



# Ministry of Forests and Range Response to the Forest Practices Board Special Investigation on Post-Fire Site Rehabilitation – Final Report

## Introduction

Protection Branch is pleased to respond on behalf of the Ministry of Forests and Range to the Forest Practices Board Special Investigation on Post-Fire Site Rehabilitation. The special investigation examined on the ground the ministry's effectiveness in rehabilitating damage to forest land base caused by suppression activities on a sample of 12 fires in the central and southern interior from the 2003 fire season.

The 2003 fires season was the most challenging and catastrophic in British Columbia's recent history with over 2,500 fires burning more than 265,000 hectares; more than 10 times the average area burned by fires. The response to these fires cost the province \$375 million and involved some 10,000 fire fighters and support personnel, 10 times the normal complement of personnel and double what has ever been marshalled before. In the urban interface, 50,000 people were evacuated, and 334 homes were lost. The province's fire suppression activities were challenged by unprecedented drought and fire behaviour, volatile fuel conditions near communities and across the landscape, resources available to deal with fires, and coordination between agencies in dealing with fires in the urban interface. Despite these conditions, the Forest Service managed an 89 percent success rate in containing new fires to 4 hectares or less, only 4 percent less than the 10 year average of 93 percent.

The ministry and Protection Program embrace a continuous improvement business approach and have undertaken an extensive post-season review of the successes and challenges of 2003. Current trends in global warming coupled with the mountain pine beetle infestation in the province make it likely the province will face increasingly severe fire seasons. The ministry therefore welcomes this independent and professional review of the Protection Program's performance in the fire suppression rehabilitation for the 2003 fire season. The review has assisted the program in confirming the importance of some of the program changes already implemented and in identifying additional program areas for further work and improvement.



## Response to Recommendations

Protection Branch has carefully considered the review and each of the recommendations in the Final Report. Below is a brief description of the issues raised respecting each of the recommendations along with the ministry's response.

### ***Recommendation 1***

***Protection branch conduct fire management planning before the fire season begins and secure agreement of the land manager on the general response to a fire.***

#### **Issue:**

The report noted that early identification of important values and sensitive areas along with an agreement with land managers on the general response to a fire would help protect important resources and speed rehabilitation planning and implementation.

#### **Response:**

The ministry agrees with this recommendation and will be implementing program and policy changes to address this over the next year. Much of the information respecting resource values is currently available to Protection staff, however a more comprehensive effort will be required to ensure that the information is complete, current, and that there is an agreement between the Fire Centre managers and the respective land managers on an appropriate suppression response. This is key to effective fire control decision making.

This need was identified early in the development of the Protection Program Strategy, which was completed and approved by the ministry executive in January 2006. The strategy specifically identifies the need for a revised provincial wildfire management planning process and policies to ensure that fire control decisions are rational, informed and supported by land managers. To address this priority, the ministry will take the lead in coordinating work with the responsible line ministries to establish roles and responsibilities for wildfire management planning and to improve the exchange of land and resource value information. A revised wildfire management planning process will help identify sensitive areas and other important resource values and ensure that fire response efforts are better coordinated and are supported by the respective land managers. Protection Program will forward to the board a copy of the draft wildfire management planning policy as soon as it is developed.



## Recommendation 2

*Protection branch ensure that staff and contractors working on fire suppression receive training to minimize the impact of suppression activities on forest resources.*

### Issue:

The report noted that training of staff involved in fireguard construction may help avoid unnecessary damage on sensitive sites where rehabilitation is either expensive or near impossible.

### Response:

Over the last 2 years, the ministry has enhanced its training of fire suppression staff and contractors across the province to minimize the impact of suppression activities on the forest resource. The S346 Fire Rehabilitation Course has been improved and is now delivered in a "train the trainer" format to Protection staff in each fire centre so that they can in turn deliver the appropriate training to local staff and equipment operators as required.

## Recommendation 3

*Where warranted by the size of the fire and/or values at risk, incident commanders should assign an individual as rehabilitation coordinator as soon as possible.*

### Issue:

The report noted that the assignment of a rehabilitation coordinator soon after a fire starts can reduce rehabilitation obligations and costs by considering rehabilitation issues during suppression activities and through the coordinated use of equipment.

### Response:

In May 2005, the Protection Program introduced draft Rehabilitation Standard Operating Guidelines for use across the province. The guidelines will be approved for use this fire season and will direct Protection staff to assign a trained Rehabilitation Specialist to larger or higher risk fires as soon as possible. Once assigned the position is responsible for overall coordination of fire rehabilitation efforts including coordination with suppression activities, ensuring that rehabilitation commences as soon as possible, and supervision of all rehabilitation personnel such as field supervisors and equipment operators. Protection staff in the fire centres have already noted many examples where implementation of these guidelines has resulted in reduced costs and improved results on the ground.



## Recommendation 4

***Government revisit the requirement to submit a rehabilitation plan to the designated forest official within 10 days of a fire being declared out.***

### Issue:

The report noted that the requirement, under the *Forest Fire Prevention and Suppression Regulation*, to submit a rehabilitation plan to the designated forest official within 10 days of a fire being declared out was unreasonable and that as a result the province was frequently in non-compliance with the regulation.

### Response:

The ministry agrees that the previous 10 day rule is not appropriate. During heavy fire seasons there may be difficulties finding sufficient qualified personnel to prepare the plans as well as circumstances where a delay in rehabilitation is appropriate. In 2005, legislation governing the Protection Program was consolidated into the *Wildfire Act and Regulation*. Under this new legislation, the Crown or a person carrying out fire suppression activities must, as soon as practicable, prepare and submit to an official, a site rehabilitation plan for approval. This new approach recognizes the importance of preparing and implementing site rehabilitation plans in a timely manner while allowing flexibility.

### Conclusion

The Forest Practices Board carries out a valuable role in monitoring and reporting to the public on the performance of the province and industry in complying with forest practices legislation. This special investigation and final report has been valuable in assessing the ministry's performance in fire suppression rehabilitation. The final report confirmed that some of the Protection Program changes implemented since the 2003 fire season are on the right track and reinforced the ministry's view that improvements are required in fire management planning. The ministry looks forward to cooperating with the board on future investigations.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the Ministry of Forests and Range by:

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Peter Fuglem  
Director  
Protection Program

January 20, 2006



File: 97325-20/2004-01

October 23, 2006

Doug Konkin  
Deputy Minister  
Ministry of Forests and Range  
P.O. Box 9525 Stn Prov Govt  
Victoria BC V8W 9C3

Dear Doug Konkin:

**Re: Forest Practices Board Recommendations**

Thank you for your letter of October 19, 2006 responding to the recommendations made in the Forest Practices Board's 2005 special investigation into post-wildfire site rehabilitation.

I am happy to note that you have completely implemented our recommendations. I now consider this matter to be closed.

All of our recommendations were a direct result of ideas put forward by people working in the protection program. From fire centre managers to volunteer fire wardens, we met people who are concerned about the impact of fire suppression on the landscape and thinking of ways to minimize that impact. I would like to thank you and your staff for your cooperation with the investigation.

We look forward to working together again in the future.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bruce". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Bruce Fraser, PhD  
Chair