

IN THIS ISSUE

- Coastal Crews in Quebec
- Staff Spotlight: Vic Upshaw
- Emergency Management BC: Flood Response
- The History of Indigenous Unit Crews
- Fire Weather Forecast
- At Coastal
- 2021 Contact Information

CURRENT STATISTICS

Fires to-date: 59

Hectares burned: 70

Human-caused: 59

Lightning-caused: 0

BANS AND PROHIBITIONS

Campfire: No Ban

Category 2: No Ban

Category 3: No Ban

Forest Use Restrictions: No Ban

[Prohibitions section of bcwildfire.ca for full details.](https://bcwildfire.ca/prohibitions-section)

Coastal Crews in Quebec

Three Coastal Fire Centre unit crews and one Agency Representative (AREP) have been deployed as part of a provincial contingent of firefighters to Quebec. Crews travelled in two groups. The first group of 120 left BC on June 12, followed by an additional 60 personnel outbound on the thirteenth.

In Quebec, BC crews will work with the Society for the Protection of Forests Against Fire (La Société de protection des forêts contre le feu (SOPFEU)). For a visual snapshot of the fire season Quebec is facing the website provides some interesting statistics: <https://sopfeu.qc.ca/en/>. Once you are on this site you can scroll across the top and select the Fire Map button for information about individual fires.

When crews are out of province, they are accompanied by a BC Wildfire Service AREP to assist in coordination efforts. An AREP is a person assigned by a primary, assisting, or cooperating government agency or private organization that has been delegated authority to make decisions affecting that agency's or organization's participation in incident management activities following appropriate consultation with the leadership of that agency. An AREP will deal with any issues including medical emergencies, procuring missing or required gear, they generally handle anything that will allow firefighters to get to the fireline and start work.

Coastal Unit Crews have been deployed to the following fires/locations but could be moved or reassigned at any time.

Fire Crew Locations (as of June 17, 2021):

- Trailblazers unit crew have been assigned to a 75.4 hectare fire northwest of Roberval. The status of this fire is 'Under Control'.
- Salish and Thunderbird unit crews have been assigned to a fire north of Lac St. Jean that is currently 'Under Control' at 1611 hectares.

The latest weather (June 17) briefing states 'Rain forecasted for Friday-Saturday with possible lightning. There were 4 new starts from yesterday's lightning and actioning all. Most fires our staff are on have received precipitation and Fire Behavior is minimal'. If enough precipitation is received and the weather moderates crews may be demobilized at any time.



Staff Spotlight: Vic Upshaw

Vic Upshaw has been involved with the BC Wildfire Service in the Coastal Fire Centre for around 25 years, starting as a crew member with the Trail Blazers Unit Crew based outside Hope, B.C. He later moved up to Crew Leader, Crew Supervisor, Wildfire Assistant and is currently a Wildfire Technician in the Fraser Fire Zone. Upshaw said the people in BCWS are his main motivation to return and being able to give back to the community beyond fighting fires has been the most rewarding aspect of this job.

Aside from fighting fires, he said it's encouraging to see the relationship building and community connections being strengthened between BCWS and Indigenous communities over the last few years. He added that places such as burial grounds and traditional hunting and fishing sites may be at risk to wildfire. Connecting with Indigenous elders and leaders during planning can help identify these values, anticipate potential issues and help us mitigate negative impacts on these sensitive areas.

"As a firefighter with our organization, I've been able to take that oral history and knowledge passed down from elders for generations to build relationships that help us work towards the same goal."

Vic added that recruiting members from Indigenous communities means gaining the oral history and traditional knowledge of local areas in B.C. Many of these communities are rural and know how to sustain themselves which can provide services or contractors with knowledge of the area in case of an emergency. This means that locals and BCWS members can stand shoulder to shoulder to support and protect communities.

As an Indigenous person, Vic acknowledged fire is important to many aspects of life. Through history

and into current day, fire is a timeless technological advancement that is used for sustenance, ceremonial purposes and land management, but it's also a facet of social connection. For many events and experiences, fire often brings people together.

"In our communities, fire is the centrepiece where you gather to listen to elders tell stories, to feel connected and to share experiences with your community. It is also where we give offerings to those who have passed and to honour those who we have lost. People from all cultures use fire to honour grief and loss, lighting a candle for example. It is part of the global human experience – there is more that unites us than separates us."

Being a member of BCWS isn't just his day job, it is a part of his identity within his community. Others may look to him and other Indigenous members of BCWS as an example for their own lives.

"It says something when I stand as a leader in uniform – younger generations may see that you can set goals for yourself, achieve what you set your mind to and become a leader yourself. I feel proud and I feel responsible in my position as a leader and that doesn't stop when my shift ends."



Vic Upshaw

Emergency Management BC (EMBC) Flood Response

Freshet and fire season are upon us, and while they may seem like separate events, there are many elements that overlap each other.

