



British Columbia News

## Prescribed burns reduce wildfire risks

<https://news.gov.bc.ca/08179>

Monday, August 12, 2019 12:50 PM

Fire is a normal and natural process in many of B.C.'s ecosystems. Many species of plants, birds, insects and other animals depend on fire for its regenerative properties. Fire helps control insects and the spread of disease in forests. A forest with trees of various ages and species helps create biodiversity.

- In B.C., wildfire seasons have been starting earlier and lasting longer as a result of pronounced droughts, climate change and increased forest fuel accumulation due to fire suppression activities.
- As seen during the 2017 and 2018 wildfire seasons, mega-fires can result in tremendous social, ecological and economic impacts. To help reduce wildfire severity and related threats to communities and critical infrastructure, the BC Wildfire Service (in conjunction with land managers) undertakes fuel management activities that include the use of prescribed fire.
- Prescribed burning is just one fuel management strategy that is used to mitigate wildfire risks and reduce the intensity of future wildfires in an area. Other methods include thinning, pruning and mechanical removal of vegetation. It is often necessary to use a combination of these methods to safely and effectively meet land management objectives.
- A prescribed fire is lit intentionally. It's an effective tool for reducing fire hazards because it helps decrease fuel loads (i.e. combustible material, such as underbrush and dead wood) on the landscape. Prescribed fires also help reduce the intensity of future wildfires by removing understory vegetation (i.e. vegetation that grows on the ground underneath the forest canopy).
- In response to recommendations contained in the Abbott-Chapman report on the 2017 wildfire and freshet seasons (Addressing the New Normal: 21st Century Disaster Management in British Columbia), the Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development is creating a more comprehensive prescribed burning program, which will also incorporate traditional ecological knowledge. It's supported by an initial \$10 million that was provided in Budget 2019.
- Prescribed burning is one of the treatments eligible for funding under the \$60-million Community Resiliency Investment program. The Forest Enhancement Society of B.C. also funds prescribed burning projects as a way to reduce wildfire risks.
- Prescribed fires help achieve land management objectives, as described in various resource management plans. These objectives may include:
  - fuel management (to reduce the buildup of forest fuels)
  - pest management (such as bark beetles)
  - ecological restoration (promoting the growth or removal of particular tree species and other vegetation during and following the application of prescribed fire)
  - wildlife habitat enhancement (improving wildlife habitat and forage for large mammals, such as deer, bighorn sheep, moose and elk)
  - post-harvesting work (fuel hazard abatement and site preparation for reforestation)
  - First Nations traditional and cultural use
  - agriculture (land and crop management, improving livestock forage)
- Factors that must be considered when planning a prescribed fire include the expanding wildland-urban interface (where urban development borders on grasslands and forested areas), critical infrastructure and land management objectives related to wildlife habitat and watersheds.
- Given the complexity of prescribed fire projects, planning for them can take six months to many years.
- When preparing a prescribed fire burn plan, vegetation type, terrain, weather conditions, fire behaviour and the venting index are taken into account. The venting index is an indication of how quickly smoke can be expected to dissipate and provides guidance to people wishing to conduct open burns.
- Prescribed fires are ignited and monitored under the direction of a certified "burn boss" or other

qualified personnel to meet pre-determined land management objectives. This type of open burning is often conducted during the spring or fall, when fires burn at a lower intensity and produce less smoke than unplanned wildfires that generally occur under warmer and drier conditions.

- Although prescribed fires (also referred to as “resource management open fires” in the Wildfire Act and the Wildfire Regulation) are exempt from the Environmental Management Act and the Open Burning Smoke Control Regulation, smoke management must be addressed within the prescribed fire burn plan.
- In accordance with the Wildfire Regulation, an approved prescribed fire burn plan is required for the use of resource management open fire in or within one kilometre of forest land or grassland.

### **Additional information:**

- A mega-fire is characterized by its extensive size, high intensity and long duration — typically challenging all conventional control and suppression efforts. These types of fires are often the result of multiple “spot fires” merging into a single, large fire. A recent example of a mega-fire was the Plateau Fire in 2017. This fire burned over 500,000 hectares of forests and rangeland in the Chilcotin region.
- An interface area (or wildland-urban interface) is where urban development borders on a rural area, grasslands or forested areas.
- In ecology, “resilience” is the capacity of an ecosystem to respond to a disturbance (such as a wildfire) by resisting damage and recovering quickly. Increasing the biodiversity of a forest by using prescribed fire can have a positive effect on the forest’s resiliency and productivity, including increased carbon storage.
- “Fuel loads” consist of combustible materials such as underbrush, dead wood and accumulations of tree needles and leaves.

### **Learn More:**

More information about prescribed burning and about planning prescribed fires is available online:

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/wildfire-status/prevention/vegetation-and-fuel-management/prescribed-burning>

### **Media Contacts**

**Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development**  
Media Relations  
250 356-7506