



Coastal Fire Centre

hot topics in Wildfire on the Coast

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Wildfire news

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The shared responsibility of using B.C.'s forests

If you spend any time in the Coastal Fire Centre's forests this summer, you may see some striking new wildfire prevention signs along the way. They were created to remind and educate forest users about the responsible use of all-terrain vehicles, firearms and campfires.

The majority of B.C.'s forests are on Crown land, so recreationalists, tourism operators, industrial operators, forest professionals and others have a vested interest in maintaining a healthy forest and preventing human-caused wildfires.

A key responsibility of anyone using our forests is to report any wildfire that they see. Their observations give BC Wildfire Service staff valuable information about how and where wildfires are burning. For example, if we receive several calls about the same fire, we can triangulate the location of the fire based on where the callers are and which direction they're looking.

People who carry out industrial work in forests also must take measures to ensure that their activities don't cause a wildfire. Should their activities start a fire, they have an obligation to carry out fire control measures until they're relieved by an official acting on behalf of the government. Before they get involved in a high-risk activity (such as running a chainsaw), operators must determine the current fire danger class for their location by referencing representative weather data. (For more information on this topic, visit: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/wildfire-status/for-industry-commercial-operators/high-risk-activities>)



Since the *Wildfire Act* is "results-based" legislation, it is the responsibility of the operator to determine what precautions he or she must take to minimize the risk of starting a wildfire. Appropriate precautions may include

completing the high-risk activity before the hottest part of the day, or maintaining a "spark watch" for a period of time after the activity is finished to ensure that it didn't start a fire. The forest provides a wide variety of recreational opportunities and (in addition to reporting wildfires) recreationalists may have additional responsibilities depending on their activities. For instance, off-road vehicle users need to ensure that no off-road vehicle restrictions are in effect in the area, such as the ones that were implemented in some parts of southern B.C. during the 2017 wildfire season. Operators must also ensure that their vehicle does not spark a wildfire because they drove or parked on dry grass or other types of easily combustible material.

Riders are reminded that all off-road vehicles are now required to have a spark arrestor installed to reduce wildfire risks when operating on Crown land. A spark arrestor is a small screen or other device that is installed in an exhaust system to stop sparks or other exhaust residue from exiting the tailpipe. (For more information on this topic, visit: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2018FLNR0044-000479>)

The shared responsibility of using B.C.'s forests cont.

Firearm use can also pose a wildfire risk. People who choose to use a firearm outside of an established shooting club or shooting range are responsible for ensuring that their activities don't start a wildfire. In recent years, the Coastal Fire Centre has experienced an increased number of wildfires caused by firearms. For example, sparks can be created when steel-clad bullets strike rocks or steel targets.

If a binary exploding target falls into dry grass, logging slash or other flammable material, it can also start a wildfire. Binary exploding targets are homemade or commercially pre-packaged explosives that are used for firearms practice. They enable a shooter to see from a distance when the target has been hit. They can pose a significant wildfire risk and so their use is banned whenever a Category 2 open burning prohibition is in effect. Those wishing to use binary exploding targets must check that their use is not prohibited.

Other recreationalists who need to be aware of potential wildfire risks are those who enjoy having a campfire. They must always check whether a campfire prohibition is in effect in the area where they are. If campfires are allowed in that area, people must follow provincial campfire regulations, including keeping the fire smaller than 0.5 metres wide by 0.5 metres high, never leaving it unattended, fully extinguishing the campfire before leaving the area for any length of time, and other safety precautions.

Additional information about campfire regulations is available online at: https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/public-safety-and-emergency-services/wildfire-status/fire-bans-and-restrictions/bcws_campfireposter.pdf

Using forest resources responsibly isn't difficult, and it doesn't interfere with your enjoyment of B.C.'s beautiful forests. It just takes a bit of planning, thinking about whether your activities could potentially start a wildfire (and how you can avoid doing so), and preserving our forest environments for others to use and appreciate.

Fire management plans

A single part of a forest may be used for many different activities. Each forested area will also have features that make it unique, such as whether the area is in a park, whether it is home to threatened or endangered species, whether the area has burned frequently due to naturally occurring wildfires (before the days of human intervention) and many other factors. Due to this complexity, a fire management plan is needed to assist with decision-making if a wildfire ever occurs in that area.

A Fire Management Plan is an agreement between government program managers that sets out certain actions that will be taken on a specific piece of land should an unplanned fire occur. The document, created by the land manager responsible for that area, includes plans for both wildfires and intentionally lit ("prescribed") fires.

Effective fire management takes into account the impact of fire, potential damage to "values" (such as infrastructure, communities and natural resources), the level of fire suppression that's warranted, the cost of forest protection, and other conditions and potential risks. A successful Fire Management Plan also considers factors such as fire prevention, fire detection and fire suppression capabilities.

