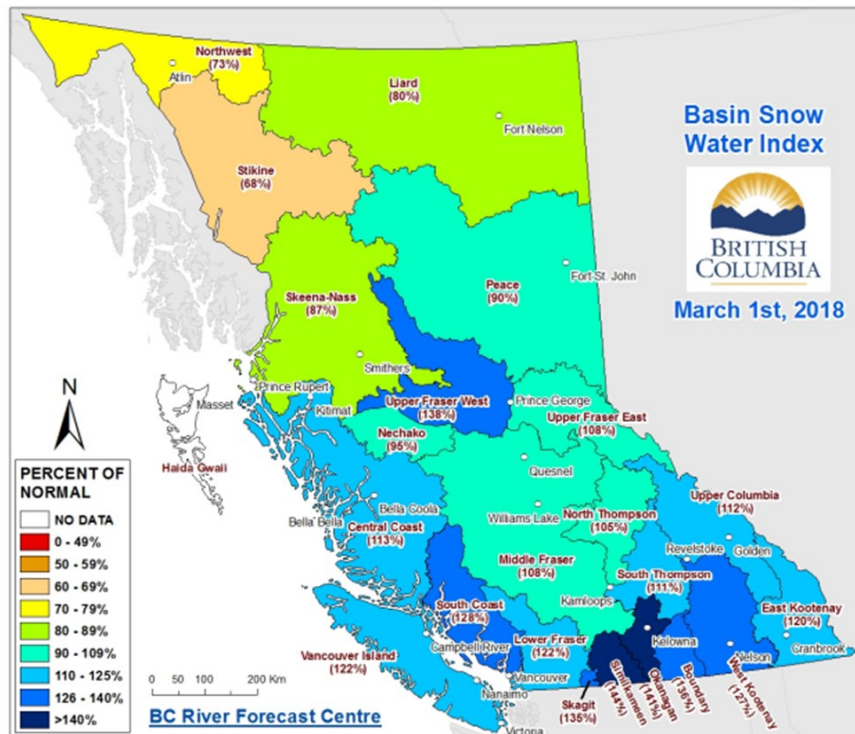
Welcome Back: Coastal Fire Centre 2018 Season Outlook

As Information Officers, one of the most common questions we get asked at this time of the year is: "What is this fire season going to be like?"

While we fully understand that people are curious about what lies ahead, the fact is that it is still too early to tell what kind of fire season it will be. Right now, our focus is on preparing for the season ahead (whatever it may bring), and on examining data that may give us a better indication of the conditions we face heading into the season.

The Coastal Fire Centre is not going into the fire season with drought conditions this year. Many areas of B.C. have higher-than-normal snowpack levels, which unfortunately are contributing to the flooding that's occurring in some parts of the Interior. One indicator of how severe the 2018 fire season might be is the amount of rain that we'll get in June. If we do not get the "June rains" that we typically see, we could be in for a busier-than-average fire season. The amount,

location and timing of lightning this summer are also variables that will influence wildfire activity. At this point, BC Wildfire Service forecasters are predicting a "near normal" fire season on the coast, but that assessment could change depending on what happens in June and beyond. Regardless of what weather we'll experience this summer, all wildfires start with a spark and most fires on the coast are human-caused. With a bit of forethought and planning, most fires are preventable. We encourage everyone to carefully consider whether their activities could cause a wildfire and what they could do to prevent it. In this first edition of *Wildfire News* this year, we've included articles about how you can access information on the BC Wildfire Service website and from other public resources, how local knowledge is used at the regional wildfire coordination centre, and how our crews spend their time when they aren't fighting wildfires. We look forward to staying in touch with you over the summer and hope you enjoy reading the *Wildfire News*.



Left: Graphic produced by the BC River Forecast Centre showing the Basin Snow Water Index (snowpack) level as a percent of normal as of March 1, 2018. Note that most regions in the Coastal Fire Centre were recorded as having 110-140% of normal snowpack.

What do BC Wildfire Service crews do when they're not fighting fire?

Some BC Wildfire Service crew leaders and crew members start work and begin preparing for the fire season as early as March, while there is still snow on the ground in some places. They get firefighting gear ready for the season and begin "recurrency training" (to refresh their skills and fine-tune their expertise), which they must complete every year before heading out to the fireline.

By the end of May, all of the season's crews are back online. New firefighter recruits have completed a week-long boot camp and have been assigned to crews throughout the province.

During busy fire seasons, firefighters — particularly those who will resume post-secondary education in September — will work on wildfires for most of their work term. But for most firefighters who work during the spring and fall months (or during quieter fire seasons), many days are spent away from the fireline as they complete other important tasks.

