

Communicating Through Wildfire

**An Introduction on How To Improve Outcomes
for Agriculture & Local Governments**

*Because wildfire response
starts long before the fire*



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Front Cover Photo

The Mt. Hayes wildfire near Ladysmith in August 2021 prompted the Cowichan Valley Regional District to declare a local state of emergency.

Front Cover Quote

Attribution to Gordon Burns, a retired rancher and a [Rancher Liaison](#) from East Kootenay.

Disclaimer

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Credits

Photos

- Mike Andrews
- Sam Bergman
- Paul Edmonds
- Chris Marsh
- Emrys Miller
- Brian & Sandy Thomas
- Flickr user Tjflex2

Content development and writing

- Harmony Bjarnason
- [Clear Sky Consulting](#)
- [Rachel Penner Consulting](#)
- [Red Dragon Consulting](#)

Communications strategy, handbook design and graphics

- [Rachel Penner Consulting](#)



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Project Oversight Committee members:

- Harmony Bjarnason — Climate Change Adaptation Program
- Jaime Haynes — Kettle River Stockmen’s Association

- Sacha Bentall and Tanya Molle — Kootenay Livestock Association
- Nancy Woods — Kootenay Milk Producers Association
- Philip Gyug, Jeffrey Nimmo and Chris Zabek — Ministry of Agriculture and Food
- Terry Balan — Regional District of East Kootenay
- Vicki Gee (former Area E director), Carlene Pires and Mark Stephens — Regional District of Kootenay Boundary

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The Thomas Creek Wildfire
in the Regional District of
Okanagan-Similkameen
burned 10,597 hectares from
[July 21 to August 24, 2021.](#)

Why It Matters



This handbook is for local governments and for farmers and ranchers who want to increase the resilience of their communities and operations. It's also for any other agencies and organizations that work with agriculture during wildfire preparedness and response.

As the [climate changes](#), wildfires in BC are becoming larger and more severe. The wildfire season is starting sooner and ending later. This means everyone needs to learn how to adapt.

Preparing for an emergency can feel intimidating and overwhelming. It can also seem financially daunting to implement effective planning and mitigation practices.

But wildfire preparedness is not a solo endeavour. It is a responsibility shared among multiple organizations and individuals, and each person has an important role to play.

About This Handbook

This handbook grew out of 5+ years of collaborative consultation, across multiple projects, with more than 100 farmers and ranchers and other individuals involved in wildfire response from across BC.

The actions in this handbook were developed from the shared stories and lived experiences of producers who managed through wildfires on their doorsteps and also from the input of local government staff, who are often stretched thin during emergency response.

Check out the [Who Does What?](#) graphic on the next two pages to see what each group is responsible for when it comes to wildfire preparedness and response for agriculture.

How to Use This Document

Wildfire preparedness, response and recovery is a rapidly evolving field. This handbook provides a starting point for farmers and ranchers and for local governments who are developing or looking to improve their preparedness and response processes.

This first section maps out the organizations and individuals involved before, during and after a wildfire and highlights opportunities and challenges for both the agriculture sector and local governments.

The second section, starting on [page 10](#), identifies how to improve communication and collaboration through a series of ideas and checklists.

The third section, [Doing Things Differently](#), presents a case study, describing how the Cariboo Regional District turned a challenging situation into an opportunity for growth.

The final sections of the document feature [templates](#) and [resources](#) for those wanting to dig deeper.

By working together and taking small steps, local governments and producers *can* improve wildfire experiences and outcomes.

Everyone has a role to play in keeping our communities safe — this handbook can help you understand how your role integrates with everyone else's.

Who Does What?

BLUE: Provincial government

ORANGE: Other governments

GREEN: Agriculture sector

BROWN: Other support organizations



PROVINCIAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT MINISTRY

Coordinates all emergency management in BC, sets response goals, administers emergency management legislation and supports **Emergency Operations Centres (EOCs)** during wildfire response



BC WILDFIRE SERVICE

Manages wildfires outside of municipal and First Nations jurisdiction through prevention, mitigation and suppression and may serve as Incident Command during wildfire response



LOCAL GOVERNMENTS



FIRST NATIONS

These governments develop and maintain emergency plans and programs for their respective jurisdictions. During an emergency, they may set up an EOC to coordinate support from.



RCMP

Support EOC operations during a wildfire, such as managing security checkpoints or maintaining security in evacuated areas



FIRESMART BC

Develops resources and programs to help citizens protect their homes and communities from wildfire

**Wildfire
preparedness
and response
partners**

Community
& agricultural
resilience



To connect with the groups listed on these two pages, visit the [Contacts section on page 35](#).

Agricultural partners



COMMERCIAL PRODUCERS



HOBBY FARMERS

All farmers and ranchers should have a plan for wildfire preparedness and response and, if they have animals, should register for Premises ID. They are responsible for ensuring the safety of their animals as well as any employees living on farm property.



Agricultural & community resilience



AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY ASSOCIATIONS

Support their members through information, resources and events and can represent their sector in an EOC



ANIMAL SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONS

Can help all farmers and ranchers with relocation and caring for pets and livestock during wildfires



PROVINCIAL AGRICULTURE MINISTRY

Supports local authorities to work with producers and facilitates reimbursement to producers for livestock relocation costs



REGIONAL AGROLOGISTS

Provincial government staff with agriculture expertise who can provide guidance and support to multiple partners



RANGE OFFICERS

Provincial government staff who can support the EOC as subject matter experts

Why Agriculture

Agriculture produces the food that helps sustain us and is also a significant economic driver in most regions of the province.

Agriculture provides jobs and supports the local economy, which underpins much of BC's tourism sector and improves the quality of life for communities and citizens through farmer's markets, agri-tourism and cultural events.

However, agriculture is also one of the most at-risk groups when it comes to wildfire.

Agricultural properties are more likely to be affected by wildfire, since farms and ranches are typically located closer to forested areas where wildfires start.

However, due to the complexity inherent in agricultural production, farmers and ranchers can't just pick up a grab-and-go bag and drive away.

From managing livestock and deciding when to relocate them, to determining whether to start harvest early, to weighing the costs and benefits of moving stored crops, to overseeing workers or tourists — producers have to coordinate a multitude of inter-related decisions when preparing for or responding to a wildfire.

Producer perspective



Develop a wildfire plan, including on-ranch equipment and resources, water sources, evacuation procedures, livestock transport, safe livestock destinations, etc.

Make a detailed photographic record — still and video — of buildings, sheds, equipment and vehicles in as much detail as possible. These will be immensely helpful when dealing with insurance companies.

Gordon Burns, a retired rancher and a [Rancher Liaison](#), has experienced a total loss fire



Why Local Government

Local governments have a legal mandate to develop and maintain an emergency management plan and program that supports preparedness, mitigation, response and recovery from disasters.

