Forest Service

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One of our worst fire seasons ever but crew training pays off

As predicted, the 1992 fire season has turned out to be extremely busy.

Throughout the summer, several major lightning storms have caused a phenomenal number of fire starts, particularly in the Kamloops, Prince George, and Cariboo forest regions, and our crews have successfully met each and every challenge.

As of September 8, 3,534 fires were recorded. At the current rate, this season may surpass the total number of fires recorded in 1985 (3,608) -- what many consider to be one of our worst fire seasons.

If 1985 totals are surpassed, then this would make 1992 the third worst fire season ever in terms of the total number of fires recorded. The two worst years were 1979, with 3,849 fires recorded, and 1970, with 4,002 fires.

In 1992, 2,341 fires have been caused by lightning and 1,193 fires have been caused by people.

Overhead team and fire crew members discuss strategy for the Eagle Fire in the Prince George forest region.

"It has been a screwy year," said **Eric Meyer**, fire weather specialist, protection branch, when trying to explain the summer's electrifying weather patterns. "The summer high pressure ridge that usually sets up and gives us a long-term warm, dry spell never really established itself strongly enough to block the weak disturbances coming off the Pacific."

These 'impulses' pump cool, moist air inland where it lies on top of the warmer, lighter air that rises from the heated land surface. This creates the atmospheric instability that is one of the prime mechanisms for generating lightning, or the cloud that produces lightning.

During the August long weekend, a major lightning storm passed through the province, and the lightning detection system recorded over 25,700 lightning strikes. As a result of this storm, 706 new fire starts occurred over a five-day period.

Out-of-province firefighters had to be called in to assist the initial attack crews. "Through the MARS (Mutual

(continued on page 2)

Deputy Minister thanks revenue project contributors

*An open letter from the Deputy Minister, **Philip Halkett**, to everyone who contributed to the recently completed three-year Revenue Management Project. (See article page 6).*

It is with great pleasure I acknowledge and thank you for your valuable contribution towards the Ministry's recently implemented Revenue Management Project.

From its conception, development and planning stages in 1988 to the project's final stages of activation this year, it has been gratifying to observe and experience the enormous dedication and team spirit of everyone involved -- here in Victoria, and throughout the regions and districts.

As the new systems become fully integrated into the daily activities of the Ministry everyone will benefit. Jobs will become easier, quicker and more interesting.

An added and valued benefit of the project has been the strengthening of everyone's skills and knowledge.

Your part in the development and delivery of the project is something of which you can be very proud and pleased. The commitment, support and genuine interest of all the individuals who played a part in this challenging endeavour has surpassed all expectations.

I look forward to your continued fine work and future contributions to the Ministry's operations -- and congratulate you on your achievements with the Revenue Management Project.

Yours sincerely,

Please distribute to all employees at their work stations

FS to be an anchor participant in CORE process

Stephen Owen, Commissioner on Resources and the Environment, issued a *Land Use Strategy for British Columbia* in mid-August.

The report describes the commission's mandate and preliminary work plans, and explains how the public can become more directy involved in making the land-use decisions that are important to them through the process of 'shared decision-making.'

"People, right from square one, are to be involved in the design of these processes," says deputy commissioner and former Forest Service employee **Denis O'Gorman**.

"From the start, we are going to pull them together, ask them the questions about their willingness to participate, ask them to identify their process concerns and issues, and then arrive at some protocols that can satisfy them, but also provide direction, in the sense that recommendations will be expected within a set time frame."

O'Gorman expects the Forest Service will be one of the anchor participants in the commission's work because so many of the issues are based on forestry land management.

The commission was created as a permanent, independent statutory body last year. Its mandate is to develop a province-wide and world-leading strategy for land-use planning and related management that reflects a larger commitment to sustainability.

The commission will undertake regional negotiation processes where broad land-use allocations will be determined. The commission will also study and support a number of community-based pilot projects over the next year to determine the most effective framework for the processes that will manage resource and environmental issues.

The initial focus will be on Vancouver Island, the Cariboo-Chilcotin, and Kootenay regions because of the land-use conflicts in those areas.

The report also presents a draft Land Use Charter -- a set of basic principles that will form the foundation of the new strategy and provide direction for the planning process.