To learn more about floods, wildfires, and how you can prepare for an emergency, we talked to Kaylee Tower, Regional Manager with Emergency Management BC.

How are flood and fire related?

EMBC uses a system called the British Columbia Emergency Management System (BCEMS), which is based on the Incident Command System to manage all hazards. Whether we are coordinating a wildfire, flood, or hazmat spill response, the basic building blocks look the same.

The biggest difference between flood and fire is the site-level response. Wildfire is a hazard where there are first responders who are dedicated to responding and stopping the fire from affecting private property. Flood response falls to the entity that is responsible for the property in question.

Local authorities and First Nations can take action to protect their critical infrastructure (e.g. city hall, sewage lift stations, band-owned homes, public works yard, etc.), and that response is supported by the province by providing flood response measures such as sandbags, gabion baskets, tiger dams, and wildfire crews to set these up.

What does flood response mean for wildfire season preparation?

Usually flood season happens in the spring and fall, and wildfire season will happen during the summer. There can be a lot of overlap between flood and wildfire season, though. I have been in an activated Provincial Regional Emergency Operations Centre (PREOC) where we were managing response to floods, landslides, and wildfires at the same time. You can't predict what will happen because these hazards are so weather dependent, so we typically prepare for wildfire and flood season at the same time.

How do EMBC and BCWS work together on flood response?

Instead of taking a lead role like with wildfires, BCWS takes a supporting role during flood response to help EMBC support local authorities and First Nations. EMBC and BCWS have a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) where EMBC can request aviation services from BCWS during flood response. We utilize aviation resources mainly to conduct aerial flood assessments and snow observations. Occasionally we'll also use helicopters to transport things like supplies and fuel to communities that have lost their road access due to flooding. We have even

Emergency Management BC Flood Response Continued

used helicopters hired via the MOU to conduct evacuations of communities that are at imminent danger from floods.

BCWS also supports flood response by providing personnel. Wildfire crews can be used for sandbagging or setting up gabions and tiger dams. EMBC has also utilised other BCWS staff in our PREOCs, and Incident Management Teams have been deployed to manage large flooding incident response. We also make use of BCWS weather forecasters because of their local knowledge and ability to provide spot forecasts when we identify an area of potential risk.

How can people prepare for freshet season?

- **Have a plan:** Having an emergency plan ensures you and your household know what to do and can safely respond if you're faced with the threat of flooding.
- **Create grab-and-go bags:** Assemble a grab-and-go bag for each member of your household with the essentials you will need if you are asked to evacuate.
- **Protect your home:** Prepare for possible flooding of low-lying areas by moving equipment and other valuables to higher locations, where possible. Clear perimeter drains, eavestroughs and gutters. Sandbags also help and may be available through your local government.

More readiness information, including the PreparedBC Flood Preparedness Guide, is available online at www.preparedbc.ca/floods

Before a flood

Read about what to do before a flood [here](#).

During a flood

Read about what to do during a flood [here](#).

After a flood

Read about what to do after a flood [here](#).



The history of Indigenous unit crews

The Indigenous Unit Crew Program has been a part of BC Wildfire Service since 1988. Before, there were no formal unit crews, instead there were street hires with a wide variety of firefighting abilities.

The program was originally developed on a contract basis and crews were created and operated throughout B.C. The first crew operated out of a gravel pit in Houston.

In 1989 and 1990 the first Indigenous unit crews started in Princeton, Riske Creek, Smithers and Vanderhoof, B.C. The program's intent was to provide local employment for Indigenous communities and utilize their knowledge of the land and fire management. In

1992 a task team reached out to every band and Tribal Council in the province to gauge community interest in supporting a local crew and determine whether the community had a potential supervisor in mind. Some of the first communities involved were Kamloops, Vernon, Alexis Creek and Port Alberni, B.C.

At its peak there were 25 or so Indigenous unit crews such as the Rainmakers, Thunderbirds, Timber Wolves, Fire Stalkers and Lightning Strikes. The program has benefitted the crews and individuals who comprise them, providing them with steady seasonal employment, instilling pride in Indigenous communities, allowing for shared resources and developing relationships between government and community. Indigenous members have made up some of the most well respected and knowledgeable crews in the province.

Indigenous unit crews were, and still are, known for their exceptional work ethic, knowledge of the land and fire management practices.

Many Indigenous folks who experienced the program have only positive things to say. Some recalled a decrease in alcoholism, substance abuse and mental health issues of the crew members throughout their time working.

Ryan Pascal, crew supervisor of the Salish Unit Crew, said his crew is completely sober during the fire season which has improved the mental and physical health of his crew.



The Heatseeker, Salish & Ravens Unit Crews

History of Indigenous Unit Crews continued

Although the program had benefits, there have also been difficulties. Some Indigenous crew members remember encountering racism in their work, even in positions of authority. Indigenous crew leaders faced racism and deviant behaviors from non-Indigenous crew members due to their background.

