



Ministry of
Forests, Lands, Natural
Resource Operations
and Rural Development

BC Wildfire Service

Standard Operating Procedure

For

Prescribed Fire

Version: 13

Program Area: Prevention

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
1. Introduction	3
2. Scope	3
3. Purpose	3
4. Definitions.....	4
5. Roles and Responsibilities	4
6. Fires - Operational Situations	7
7. Costs and Contraventions.....	8
8. Post Burn Requirements.....	8
9. References, Resources and Links.....	8
10. Appendices	8
11. Document History.....	8
12. Approval.....	9

1. Introduction

Wildfire is a natural occurrence on the landscape and Prescribed Fires are an ecologically appropriate and cost effective means to achieving land use and public safety objectives in many areas of the province. Prescribed Fires can also contribute to achieving air quality and climate action targets by preventing large, intense wildfires and replacing them with more frequent, well-timed and well-planned low-intensity fires which consider smoke management objectives.

Key objectives of Prescribed Fire use in BC include:

- Using Prescribed Fire more regularly to mitigate wildfire risks to communities, watersheds, infrastructure and natural resource values; and
- Supporting sustainable, healthy and resilient ecosystems through the careful and controlled use of fire, where appropriate.

When using Prescribed Fires to achieve the objectives listed above there is always provision in place for firefighter and public safety. Safety is the first priority for all Prescribed Fire activities and outcomes.

2. Scope

This Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) applies to the BC Wildfire Service (BCWS) and provincial government agencies utilizing Prescribed Fires on provincial Crown land, and provides information and guidance to other agents in the planning and implementation of Prescribed Fire projects on all land types.

3. Purpose

The purpose of this SOP is to provide direction and assistance for the implementation of Prescribed Fires in accordance with the *Wildfire Act*, *Wildfire Regulation* and Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development (FLNRORD) Policy 9.5 Prescribed Fire. This SOP:

- Provides BCWS and other provincial government staff with consistent direction, communications and a co-ordinated planning and implementation process for Prescribed Fire in BC (see Appendices 3 and 4 for Prescribed Fire Approval Process and Steps);
- Provides guidance to support Prescribed Fire practitioners (such as provincial land management agencies, resource managers) and First Nations who utilize Prescribed Fire to meet resource management objectives; and
- Defines the roles and responsibilities of the BCWS, provincial ministries and government or non-government agents utilizing a Prescribed Fire in regards to planning, implementing, monitoring, and reporting Prescribed Fire projects.

4. Definitions

Act	The Wildfire Act (British Columbia) as it may be amended or replaced from time to time.
Burn Boss	The individual responsible for the management of all Prescribed Fire operations.
Burn Plan	A documented plan prepared in advance of a Prescribed Fire that describes the objectives, burn operations, mitigation plan and post-fire monitoring of the open fire.
Burn Prescription	A course of management action defined for a burn area after specific assessments and evaluations have been made. This Burn Prescription will include all the components to meet the land management objectives in a safe and effective manner.
Containment Area	An area outside of the intended project area where the application of fire has been identified, incorporated, and authorised by an Official in the approved Burn Plan.
Contingency Plan	That section of the Burn Plan that identifies unlikely events and the resources needed to mitigate these events.
Control Line	An inclusive term for all constructed or natural barriers and treated fire edges used to control a fire.
Escape	When the fire breaches the Control Line and enters the Containment Area.
Ignition	The beginning of flame production or smouldering combustion; the starting of a fire.
Official	As defined in section 1 of the <i>Wildfire Act</i> .
Prescribed Burning	The knowledgeable application of fire to a specific land area to accomplish pre-determined forest management and/or other land use objectives.
Regulation	The Wildfire Regulation (British Columbia) as it may be amended or replaced from time to time.
Prescribed Fire	An open fire as defined in section 1(1) of the Wildfire Regulation.
Wildland Urban Interface (WUI)	As defined in the FireSmart manual, the WUI is any area where combustible wildland fuels are found adjacent to homes, farm structures or other outbuildings. This may occur at the interface, where development and wildland fuels (vegetation) meet at a well-defined boundary, or in the intermix, where development and wildland fuels intermingle with no clearly defined boundary. In British Columbia, this term is further defined as: the area within the two kilometres of a community with a minimum density of six structures per square kilometre.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