Recognizing that a healthy environment and economy are essential to the social, cultural, material, physical, and spiritual well-being of British Columbians, the four-page draft charter outlines the government's commitment "to protect and restore the quality and integrity of the environment, and secure a sound and prosperous economy for present and future generations."

The Forest Service and other ministries will be key participants by providing information, background knowledge, and technical support.

"In the shared decision-making model, they are also stakeholders, so the ministries will be functioning as they did in the old-growth [strategy] process as parties at the table along with representatives from industry, the academic community, and non-governmental organizations, interested in solving the problem at hand," says O'Gorman, "It means a different kind of working relationship, more of a collegial relationship rather than one of command and control."

One of our worst fire seasons ever . . . *(continued from page 1)*

Aid Resource Sharing) Agreement we have with all of the provinces, territories, and some northern states, we can call for short-term assistance. This helps us over the initial fire bust until our own crews start to come back off the fire lines and get refreshed," explained **Steve Westby**, superintendent, initial attack crews, protection branch.

Out-of-province firefighters were called in July to help combat the Stone and Eagle fires near Prince George. The Stone fire caused the evacuation of eight families in the community of Stoner, when it burned right up to their back yards.

The Lytton Fire in the Kamloops forest region over the August long weekend resulted in the evacuation of 42 homes. Started by children playing with matches and fueled by the dry conditions and 55 kilometre per hour winds, the fire quickly spread. Three homes and 694 hectares were burned before the fire was brought under control.

Evacuation of 35 families on the west side of Okanagan Lake was also necessary August 18. "It was a 17-hectare blaze believed to have been caused by sparks from a roadside grass mower at Fintry in the Vernon fire district," said **Rick Whyte**, fire suppression coordinator, Kamloops forest region.

About 100 firefighters were needed to contain the fire. People were allowed to return to their homes on a conditional basis the next day. "We wanted to get them back to their homes as soon as possible but we also wanted to make sure that the fire was safe and didn't get away on us again," Whyte said.

The Kamloops forest region has been the busiest in the province for fire starts. Whyte noted that with all the lightning-caused fires this year, the region was 50 per cent above their average.

While there has been a phenomenal number of fire starts this season, initial attack crews have had an exceptionally high success rate in preventing small fires from escaping to project fires.

Gary Hartwig, fire crew superintendent, protection branch, estimated that the initial attack crews are successful about 92 to 94 per cent of the time.

And with the advent of the unit crew program, project fires have been cut right down in terms of time and money spent. "We've also seen our accident rates cut substantially from the days when we had 'street-hired' firefighters, with little or no training," Westby said.

The unit crew program is in its fifth season and has expanded from one crew in 1988 to 27 this year. The native crew program funds 18 of these.

"By all indications, we will have a very low accident rate in fire suppression this year," says Hartwig. "We attribute that and the high productivity of the crews to high standards for training and physical fitness, and to the overall sense of teamwork that develops when they work closely with the same people through the summer. The training seems to be really paying off."

Introducing new ADM Thea Vakil

Thea Vakil, the new assistant deputy minister for management services division really has her work cut out for her.

With the 93/94 fiscal year looming on the horizon, ministries are being asked to tighten their belts.

Vakil, who has a MSc in business administration from UBC, is now responsible for the human resources, financial services, technical and administration, information systems, and auditing services branches plus the section that deals with freedom of information.

"As the executive financial officer, of course, I have to be concerned about the budget. Because of the government's relatively poor fiscal position, the budget process will be a difficult one," Vakil said in a recent interview.

Her previous position, as assistant deputy minister and secretary to the Treasury Board, may prove invaluable in this process. She understands the bigger picture and is well aware of how budgets hang together.

But she is still just getting her feet wet after starting the job at the beginning of August. "Right now I'm trying to understand how the Forest Service works and what all of the issues are. These are the priorities at the moment, as is building on my predecessor's work with the Management Services Strategic Plan."

The strategic plan came out of the need for all aspects of management services to become more aligned with the overall objectives and business program goals of the Forest Service. Some finance and administration workshops were held early this year to develop plan objectives. "I have accepted those as the starting point for continuing what I think is a very good initiative," Vakil said.