During these periods, crews will continue their training, assist with fuel management projects, and ensure that their trucks, firefighting gear and tools are always "fire ready". The training is varied, but often covers water delivery systems, fireline safety and fire science.

Firefighters who are eligible to participate in "hover exits" must complete this training every year. During a hover exit, the person holds onto the skids of a helicopter as it hovers

above the ground and can then safely exit without the aircraft having to touch down. This technique is used in cases where no suitable landing area or other reasonable means of accessing the fire exists.

Other types of training that are not required every year focus on furthering a firefighter's education in a number of different areas, including danger tree assessment, aviation resource management and helipad construction, to name just a few. Crews also regularly conduct first aid scenarios so they're well prepared if an injury occurs on the fireline.

Depending on the severity of the fire season and the level of wildfire risk, B.C.'s fire crews may be deployed to help other agencies in this province or elsewhere. For example, many fire crews (and other BC Wildfire Service personnel) assisted with flood relief efforts in the Interior last spring and are doing so again now.

In the spring and fall, it's also common for BC Wildfire Service crews to help other provinces or countries who need extra firefighting horsepower, so long as the fire situation here allows us to provide that assistance. Sufficient firefighting resources will always remain in B.C. to deal with the wildfires burning here.

Crews also take part in physical fitness activities, attend community engagement events and deliver presentations to school groups.



Left: Members of the Salish Unit Crew from Pemberton aid in sandbagging efforts at the Kelowna International Airport earlier this week. In addition to this crew, the Coastal Fire Centre currently has two other unit crews deployed to assist with flood mitigation activities. Information about evacuation orders and alerts due to flooding hazards can be found on impacted regional districts' emergency operations centre or emergency services websites and social media accounts: <https://www.emergencyinfbc.gov.bc.ca/current-flooding-information/>

Local Knowledge and the Regional Wildfire Coordination Centre

The Coastal Fire Centre encompasses a large geographic area (16.5 million hectares, to be precise) and its topography, fuel types, weather patterns and population densities are incredibly diverse. The Coastal Fire Centre is, of course, on the coast. That means that stretches of ocean separate many parts of the fire centre from each other. Responding to wildfires on islands comes with unique challenges, and the presence of the ocean influences coastal wind and weather patterns in ways that are not seen in the Interior of the province.

So how does the Regional Wildfire Coordination Centre, which is located in Parksville on Vancouver Island, make effective decisions to manage wildfires when they occur throughout the Coastal Fire Centre? The answer is two-fold: planning starts well before the fires do; and the Regional Wildfire Coordination Centre's success relies in large part on local knowledge that exists at the fire zone level and is shared throughout the fire centre.

The Coastal Fire Centre is divided into multiple fire zones (see map below). A Wildfire Officer is responsible for each zone and manages that area with the help of other zone staff. Within each zone, they identify potential trouble spots where human-caused fires occur most commonly, such as: along certain highways or roads; at popular bush party locations; in places where people go target shooting; and along favourite off-road vehicle routes.

Zone staff are also knowledgeable about where lightning most commonly occurs, such as in the Sea-to-Sky corridor that cuts through the Pemberton and Fraser Fire Zones. They also have a good understanding of the kinds of industrial work that occurs in their zones, historical weather patterns, local fuels and topography, prevailing winds and local communities and government.



So how is this local knowledge used by the Regional Wildfire Coordination Centre? The centre is overseen by a rotating roster of Regional Wildfire Coordination Officers throughout the fire season. These senior staff members have operational backgrounds, and relevant skills and training. Some of these officers are based at the Coastal Fire Centre headquarters in Parksville, but others come from fire zones elsewhere in the Coastal Fire Centre.

When fire zone staff serve as Regional Wildfire Coordination Officers, it's an opportunity for them to bring their unique knowledge into the centre and share it with other operational staff, including those who will also take on that role. Regional Wildfire Coordination Officers meet each spring to discuss best practices, share information and plan for the season ahead. In the fall, these officers and other people filling many different operational roles meet in debriefing sessions to discuss what went well during the fire season and what could be improved the following year.

The Regional Wildfire Coordination Centre works closely with each fire zone to establish appropriate preparedness levels throughout the fire season. Before the season begins, the Coastal Fire Centre compiles a Preparedness Guide to help fire centre and fire zone personnel establish staffing and equipment levels to address fire danger ratings and conditions within the Coastal Fire Centre. This guide is compiled using a combination of science, professional experience and historical data.

Once the fire season begins, "prep calls" are held twice per week. With the help of the Preparedness Guide, the Regional Wildfire Coordination Officer and fire zone staff ensure that adequate resources are on hand to respond to fires. The "prep plan" takes into account the risk of new fires starting, the current level of fire activity, current indices (various measurements that take moisture content in forest fuels and other factors into consideration), current and forecasted weather conditions, the risk of lightning and more.

