



# Catastrophic Wildfires – why did they happen and what can be done?



Fieldtour to Fox Mountain - Woodlot licensees George Delisle (l) and Jerry Bennner (r) checking growth rings of a burned tree from the 2017 wildfire.  
(Photo Credit: Williams Lake Tribune)

By LISA MARAK

Woodlot licensees gathered in Williams Lake for the Federation of BC Woodlot Associations (FBCWA) AGM to look at what happened in the Cariboo and around Williams Lake during the 2017 wildfire season and examine ways in which forest management can change and be improved, not just to prevent wildfires but also to have healthier, more resilient forests and ecosystems. Representatives from the Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations & Rural Development (FLNORD), industry, local government and academia from around the province joined them as they discussed the

challenges BC faces managing forests in the wake of the two worst wildfire seasons.

The more than 100 delegates saw firsthand the impacts of the 2017 wildfires during their fieldtrip to nearby Fox Mountain where salvage logging and post fire restoration work was underway as well as a fuel mitigation project on the Williams Lake Community Forest. Along the route was a Douglas fir stand infested by fir beetle. The population is expected to expand significantly as fire stressed and dying trees are far more susceptible to beetle infestations. Lorraine Maclauchlan, Regional Entomologist, FLNORD spoke on this topic: “Forests Under Siege – Insects Response to Changing Forests” with wildfires, global warming and existing

forest management strategies being key factors.

The three-day meeting started off with remarks from Mike Pederson, Regional Executive Director, FLNRORD on recovery efforts underway in the Cariboo region and funding accessed for fire prevention and fuel mitigation in the wildland urban interface through the Forest Enhancement Society (FES) and the Community Resiliency Investment Program (CRIP). Gord Chipman, director of the Cariboo Woodlot Association described the realities of the 2017 wildfire season and lessons brought forward to 2018 while Ian Meir, Acting Executive Director, BC Wildfire Service (BCWS) spoke of implementing new strategies and BCWS’s efforts to continue engaging stakeholders when



looking at the 2018 wildfires.

The second day focused on why such catastrophic wildfires, their impacts, prevention and risk reduction through a panel presentation. Bob Gray, a fire ecologist spoke on how BC's forests and communities are not resilient to wildfire and beetles with the current conditions of our forests and warming climate. He presented a model on restoring our landscapes to be more resilient to future fires, which included prescribed burning as a forest management measure. Some tough questions were asked – What important values do you want protected? And what resulting conditions are unacceptable? Brian McNaughton, FBCWA General Manager and two time evacuee in 2017 touched on this in his presentation speaking on the retention (little or no logging) around Williams Lake to preserve old growth, ungulate winter range, and scenic corridors which contributed to the volatility of the wildfires around the city. Miles Fuller, forest consultant from North West BC presented his findings of the Nadina fires and how the fires went around plantations previously

logged and broadcast burned. Jeff Mycock, Chief Forester, West Fraser Mills looked at industry impacts and perspectives of the 2017 & 2018 wildfires, ranging from a record area of forests burned, highest costs, and impacts on their business, community and forest values. BC's Chief Forester, Diane Nicholls wrapped up the presentation with thought provoking remarks about forest management to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires.

During the panel discussion, numerous ideas were advanced for necessary changes to the way public forests are managed setting the stage for further discussions and actions that need to occur.

While Woodlot Licences may be a small forest tenure, many are located next to communities in the wildland urban interface and along highways. In managing in these critical areas around communities, woodlot holders want to ensure they are responsibly managing their small piece of Crown forest. This conference highlighted how serious and engaged woodlot licensees are about their role in making our forests and ecosystems more fire resilient.

**THE 2017 /2018  
WILDFIRES IMPACTED  
60 WOODLOT  
LICENCES TOTTALLING  
10,188 HECTARES.**



Gord Chipman, Director of the Cariboo Woodlot Association and manager WL 502 describing the realities of the 2017 wildfire season at the Williams Lake Visitors Centre.

## Minister's Woodlot Awards for Excellence and Innovation

The province recognized three woodlot licensees at the AGM for 2018:

- Charles Bloom Secondary School Woodlot - provincial and Southern area
- Saulteau First Nations (John Stokmans) - North area
- Todd & Joan Thompson - Coast area

For more information on the recipients, visit [woodlot.bc.ca/stewardship/](http://woodlot.bc.ca/stewardship/)

"I'm incredibly proud of the work this year's award winners are undertaking to provide benefits to the communities and forested areas around them," said Jeff Beale, president of

the Federation of British Columbia Woodlot Associations. "Award recipients continue to demonstrate the enhanced opportunity for additional local revenue streams, employment, education and sustainability when innovation and excellence in woodlot management are applied. Congratulations to Charles Bloom Secondary school for leading the pack, and kudos to Martin Tooms, the teacher who is the driving force behind the program."

**All AGM presentations can be found at [woodlot.bc.ca/annual-general-meeting-conference/](http://woodlot.bc.ca/annual-general-meeting-conference/)**



Minister's Award – Provincial recipient of Minister's Award for Excellence & Innovation – Charles Bloom Secondary School ( l-r Kathy Wickum, District Principal SD22, Martin Tooms, CBSS Forestry Program Teacher, Jeff Beale, President FBCWA, Diane Nicholls, BC's Chief Forester, FLNRORD.



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