They are responsible for declaring states of local emergency — and they respond to the advice of subject matter experts such as the BC Wildfire Service — and for providing emergency support services to all affected residents.

Emergency management programs may be staffed by only one or two people yet still need to serve an entire regional district.

During any emergency, they adhere to the BC Emergency Management System's [standard response goals](#), which prioritize human life and health.

Local governments are often the connectors between their residents and provincial funding programs, such as those that reimburse ranchers whose fences are cut during wildfire response or that help feed livestock after a wildfire.

This means that coordination and clear communication between the various levels of government can make a big difference in improving outcomes for both agriculture and communities.

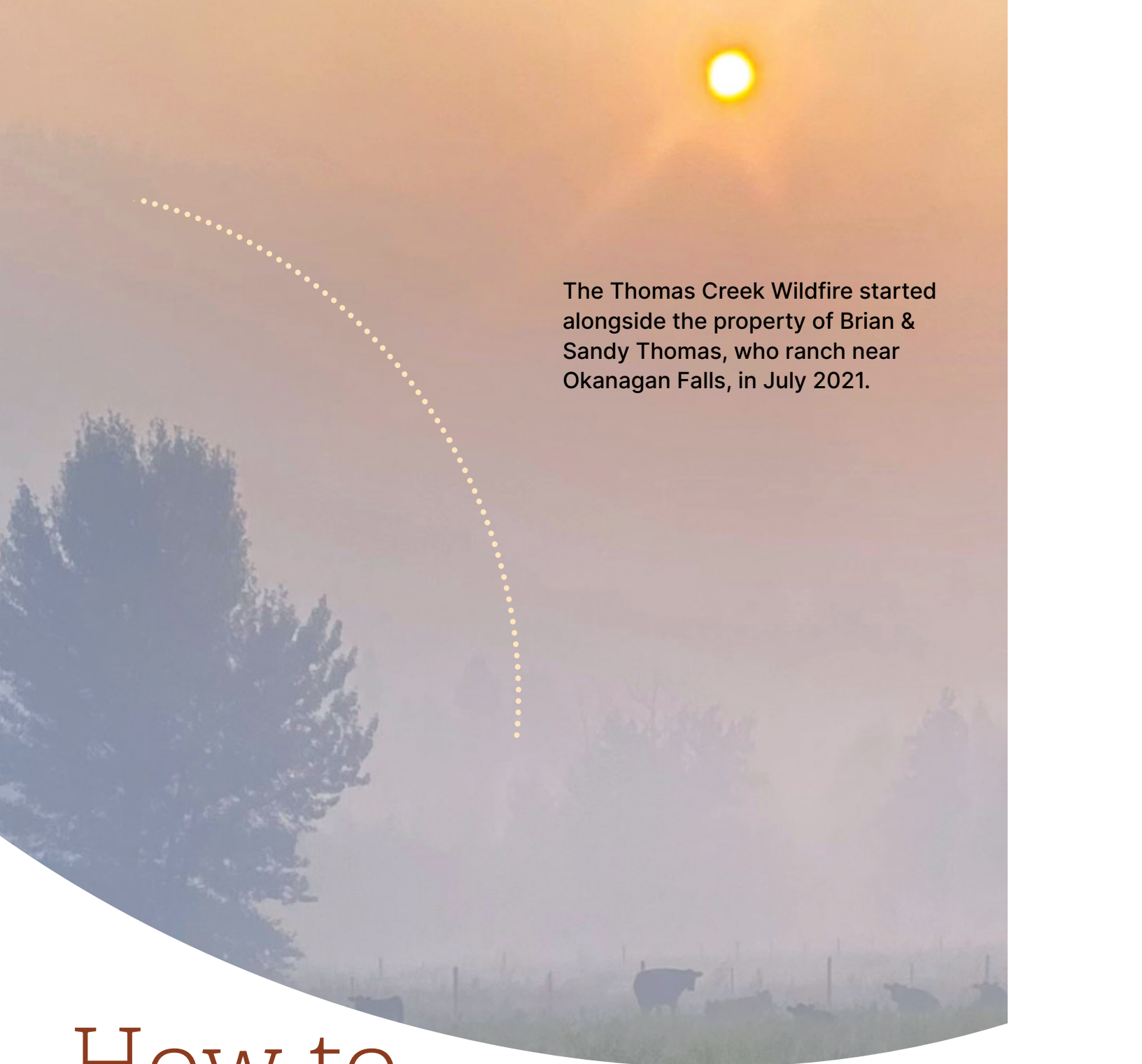


Agriculture is the southern Okanagan. Look at the farms, the wineries — if we don't have them, we don't have anything.

Sean Vaisler, Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen

Emergency manager perspective





The Thomas Creek Wildfire started alongside the property of Brian & Sandy Thomas, who ranch near Okanagan Falls, in July 2021.

