

TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR A SPECIAL REPORT

LANDSCAPE FIRE MANAGEMENT

BACKGROUND

The amount of forests burned in the past 5 fire seasons is almost more than the previous 45 years combined. Due, in part, to existing and anticipated changes in climate, we expect fires to become more frequent, larger, and more severe in British Columbia. Management of forests needs to shift to address the future risks of wildfire by managing for wildfire at a landscape level.

Landscape fire management involves coordination and collaboration of activities at various scales. These activities include designating where fire is appropriate, identifying values for protection, designing and building strategic fuel breaks, managing road access, targeting harvesting in high wildfire threat areas, and conducting prescribed burning, post-harvest hazard abatement, appropriate reforestation practices and stand-level fuel treatments. These activities are most effective when dynamically planned over time, responding to ongoing disturbances and integrated into multi-decade planning periods typically used in sustainable forest management.

Past Board reports signaled the need for a coordinated approach to landscape fire management. In 2019, the tactical forest planning special report identified the inconsistent application of fuel management plans as a wildfire prevention tool. In 2012, the Board's special investigation, *Fire Management Planning*, urged government to collaborate with First Nations, licensees, the public, and local government in the design of fire management plans. Going back as far as 2006, the Board's special report, *Managing Forest Fuels*, called for landscape-level plans to assess spatial patterns of treatment across the landscape and incentives to encourage fuel reduction in priority areas. The Board's past concerns echo findings from other independent reports—both the *Firestorm 2003 Provincial Review* (Filmon) and the 2018 *Addressing the New Normal* (Abbott/Chapman) reports called for a strategic mitigation of fuel hazards through coordinated efforts.

Recent amendments to the *Forest and Range Practices Act* (FRPA) will require the chief forester to consider the objective to prevent, mitigate, and adapt to the impacts caused by significant disturbances to forests, including wildfire, when preparing a forest landscape plan.

OBJECTIVE

This special report will identify fundamental principles of landscape fire management with a goal of sustaining resilient ecosystems. Advocating for the importance of wildfire as a consideration in all aspects of forest management, the report will identify criteria to achieve the principles relative to forest and range planning and regionally appropriate practices

SCOPE

This special report is provincial in scope, and will include a review of literature and strategies in the field of landscape fire management. Principles and criteria identified through the course of this work will be linked to examples of forest planning, such as strategic ways of mitigating wildfire through forest landscape planning, and practices, such as aligning forest activities with strategic wildfire risk reduction objectives. The report will consider spatial and temporal planning scales (near to long term and landscape to stand level). While the report will examine the opportunities to integrate landscape fire management into forest management, and draw on examples of ways to implement these principles, it will not assess or evaluate the efficacy of current wildfire management planning in BC.

APPROACH

Board staff will engage subject experts in the fields of forest and fire ecology and management. Engagement will include practitioners, Indigenous knowledge keepers, scientists and policy experts within and outside of governments, academia and industry.

The project will:

- review current literature;
- review policies governing forest and range planning and practices in BC relative to wildfire management;
- draw from experiences within and outside of British Columbia to identify fundamental doctrines of landscape fire management (the principles); and
- identify examples of how these principles can be applied to forest planning processes, and how forest managers can integrate these principles into forest and range practices.

REPORTING

Under the authority of section 135 of FRPA, the Board Chair will prepare a special report. The report will identify opportunities for improving integration of landscape fire management into forest planning and practices. The report will identify principles and criteria that can be used to guide landscape fire management and planning, and may include recommendations for improving policies and processes pertinent to forest practices, such as forest landscape planning.

This report is the first in a series of reports about wildfire. Subsequent work will examine the application of the principles and criteria of landscape fire management that are described in this special report.