A comprehensive Fire Management Plan may also include a Fire Suppression Plan. A Fire Suppression Plan includes details about actions that would be required to protect human life and property, and to minimize any damage resulting from a fire. A Fire Suppression Plan may be more site-specific than the Fire Management Plan. For example, a large provincial or federal park may have an overall Fire Management Plan, with specific Fire Suppression Plans for different areas of the park.

Simply put, a Fire Management Plan outlines the land manager's overall objectives and priorities should a wildfire occur or if a prescribed burn is planned.

Moving into a Wildland Urban Interface area

The population of B.C. has been increasing continuously over the last century. The Coastal Fire Centre is now home to over 75% of B.C.'s population.

Many people live in metropolitan areas that are not considered to be part of the "wildland urban interface" (where developed areas border on rural landscapes), and they likely won't have their homes directly affected by a wildfire. However, the province's growing population has resulted in an expansion of developed areas that border on forested areas.

For many people, the thought of leaving a crowded city and moving to a community surrounded by nature is appealing, but these newcomers may not have a full understanding of FireSmart principles or the risks that come with living in the wildland urban interface. The same could be said for some city dwellers who own cabins or second homes in forested areas — sometimes in the interior of the province where wildfires can be intense and occur frequently.

People who live in the wildland urban interface sometimes do not know a lot about wildfire prevention or how wildfires start and spread. One explanation for this may be the rapid modernization of our lives. At one time, people who lived in a rural area heated their homes and cooked using a wood stove or open fire. They would have understood how different types of fuel affected the fire, how oxygen can be used to control it and how important chimney and roof maintenance was to their safety. It would have been easy to relate that knowledge to wildfires. Today, far fewer people have that direct, sustained experience with fire.

Even recreationalists who spend quite a bit of time in the forest may not be experienced in the safe use of fire or understand wildfire risks. Examples include people dumping hot charcoals from a barbecue onto the forest floor (because they don't want to set a garbage can on fire) and hunters who don't realize that some kinds of bullets can create more sparks than others.

Regardless of your level of wildfire knowledge, it's helpful to stop and look at your activities in a different light: Could what I'm doing start a wildfire? How could the fire spread? Would I be able to put out a fire before it gets out of control? What could I do differently to decrease the risk of starting a wildfire? A bit of forethought can go a long way toward preventing human-caused wildfires.

Whether you live in the wildland urban interface or own a secondary home there, you should consider a variety of factors to increase the chances of your home surviving a wildfire:

- Are there any firefighting services available where I live? Which agency provides them? What kinds of fires can they respond to? (Remember that BC Wildfire Service crews are not trained to fight structure or vehicle fires and can't respond to them.)
- If I'm in the market to buy a home in the wildland urban interface, do I know what features to look for in a FireSmart home? (Knowing what to look for before purchasing a home can save a lot of time and money down the road when you decide to implement FireSmart principles.)
- What risks am I taking if I choose to pile firewood beside my home, allow grass to grow tall and dry out in the summer, or don't clean the home's gutters regularly?
- How can I make it easier to complete FireSmart activities if I'm busy or don't live on the property?
- Is there a rural strata group in my area that has set standards in place for reducing wildfire risks? Can I participate in organized work groups to tackle bigger projects with more people?

Anyone who owns a house or cabin in the wildland urban interface should learn about FireSmart principles and apply them around their homes. Many activities that will make a structure more FireSmart (fire-resistant) are easy to do and inexpensive. More complex or time-consuming steps can be done as part of a long-term project or in conjunction with other home improvement projects (such as choosing fire-resistant roofing material when it's time to replace your roof).

Information about FireSmart principles and the FireSmart program is available online at www.gov.bc.ca/firesmart

The most common reasons for human-caused fires in the Coastal Fire Centre

Every year, the BC Wildfire Service spends a lot of time and commits considerable resources to suppress human-caused wildfires that could have been prevented. About 65% of the wildfires that started in the Coastal Fire Centre over the past 10 years were human-caused, while only about 35% were triggered by lightning (naturally occurring wildfires). Note that all of the statistics cited in this article refer to wildfires that occurred in the Coastal Fire Centre over the last 10 years.

“Human-caused” is a large category that includes a wide variety of specific causes. For instance, if a tree falls on a power line and starts a fire, it’s considered to be a human-caused fire because people installed the power line. Arson, fireworks, burning vehicles and open burning are other fire causes that fall into this category.

Some people think that the careless disposal of smoking materials is a leading cause of wildfires, but that behaviour only caused about seven per cent of all human-caused fires in the Coastal Fire Centre over the past 10 years. (Vehicles that catch on fire and then ignite nearby vegetation account for a similar percentage of human-caused fires.) Nonetheless, it is crucial to dispose of cigarettes, matches and related items responsibly.