How to Build Resilience & Improve Outcomes

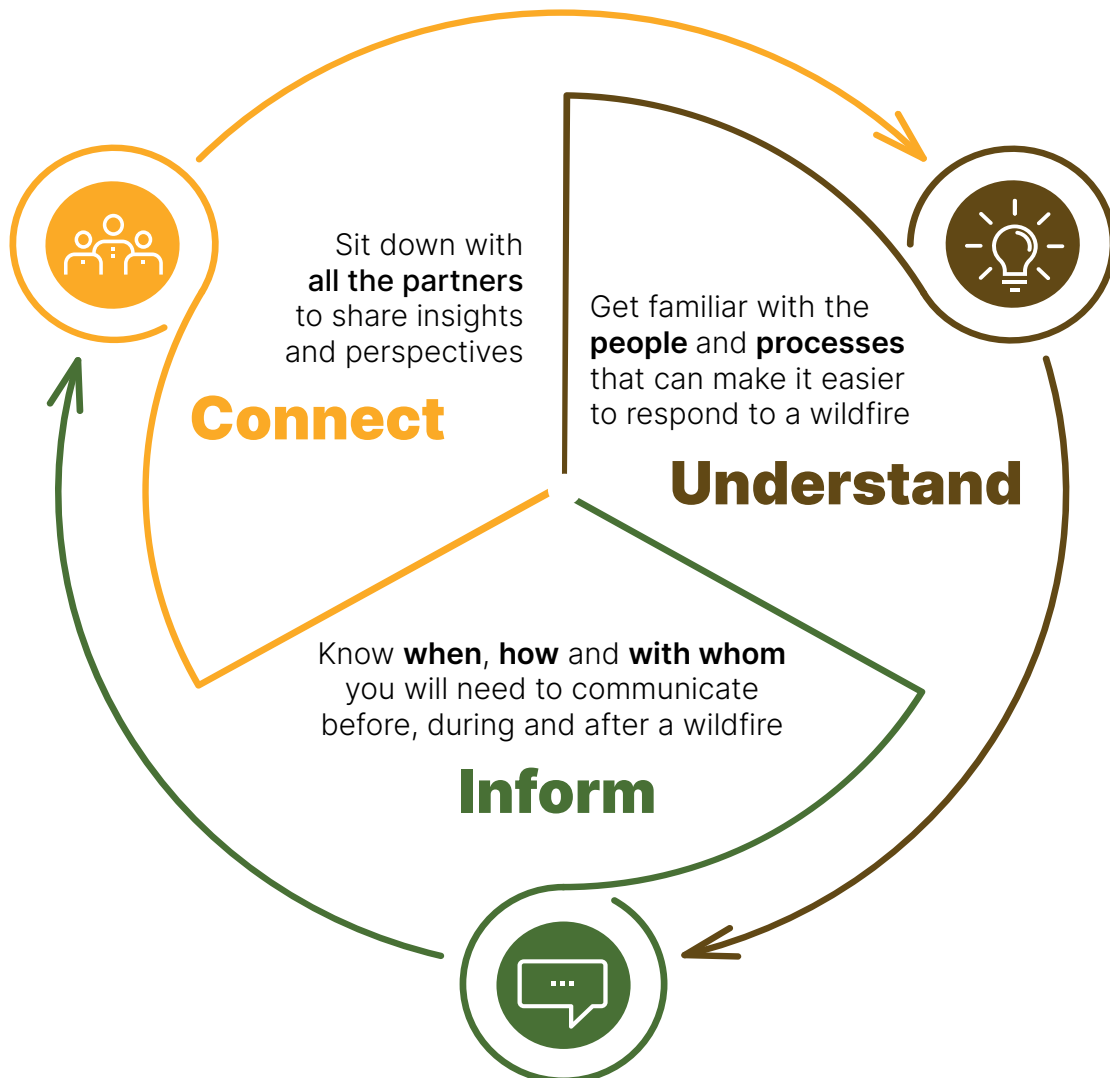


You don't need extensive resources to lessen the impacts of a wildfire. Simple steps — and a commitment to work together with all partners — can go a long way toward making a crisis easier to manage and cheaper to clean up while also decreasing stress and suffering.

This section outlines a series of potential actions that local governments and farmers and ranchers can take to improve communication and collaboration within three key areas.

As you work through items on these lists, you may feel ready to implement some more intensive actions. Those actions can be found in documents identified in the [Resources section on page 33](#).

Don't worry about completing every action. Instead, focus on those that make sense for your specific operation or organization.





Understand

You can reduce the impact of a wildfire. Building relationships now will lower stress levels and improve recovery times when an emergency hits. Learning key processes will increase your ability to respond quickly and effectively in a high-pressure situation.

A general tenet in emergency management is: You don't want first contact with someone to be a 3 a.m. phone call where you're asking them to do something difficult.

Having a personal connection beforehand will create the kind of trust necessary for a rancher to move 400 head of cattle off their summer range when a threat is imminent.

It will also help create the insight and understanding an emergency manager needs to implement a smoother re-entry process during an evacuation order.

Producer perspective



Being prepared was important — having the water truck, sprinklers and caterpillar ready. One of the things I think I will do next year is more mowing and FireSmart around the buildings. Have a plan; do it early!

Brian Thomas, a rancher and a [Rancher Liaison](#)



Brian Thomas, who ranches near Okanagan Falls, swiftly built this fire break on his property in July 2021 when he saw a wildfire approaching. Brian is also a Rancher Liaison — to learn more about this role, see [page 25](#).

Actions for Local Government Staff

Get to know your community

- Learn about agricultural production in your region and any unique tasks farmers and ranchers may have to do during a wildfire, such as harvesting and transporting crops, supporting workers who live on site or moving livestock.
- Introduce yourself to the administrators or chairpersons of the [agriculture industry associations](#) that are active in your region to open the lines of communication.

Use the form on [page 36, Agricultural Production & Contacts in My Region](#), to capture essential details about agriculture in your area.

- Contact the [regional agrologists and range officers](#) in your region and learn how they can provide support during a wildfire.
- Scan through wildfire preparedness resources for producers (listed in the [Resources](#) section at the back of this handbook) to understand the complexity and timelines of what they need to do.
- Contact [BC Cattlemen's](#) to find out if they've identified a [Rancher Liaison](#) in your area. To learn more about liaisons, see [page 25](#).

Know what you will need to respond most effectively

- Identify the people in your organization who will be responsible for leading different actions in this handbook.
- Establish a process for figuring out which farmers and ranchers in your area might be affected by an active wildfire.
- Recognize that producers with livestock will take longer to evacuate — determine what you can do to give them more time to relocate their animals.
- Develop a re-entry process if you don't have one already. See the sidebar on [page 16](#) for more details.
- Get clear on the systems that will be used to communicate with producers during a wildfire. Make sure the technology works and that staff are comfortable using it.
- Familiarize yourself with the [procedures for providing provincial support \(PDF\)](#) for livestock relocation.

Actions for Producers

Build your network

- Review your local government's emergency resources and save their contact details, typically listed on their website. Let them know if there's information you need but can't find online.
- Find out if your local government has a process for applying for re-entry during an evacuation order and what the eligibility and requirements are.

If you have property in multiple regional districts, connect with emergency staff in each of those regions as their processes may differ.

- If you belong to an agriculture industry association, make sure they have your up-to-date contact information.
- Reach out to neighbours — or to farms in neighbouring regions — to discuss how you might be able to support each other during an emergency, for example, by hosting animals.
- If you own animals, familiarize yourself with organizations that can support animal relocation — start by reaching out to groups listed in the [Contacts section on page 35](#).

Know where you can access more information or supports

- Take steps to design a wildfire preparedness plan by reviewing the resources for producers on [page 33](#), including [videos](#), tools and a [guide and workbook](#).
- Look into programs ([like the Extreme Weather Preparedness for Agriculture pilot project](#)) that provide funding for preparedness.
- Find out if your local government has a FireSmart coordinator, or search online for your [Local FireSmart Representative \(LFR\)](#), who can conduct a property assessment.
- Revisit the [Who Does What?](#) graphic on pages 6 & 7 and explore the [Resources](#) section at the back of this handbook.
- Understand the [three phases of evacuation](#) — including when to take action — and how they will be communicated in your area.

Actions for hobby farmers

You are responsible for maintaining the welfare of all animals on your property during an emergency. If livestock are not your [primary source of income \(PDF\)](#), you are responsible for costs associated with relocation.

