Ministry of Forests & Range
LBIS Funding Request Form

Investment Category: Fuel Management

Investment Category Contact: Mike Dittaro Fuel Management Specialist WMB

Amount Requested: $18.75M/yr (amount may be reduced if alternative funding is received)

Request Rationale:

As funding available to local governments and First Nations for the Operational Treatment component of the Strategic Wildfire Prevention Program, administered through the Union of British Columbia Municipalities is fully committed as of the end of August, 2010. Funding is requested on an annual basis for the continuation of the program.

Other funding programs such as the Job Opportunities Program, (part of the Community Development Trust), Community Adjustment Fund, (part of Federal Western Economic Diversification) and the Federal Mountain Pine Beetle funding that had previously allocated funding for fuel reduction projects are also ending and no other funding sources can be identified. Discussions with Natural Resources Canada have indicated no new funding programs are contemplated.

The 2003 provincial fire season cost the province $371M in direct fire suppression costs, $400M in indirect costs, $126.9M in private losses and the province is still responding to legal challenges seeking over $100M in damages. Along with these costs, communities faced public health threats, loss of tourism revenues and severe social disruption. Following the 2003 provincial fire season, the Filmon Report identified hazardous forest fuel accumulations in the wildland urban interface as one of the main priorities to be addressed to reduce the wildfire threat to communities.

To meet the Filmon recommendations, reduce hazardous fuels, and create safer communities, a Strategic Wildfire Prevention Program was implemented in 2004 through the Provincial Fuel Management Working Group (PFMWG). The PFMWG is composed of the Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM), the First Nations Emergency Services Society (FNESS) and the Ministry of Forests and Range (MFR).

The PFMWG facilitates the delivery of community based fuel reduction projects through a cooperative government/community cost sharing program. The program currently provides grants of up to $15,000 to support the development of Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs) and provides 75% of the funding for operational treatment projects with 25% being the responsibility of the community.

It has taken 6 years to build a strong Strategic Wildfire Prevention Program resulting in 103 local governments working on 158 Community Wildfire Protection Plans - including 82 by First Nations. While many plans have been completed, there remains a tremendous amount of work to complete the operational treatments.

It is a reasonable assumption that the effects of climate change and increasing fuel load associated with dead and dying mountain pine beetle killed timber will ensure wildfire issues are a problem for the foreseeable future, and furthermore, if fuel treatments in high risk areas are not undertaken, significant structural losses and community impacts may result, despite our best fire suppression efforts.

It is essential to maintain the momentum of the Strategic Wildfire Prevention Program to ensure communities remain engaged in wildfire threat reduction to avoid the risk of tremendous economic and social costs that occur when wildfires threaten communities.

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Business rationale (include benefit/cost impacts):

The Strategic Threat Assessment completed in 2004 indicated that potentially 685,000ha of high wildfire risk in and adjacent to the WUI could require fuel management treatments. The actual prioritized areas that require treatment are identified during the Community Wildfire Prevention planning process. To date 42,000ha have been treated.

It has been estimated that for every $1M invested in fuel reduction treatments, the outcome produces approximately $3.4M in positive benefits. A detailed 2006 study conducted in the Oregon and Washington show that fuel reduction treatments resulted in economic, social and ecological benefits including: reduced suppression costs, reduced post wildfire silviculture and rehabilitation costs, avoided loss of valuable timber, avoided costs of evacuations and lost infrastructure, and avoided losses due to wide scale economic disruptions associated with major urban interface wildfire events.

The funding needed to totally resolve the hazardous fuel conditions that currently exist in the province cannot be established (see above) but it's safe to say that an ongoing yearly commitment of $18.75M is required to maintain the program at its current level of local government and First Nation's participation. LBIS funding request(s) may be reduced once the outcomes of other funding requests are know. Future funding needs may be reduced if fibre created through treatments is merchantable & revenue generated is used to help offset costs i.e. bioenergy.

The program proved its effectiveness during the 2009 wildfire season when two major interface fires occurred in fuel treated areas: one in the Glenrosa area in West Kelowna and the other near Alexis Creek. These fuel treatments were instrumental in preventing structure loss, creating a safer operating area for fire-fighters, reducing suppression costs and providing for safe evacuations. In addition reduced suppression resource needs in the WUI as a result of fuel treatments will enable more resource allocation to the THLB to protect and limit damages to: timber supply (short/mid/long term); water and air quality; and other values.

Investments in fuel management treatments will directly and significantly contribute to the present and long term attainment of the provincial golden goal "To lead the world in sustainable environmental management, with the best air and water quality, and the best fisheries management, bar none." This will be accomplished by:

1) Enabling the completion of ecosystem based treatments in and adjacent to the WUI which will include the reintroduction of prescribed fire. This will have the added benefit of expanding the skill and knowledge base of this land management tool thereby making it more easily and safely utilized at the landscape level to bring forests to a healthier state in a controlled manner;
2) The goal of treating the forest fuels in and adjacent to the WUI is to reduce the intensity and severity of wildfire which will have the added benefit of reducing the volume and duration of smoke emissions created from a future wildfire; and
3) Successful treatment of the forest fuels will result in a reduction of fire severity and depth of burn. Retention of organic material after a wildfire event will limit runoff potential which will benefit water quality & fish habitat.

In addition these investments will have benefits to and will assist other investment categories in achieving their targets. Specifically:

- Current reforestation/Mid Term Timber Supply – suppression resources available to action wildfires that threaten timber & watershed values/investments;
- Fish Passage – reduced wildfire severity will result in a reduction of deleterious material in streams (reduced runoff); and
- Ecosystem restoration – as the activities of ER and fuel management are essentially the same, target achievement in and adjacent to the WUI contributes to the success of two categories.

Amount Allocated (to be filled out by FPIB):
Allocation Rationale (to be filled out by FPIB):

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