

December 20, 2024

Hon. Ravi Parmar  
Minister of Forests  
Province of BC

By email: [FOR.Minister@gov.bc.ca](mailto:FOR.Minister@gov.bc.ca)

Dear Minister Parmar:

**Re: Cooperative Community Wildfire Response (CCWR) program**

The Regional District of Kootenay Boundary wishes to convey its serious concerns regarding the recent changes to the Cooperative Community Wildfire Response (CCWR) program. In a recent report sent to the RDKB Board of Directors, staff outlined changes to the CCWR program that are in stark contrast to how the program was initially envisioned. The changes represent a substantial shift of provincial responsibilities onto local governments.

For the RDKB to undertake the work as outlined in the CCWR program guide, it will take considerable staff time to ensure the CCWR groups are managed as effectively and proficiently as the Province requires. This assessment comes from years of staff experience both managing and supporting volunteer groups across the RDKB. Groups that rely on well-meaning resident volunteers to perform a service require higher levels of administrative oversight to ensure regulatory compliance and to manage liability risk. Our Emergency Management service consists of 2.5 FTE operating an efficient, truly regional program, that deliver services to eight municipalities and five electoral areas and addresses all four pillars of emergency management. The RDKB Emergency Management Program simply does not have the capacity to take on the CCWR program with the level of oversight required by the Provincial government.

Emergency management programs, such as ours, operate as true regional services where every local authority within the region participates utilizing shared resources. Since CCWRs are meant for areas outside of fire protection zones, only a small portion of the RDKB emergency management service area is eligible. This would leave the majority of emergency management service members funding a portion of a service from which they would receive no benefit. This would stand in stark contrast to the Regional District model under which we operate under in BC.

We understand that the CCWR Program has been introduced as “optional.” However, given the way the program changes were introduced, groups wishing to form a CCWR are contacting regional districts across the province expressing interest in the program. In some cases, these expressions of interest came even before local governments were informed of the changes or given any program

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information. These groups no longer see this as "optional". This leaves regional districts having to engage in difficult conversations with these keen individuals. The groups that are inquiring about the CCWR have a desire to perform direct fire attack. As outlined in the CCWR program outline email dated October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2024, the CCWR program is meant only "to *provide* support activities such as:

- o Expediting resources, like personnel, equipment, and supplies.
- o Mopping-up. For example, cooling ash pits.
- o Patrolling areas to prevent potential flare-ups".

With this difference in expectations, it will be left to regional districts to communicate to these groups the limited scope of their involvement as dictated by the Province.

From the limited conversations our staff have had with the BCWS regarding the CCWR program, it is our opinion that the consultation process did not meet the Province's regular standards. When our staff inquired about said consultation, the BCWS admitted that the majority of consultation was with select elected officials and that very few emergency management practitioners were consulted regarding the CCWR program. When communications did come to regional districts, they were originally sent solely to FireSmart staff, again leaving out emergency management staff that will play a critical role in the delivery of a CCWR program if a regional district is to accept the work. The CCWR program does not align with FireSmart principles. Having the funding flow through the UBCM CRI grant stream further creates confusion and blurs the lines between evacuated people, people wishing to stand and defend, FireSmart principles, and Fire suppression efforts.

In conclusion, the Regional District of Kootenay Boundary cannot effectively absorb the responsibilities shifted onto local governments under the revised CCWR program. This shift undermines the operational structure of our emergency management services, imposing additional burdens without prior consultation. While the CCWR program is presented as "optional," the misalignment between community expectations and the CCWR program will only further strain the relationship between residents and local government when it comes to emergency management and wildfire response. These challenges necessitate a reconsideration of the program's implementation and expectations to better support regional emergency management efforts. We urge your office to engage in open dialogue and seek adjustments that reflect the operational realities and capacities of regional districts like ours.

I hope you will consider these issues seriously and work with local governments across BC to find practical solutions.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Andy Morel  
Chair  
Regional District Kootenay Boundary

cc:

- Hon. Brittny Anderson, Minister of State for Local Governments and Rural Communities
- Hon. Kelly Greene, Minister of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness
- Cliff Chapman, Director of Operations, BC Wildfire Service
- Kaitlin Baskerville, Provincial Operations Manager of Preparedness BCWS
- President Mandewo, UBCM
- Regional Districts