Beyond improving the budget and financial management process, Vakil feels the strategic plan initiative has helped to get people working together as a team and a community, simply by having them in the same room talking to one another.

"All organizations experience difficulties from time to time, and in an organization as decentralized as ours, those difficulties become pronounced, simply because of geographic dispersion. But I certainly do feel that the Forest Service, as a whole, reflects a positive corporate culture -- people are quite aware of what its focus and mandate are, and aware of what needs to be done."

Thea Vakil, new assistant deputy minister of management services division.

Vakil notes that in the last couple of years management services council meetings haven't happened as often as they once did. Depending on the resources available, she plans to re-establish more frequent council meetings, with the next one occurring in September.

Council meetings are attended by all management services division directors, regional staff managers, and representatives from the operations and forestry divisions.

Vakil remarked that some organizational structures are better than others but that structure was not as important as the way people behave. "I think that a hierarchy is not, by definition, bad. But the structure of an organization, in itself, has really nothing to do with the way we operate. Management styles supersede or replace structure to a large extent. You can make anything work if you are of good will and have a group of capable people who are motivated."

She describes her own style of management as 'open.' "I like my communications with people to be face-to-face, rather than writing memos back and forth."

News in brief

Recent news releases

- Okanagan area residents' views sought on Fletcher Challenge's request to transfer its operations in the southern interior to Okanagan-based Riverside Forest Products Ltd. - #82
- Province to establish 12-member First Nations Forestry Council to assist the government, the First Nations, and the forest industry in implementing recommendations of the Task Force on Native Forestry - #83
- Six companies apply for two-year, non-replaceable forest licence(s) to salvage merchantable timber from insect-damaged lodgepole pine stands west of Williams Lake - #84
- Fort St. James area residents' views sought on future of timber sale licence previously held by the bankrupt Gregory Timber Ltd. - #86

Freedom of Information: Questions and Answers

On June 23, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Bill (FOI) passed third reading in the legislature. Each regional management team, and several branch management teams have already been briefed on the contents of the legislation, and the changes that are anticipated in the way we respond to requests for information.

Following are some questions that are commonly being asked about FOI and how the Forest Service has responded.

If the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* is not to be passed into law until fall of 1993, what are the Forest Service's obligations now?

A long period between introduction and passage into law enables government to get records management systems in place so that legislated time limits for responding to requests can be met. The time will also be used to train staff on FOI. Regulations, policies, and procedures also need to be drafted. The Forest Service will comply with the spirit of the legislation until it becomes law in the fall of 1993.

If we receive a request for information from the public, how should we handle it?

If the request is for information we have routinely released in the past, go ahead and release it. Otherwise, take a quick look and provide the record if it doesn't reveal any personal or third party business information. If you think there may be some harm as a result of releasing information, or if you have any other questions, contact either **Jack Boomer**, manager, information and privacy section (356-6986) or **Terry Whitney**, program analyst (953-3386).

Many offices are experiencing resource constraints. Will additional staff be made available to handle FOI-related requests?

It is impossible to forecast the number of requests the Forest Service will receive, and how much each office will be affected. We already provide a great deal of over-the-counter information to the public, so it is hoped that FOI will result in only a marginal increase in requests for information. Beginning in September the information and privacy section will be conducting a survey to find out how much and what type of information we currently provide to the public. From this, we can determine any changes in workload once the legislation becomes law.

As you can see, FOI really does affect the way we do business. If an information session has not yet been arranged for your office please contact either **Jack Boomer** or **Terry Whitney** for more information. Questions about records management should be directed to **Bernie Gillespie**, records officer (387-5415).

As we can all learn from questions that arise, look carefully at situations that come up in your office, and at information held there. If you are unclear how a situation or release of information would be handled under FOI, please call Jack or Terry.

*submitted by **Jack Boomer**, manager,*
information and privacy section, management services division

Clayoquot Sound draft strategy released

After a three-year negotiation process, the second draft of a sustainable development strategy for the old-growth forests in the contentious Clayoquot Sound area was released at the end of August.

The Clayoquot Sound Sustainable Development Steering Committee's plan calls for a doubling of park lands, with 19 new parks proposed to protect some of the area's unique ecosystems.