Open burning is statistically more likely to start a wildfire than either burning vehicles or cigarettes. Open burning that complied with wildfire legislation started fewer fires over the past 10 years than fires that were not in compliance (such as those that were too large or were lit during an open burning prohibition). The open burning statistics are a good reminder to never burn when it’s windy, to comply with any prohibitions that are in effect, and to ensure that you have sufficient people, water and equipment on site to extinguish an open burn should it start to escape.

Unfortunately, fires that are deliberately set to create damage (arson fires) are a more common cause of wildfires than open burning. These kinds of fires can be particularly dangerous for the public if they start in high-population areas.

The largest single factor contributing to human-caused wildfires has been campfire use. The majority of these wildfires were caused by campfires that people abandoned (i.e. not fully extinguished before the people left the site) and campfires that did not comply with legislation. Campfires that were in compliance and were being monitored by the people who lit them accounted for a very small proportion of campfire-caused wildfires. On average, campfires account for about 25% of human-caused wildfires in the Coastal Fire Centre each year.

Adhering to local and BC Wildfire Service open burning prohibitions, and ensuring that any allowed campfire complies with the regulations, are easy and effective ways to help prevent campfire-related wildfires.



Take a close look at this photo of a wildfire discovered on May 30, 2018 in the Coastal Fire Centre and see page 5 for the full story.

Fires to Date

Total 39

Lightning 2

Person 37

Number of fires since last Newsletter (May 25)

Total 10

Lightning 0

Person 10

Fire Danger Rating today



Current Prohibitions (within BCWS jurisdictional area)

Category 2 open fires are prohibited in the Coastal Fire Centre except in the Haida Gwaii Natural Resource District and the 'Fog Zone.' For more information, go to www.gov.bc.ca/wildfirebans

Wildfire news

Coastal Fire Centre

How can a campfire cause a wildfire?

On May 30, BC Wildfire Service crews responded to reports of a wildfire burning near the Strathcona Dam west of Campbell River. When they arrived, it was clear that the fire had originated from a campfire ring. It appeared as though the campfire had not been extinguished and one of the rocks that formed a ring around the campfire had rolled away. The fire crept into the surrounding vegetation and began to spread (see photo on page 4).

With the help of a helicopter that bucketed water to calm down fire activity and winds that were in their favour, the firefighters were able to quickly contain the fire to only 0.009 hectares. This wildfire is a good example of how easy it is for a campfire to start a wildfire and how easily it could have been prevented.

This is only one example of how a campfire can start a wildfire. Updrafts from your campfire can carry sparks and embers long distances and could ignite dry forest fuels (either in trees or on the ground). By keeping your campfire small, hot and burning efficiently, you can help minimize the risk that your fire will start a wildfire. Paying attention to increases in wind speed or changes in wind di-

rection can also help you prevent a wildfire.

When you are finished with your campfire, it is imperative that you extinguish it completely and double-check that it is out before you leave the area. Dumping water on the campfire is only the start of this process. Stirring the ashes and reapplying water exposes the above-ground fuels to moisture and cools them down. However, if you detect a "return of heat" after the water has evaporated, you need to keep working to extinguish the fire. The culprit could be a log whose interior is still burning, or a root still smouldering under your campfire site. Keep wetting down your campfire and stirring the ashes and embers until all remnants of the fire are cool to the touch.

The only way you can ensure that your campfire is completely out is to "cold trail" it. This is one of the techniques that BC Wildfire Service crews use to ensure that a fire is extinguished. Carefully run your hand over the entire campfire area and over any partially burned fuel that remains. By doing this, you will be able to tell if any heat is still coming from the ground or the partially burned fuel.

Weather

SYNOPSIS: (Today-tomorrow) A very wet rain band now pointed at the coast is bringing rains on the mainland from Squamish north to Bute Inlet, along Vancouver Island from Duncan to Qualicum and to the Lower Mainland. The system is drifting eastward slowly such that once it starts to rain in a certain location it will continue to rain and rain quite heavily for a few hours. Environment Canada computer forecasts are indicating over 40 mm possible along the southwest facing slopes both on the mainland and southwest Vancouver Island. This afternoon the system drifts eastward reaching all along the north side of the Fraser River and north to Jarvis Inlet with steady rains, heavy in places while on the Island the clouds are breaking up and rains decrease to a few showers. By midnight less and less showers are falling towards the

west and rains decrease to scattered showers on the mainland including a few showers through the dry belt zones of D'Arcy, Fraser Canyon and Manning Park. The system is well east of the Coast Mountains tomorrow but Coastal zones remain in the centre of a cool unstable upper trough with clouds and a few showers likely. Winds remain reasonably light throughout.

OUTLOOK: (Sunday-Tuesday) By Sunday the cold upper trough is filling and moving east allowing a weak and still cool upper ridge to build just west of Coastal zones. Weather transitions from cloudy, showery and cool on Sunday to sunny periods, sometimes windy but still cool on Monday. The ridge is over the coast by Tuesday bringing a gradual warming drier trend.