Lead Agency or Proponent

A. Project Planning

The lead agency or proponent will:

1. Prior to submission of the Burn Plan, ensure that all required site plans, silviculture prescriptions, fuel management prescriptions and stand management prescriptions are completed and that they clearly outline the land management objectives to be achieved with the application of the Prescribed Fire.
2. Prior to submission of the Burn Plan, ensure that all authorities, tenures, First Nation and stakeholder referrals, consultation, information sharing and legislative requirements are completed for the project area and documented appropriately.
3. Ensure that a Burn Plan is prepared and signed by a qualified forest professional that includes all of the required elements in accordance with the Burn Plan template located in Appendix 1 Burn Plan Template.
4. Submit the Burn Plan for review and written approval by the designated Official a minimum of 60 days prior to the operational requirement (preferably 1 year).
5. Ensure that all pre-burn preparation activities are completed for the site as outlined in the Burn Plan, including but not limited to:
 - a. The mechanical or hand construction of fuel or fire breaks (Control Line).
 - b. Contacting all agencies and/or individuals that have values within or adjacent to the burn area and documenting any required measures or mitigation actions in the Burn Plan.
 - i. The preparation for values protection.
 - c. Conducting all notifications, consultation, radio ads, newspaper ads, media relations, open house meetings, door to door communications, and inquiries that relate to the intended Prescribed Fire (see Appendix 2 – Communications Plan Template).
 - d. Obtaining and maintaining a valid burn registration number by contacting the Burn Registration Line at: **1-888-797-1717**
(<http://bcwildfire.ca/Restrictions/ResourceMgmt.pdf>).
 - e. Smoke management must be considered.
6. If applicable, ensure that a signed Prescribed Fire agreement between the BCWS and the lead agency or proponent is in place.

B. Project Implementation – Pre-Burn

The lead agency or proponent will:

1. Ensure that they have a Burn Plan approved, in writing, by an Official.
2. Ensure that the equipment and resources documented in the approved Burn Plan are available to meet the plan requirements.
3. Conduct the pre-burn preparation activities in accordance with the Burn Plan.

C. Project Implementation – Burn Day

The lead agency or proponent will:

1. Ensure that equipment and resources identified in the approved Burn Plan are at the site of the Prescribed Fire.
2. Ensure compliance with all other requirements in the approved Burn Plan and in accordance with the obligations and responsibilities in the [Act](#) and [Regulation](#).
3. Provide the BCWS designate with contact information for the proponent's Incident Commander for the Prescribed Fire.
4. Monitor on-site weather conditions for compliance with the Burn Prescription.
5. Ensure that the BCWS Go-No-Go checklist (Appendix 1 – Burn Plan Template) has been completed and signed off prior to Ignition.

D. Project Implementation – Post Burn

1. The lead agency or proponent will establish a wildfire suppression patrol plan, identifying the resources required to ensure the Prescribed Fire burn operations do not escape the Containment Area as set out in the Burn Plan.

BC Wildfire Service

The BCWS will implement an annual program planning cycle to facilitate Prescribed Fire burning in subsequent burning seasons. Planning meetings with lead agencies or proponents is expected to occur:

- In September for burning planned for the following spring;
- In March for burning planned for the following fall.

A. Project Planning

An Official will review the Burn Plan to assess the technical, operational, logistical, and safety components of the plan, and approve the Burn Plan if it is considered acceptable by the Official:

1. Burn Prescription:
 - a. Achievable timing (for example, does the proposed timing of the Prescribed Fire occur within the historical burn window based on weather data and local knowledge?);
 - b. Will the parameters set in the Burn Prescription achieve the burn objectives? (For example, are the objectives clearly defined, are the fuel conditions reasonable).
2. Are the containment lines, fire guards, fuel break locations, and design appropriate for the planned Ignition pattern and expected fire behaviour? Has a field recce of the site been completed?
3. Are the appropriate fire control resources allocated to the project?
4. Has the Containment Area been identified and incorporated into the Burn Plan?
5. Has a burn registration number been obtained for the timeframe of the anticipated Prescribed Fire?