The Clayoquot Sound area contains 12 of the remaining 37 unprotected and undeveloped large watersheds on the island. The sound borders Pacific Rim National Park in the south, includes Meares Island, stretches north to the Hesquiat Peninsula, and to the east touches the southwest corner of Strathcona Provincial Park.

A task force, established in 1989, recommended the formation of a sustainable development steering committee to look at long-term land use issues and to develop a sustainable development strategy.

Convened in 1991, the committee is sponsored by the Forest Service, Environment, Lands and Parks, and Economic Development and Trade, and is chaired by **Jim Walker**, assistant deputy minister, Environment.

It was originally made up of 23 members representing communities, interest groups, and government agencies. Representatives of environmental groups left the process in April, 1991, because they didn't agree with the continuation of logging during the discussions.

The committee completed background studies on various issues of concern including native interests, tourism, and timber resources. In addition, community value surveys were done for Port Alberni, Tofino and Ucluelet -- the three communities whose economic status depends mainly on Clayoquot Sound.

People living in these communities appear to be sharply divided on the role of forest management and old-growth forests, with 54 per cent of Tofino residents saying old-growth forests should be left in their natural state, compared with nine per cent in Ucluelet, and seven per cent in Port Alberni. However, a large proportion of the population in all three agree that some old growth should be left in a natural state.

The first draft strategy's goals included the maintenance of life support systems, species diversity, sustainability, a secure industrial base, employment, plus the coexistence of these goals.

One of the most contentious issues throughout the process has been the chapter dealing with protected areas.

The second draft proposes that 19 areas be protected as parks or reserves, including the Hesquiat Peninsula, sections of Flores and Vargas Islands, and Upper Shelter and Sydney Inlets.

While the steering committee is in general agreement, some members have reservations about a few of the proposals. And it seems likely that the proposed protected areas and forest management guidelines will receive the most scrutiny when the strategy is reviewed by the public in mid-September.

*submitted by **Emma Neill**, community liaison officer,*
Port Alberni forest district

Major forest fire accident used for first-aid competition

Disaster struck in the form of a major forest fire accident in the Vancouver forest region in mid-June.

Fortunately, teams of first-aid personnel were on hand for a mock rescue that was part of the Workers' Compensation Board 35th annual first-aid competition.

The accident scenario began with a forestry crew working the front line of a forest fire. The fire is pushed towards the crew when the wind shifts. A tree explodes into flames and falls on some of the workers, trapping them under burning branches until they can be freed by rescuers.

At the start of the event, first-aid teams were told that a search and rescue helicopter has been dispatched and will be ready to transport 'victims' in twenty minutes. About five minutes into the rescue, a worker watching the helicopter land is struck by flying debris.

It all added up to an exciting competition for the eight first-aid teams.

Through the creative use of special make-up, the 'victims' of this fire-fighting accident displayed scorched and blistered skin, broken legs, and various other injuries. Abandoned fire-fighting equipment was scattered around the 'victims' to add a degree of difficulty to the rescue event.

"The make-up was unbelievable," said **Reinhard Mueller**, draughting superintendent, Vancouver region, who was responsible for the props in the scenario.

Mueller became involved with the forest fire scenario through his wife, Peggy, who works as a safety officer for the Workers' Compensation Board.

"It took a lot of hours, sneaking behind people's backs, to get all the equipment," notes Mueller, who was instructed to keep the scenario theme *top secret*. "Even the board members didn't know what was going to happen," adds Mueller.

The accident scenario required the use of two trucks, an all-terrain vehicle, portable pumps and hose, back-packs, chain saws, firefighter coveralls, and hard hats. This equipment lent authenticity to the scenario, helping to create a realistic accident scene.

Equipment was at a premium at the time. Vancouver region's protection section was engaged in fire suppression activities but fortunately, Mueller was able to secure the necessary props for the competition with their help.

In a recent thank-you letter, the Worker's Compensation Board notes that the "success of the day was due in no small part to the generosity of the Forest Service." The letter also recognizes the dedication and many hours of work that Reinhard Mueller offered to ensure that the first-aid competition was a realistic and challenging event.