Over time as BCWS evolved, increased barriers to the application and recruitment process resulted in challenges to Indigenous applicants that still exist today.

Some challenges included being relocated far from their family or local Nation, expectations of applicants to have a computer or have cover letter and resume skills, which were often less accessible to Indigenous applicants, and mostly white interview panels are less representative of new Indigenous hires.

More complex wording on applications, learning how to answer competency-based interview questions, having minimal internet access, having a criminal record or not having a passport or driver's license also often meant they didn't make the recruitment cut.

There were also cultural differences. For example, during dipping season when many Indigenous people are providing for themselves and their families for the year, members would be up all-night catching game, fishing, hunting and getting wood to provide for their families.

These cultural practices resulted in them taking leave as it's an important cultural time, but the new, and stricter, government standards were expected to be conformed to without cultural considerations.

These barriers to recruitment and retention contributed to a decrease in the amount of Indigenous crew members. This decrease is an apparent shift away from the initial intent of the Indigenous Unit Crew Program, which was a program to build on the expertise of Indigenous people, to increase Indigenous community capacity economically and bridge the employment gap.

Work is currently underway to address such barriers.

Some work underway includes having Indigenous staff members involved in recruitment of new Indigenous employees, the Indigenous Forestry Scholarship and the Indigenous Youth Internship Program.

The recruitment and interview process has also been adapted to better accommodate Indigenous applicants. Indigenous people interested in working for BCWS can be partnered with a current staff member to help answer their questions on the job and support them through the application process. Competencies and requirements were also adjusted to account for cultural knowledge and activities.

Ultimately this change saw an increase in applications from Indigenous people, a trend BCWS hopes to continue.

While there is still work to be done, BCWS is proud of the steps that have been taken and grateful for those who have shared their experiences and challenges with us so we can continue to grow.

Fire Weather Forecast

Issued: 14:00 PDT Friday 18 June 2021.

SYNOPSIS: A ridge of high pressure is maintaining sunny skies, seasonal temperatures, and gusty inflow winds across the south coast today. Winds will be slightly gustier today than Thursday owing to the stronger pressure gradient. Further north, yet another low is approaching Haida Gwaii with cloud extending to the Mid Coast. Rain associated with that system will reach Haida Gwaii tonight and spread to the North Island by Saturday morning. Over the South Coast, temperatures will be in the mid-twenties today with RHs around 30-40% for most locations. Far inland reaches of the Pemberton and Fraser zone will likely see RH drop into the high 20's again today. On Saturday, temperatures cool by 3 to 5 degrees and RH come up to 50-70% as an upper trough slides down the lee side of the Coast Range. The farthest inland reaches of the Sunshine Coast through the Fraser Zone could see a sprinkle or two, but precipitation will be light to non-existent. Winds switch to outflow Saturday night which will mark the beginning of a 2-3 day outflow pattern yielding falling RH.

OUTLOOK: The long-advertised ridge of high pressure builds in confidently on Sunday enabling very warm air to push in from the US. Temperatures will rise above 30C for inland locations and upper 20's for coastal sites. A thermal trough along the outer coast on Sunday and Monday will support outflow winds enabling RH's to fall to 20% and teens for select dry inland sites. Monday will be the hottest day of the hot spell with inland temperatures likely flirting with the 35C mark. Winds switch to inflow beginning Tuesday helping to alleviate the heat and raise RH. Moisture and instability approach from the south next Wednesday opening the door to potential thunderstorms and lightning. After several days of drying and rising fire danger, this will be a pattern to watch.

6 TO 10 DAY: (next week) The dry and warm spell now seems likely to persist through most of next week allowing a prolonged drying period with rising fire danger. The first sign of precip appears next Friday, June 25th and will likely be confined to Mid-Coast and northwards.

At Coastal

While the Coastal region did experience some precipitation, we are moving into a strong drying trend that is happening quickly, with no significant precipitation in the upcoming forecast for most areas. Sunday and Monday will be the hottest days, and while temperatures are expected to moderate to normal seasonal weather after that, many areas, including parts of Vancouver Island and the Fraser Valley, are drying out quickly and expecting no rain. Remember this is the time of year that the need for prohibitions is routinely reviewed and if necessary enacted. If a prohibition is enacted it will appear [here](#).

A great new tool that has become available to all British Columbians is the new First People's Cultural Council - Map of BC - <https://maps.fpcc.ca/?search=heritage>.

The George Road Fire (K70804), currently burning within the Kamloops Fire Centre's jurisdiction, is near the eastern border of the Coastal Fire Centre. For more information on this fire go to [Wildfires of Note](#).

Contact Information

Report a Wildfire: *5555 on a cell or 1 800 663-5555

Wildfire Information Line: 1 888 3FOREST

Burn Registration Number: 1 888 797-1717

Information Officer Phone Number: 250 951-4209

Information Officer Email:

BCWS.CoFCInformationOfficer@gov.bc.ca