- 1. Understand:** Review the [emergency management guide for small mixed farms \(PDF\)](#) and [producer resources on page 33](#).
- 2. Be prepared:** Have a plan for [relocating your animals](#) if they need to be moved, and familiarize yourself with re-entry processes in case you need to evacuate and then return to tend to your farm.
- 3. Stay connected:** Know where to find emergency information for your region, and sign up for emergency alerts.

If you have to relocate animals during a wildfire, do this during the **Evacuation Alert** phase! During an Evacuation Order, roads will be needed for human evacuation.



Many farms in the Kootenays' three regional districts have a small number of poultry.



One of the best pathways to an effective wildfire response is sharing timely and accurate information with the people who will be impacted by that information — especially if they need to take action to protect themselves.

These pages outline the most important things you can do to lower stress levels during a wildfire: improve communication before and during the emergency.

Remember that communication during an emergency is more successful if you've built relationships and maintained communication channels beforehand.

Temporary access permits: Reduce stress through clearly communicated procedures

For farmers and ranchers, trying to gain access to a property that's under an evacuation order can be one of the most stressful aspects of a wildfire.

Re-entry to an evacuation zone can only happen when the BC Wildfire Service has confirmed that it's safe to do so.

And since farming and ranching operations can't be shut down at a moment's notice, producers will almost certainly need to return to tend to bona fide agricultural activities.

However, permits and processes for re-entry vary greatly from region to region, and it's easy to get confused.

Local governments can ease the confusion with two steps:

- 1. Define the process for allowing re-entry**
- 2. Clearly communicate this process to the agricultural community**

For ideas and examples of re-entry processes, check out the following:

- [Emergency Management BC guide \(PDF\)](#), which recommends a 10-step approval process
- [Temporary access guidelines \(PDF\)](#) developed by the Regional District of Central Kootenay
- [Doing Things Differently on page 22](#), a case study from the Cariboo Regional District

Actions for Local Government Staff

Get ready to share information before the emergency happens

- Document your plan for communicating with the agriculture sector during wildfire season. You may wish to incorporate some of the recommendations for communications protocols listed on [page 27](#).
- Consider distributing sector-specific preparedness messages each spring to maintain a positive connection with farmers and ranchers.
- Design [agriculture-specific templates](#) for information bulletins to explain evacuation alerts and orders.
- Be prepared to share information more frequently to the agriculture sector during a wildfire, for example, through regular town halls or email updates.

Use your website to preemptively address agricultural needs

- Publish the [Farm/Ranch wildfire guide and workbook](#) resources on the emergency preparedness section of your website.
- Explain the re-entry permit process in plain language on your website. Check out the sidebar on the [previous page](#) for more resources.
- Publish emergency contact numbers and links on your website.

Reach out to producers directly

- Consider distributing BC Wildfire Service seasonal outlooks ([like this PDF](#)) directly to your agriculture contacts.
- Explore options for using an agricultural filter function in your emergency alerts system to deliver producer-specific notices.
- Let farmers and ranchers know who they can contact during an emergency.

Explore the [Examples section](#), starting on [page 27](#), to see samples of ag-specific communication materials and to download one regional district's wildfire communication plan.

Actions for Producers

- Make it easy to receive information from your local government:
 - Sign up for their emergency alerts system
 - Bookmark the web page where they post emergency updates
 - Follow them on Twitter or other social media channels
 - Check your spam folder to make sure important emails aren't getting lost
 - Find out if they have an 800 number
- If you have animals, register for a [Premises ID](#) so that emergency staff will know if your livestock are in the path of a wildfire and can more easily and quickly help you protect them.
- Consider offering your experience and expertise as a subject matter expert or Rancher Liaison — reach out to your local government's emergency department or to [BC Cattlemen's](#) to indicate your interest and inquire about their vetting process. Learn more about ag liaisons on [page 25](#).
- Know how to report a wildfire by calling 1-800-663-5555 or *5555 from a cell phone.
- If you've developed a [wildfire preparedness plan](#) for your operation, share it with people who might need to use it in an emergency, such as staff.
- Know the risks and responsibilities if you see a new fire in your area — familiarize yourself with the [Wildfire Protocol for Initial Attack by Local Stakeholders \(PDF\)](#) and be sure to immediately report the fire and notify BC Wildfire Service if you are initiating wildfire suppression.
- Help coordinate or initiate an information exchange by reaching out to your local government's FireSmart coordinator. See the [Connect section on page 20](#) for more information.

Stay up to date on active wildfires and smoke

- [BC Wildfire Dashboard](#)
- [BC Wildfire Service app for Android or iPhone](#)
- [Current wildfire activity in the province](#)
- [Smoke forecast](#)

Emergency manager perspective



Bringing everyone into the room — this is the best way to forge relationships. Local governments need to communicate and market our planning and preparedness materials. Get out there and have town halls and community forums.

Sean Vaisler, Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen



Each agricultural commodity has unique needs during a wildfire threat but all have to make a multitude of inter-connected decisions to protect their complex operations.



Sometimes, bringing people together can be the hardest step. But it can also be the most powerful thing you can do to build your community’s resilience. When all the voices are at the table, you have a much greater opportunity to learn, adapt and make effective change.

Annual meetings or workshops that include producers, emergency responders and local and provincial government staff can be one of the most successful ways to develop a collaborative wildfire response and improve recovery.

Typically, the local government is in the best position to organize and host these meetings — but they can’t do it alone.

Agriculture industry associations may also be able to coordinate events or provide support in other ways.

To help get resourcing for these events, farmers and ranchers can advocate to provincial government staff and elected representatives. They can also help make sure the events are well attended by bringing their neighbours.



Aircraft at the 100 Mile Airport provided support during the 2021 wildfire season.

1. Tap into existing supports or systems

Contact the provincial agriculture ministry to find out how they can help deliver a workshop on producer preparedness. Find out if other groups are organizing emergency preparedness events you can participate in or add onto.

2. Determine your objective(s) for a two-way exchange of information

Some possibilities include:

- Improving coordination and formalizing protocols between relevant parties before wildfire season: Does everyone know what you are going to do during a wildfire and how you are going to do it?
- Presenting the BC Wildfire Service forecast (fire threat and hazard outlook) for the coming wildfire season
- Explaining the re-entry process to farmers and ranchers and learning what their needs might be during an evacuation
- Delivering training to specific commodity groups in your area that have unique considerations during an emergency, such as moving livestock or watering orchards
- Debriefing after a wildfire has happened with those who were affected

A pre-season information exchange was identified as a top priority for producers and local governments during a [2017-2018 project in the Okanagan \(PDF\)](#).

3. Choose the best format

Will a virtual meeting for two hours be the most inclusive and accessible? Or do you need a full day, in-person workshop with smaller breakout sessions?

Alternatively, an on-site session at a local operation might be the most effective. For example, you could invite a FireSmart representative to conduct an assessment of a farm property and show a group of producers how they can mitigate fire spread on their operations.

