
TO: Committee of the Whole**MEETING:** March 12, 2019**FROM:** Joan Michel
Parks and Trails Coordinator**SUBJECT:** Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development
Wildfire Response Agreement 2019-2022

RECOMMENDATION

That the 2019-2022 Wildfire Response Agreement with the Ministry of Forest, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development be approved for execution.

SUMMARY

The RDN's 2016-2019 Wildfire Response Agreement with the BC Wildfire Service at the Ministry of Forest, Lands, Natural Recourse Operation and Rural Development (FLNRO) expires 31 March 2019, and the Province is requesting RDN approval of a 2019-2022 agreement – see Attachment 1.

The agreement provides for fire-fighting at RDN owned or managed parks situated outside local fire protection areas and therefore not served by fire departments. In return for an annual fee from the RDN, the BC Wildfire Service undertakes to provide necessary wildfire-fighting services at parks detailed in the agreement.

The existing 2016-2019 Wildfire Response Agreement covers wildfire-fighting services for 16 RDN parks representing 1,769 hectares, at a cost to the RDN of \$1,000 per year. The Province's updated agreement for the 2019-2022 term contains minor language changes from the existing agreement and stipulates an annual fee to the RDN of \$1,100 per year for the Province's services. Park area covered and RDN responsibilities are unchanged.

The RDN has statutory responsibility for fire-fighting on lands it owns or manages under Crown licence or lease. Since 2008, the RDN has used the Province's wildfire response agreements to manage this responsibility for lands not otherwise served by fire departments. Most industrial and other large landowners in the Province such as Island Timberlands and TimberWest also rely on wildfire response agreements. In the absence of such an agreement, the RDN would need to develop and maintain its own fire fighting capacity, or identify and engage with private sector fire fighters willing to fight fires at remote parks on a fee for service basis. In either case, and cost aside, it would not be possible to replace the capacity, services and commitments on offer from the Province through its wildfire response agreement program.

BACKGROUND

Landowners and managers have statutory obligation under the laws of British Columbia with respect to wildfire prevention, detection, control and suppression. For example, if intending to use a chainsaw for trail maintenance in a back country park, Parks Services staff must have the appropriate resources on hand to carry out initial suppression and control of a fire sparked by chain saw use. The RDN's obligation under the Wildfire Response Agreement is to undertake control as best practical until relieved by the Province.

Following the Okanagan wildfires in 2003, the Province engaged with local government and large back country landowners on improved coordination and management of wildfires. In 2008, the BC Wildfire Service implemented the wildfire response agreement program. Under these agreements, the Province assesses the risk and cost of suppressing wildfire on Crown lands as well as privately held lands not served by fire departments, takes into account any landowner contribution of fire-fighting resources, and assesses the landowner an annual fee to pay for the Province's commitment to take primary responsibility for wildfire control and suppression on the privately held or managed lands.

The RDN has participated in the wildfire response agreement program since its inception in 2008. The BC Wildfire Service has the expertise, infrastructure and response resources needed to prevent, detect, control and extinguish wildfires across the land in a coordinated and organized manner. The wildfire response agreement program maximizes use of all available landowner wildfire fighting resources and integrates those resources within the greater Wildfire Service operation in order to protect valuable public and private land assets. The agreement does not relieve landowners and managers of their statutory obligations with regard to wildfire, but recognizes the practical limitations of individual fire fighting capacity and the public's interest in containing the spread of wildfire. The primary target of the agreement is the industrial sector, and both Island Timberlands and TimberWest operate under wildfire response agreements with the Province. These agreements do not address structural fires, which remain the landowner's responsibility.

There has been no instance of wildfire in a park since the wildfire response agreement program was initiated. The RDN contributes to wildfire prevention by restricting campfires to its two campground parks, applying campfire and smoking bans during periods of high wildfire risk, communicating repeatedly about the risk of fire, and avoiding work in the woods during periods of high fire risk. Parks Services maintains a close working relationship with Coastal Fire Centre staff based in Errington who regularly visit RDN parks, help evaluate risk, and use RDN parks for wildfire risk management and fire fighting practice. At Horne Lake Regional Park where park structures and vehicles would not be addressed directly under the Wildfire Response Agreement, the RDN Parks Division maintains portable generator, water pumps, hoses and other tools for use by Park Operator personnel and RDN staff in the event of fire involving park buildings and lakefront campgrounds. The Horne Lake Park Operator has prepared an Emergency Response Plan, which has been reviewed by RDN Emergency Services and includes a section on fire.

Beyond the Wildfire Response Agreement, the RDN carries a \$2,000,000 per incident fire-fighting endorsement under its Municipal Insurance Association Liability Protection Agreement. This endorsement satisfies requirements set down by forest companies licensing RDN use of private lands for regional trail. The endorsement would come into effect in the event that it can be proved that the RDN or its authorized trail users were responsible for starting a wildfire along licensed trail.

ALTERNATIVES

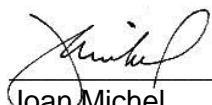
1. That the Board authorize execution of the 2019-2022 Wildfire Response Agreement.
2. That the Board provide alternative direction.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The \$1,100 annual fee associated with the Wildfire Response Agreement is covered in the annual Regional Parks Operating budget.

STRATEGIC PLAN IMPLICATIONS

Focus On Service And Organizational Excellence - We View Our Emergency Services As Core Elements Of Community Safety



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February 13, 2019

Reviewed by:

- C. Morrison, Manager, Emergency Services
- W. Marshall, Manager, Parks Services
- T. Osborne, General Manager, Recreation and Parks Services
- P. Carlyle, Chief Administrative Officer

Attachments:

1. Wildfire Response Agreement 2019 - 2022