

Mountain Pine Beetle Action Plan 2006-2011



July 2007

ACTION PLAN SNAPSHOT: FUEL MANAGEMENT

Maintaining and protecting public safety against the threat of wildfire is a key objective of the 2006-2011 Mountain Pine Beetle Action Plan.

The beetle epidemic is contributing to forest fire risks in two ways. First, increased harvesting to salvage beetle-attacked timber has created additional logging debris, such as tree crowns, stumps and branches. This woody debris is left behind for environmental reasons, but may act as potential fuel for the ignition and spread of wildfire.

Second, experts anticipate that fire behaviour may be more severe in beetle-killed stands compared with green and healthy forests. While research is ongoing to study this issue, fire managers currently regard stands of dead or dying trees in the wildland-urban interface (within two kilometres of urban areas) as potentially representing an increased wildfire hazard for nearby communities and First Nations.

As part of its Mountain Pine Beetle Action Plan, government is carrying out fuel management activities and implementing wildfire mitigation strategies where necessary for public safety. This work is led by the Ministry of Forests and Range's protection program as guided by the Provincial Fuel Management Strategy.

The core of this strategy is a province-wide assessment of hazardous forest fuels. The Provincial Strategic Threat Analysis was completed in 2004 and has mapped and identified 1.7 million hectares of forest land in and around B.C. communities that may require treatment, including 460,000 hectares of which may be affected by the mountain pine beetle. The highest priority areas are beetle-affected stands adjacent to, or within, two kilometres of the wildland-urban interface.

This data is provided free of charge to communities wishing to develop a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). These plans identify fire hazards in and adjacent to communities, and outline what actions are required to improve community safety and reduce the risk of property damage. To date, 86 local governments have either completed or are preparing such plans, through a provincial partnership with the Union of British Columbia Municipalities.

The province is also working with the First Nations' Emergency Services Society to provide funding for fuel management planning and risk reduction activities in beetle-attacked forests adjacent to First Nations communities.

Beyond assisting with planning, the province is funding projects to treat large areas of forest land to reduce the build-up of forest fuels. Nearly \$18 million is being invested in fuel management treatments over three years in high priority areas adjacent to communities. Activities include removing beetle-attacked stands, prescribed burning and removing slash from old logging sites.

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Additional funds are being used to conduct fuel pilot projects, designed to test different types of fuel treatments for their economic and operational viability.

As well, the Ministry of Environment has conducted fuel reduction programs in a number of beetle-impacted provincial parks – including Mount Robson, Silver Star, Manning and Lac le Jeune – in the interest of maintaining and protecting public safety.

Fire management is being informed on an ongoing basis by the latest science. The Carrott Lake Mountain Pine Beetle Experimental Fire Study is helping to provide B.C. fire managers with a better understanding of how fire behaves in beetle-killed stands. This information will help determine safety hazards that should be considered when responding to a fire, as well as when conducting fire suppression activities like prescribed burns.

As the Filmon report indicated, however, the risks of interface fire won't be solved overnight, or by any one group. The Ministry of Forests and Range is working co-operatively with local governments and other agencies to reduce the risks for communities and First Nations in beetle-impacted parts of the province.

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