4. Invite relevant players

These people will change, depending on the objective of your event.

For example, if you're hosting a general pre-season information exchange, you will want to invite representatives from many groups, including local agriculture industry associations and the BC Wildfire Service.

5. Be prepared for heightened emotions

It's normal to experience tension when talking about something as unsettling as wildfire and emergency preparedness.

Remember that everyone's feelings are valid and that you all ultimately want the same thing: a vibrant and resilient community.

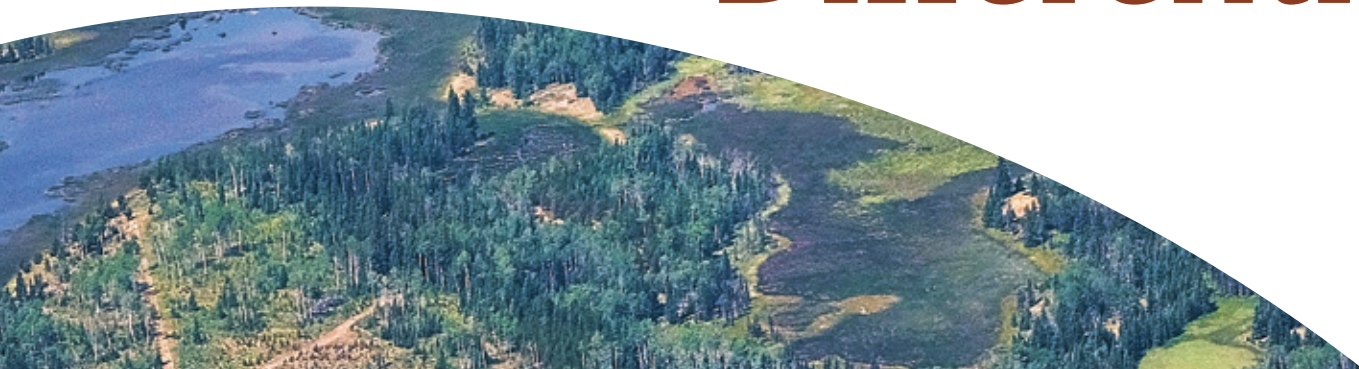
6. Rinse and repeat

These meetings are meant to be dynamic. Repeating the five steps above every year will help build relationships and foster the type of collaborative dynamic that will lead to better outcomes during a wildfire.

In 2021, the Cariboo Regional District's EOC supported wildfire response to the Flat Lake fire, among many others, pictured here near 83 Mile House.



Doing Things Differently



The 2017 wildfire season in BC was unprecedented for its time — over 1.2 million hectares were burned, 65,000 people were evacuated and over 100,000 livestock were impacted.^{1,2,3}

These events sparked multiple improvements in how the Cariboo Regional District engaged with the agriculture sector during wildfires. **Stephanie Masun, Manager of Emergency Program Services**, explains what they did.

Desperate times lead to better measures

Between July 6 and September 20 of 2017, the region was impacted by dozens of wildfires, some of which forced the evacuation of Williams Lake and many small towns, First Nations and rural areas.

The exceptional situation led to tense moments between producers, the BC Wildfire Service, RCMP and local authorities, so the CRD decided a new approach was needed.

“It’s how can we all work together to support this important economic sector, knowing

that this is a business, and businesses fail — but businesses shouldn’t fail because of something that we have done or have neglected to do,” says Stephanie.

Farmers and ranchers make up a significant portion of both the population and the tax base in the Cariboo Regional District, with operations ranging in size from a few acres to over 3,000.⁴

Beef cattle production makes up about one-quarter of this sector.⁵ Crown range — often vulnerable to wildfire — provides about 40% of the annual forage needs of the ranching industry.⁶

Working with multiple partners, including governments and contractors, the CRD integrated a risk reduction model into their emergency operations centre and added an agricultural liaison role to the EOC.



Cattle near Churn Creek. Beef cattle operations make up about one-quarter of the agriculture sector in the Cariboo region.

Since then, the CRD has implemented even more changes to their wildfire response and management, including updating and streamlining their temporary access permit system.

The result of these changes has meant that subsequent emergencies have been less stressful for producers and local government staff alike.

Working with an agricultural liaison

The job of an agricultural liaison is to improve communication between the EOC, BC Wildfire Service, the provincial government and farmers and ranchers.

By working with producers, the liaison ensures farmers and ranchers have the most up-to-date wildfire and evacuation

information, are aware of available supports and can understand the process for re-entry.

A liaison has lived experience with and knowledge of farming and ranching in the area. Using coordinated systems to identify areas where producers might be threatened by an active wildfire can improve their ability to respond quickly and decisively.

Having this role in place in the Cariboo Regional District reduced friction between everyone involved and directly improved outcomes.

“I think I would always have somebody with some agricultural knowledge in our EOC,” says Stephanie. “I think it reduces harm and solves problems for people who have real and legitimate problems.”

Continued on page 26 >>



Advance planning, coordination and collaboration among diverse groups can lead to better outcomes during an emergency.

What is a liaison officer in wildfire management?

A liaison officer is a formal role within the [incident management command system](#) that serves as an information conduit between a specific group and emergency responders and government agencies.

Rancher Liaison Officer

This is a [local rancher](#) contracted by the [BC Cattlemen's](#) who works "in the field." They communicate directly to ranchers and other community members and are a voice on behalf of producers to the BC Wildfire Service.

Rancher Liaisons can also help producers with accessing re-entry permits during an evacuation and supports during recovery.

"By being included in the daily planning and status meetings, I can supply ranchers with real time conditions that may affect their land base and allow them to prepare mitigation strategies," says Gordon Burns, a Rancher Liaison in East Kootenay.

"In reverse, I supply local terrain and weather conditions to the Incident Management Team that the ranchers — who have been on the land for decades — are aware of.

"Fire changes so quickly, and it is difficult for the IMT to get the

changes communicated to ranchers in a timely matter.

"The Rancher Liaison knows the area, local ranchers and who may be in an area at what time. They also have the contact info to communicate directly with them as things change."

Agricultural Liaison Officer

This is a trained staff member from the Province's agriculture ministry — typically a regional agrologist — that is available to support the provincial regional EOC (PREOC).

The ag liaison officer will have awareness of agricultural activities in the region and be able to advise on the potential impacts of mitigation measures.

To activate this liaison, a local government needs to submit a formal request through the emergency management ministry.

Having this person in the PREOC during a wildfire has improved outcomes for farmers and ranchers and for emergency responders.

Other options

A local government may also want to develop a relationship with a local subject matter expert for a specific commodity prevalent in their area.



The more we all take responsibility to support each other, the better the system is going to be.

