

BACKGROUND

June 19, 2025

Forest Practices Board

Recommendations to strengthen wildfire resilience

This special investigation evaluated how forestry activities subject to the Forest and Range Practices Act and Wildfire Act help or hinder wildfire risk reduction efforts within the wildland-urban interface.

Investigators sampled 43 cutblocks and 22 wildfire risk-reduction treatments within interface areas classified as high or extreme wildfire threat by the Province. Investigators reviewed forestry plans and documentation, evaluated compliance with hazard and fuel-treatment requirements in the field, and interviewed First Nations, forestry professionals, government decision-makers and BC Wildfire Service staff. As a result of the findings, the board is proposing five recommendations to government.

Board recommendations:

1. Set proactive fire management objectives: Establish proactive fire management objectives in the interface to reduce wildfire hazards, rather than merely prevent hazard increases.
2. Improve legal definitions and transparency: Ensure the wildland-urban interface includes municipalities and other high-risk populated areas, and that maps defining the legal interface are publicly available.
3. Increase public accessibility of wildfire risk-reduction plans: Create a centralized, public repository for community-scale wildfire risk reduction plans to support co-ordinated action, community advocacy and cross-jurisdictional wildfire risk reduction.
4. Strengthen fire-hazard abatement timelines: Require abatement periods to follow an “as soon as practicable” standard to reduce prolonged wildfire vulnerability.
5. Enhance fire-hazard assessment guidelines: Revise and update the Ministry of Forests’ 2012 fuel-hazard assessment and abatement guidelines to address current limitations and align with best practices in wildfire risk assessment.

Key findings:

Fire hazard assessments lack content and lag in timing

- Professionals who integrated risk assessment early in planning and followed through with abatement reduced fire hazards ahead of peak fire season.
- Thirty per cent of assessments did not meet legal content requirements.
- Eighty-six per cent of fire hazard assessments were complete; 23% were completed on time.

Legal requirements for hazard abatement are too broad and often unmet

- Sixteen per cent of cutblocks did not meet hazard abatement requirements; another 21% needed more work during the remaining abatement period to comply.
- Current regulations permit logging debris (slash) to remain on site for up to 30 months, keeping flammable materials on the ground across multiple fire seasons.
- Without fire-management objectives in the interface, logging activities can meet requirements without meaningfully reducing wildfire risk.

Poor definitions without maps worsens wildfire risk

- Maps of these legally defined areas are not publicly available, making it difficult to verify or enforce compliance.
- Faster fire hazard assessment and cleanup apply only inside the interface, but the legal definition mostly excludes municipalities.

Smoke rules limit burning windows

- The Open Burning Smoke Control Regulation restricts when slash can be burned, limiting one of the most effective fuel reduction tools.

Wildfire risk-reduction treatments

- More than 90% of wildfire-risk reduction treatments achieved fuel-reduction goals.
- Approvals for wildfire risk reduction treatments can take up to a year, and there are minimal consequences for non-compliance.

Few licensees use fire-management stocking standards

- Eighty-three per cent of forest licensees did not use fire-management stocking standards, which are more wildfire-resilient standards for regenerating areas after logging.

Alignment of harvest with community risk plans

- Some licensees have used harvest operations to support abatement, demonstrating the capacity to support risk reduction when mitigation is planned.
- Logging in interface areas occurred 11 times more often than wildfire risk-reduction treatments, yet logging plans rarely align with community wildfire risk-reduction plans.

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