



For immediate release
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Downton Lake wildfire investigation finds BC Wildfire Service compliant

VICTORIA – The Forest Practices Board has released the results of its investigation into a complaint about the BC Wildfire Service's (BCWS) use of planned ignitions during the 2023 Downton Lake wildfire near Gun Lake.

A planned ignition is a deliberate use of fire in an emergency to remove unburned fuel from an area, typically between a control line and the wildfire. Burning this fuel can help contain the wildfire and make fire suppression efforts more efficient.

The complaint, submitted by three Gun Lake residents, raised concerns that a planned ignition conducted by BCWS on Aug. 1, 2023, contributed to the destruction of more than 40 homes on the west side of the lake.

The board assessed whether BCWS complied with the Wildfire Act and if its decision to use a planned ignition near the complainants' properties was reasonable, given the conditions at the time.

The board found BCWS complied with the Wildfire Act and BCWS's decision to conduct the ignition in this emergency situation was based on sound forest practices and a reasonable assessment of the wildfire threat.

"We recognize the devastating losses experienced by the people and community of Gun Lake," said Keith Atkinson, chair, Forest Practices Board. "After a thorough review, we found that BC Wildfire Service acted within its legal authority, and its decision to conduct a planned ignition on Aug. 1, 2023, was reasonable given the circumstances and the threat the wildfire posed to the area."

The investigation determined BCWS conducted the planned ignition because officials believed that without this action, the wildfire would spread to nearly the entire southwestern shoreline of the Lajoie and Gun lakes, with the potential to reach the community of Gold Bridge.

Gun Lake lies within the territories of the ?Esdilagh First Nation Government {Alexandria}, the N'Quatqua First Nation, the T'it'q'et First Nation, the Tl'esqox First Nation (Toosey First Nation), the Tl'etinqox Government {Anaham}, the Tsal'ah First Nation, the Tsideldel First Nation {Alexis Creek}, the Whispering Pines/Clinton Indian Band, the Xeni Gwet'in First Nations Government and the Xwisten (Bridge River Indian Band). The board recognizes the ongoing importance of its historical relationship with the land.

Learn more:

To read the full report, visit: <https://www.bcfpb.ca/release-publications/releases/>

Contact:

Tanner Senko, Communications Manager
Forest Practices Board
tanner.senko@bcfpb.ca
Phone: 250-889-8211 / 1 800 994-5899