However, Mueller's dedication extended even further when he dressed up as **Smokey the Bear** for the awards banquet that followed the competition. In this case it seems Smokey had more of a hand in creating a forest fire than in putting one out.

submitted by ***Nancy Argyle****, public information officer, Vancouver forest region*

*Smokey the Bear (**Reinhard Mueller**) and **Rich Courtney**, first-aid section manager, Workers' Compensation Board, at first-aid competition awards banquet.*

Revenue management project completed!

The revenue management project has been completed. It is functioning. And we did it!

The project started three years ago and the people-power needed to complete the 'enterprise' came from various branches, the six forest regions, and the forest districts.

The project management team consisting of the executive steering committee, the business coordination group, and individual project steering committees, was supported by numerous project teams, a few outside contractors and consultants, and a cross-project systems coordination team to ensure progress and continuity.

John Mallett, operations director, operations division, said the forest tenure administration system portion of the project is proof that "branches, regions, and districts can work together to produce a good product."

"Now that most of the systems are developed, it is critical that both system owners -- branches -- users -- everyone -- work together to ensure that the systems are maintained and enhanced, and to ensure that our organization can adapt to the business transformation currently taking place with the Forest Service," Mallett said.

David Ford, manager, planning and data administration, information systems branch, said the work was "harrowing, but worth it."

In 1988, the Forest Service recognized weaknesses in revenue administration and proposed a broad range of initiatives, including new legislation, policies, and business practices. Also based on these proposals were significant systems redevelopment, implementation, and staff training.

In spring 1988, Treasury Board approved the Forest Service's request to proceed with this major undertaking and allocated $11.35 million for the three-year Revenue Management Project.

Change was inevitable when the Forest Service started addressing the many approaches to revenue administration in:

- the forest tenure administration system;
- the harvest billing system;
- client, credit management, accounts receivable, and collections; and,
- electronic data interchange.

The cumulative effect of these projects occurring at the same time tested the endurance of every functional area and individual involved in the project.

The Forest Service approached this challenge in a positive manner -- by focusing on the benefits:

- faster processing of payments by industry;
- reduced level of bad debts;
- reduced risk of revenue leakage;
- efficiency improvements;
- improved waste management;
- increase in rental, range, and export revenues;
- reduced risk of software failure;
- improvements in the management of the small business program;
- Forest Service-wide program monitoring; and,
- standardized procedures and training.

With these in mind, the project focused on some of the most evident and tangible problems, with the following goals as the outcome:

- to strengthen legislation and policy;
- to strengthen staff skills and knowledge;
- to improve the integration of functions and information;
- to improve and formalize business practices;
- to change attitudes towards revenue management; and,
- to develop new information systems to replace out-dated, unreliable manual and computer systems.

It was recognized at the outset that this was a high-risk project, requiring the implementation of a complex array of new policies and computer systems -- all within a tight time frame, and with only existing staff as a resource.

The most significant undertaking of the project was to make the harvest billing system more robust, reliable, and more flexible in its ability to accommodate policy changes.

Greg Grove-White, manager, harvest revenue, said, "the project raised the level of decision making in the Forest Service to a better standard."

"This has been an exciting few years. We have learned a tremendous amount about the Forest Service, about the revenue function and about building information systems," **Randy McDonald**, manager, financial systems, financial services branch said.

"Most importantly, we have learned that we have the people in the Forest Service who are capable of successfully making significant improvements to the way we do things."

*submitted by **Nick Krischanowsky**,*
executive coordinator, management services division

Touch Your Forests

The pilot phase of the Touch Your Forests touchscreen system, being developed by the silviculture branch, was completed on March 31, 1992.

The interactive, multimedia prototype, which incorporates video, audio, text and animation, provides an entertaining and credible source of information on forestry in the province.

Testing of the system on two target groups -- high school and college students and Forest Service and Forestry Canada non-forestry staff -- showed strong support for its concept and design.

The goal of the Touch Your Forests project is to provide access to an interactive information source that promotes awareness and critical thinking about forest management in British Columbia.

The objective of the project's current phase is to develop eight units of the touchscreen system.

The system is designed for an informal learning setting and is targeted towards 16- to 35-year-olds with an average grade-seven reading level. It will be developed, maintained, and enhanced on the basis of input and feedback from this group.