Stephanie Masun, Cariboo Regional District



People had to evacuate during the 2017 Mitchell Lake wildfire in the Cariboo Regional District.

How things improved

- **Faster and easier processes** The re-entry process went more smoothly, and supports, such as livestock relocation assistance and cost recovery funds, got to farmers and ranchers more quickly.
- **More time to respond** By receiving timely information about where wildfires were and how they were advancing, producers were better able to prepare their operations for imminent threats or move animals to safer locations.
- **Less stress** With better systems and open lines of communication, government staff received fewer calls from frustrated and confused producers and residents.

- **Improved response for all residents** By having a liaison in the EOC dedicated to the agriculture sector, staff were freed up to provide more support to other groups.
- **Enhanced community resilience** Less emotional, physical and financial stress on agriculture meant people, crops and livestock recovered more quickly, improving food and economic security for the region — and the province.

Knowing that wildfires will continue to affect the region, the CRD is committed to making ongoing improvements to its communications with the agriculture sector before, during and after a wildfire.

Examples

This section includes samples and extracts from materials developed during a [series of projects with the Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen](#) from 2017-2021. Local governments are invited to use these materials as inspiration for their own unique situations.

Recommendations for Communications Protocols

Formal communications protocols are one way to map out how communication with the agriculture sector will flow before, during and after a wildfire.

The process of developing a formal protocol can be a collaborative exercise in deciding how agencies will communicate, when they will communicate and who they will communicate with — while also thinking about how these activities integrate with existing processes and systems.

The following practices have been condensed from the *Project Report / Discussion Document: Planning and Information Exchange for Wildfire Impact Reduction* by B.A. Blackwell & Associates.

Download [the project report \(PDF\)](#) to see the complete list of elements.

The project report outlines the rationale for developing formal protocols and provides more tips on how to do it.

- Standardize pre-season **communication and information sharing** between local governments, government agencies and farmers and ranchers.
- Ensure local government collaboration and/or coordination in cross-jurisdictional emergency management, depending on local capacity and resources.
- Develop a multi-layered approach for essential notifications and ongoing information sharing during a wildfire, for example, by using several mediums to communicate.
- Establish a practical evacuation zone **re-entry permit system**.
- Engage with producers regularly during a wildfire. See the Inform section, starting on **page 16**, for some ideas.
- Formalize the inclusion of agriculture specialists, such as **ag liaisons**, in the EOC.

Agriculture-Specific Communication Materials

This example was taken from the RDOS [Wildfire Communication Plan for Agriculture \(PDF\)](#)

APPENDIX C. Information Release for Agricultural Producers



INFORMATION RELEASE

**[Information Release: Direct to Agricultural Commodity Groups Only Contacts Section 7]
For Immediate Release
Date and Time**

This information release is being issued due to wildfire that has actual or potential impact to members of your agricultural organization. Please see attached RDOS [*Release Information/ Evacuation Alert/Evacuation Order*] which provides detail off the location[s] impacted.

COMMODITY GROUP ACTIONS:

- INFORM your members by email as soon as practical (all emergency messages will be cascaded direct the RDOS or emergency response services)
- REMIND your members:
 - Check BC Wildfire and the RDOS emergency websites (links below) and listen to local radio for information updates and announcements.
 - WATCH for RDOS emergency messages
 - REGISTER for the RDOS emergency notifications
- SHARE the WILDFIRE PREPAREDNESS BULLETIN FOR AGRICULTURE plan with your members for reference information.
- PLAN: remind members to complete the Farm Preparedness and Mitigation Plan. A workbook is available as fillable PDF so information can be saved and revised as needed. <https://www.bcagclimateaction.ca/library/wildfire-preparedness/> Alternatively, FILL OUT the workbook at www.bcagclimateaction.ca. This plan can be submitted to the RDOS EOC (Emergency Operations Centre) at eocinfo@rdos.bc.ca
- If the situation worsens, all emergency messages will be sent direct by the RDOS.

For the latest information, please visit [website] and Facebook [address]
[Twitter]

Issued by EOC Director

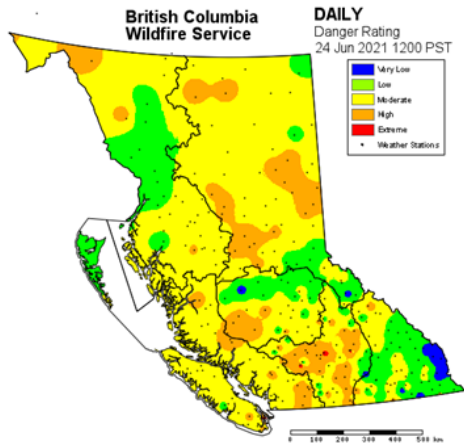
EOC [Phone Number]

Developing information releases specifically tailored for producers during a wildfire can reduce confusion as well as the need for phone calls and emails.

This example was created along with the RDOS [Wildfire Communication Plan for Agriculture \(PDF\)](#)



2021 WILDFIRE PREPAREDNESS BULLETIN FOR AGRICULTURE



2021 Seasonal Outlook

The **SEASONAL OUTLOOK** (Updated June 24 2021) is a long-range planning tool used by fire resource managers to present predictions of fire weather severity.

- The month of May was significantly drier than normal for the southern half of British Columbia. Many southern regions received less than 40% of their normal precipitation. Penticton received only 33mm of precipitation between March and May, 33% of their normal precipitation for that time period (88mm).
- Despite the dry conditions in the southern part of province, the amount and average size of wildfires have been relatively low when compared to historical data. This reduced fire size is likely due to seasonal 'green up' of grass and other fuels.

WILDFIRE DANGER refers to the potential for wildfires to start and grow. Low hazard means they may start but not grow, and extreme means fires will start easily, burn deep, and grow quickly.

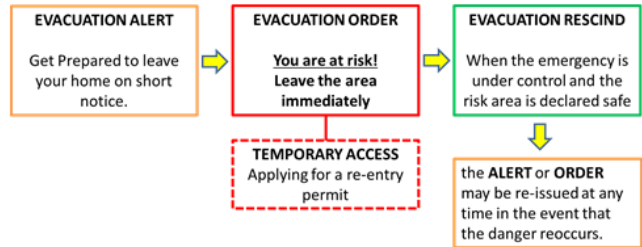
The fire danger rating is updated daily. Fire danger maps (like the example on the left) can be found at www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/wildfire-status/wildfire-situation/fire-danger.

Evacuation Stage Explained

There are three evacuation stages that agricultural producers need to know about.

Evacuation alerts are the stage at which ag producers want to be making plans and moving livestock if possible


Temporary Access Permits are only issued when it is safe to do so.



Bulletin produced by:
www.eddragonconsulting.com

A pre-season information bulletin like this can deliver up-to-date, factual and timely information about wildfire conditions, as well as preparation and planning tips.