Depending on the potential for wildfires to start and spread aggressively, the prep plan could call for placing a Response Officer on standby (who is able to check out reports of new fires) to having unit crews, helicopters, heavy equipment and people trained for specialized roles (such as logistics or finance staff) at the ready. The Regional Wildfire Coordination Officer is important in this process and will take into account the overall wildfire risk and current fire activity, and ensure that the amount and types of firefighting resources are appropriate.

While we can't predict exactly where or when the next wildfire will happen, the combined power of local knowledge and the Regional Wildfire Coordination Centre enables us to be prepared to respond appropriately when new fires start.

How to access BC Wildfire Service information resources

In addition to the “Staying Informed” document that we sent to you this week, we want to provide some more insight into how you can access information about wildfires and the BC Wildfire Service.

Our website (www.bcwildfire.ca) has been reorganized since last season to make it more user-friendly. We encourage you to take a look at it. Topics that are searched for the most (such as “Wildfires of Note”, the interactive wildfire map, and current prohibitions) and much more can be accessed directly from the main page (pictured to the right).

Below are some more ways to access topics directly without going through the main page:

Where can I find more detailed information about fires that are particularly visible or pose a threat to public safety (“Wildfires of Note”)?	http://www.gov.bc.ca/wildfiresofnote
What kinds of fires are currently prohibited?	http://www.gov.bc.ca/wildfirebans
What is the fire danger in my area?	http://www.gov.bc.ca/wildfiredanger
Where can I find information about the FireSmart program?	http://www.gov.bc.ca/firesmart
There’s a fire nearby that’s designated as “Out of Control”. What does that mean?	https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/wildfire-status/about-bcws/wildfire-response/response-terminology or go to www.bcwildfire.ca , click on “About the BC Wildfire Service”, click on “Learn More” under the “Wildfire Response” heading at the bottom of the page, and then click on “Response Types and Stages of Control”
Where can I find information about wildfire prevention for outdoor recreationalists, including information about campfires?	https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/wildfire-status/prevention/outdoor-recreationalist or go to www.bcwildfire.ca , click on “Wildfire Prevention”, and then click on “For the Outdoor Recreationalist”
Where can I find information about wildfires and air quality?	https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/wildfire-status/wildfire-situation/air-quality or go to www.bcwildfire.ca , click on “Current Wildfire Activity” and then click on “View Wildfires and Air Quality”
Where can I find maps of wildfire perimeters from previous seasons?	https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/wildfire-status/about-bcws/wildfire-statistics or go to www.bcwildfire.ca , click “About the BC Wildfire Service” near the bottom of the page and then click on “View Statistics and Geospatial Data”
Does someone nearby have a Category 3 open burning permit?	https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/wildfire-status/fire-bans-and-restrictions/ofts or go to www.gov.bc.ca/wildfirebans and click on “Open Fire Tracking System” at the top left of the page

How to access BC Wildfire Service information resources cont.

You can also view wildfire information by region. The Coastal Fire Centre's page can be found here: <http://bcfireinfo.for.gov.bc.ca/hprScripts/WildfireNews/FireCentrePage.asp?FC=2>. It contains wildfire statistics and current burning prohibitions, and lists the most recent Information Bulletins released by the Coastal Fire Centre.

Coastal Fire Centre Wildfire Information

	Provincial	Coastal
New Lightning-Caused Fires	0	0
New Human-Caused Fires	3	0
Total Fires to Date (current fiscal year)	96	11
Total Area Burned (Ha.) (current fiscal year)	1,579	16

Emergency Info BC



B.C.'s official channel for emergency alerts: www.emergencyinfobc.gov.bc.ca

DriveBC



Get a complete list of impacted highways and closure information at www.drivebc.ca

On the 'Current Wildfire Activity' page of www.bcwildfire.ca, there are quick links to Emergency Info BC and Drive BC

As mentioned in the "Staying Informed" document, the BC Wildfire Service also uses a Facebook page ([@BCForestFireInfo](https://www.facebook.com/BCForestFireInfo)) and Twitter account ([@BCGovFireInfo](https://twitter.com/BCGovFireInfo)) to share breaking information about wildfires, changes to burning prohibitions and prescribed burning being conducted by the BC Wildfire Service.

There is also a toll-free phone line (1 888 336-7378) that provides pre-recorded information about Wildfires of Note, current prohibitions, fire behaviour advisories and the current fire danger rating.