An advisory team has been formed to guide, provide two-way feedback, and serve as the basis for project decision-making. Forest Service team members include: **Michael Blackstock**, project manager; **Steven Hunt**, project assistant; **Kelly Hutton**, public silviculture information forester; **Tom Lacey**, Merritt forest district; **Jim Challenger**, public affairs branch; and, **Linda Barnes**, information systems branch.

Non-Forest Service advisory team members include: **Pat Fogarty**, public volunteer; **Mark Hawkes**, Ministry of Education; **Tony Roy**, British Columbia Systems Corporation; **Jeni Gillings**, student representative; **Barry Pavitt**, marketing company; and, **Gail Wallin**, British Columbia Forestry Association.

The project advisory team held its first meeting July 14-15 and developed a project plan for the upcoming fiscal year.

Public input will continue to be the driving force behind the development of Touch Your Forests under this plan, with new storyboards and revisions of existing storyboards based on target group feedback.

Focus testing of the touchscreen system by the target group is slated for February, 1993. Delivery of the eight units is planned for March, 1993.

For more information, contact:

Michael Blackstock, project manager, 387-8914

Kelly Hutton, public silviculture information forester, 356-6214

Steven Hunt, project assistant, 387-8916

Mitchell moves to Protected Areas

Warren Mitchell, major projects manager, integrated resources branch, has been appointed director of the Protected Areas Strategy initiative.

"The government is bringing together all protected area initiatives and programs under one strategy," Mitchell said. "This includes the Old-Growth Strategy and Parks and Wilderness for the '90s, and other initiatives for ecological reserves and wildlife management areas."

Mitchell reports to the interagency assistant deputy ministers committee for protected areas with co-chairs from the Forest Service, B.C. Parks, B.C. Environment, and Energy, Mines and Petroleum Resources. They will recommend how best to coordinate protected areas programs and to integrate their objectives for conservation and recreation. The committee will also guide the implementation of the strategy's components.

"Our objective is to present a comprehensive strategy to Cabinet by the end of October," says Mitchell.

The Protected Areas Strategy is a key component of the provincial land-use strategy being developed by the Commission on Resources and Environment (see related story on page 2). It will enable regional planning processes being set up under the commission to evaluate regional protected area candidates within an overall provincial context. More than 180 areas in the province have been designated for study by the Cabinet.

ROOTS

Forest fires brought death and destruction to many pioneer communities in British Columbia. This photograph, from the Forest Service collection held by the Provincial Archives, shows residents of Port Neville seeking refuge on the water during the fire of June 1925. Timber supplies at the time seemed virtually unlimited and many settlers believed forest fires were simply a natural accompaniment to progress and development. Even when the danger of fire was understood, pioneers seldom had any concept of basic fire prevention techniques (B.C. Archives photo H-4952).

Orientation to the Forest Service

The two-day 'Orientation to the Forest Service' program is set for this fall with about 28 courses being offered between late September and March, 1993.

The orientation provides general information on the Forest Service and is appropriate for technical/operational/administrative staff in the district, regions, or branches.

All employees are welcome to attend. New employees find the course an essential foundation for their work and it also helps them to clearly understand their roles and responsibilities in relation to the overall goals and operations of the Forest Service. The course had excellent reviews last year from those who attended and veterans have found the course to be a useful update.

The classroom-based course includes group discussions, exercises, videos, slides, overheads, and lectures.

The Deputy Minister, **Philip Halkett**, is fully supportive and participates in all courses held in Victoria.

Information about course dates can be obtained from your district, region or branch training contact.

Appointments

John Smith joined the training and development section of human resources branch as the Forest Service's first enforcement training officer on August 4.

Smith comes from the Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks, where he was the training officer for the conservation officer service. Before that, he was a member of the RCMP for 23 years, which included a three-year tour as an instructor at the Canadian Police College.

Smith will be responsible for the development and delivery of enforcement training for operations and timber, and providing advice on enforcement matters to districts and regions.

Keri Norrie is the new audit project manager in the audit services branch.

Norrie is a chartered accountant with an honours degree in business from York University in Toronto and was previously an audit manager with Ernst and Young (formerly Clarkson Gordon) Chartered Accountants, in Edmonton.

As well as extensive experience in auditing, she has carried out many non-audit projects including efficiency and effectiveness studies, feasibility reviews, and computer system evaluations.

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