This example was developed for the [RDOS](#) during a pilot project.








2021 WILDFIRE PREPAREDNESS BULLETIN FOR AGRICULTURE

TEMPORARY ACCESS PERMITS may be requested via the RDOS Emergency Operations Centre. Applications will be assessed by RDOS, BC Wildfire Service and agricultural experts. This assessment takes account of many situational variables and considerations to ensure safety of responders and the public.

- Having a farm/ranch wildfire plan will be one those assessment considerations.

Typical temporary access considerations for agricultural premises include:

-  Critical crop management
-  Irrigation management
-  Harvest
-  Livestock care, health and relocation
-  Relocation of product or assets

Have you completed your Farm/Ranch Wildfire Preparedness Plan?

- Before an event: Download the workbook and guide at www.bcagclimateaction.ca/wildfire and share the completed document with the RDOS Emergency Team
- During an event: Keep a copy on-hand for BC Wildfire Service
- After an event: Review the plan information

(Workbook)

Farm / Ranch Wildfire Plan

for

Preparing for and Responding to Wildfire

© Plan Lead: [redacted]

OFFICIAL EMERGENCY INFORMATION

REGIONAL DISTRICT OKANAGAN-SIMILKAMEEN

- RDOS** emergency website emergency.rdos.bc.ca
Find interactive maps and information on emergency preparedness and recovery.
- Evacuation notifications:** emergency.rdos.bc.ca
Sign up for CivicReady Notifications
- RDOS EOC Twitter:** [@EmergMgtRDOS](https://twitter.com/EmergMgtRDOS)
the latest RDOS emergency information.
- RDOS** emergency number: **1-250-490-4225**

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT BC (EMBC)

- To report an after-hours emergency, contact EMBC's Emergency Coordination Centre **1-800-663-3456**
- www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/emergency-preparedness-response-recover







BC WILDFIRE SERVICE

- BCWS** dashboard at www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/wildfire-status has information on fire danger ratings, wildfires of note, an interactive wildfire map and much more

OFFICIAL EMERGENCY NUMBERS

- To report a wildfire or irresponsible fire behaviour call: **1-800-663-5555** or ***5555** (cell)
- Report all Poachers and Polluters (RAPP) **1-877-952-7277** or **#7277** (cell)

Support for this project provided by:

Information bulletins like this can be distributed to farmers and ranchers through a variety of communication channels, such as social media, agriculture industry associations newsletter lists, local government websites and direct mail.

Communication Plan Quick Reference Guide (2 pages)



QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE Wildfire Communication Plan for Agriculture

When to use this Quick Reference Guide: This guide will be used to implement the Wildfire Communication Plan for Agriculture.

Objective: The objective of this Quick Reference Guide is not to be a detailed instruction manual, but to provide a basic, handy reference containing key information needed by Emergency Operations Centre Staff in the event of a Wildfire with potential impact to the agriculture community.

This Quick Reference Guide should be used with the Wildfire Communications Plan for Agriculture.

PURPOSE Wildfire Communication Plan for Agriculture		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To exchange information with agricultural residents upon identified trigger points. Exchange information with the agriculture sector pre, during and post wildfire season. Provide a professional, co-operative and effective response – focused on the agriculture sector. Manage robust communication procedures that provide advice and guidance to agricultural producers’ and other agricultural organizations. 		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
WHEN	PRESEASON ACTIVITIES	HOW*
Monthly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reminder to sign up for Civic Ready (all sectors) 	Civic Ready
November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information cascade for agriculture business insurance changes before Wildfire season 	<i>Appendix C</i>
December to March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plan and organize annual pre-season meeting of agricultural representatives and response agency representatives 	<i>Appendix B</i>
March/April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advanced planning preparedness EOC meeting for new wildfire season Develop annual agricultural information bulletin Pre-season wildfire risk and hazard meeting 	<i>Appendix D & E</i>
April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Issue annual agricultural information bulletin 	<i>Appendix E</i>
May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Province wide annual emergency preparedness week 	RDOS Plan
WHEN	RESPONSE ACTIVITIES	HOW
EOC Activation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information releases if potential impact to agriculture Think also commodity group communication 	RDOS EOC Plan
EOC Operational periods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Produce and cascade summary situation report to commodity groups Action planning – plan to share of digital and non-digital information to hard to reach agriculture communities Contact Range Officer FLNRORD Assess need to host a community engagement event Assess need for Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries liaison officer templates Remember to use Civic Ready Agriculture groups Consider need for temporary access procedures 	RDOS EOC Plan Also: <i>Section 5.2 & Appendix C</i>
Think!	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Correct and timely information cascaded? Maintain liaison with BC Wildfire Service, range officer, Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries, commodity groups 	RDOS EOC Objectives



Table continued next page

*Normal font refers to RDOS procedures; italics refers to Wildfire Communication Plan for Agriculture.

A [reference document like this \(PDF\)](#) can be used to outline communication protocols and timelines in a handy, at-a-glance format.

Download [the PDF of this two-page guide.](#)

Quick Reference Guide continued

WHEN	RESPONSE ACTIVITIES <i>continued</i>	HOW
EOC Operational Periods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temporary Access Requests • Assess if you have enough resource to manage requests • Manage at a pre-determined time • Liaise and agree emergency risk level for temporary access (Level of Risk; Access; Routes and Planning) see section 5.2. • Provide Temporary Access Permit to requesters • Manage appropriate checkpoints and provide RDOS permit process information • Manage information release content if potential impact to Agriculture 	RDOS EOC Plan Also: <i>Section 5.1</i>
Think! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Correct and timely information cascaded? • Maintain liaison with BC Wildfire Service, range officer, Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries, commodity groups • EOC Action Planning with objectives for connecting with agriculture producers – digital and non-digital • Maintain routine contact with commodity group contacts and request the cascade of non-emergency information • Consider Community meetings • Promote summary of Farm Preparedness plan 	RDOS EOC Objectives
WHEN	RECOVERY ACTIVITIES	HOW
During Response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan for Recovery – Advanced Planning or RDOS Recovery Plan 	RDOS Recovery Plan
Evacuation Rescinds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liaise with BC Wildfire Service, range officer, Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries to produce risk assessment and action plan for recovery • Plan for re-entry where applicable • Include restoration activities (FLNRORD lead) in recovery plan • Provide information and guidance to impacted communities and groups 	RDOS Recovery Plan
Think! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you assessed unmet needs? • Provided business specific information and where to find more • Explained roles and responsibilities on who can help 	RDOS EOC/ROC Objectives

Useful References

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wildfire Communication Plan for Agriculture & appendices • Farm Preparedness and Mitigation Plan • 2-page Farm Preparedness and Mitigation Plan Summary (tear away) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RDOS EOC Response and Recovery Plans • RDOS EOC Communications Plan • RDOS partner and stakeholder contacts lists • EMBC Temporary Access procedures |
|---|---|

Funding for this project has been provided by the governments of Canada and British Columbia under the Canadian Agricultural Partnership, a federal-provincial-territorial initiative. Funding is administered by the Investment Agriculture Foundation of BC and the BC Agricultural Research & Development Corporation. This project is part of the Regional Adaptation Program delivered by the Climate & Agriculture Initiative BC.



