

## Proactive preparation for potential wildfires

Unsurprisingly, Council members have been asked if we are watching what's going on in Northern BC and Alberta and if we are learning everything we can to prevent a similar situation here. Yes ... and, hopefully.

Yes, we are very conscious of the disastrous impacts of the out of control wildfires in BC's Peace Region and around Fort McMurray in Alberta. The social, economic, and ecological devastation these fires are causing is hard to fathom. It will take years to truly measure the impacts and add up the costs; and, a long time for the people, communities, and forests to recover from this natural, climate change compounded, disaster.

So yes, Council is watching and we will make every effort to learn from these current fires.

But, the answer to the question of whether we will be enabled do everything possible to prevent a catastrophic fire event from happening here is not fully in our control.

Unfortunately, we do not have the means to directly apply any lessons learned about proactive fuel management, as we do not have any authority to conduct work on the crown forestland or the large tracts of private forestlands surrounding our community (the "interface").

Managing forests for fire is complex and very expensive, and while the Premier is now talking about having to undertake the work needed to protect communities as quickly and deliberately as possible, we've heard those words every year in BC since 2003 with little real evidence of the work actually being done. Unfortunately, the politicians who make the biggest promises during a crisis that they will take every measure to prevent these events from happening again don't have a stellar track record of following through after the smoke blows away.

Remember Kelowna and BC's 2003 "Firestorm" summer? I remember it only too well, my brother was one of the firefighters who got trapped in Upper Mission and had to hunker down while houses and trees exploded all around him. My brother's experience in 2003 exactly mirrors the stories being told today by the structural firefighters who fought the "Beast" that threatened to level their entire town.

Recall Slave Lake when the entire town had to be evacuated and 333 homes, 169 apartment units, three churches, 10 businesses, the town hall and the library were all burned down? The report from that catastrophic event was called "Wisdom Gained" – there's some irony in that choice of words for the people of Fort McMurray.

Quesnel, one of BC's more vulnerable interface communities, has a [Community Wildfire Plan \(2017\)](#), but has had only a few hectares of actual fuel management work done around its boundaries. Council has been actively working with the Minister of Forests over the past year to change this situation and to obtain a community forest tenure that would incorporate the entire fire vulnerable crown forestland surrounding the City. If we are awarded this tenure as soon as possible we will be able to take immediate advantage of the new financial and technical resources the province is making available to do fuel management work around vulnerable communities.

In short, an interface community forest tenure is what we need to enable us to apply any lessons learned from Kelowna, Slave Lake, and Fort McMurray. We're hoping to hear soon whether the City of Quesnel will be successful in its bid to proactively protect our community from wildfire risk through the awarding of an interface community forest license.

Mayor Bob Simpson

Email: [mayor@quesnel.ca](mailto:mayor@quesnel.ca)