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Sometimes you can't see the forest fire for the trees!

Every fire that crews go to has a distinct set of challenges, particularly here on the coast. One of the challenges often faced by crews is to locate the fire. Once a fire is called in you would expect that the report would come with enough information that it would be a simple matter of going out the door directly to the right location. This is not always the case. More often than not, the report comes with very general information, or in some cases simply—'I smell smoke'.

Think about the sheer volume of land in each fire zone. Then think about how you would give directions to crew mates in a particular location if you were standing at the bottom of a cliff and only seeing the occasional puff of smoke, or the smoke was masked by low cloud. These were some of the complications faced by crews in late September in their bid to locate and deal with a lone tree struck by lightning near Lions Bay.

The crew was called to respond to a report of smoke above Lions Bay. Transported to the vicinity by helicopter, the crew was able to spot the tree but were not able to get a GPS reading before the cloud ceiling dropped forcing the helicopter to return to base. They were able, however, to get a set of eyes on it to determine that it was a single tree burning and that there was no fear of the fire spreading quickly due to location and weather conditions.

The crews picked up their truck and drove to the approximate location and after sourcing a deactivated logging road (largely overgrown) they started the long hike up (way up). Getting to the approximate area the crew was not able to locate the tree. Remember they are on a steep hillside, looking up for a single tree that is burning in the centre like a chimney above the canopy of thick trees. By this time it was late and they were forced to leave the site (can you spot the smoke in photo above?).

The second day the crew started their hike at first light, and with a better idea of the location of the tree from GPS readings taken that morning by

heli. Once on site they confirmed the fire to be indeed a single tree. There was very little spread and the tree was likely to burn and topple on its own. The issue was—when it toppled would it have enough integrity to hurtle down the slope and loosen rocks and debris onto the Sea-to-Sky Highway below?

It was determined that a Danger Tree Faller should be brought in to take down the tree and preparations should be made in case the faller



recommended the highway be closed as a precautionary measure. Flaggers were contacted and all appropriate agencies involved notified of the work being planned for the following morning. But nature has its own way of dealing with unhealthy trees. Overnight, the tree, weakened by the fire, collapsed in on itself, and broke into smaller pieces. Although some of the debris rolled to the edge of the cliff it stopped short of rolling down the cliff face and pushing any rocks down the slope.



Tree on fire, looking up



25 years of Service—we couldn't be prouder!



We are in the amazing position of recognizing six of our auxiliary staff for 25 years of service to the people of BC.

A special awards ceremony was held in Pemberton on Sept 28, attended by the hereditary chief of the Lil'wat Nation Leonard Andrew, the elected chief of the Lil'wat Nation Dean Nelson, and BCWS Executive Director Madeline Maley, Director Ian Meier, Coastal Fire Centre Manager Ken Taekema, along with zone staff, family and special friends.

The plaques presented to the individuals contain a raw garnet, in recognition of their service on the Garnet fire near Penticton in 1994. A feast celebration was enjoyed by all, along with laughter and tale swapping by the participants.

The Salish Unit Crew was formed in 1990 by Crew Supervisor Ryan Pascal along with Calvin Nelson, Marshall Ritchie, Lance Joe, Brennan Dan, and joined by Cecil Edmonds when he transferred home from the Seton Lake crew in 1991. They were joined by fourteen other Salish crew each year including Dean Nelson who worked on the crew for 15 years, and is now the elected chief of the Lil'wat Nation.

All but one of these people have spent of 1100 days on the fireline.

The Garnet Fire

The Garnet Fire ignited on July 20, 1994, on the south side of the mountain flanking Ellis Creek canyon along Penticton's eastern edge. It was an interface fire that ultimately burned 5500 hectares, and caused 3000 people to be evacuated from their homes.

At the height of the fire's intensity there were 502 personnel (including 100 military) working on this fire. What is most often discussed by crews is the number of times the fire front shifted, the incredible hot and dry conditions in the area, the work with other agencies, and a sense of loss still felt for each of the eighteen homes burnt by the fire.

Fuels Management and reducing risk

Crews are still busy putting their expertise to work by eliminating excessive forest fuels that put communities at risk. Much of this work is being done after consultation with local governments to identify the hazards and establishing plans that meet common goals.

All zones are working on this vital work. Each burn has been assessed, needed resources identified and plans made. Each site is evaluated and safety plans developed. Land managers are consulted to ensure the burning meets their needs as well. Sometimes the project is being undertaken by local government, and our crews are undertaking the burning, like the Millennium Trails project in the Sunshine Coast. Some projects are being undertaken on crown land near communities where old forestry debris is posing a hazard, like the ones in the Sechelt area.



Millennium Trails pre-treatment



Old Sechelt Mine fire site Sunshine Coast

Weather is the determining factor for the ignitions. The risk of the fire escaping must be low and manageable by the resources on site, but the fire must burn well enough to consume the fuels and reduce the risk. Venting forecasts are also critical, to move the smoke up and away from communities and air sheds.

The burns that could be visible to communities are noted on our Facebook page [BCForestFireInfo](#) or our website in our Information Bulletin section. The exact date of the burn is hard to predict: crews are ready to take advantage of favourable burning days in the coming weeks.

Remember: fuels management is a shared responsibility between all levels of land managers, including homeowners.

Large scale fuels management is undertaken by Strategic Wildfire

Prevention Initiatives (SWIPs), and Community Wildfire Protection Programs (CWPPs) to manage fuels on public land. FireSmart undertakes the same principles, but on private land.

You can join us by learning more at [FireSmart Canada](#), or [BCWildfire.ca](#).



Lighting test piles—Sechelt

To Date
in Coastal

Fires to Date

Person
Caused **137**

Lighting
Caused **55**

Total
Number
of Fires **192**

Fire Danger
Rating today



Current Prohibitions
*(within BCWS
jurisdictional area)*

There are no prohibitions against open fire or activities within the Coastal Fire Centre's jurisdictional area. Please check with your local government for open fire bylaws in your area.

The 2016 Fire Season



Fire at Bamberton



Single Burning Tree



Lighting off a dozer guard



Chilliwack Lake fire

At Coastal

This season has been unusual in that in that much of the contact we have had with the media and the public has included an underlying element of fear or tension due to the Fort McMurray fire, and the fires in the Fort St. John area.

We were lucky in that we did have a fairly quiet fire season and we were able to spend some time with each caller to explain what was different about the fires on the coast this year compared to last year.

We talked about what weather conditions meant for fires ignited this year and why. We pointed out that although we were not experiencing extreme fire conditions, that now would be a good time to look at the callers' preparedness for an emergency, perhaps FireSmart their properties, or look at promoting FireSmart in their communities.

With the densest population of any Fire Centre in BC we always expect a higher than average number of human-caused fires, but this season that number has been over 70%. Truly disappointing, and something we will continue to work on.

We appreciate your help, and please spread the word. Without a doubt, the easiest thing homeowners can do, with the biggest impact, is to FireSmart their properties.

The other thing is not to start fires in the first place.

Farewell for 2016

This is the last regular newsletter for the 2016 fire season. We hope you found out something new from our newsletters, and we look forward to writing more for you next year.

We welcome comments, and new additions to our distribution list. Just drop us a line at:

FORHPRP.INFOCO@gov.bc.ca

We'd love to hear from you.

- Donna & Marg