

IS THE BC GOVERNMENT COMMITTED TO WILDFIRE MANAGEMENT ADAPTATION?

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The BC Government actions regarding catastrophic events have been consistent with other political responses to similar events around the world. The traditional responses are to:

- 1) Conduct an analysis regarding the impacts of the event.
- 2) Take action to mitigate short-term impacts.
- 3) Identify adaptive measures to prevent or minimize the impacts of future events.

Examples of these are the Mountain Pine Beetle (MPB) epidemic and the 2003 wildfire season in BC, the cod fishery off the east coast of Canada,^{1,2,3} the MPB epidemic in the mid-western USA⁴ and climate change reflected in the ice storms in Ontario (1998)⁵ and France (1999)⁶. **What did BC do regarding their two catastrophic events?**

The BC response to the MPB catastrophic event involved approximately \$1 Billion being directed at the analysis of the impacts and mitigation actions. In fairness to the Government, they established the Beetle Action Coalitions (BACs) with the mandate to develop and implement community based adaptation and diversification strategies. A combined second \$1 Billion was committed over 10 years by the Provincial and Federal Governments. However, in 2008 after 3-4 years of response, based on the wisdom of the BC Forest Minister, it was declared the epidemic was over. **An amazing lack of foresight and leadership but maybe good short-term politics!** By 2010, the BC funds to the BACs were reduced to a fraction of what was needed to implement the strategies. The Government of Canada directed the remaining ~\$800 Million of committed funds to dealing with the MPB impacts and mitigation strategies in Alberta. The commitment of a second \$1 Billion was never talked about again and the communities were left to fend for themselves with funding limited through access to other politically motivated and diversely focused programs. It was back to business as usual with the BC Government moving on to deal with the next crisis.

¹ McCay, B.J. and Finlayson, A.C., 2005. *The political ecology of crisis and institutional change: The case of the Northern Cod*, American Anthropological Association Ann Meeting, Nov 15-19, 17p.

² Hamilton, L.C., 2003. *Fisheries dependent communities: Propositions about ecological and social change*, Arctic Economic Development and Self-Government, G. Guhaime and N. Bernard (Eds), Quebec City: GETIC, Universite Laval, p49-61.

³ Ramsey, P., 2003. *Fish and chips: Lessons from the East Coast for BC forest communities*, Carswell, Division of Thomson Canada, Limited, 27p.

⁴ Tyler, K., 2005. *The Forest of the Future: Ecologist Lee Frelich on the Fate of the Boundary Waters*, Imprint Magazine, University of Minnesota, 5p.

⁵ <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/ice-storm-1998/>

⁶ Raymond, P., Lloyd, D., and McConnell, D. 2001. *The post-Christmas 'French' storms of 1999*, Weather, Vol 56, p 81-91.

The BC Government's response to the Filmon⁷ report on the 2003 wildfires was equally disappointing. Actions were taken to identify the impacts and mitigation requirements. However, adaptation support has been limited and communities do not believe enough is being done⁸. To date, \$78 Million has been directed primarily to adaptation actions regarding fuel management in the interface forests around communities and encouraging residents to implement the Fire Smart program. This has resulted in treatment of less than seven per cent of high-risk land. The Forest Enhancement Society received \$235 million in 2016-2017 for activities, including wildfire risk reduction, bringing the total spent on adaptation, when combined with the strategic wildfire initiative, to \$313 Million. This has been totally inadequate when compared to the necessary \$6.7 Billion of support required based on the Forest Practices Board⁹ area treatment cost estimates. It should be remembered the cost of fighting the wildfires in 2017 was in excess of \$500 Million. **Are we to continue with this strategic focus or increase adaptation commitments?**

I am reminded of the comment by Dr. Mark Leier, SFU Professor & Labour Historian: "Governments do not do things because it is the right thing to do. They do the right thing when they are pushed and pressured to do them." Adaptation relative to expected future catastrophic events is a long-term commitment and usually expensive. Dr. Lori Daniels, UBC Associate Professor, Forest and Conservation Sciences stated "Here we are with wildfires with severe consequences. And unlike a major earthquake, it's not if it's going to happen in our lifetime. It happens every summer in our lifetime."⁸ The question is: **What are BC's adaptation plans?**

The BC Government has embarked on two reviews of the 2017 wildfire catastrophic event.

- 1) An internal review by the BC Wildfire Service, and
- 2) An independent review of this year's wildfire and flooding seasons.

The relatively recent responses from the BC Government to catastrophic events (i.e., MPB epidemic, 2003 wildfires) and their consistency with those of politicians in other jurisdictions raise the question: **What can we expect from the 2017 wildfire reviews? Will the response by Government to the recommendations be the same?** If we are to minimize the economic cost over the long-term to the Province and its citizens, it will take political leadership and a commitment to break the traditional model adopted by politicians around the world. Wildfire ecologists and management experts have identified actions that can assist in adaptation, specifically landscape level strategic forest land management planning. This should and can be done using ecosystem management principles while protecting against catastrophic wildfires. **Will these be listened to and the traditional political response to catastrophes truncated or will the past and current strategies and actions by the Ministry take precedent and be strongly defended?**

⁷ Filmon, G., 2004. *B.C. Firestorm 2003 Provincial Review*, Government of B.C.

⁸ <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/b-c-hasn-t-done-enough-to-reduce-wildfire-risk-communities-say-1.4273910>

⁹ <https://www.bcfpb.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/SIR43-Fuel-Management-Update.pdf>