This two-page guide is a companion to the RDOS [Wildfire Communication Plan for Agriculture \(PDF\)](#).

Resources

Links for producers

These resources will help both commercial producers and hobby farmers plan for and respond to wildfire. However, support systems during a wildfire and eligibility for post-wildfire recovery compensation will differ for the two groups.

- Download the [guide and workbook](#) for creating your farm/ranch wildfire plan
- Check out videos and webinars that explain how to develop your farm/ranch wildfire plan:
 - [An introduction to preparedness](#)
 - [How to create an operations map](#)
 - [How to reduce risk to farm assets](#)
 - [An in-depth look at using the farm/ranch guide and workbook](#)
- Access [livestock relocation fact sheets](#)
- Learn more about [recovering from disaster](#) and accessing recovery programs
- Bookmark [this page listing multiple wildfire preparedness](#) resources
- If you own animals, register for the [Premises ID program](#)
- Support your mental health by downloading [Rooted in Resilience \(PDF\)](#) and [other resources](#) from FCC

Links for local governments

- Learn more about agriculture in your area through the following:
 - [Agricultural Land Use Inventories](#)
 - [Census of Agriculture data](#), organized by regional district, or the [2016 PDF for all regional districts](#)
 - Your regional district's area agricultural plan if it has one
 - Agriculture industry organizations operating in your area, starting with the [Province's comprehensive list](#)
- Download [resources to help you improve communication](#) with agricultural residents
- Review [Managing Access to Areas Under Evacuation Order \(PDF\)](#) to learn more about recommended processes for re-entry and to access tools and templates
- Understand the [provincial policy \(PDF\)](#) for providing financial support for livestock relocation during an emergency

References

- 1 www.gov.bc.ca > Public safety and emergency services > Wildfire Service > About the BC Wildfire Service > Wildfire History > Wildfire Season Summary > [2017 Wildfire Season Summary](#)
- 2 [2017 Freshet and Wildfires: Provincial After-Action Review, Province of British Columbia \(PDF\)](#)
- 3 [Addressing the New Normal: 21st Century Disaster Management in British Columbia, Report and findings of the BC Flood and Wildfire Review: an independent review examining the 2017 flood and wildfire seasons \(PDF\)](#)
- 4 [Cariboo Regional District Agricultural Area Plan 2022 \(PDF\)](#), via the Cariboo Regional District [Agricultural Area Plan web page](#)
- 5 [Cariboo Regional District Agricultural Area Plan \(PDF\)](#)
- 6 Ministry of Agriculture. Cariboo Regional District Agriculture in Brief Fact Sheet. 2013

Contacts



Agriculture industry associations

Agriculture industry associations include commodity-specific member groups (see below) as well as [farmers' institutes](#) and general agricultural support groups, such as the [Kootenay & Boundary Farm Advisors](#).

Some of these organizations have regular newsletters, which can be a great medium for communicating with producers.

Many groups also host meetings and other events that may be open for government officials to attend.

Commodity groups

The following member groups represent commodities most likely to be impacted by wildfire in BC. For an exhaustive list, see the [Provincial industry contacts web page](#) where you can search by category or region.

- [BC Cattlemen's](#) and its regionals and locals — *this organization can also support livestock relocation*
- [BC Cherry Association](#)
- [BC Dairy Association](#)
- [BC Forage Council](#)
- [BC Fruit Growers' Association](#)
- [BC Grain Producers Association](#)
- [BC Grape Growers' Association](#)
- [BC Honey Producers' Association](#)
- [BC Wine Grape Council](#)
- [Horse Council BC](#)
- [Peace River Forage Association of BC](#)

Review the [Who Does What?](#) graphic on pages 6 & 7 to see how the groups on this page play a role in wildfire preparedness and response.



Local government

Locate your region on this [local government boundaries map](#)



Provincial agriculture ministry

- [Prepare for wildfire](#)
- [AgriService BC](#) 1-888-221-7141



Regional agrologists

Browse the government directory to find [Regional Agrologists](#) in your area



Range officers

Browse the government directory to find [Range Officers](#) in your area



Provincial emergency management ministry

[Emergency management in BC](#)



BC Wildfire Service

[Current wildfire activity in BC](#)



FireSmart BC

[FireSmart BC](#)



Animal support organizations

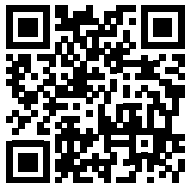
- [ALERT Canada](#) — Animal Lifeline Emergency Response Team
- [BC SPCA emergency response services](#)
- [CDART](#) — Canadian Disaster Animal Response Team

Agricultural Production & Contacts in My Region

Use this form to record essential details about agriculture in your area. Refer to the [Contacts](#) and [Resources](#) sections on previous pages if you need help getting started.

REGION		NUMBER OF FARMS	
TYPES OF COMMERCIAL AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION			
HIGHLIGHTS OF UNIQUE NEEDS (LIVESTOCK, HOUSED WORKERS, AG TOURISM, ETC.)			
AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES THAT MAY BE INELIGIBLE FOR SUPPORTS THROUGH THE PROVINCIAL AGRICULTURE MINISTRY OR THAT MAY BE HARDER TO COMMUNICATE WITH, SUCH AS HOBBY FARMS			

AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY ORGANIZATIONS			
NAME	GENERAL EMAIL	CONTACT PERSON	PHONE NUMBER
REGIONAL AGROLOGIST(S)			
NAME	EMAIL	PHONE NUMBER	
RANGE OFFICER(S)			
NAME	EMAIL	PHONE NUMBER	
RANCHER LIAISON OFFICER(S)			
NAME	EMAIL	PHONE NUMBER	
OTHER LOCAL SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS			
NAME	EXPERTISE	EMAIL	PHONE NUMBER



Visit the [Climate Change Adaptation Program website](#)
for the most up-to-date version of this document.

Director of Territorial Stewardship perspective



Communication is huge! Having a more unified approach and increasing regional coordination and relationship building will improve the success of any wildfire response.

Colleen Marchand, Okanagan Indian Band



Heavy smoke from the Thomas Creek Wildfire impacted wineries throughout the Okanagan. The 2021 wildfire season was BC's third worst on record, in terms of hectares burned, and the worst in terms of fire suppression cost at [\\$718.8 million](#).