In addition, Information Officers throughout the province can use their stakeholder distribution lists to help keep people informed about significant wildfires in their area. For example, last year the Precipice wildfire caused evacuations in both the Bella Coola Valley and the Cariboo Fire Centre. Information Officers at the Coastal Fire Centre were able to sort our distribution list geographically and send information about that fire to people living in the Bella Coola Valley who had signed up to be on the list. If you know someone who might like to be added to the distribution list, they can contact us at BCWS.COFCInformationOfficer@gov.bc.ca and request to be added to the list.

If you are having trouble finding information online or have any questions, please contact us at BCWS.COFCInformationOfficer@gov.bc.ca or call 250 951-4209.

Fires to Date

Total	12
Lightning	1
Person	11

Fire Danger Rating today



Current Prohibitions (within BCWS jurisdictional area)

None

Did You Know?

150 years ago, in 1868, the gold mining town of Barkerville was destroyed by fire and 116 homes burned down. The fire was started when a miner tried to kiss a girl in one of the town's saloons. The ensuing struggle dislodged a stove pipe, setting the ceiling canvas on fire. The Williams Creek Fire Brigade was formed immediately after the fire and the town was rebuilt.

About Coastal

More new recruits are at a BCWS Bootcamp in Merritt this week. The fast paced seven day program put our new hires through wildfire fighting theory and gives them hands on experience running chainsaws and pumps, digging fireline and building hoselays. They will also gain experience burning out fuels to strengthen the fireline into a control line, how to do the job safely, and lots and lots of physical training to get them ready for the season. These recruits are sent around the province to fill vacancies on Initial Attack Crews and Unit Crews. We expect to employ people from these graduates to bring our crews back to full capacity on the Coast.

Other staff are attending “speciality” training to prepare them to work in Plans, Logistics, or Finance. Our newly promoted Crew Leaders will attend a course to help them prepare for their new supervision duties.

Our Coastal fire season is off to an average start due to the weather, but the same weather has created flooding in the interior. Right now, 51 Coastal Fire Centre staff are helping, either filling and placing sandbags or organizational functions. All our

“waterline” staff take Swift Water training before they go to ensure they know the hazards they face. Since April 1, we have responded to twelve fires, eleven of which are person caused and one by lightning.

We are concerned, because at this time of year the forest is about as resilient as it’s going to be. The mix of warm and rainy days has greened the forest up, and plants are well hydrated. Reasonable and careful wildfire prevention has the best chance of working now, as opposed to the middle of the summer.

One thing to remind people is that anything without roots (slash, dead grass, fallen logs) can’t take advantage of the rain. The only absorption is through its surface, and this type of moisture dries out quickly. Starting fires too close to this type of material creates the risk of escape of your fire from embers, even at this time of year.

We are due for a hot weekend – please be careful and thoughtful with any open fire right now and most importantly: PUT IT OUT when you’re done. “Out” is cold and not smoking. Nothing else will do.

Weather

SYNOPSIS: An upper trough maintains near seasonal temperatures across the majority of the region today. Patchy moisture should continue to burn off from most areas through late morning, then likely feeds isolated convective showers this afternoon, favouring (but not limited to) higher terrain of the south. Lingering low-level moisture combined with a cool northwesterly/inflow pattern should help maintain elevated humidities in most areas today. Bands of moisture and instability entrained in a developing northeasterly flow maintain isolated to scattered showers over eastern sections of the Fraser and Pemberton zones overnight tonight while most other areas see partly clear skies and dry conditions in the evening followed by patchy fog and low cloud by morning. An upper ridge strengthening over the region on Friday brings sunnier skies, warmer temperatures, and lower humidities. Light outflow conditions showing up in some mainland valleys by morning should weaken by noon. A light outflow pattern should redevelop Friday night although there is still a risk of patchy fog and low cloud in some areas by Saturday morning.

OUTLOOK: A strong upper ridge brings progressively higher temperatures and lower humidities Saturday and Sunday with the help of a light outflow pattern each night. Temperatures throughout the inland sections of each zone should reach the high twenties with a few possible occurrences of 30° or higher Saturday afternoon. Humidities should dip to between 18% and 25% in parts of the; likely a few points higher on the Island. The ridge of high pressure should be at its strongest on Sunday bringing hot and dry weather to all zones. Temperatures should reach the high twenties to low thirties in parts of each zone with afternoon humidities in the 15% to 25% range. Generally light winds should be seen each day. The upper ridge weakens in response to an upper trough pushing slowly onshore Monday or Monday night. Weak bands of frontal moisture associated with the approaching feature could bring cloudy periods to Haida Gwaii and the Mid Coast on Monday but the general call elsewhere is for another unseasonably warm and dry day with similar or else slightly lower temperatures and similar or else slightly higher humidities than Sunday.