B. BCWS Assistance

BCWS staff may assist with conducting a Prescribed Fire burn if BCWS staff are available and the lead agency/proponent is a provincial government ministry.

BCWS staff may be available to act as a Burn Boss for a non-government proponent utilizing a Prescribed Fire burn on Crown land if an agreement is in place clearly defining the roles and responsibilities of the BCWS and those of the proponent.

BCWS staff may be available to act as a Burn Boss for Prescribed Fire burns that are utilized on land other than provincial Crown land. The land owner must provide the BCWS with the specific authority to use the land in that way and to introduce fire on the land. The land owner may be asked to indemnify the government against any third party claims resulting from the fire or to provide proof of insurance for any such claims.

If the Burn Boss is not a BCWS employee, BCWS staff may assist the proponent in the suppression and control of the Prescribed Fire. An agreement clearly defining the roles and responsibilities of the Burn Boss, the BCWS and the proponent is required in advance of the Ignition. The proponent must provide the BCWS with the specific authority to provide the fire suppression services on the land and may be asked to indemnify the government against any third party claims resulting from the fire or to provide proof of insurance for any such claims.

Land Manager

The applicable Land Manager(s) is responsible for reviewing the Burn Prescription and Burn Plan to ensure that pre-established land management objectives are being met and any impacts on relevant values are acceptable. An Official has the final authority to approve the Burn Plan and may consult with the Land Manager before granting that approval.

6. Prescribed Fires - Operational Situations

Wildfire Declaration (BCWS)

A prescribed burn will be declared a wildfire when the following occurs:

1. An Escape occurs (see definition) and the capacity of the defined resource requirements as specified in the approved Burn Plan (including contingency resources) can no longer control the Escape and the intended prescribed burn.
2. The fire is outside of the authorised Containment Area identified in the approved Burn Plan.

In the event that BCWS is not involved in the prescribed burn project:

1. The Fire Centre will decide whether an Escape called a wildfire will remain under the control of the agency conducting the burn or taken over by the Fire Centre. The key decision maker at the Fire Centre is the Regional Wildfire Coordination Officer (RWCO).
2. The Fire Centre Manager, or designated (DFCM/RWCO), will seek out and consider advice from the Incident Commander in making their determination.

7. Costs and Contraventions

7.1 The lead agency or proponent is responsible for paying for the costs of the equipment and resources identified in the approved Burn Plan, except where a signed Prescribed Fire agreement between the BCWS and the lead agency or proponent describes otherwise.

7.2 If an Escape occurs, the FLNRORD Compliance and Enforcement Branch may undertake an investigation to determine whether a contravention of provincial legislation occurred, and may take enforcement action. The BCWS may also conduct an investigation to determine whether an action will be initiated to recover the government's fire control costs and/or the value of any Crown resources damaged or destroyed as a result of the fire.

8. Post Burn Requirements

The lead agency or proponent is responsible for developing and carrying out a "Post Burn Monitoring" program as described in the approved Burn Plan. The program may include, but is not limited to:

- Reporting of hectares burned and mapping to appropriate government program (such as RESULTS).
- Methodology to monitor the achievement of the Prescribed Fire objectives.
- Program to monitor any post fire hazard such as slope stability.

9. References, Resources and Links

Wildfire Act

Wildfire Regulation

Ministry of Forests Act, s.4(b)

Environmental Management Act (Open Burning Smoke Control Regulation)

Policy 9.5 – Prescribed Fire

10. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Prescribed Fire Burn Plan Template

Appendix 1a – Burn Plan Signature Sheet

Appendix 2 – Prescribed Fire Communications Plan Template

Appendix 3 – Prescribed Fire Application/Approval process

Appendix 4 – Prescribed Fire Steps

11. Document History

1	New Standard Operating Procedure	

2	Revised Standard Operating Procedure	

12. Approval

Signature

Name, Title