



Date: June 16, 2004

TO: Board Members - Parks and Recreation

**FROM: General Manager - Parks and Recreation and
General Manager – Fire Chief**

SUBJECT: Wildland Fire Preparedness

RECOMMENDATION

This information report is to advise both Council and the Park Board of the fire preparedness initiatives taken by Vancouver Fire and Rescue and Park Board staff.

BACKGROUND

Interior wildfires in 2003 have heightened awareness of risks associated with natural and remnant woodlot park areas in the City. With an anticipated trend to warmer, drier summers both Fire and Rescue and the Park Board are enhancing their levels of preparedness in case of a fire outbreak.

With regard to Stanley Park, the following outlines previous fire prevention activity.

There have been interagency protocols with Vancouver Fire and Rescue Services and the B.C. Forest Service for many years. These protocols include regular meetings and communications, taking fire trucks through Stanley Park trails, providing updated Park maps including digital maps to E-COMM, ensuring through BC Forest Service that provincial air support is available.

In 1993 a fire simulation exercise was held near Prospect Point in Stanley Park. This exercise included B.C. Forest Service, B.C. Ambulance Service, Vancouver Fire and Rescue, Vancouver Police and Park Board staff. This full on simulation exercise included shutting down the west side of Park Drive, establishing a command centre, creating an artificial smoke fire, putting Forest Service Fire Unit Crews on the ground and helicopter water drops.

The Park Board also has a protocol with airlines who use Vancouver Harbour as a landing site that their pilots keep watch for and report to the air traffic control tower any smoke they may see in Stanley Park as they fly over. This protocol is refreshed with the Airlines each year as a reminder to all pilots. The control tower contacts 911 to report any smoke seen by pilots. The control tower statistics show, depending on wind and

weather conditions, there are in the range of 100 incoming flights over Stanley Park each day, and 100 outgoing flights.

Two years ago Parks was included in a justification to the City for VFRS to purchase 2 new specific wildland fire fighting vehicles. One of these state of the art wildland vehicles has been allocated to a fire hall that makes it readily available for Stanley Park protection.

Two years ago Parks purchased and outfitted a fire maintenance trailer. This trailer is available for park staff to use to monitor fires that have been extinguished by VFRS who may request our forestry crew watch the fire for a time to ensure it does not reignite.

The Stanley Park Forestry Crew spends much of their working year removing and reducing fire fuel loading in the Park. Some years ago fuel was control burned in the Park. Burning restrictions have stopped this practice so the crew now removes it, or bucks up the logs and limbs to ensure they lay flat on the ground. This speeds the natural process of degeneration.

DISCUSSION

Whereas historically the focus of concern was Stanley Park, the issues now encompass Pacific Spirit Park, Everett Crowley Park and Jericho Beach Park.

Fire and Rescue Services is pursuing three main initiatives to enhance preparedness levels.

Equipment and Training

Providing a rapid response to the various parks within the City of Vancouver which are at a potentially high risk of wildfire is one of the main priorities. Therefore, work is being carried out to ensure that the appropriate fire suppression equipment is situated at the optimal locations (Fire Halls # 19, # 10, #5, #8 and #6). In addition, practical, hand-on training is extremely important. All of the fire halls designated as 'wildland fire halls' receive the Forestry S-100 and the new S-215 courses before the beginning of the fire season (July through October). Additional time has been assigned for these Halls to carry out tactical inspections of their respective wildland parks so that they are familiar with the local risks and concerns. Also, all trails within the parks and hydrants surrounding these areas have been located and shown on maps which are routinely updated.

Inter-Agency Co-operation

The international Association of Wildland Fire, in their "National Wildland Fire Policy Summit" identified that the major issue facing organizations involved in wildland firefighting was the need to improve their communications with each other and to work together toward implementing existing plans. Organizations in the Lower Mainland have been somewhat fragmented and have not always worked together in the past to effectively achieve common goals. Local organizations are also sometimes not aware of each others' programs and initiatives. To that end, we have involved some of the

stakeholders involved in Parks protection; specifically the GVRD, the B.C. Forest Service, and the Vancouver Park Board, to ensure that our efforts are co-ordinated. Other stakeholders will also be involved in the future.

Some of the initiatives which are either completed or underway include developing response protocols, dealing with access concerns and training issues. This year members of the Park Board as well as members of the Heavy Urban Search and Rescue Team (HUSAR) will be trained in wildland firefighting protocols.

Public Education

The devastating wildland fires which occurred in the interior last summer have focused the public's attention on issues affecting the wildland fire problem, particularly in the interior and other rural communities. However, the general public does not always understand the nature of the wildland urban interface and do not make the connection that it also applies in Vancouver's urban setting.

Through the combined efforts of the GVRD Parks Protection Crews and the Vancouver Park Board, signage has been developed and placed throughout the Parks system. These signs will be used during high fire risk periods and include emergency contact numbers to be used to ensure prompt fire reporting.

A more detailed description of the Fire and Rescue Services wildland urban interface program is attached to this report as Appendix 1.

Park Board 2004 initiatives include the following.

- a) Interagency meetings were held over the winter and spring. The provincially initiated Filmon Report was discussed and the recommendations were reviewed. The two main recommendations were to reduce fire fuel loading in forests and to have an emergency management plan in place. These two issues have been in place in Stanley Park for many years. One of the main tasks of the forestry crew has been reducing fire fuel in the Park. We have removed 320 logs from the Park over the last 5 years.
- b) Improved communication links and fire preparedness between Parks, Police, GVRD, B.C. Forest Service and VFRS has been established. An improved protocol for fire response now includes the dispatch of the wildland vehicle, as well as regular fire apparatus, to every fire call in Stanley Park.
- c) Stanley Training: on June 16, 2004 twenty Park staff including Stanley Park forestry, Park Rangers, Van East and Arboriculture staff attended a half day fire suppression course instructed by Vancouver Fire and Rescue (VFRS) training staff.
- d) Additional signage: new Forest Fire Hazard rating signs based on the provincial sign design will be installed at all main Park entrances when the Fire Hazard rating at the Vancouver Airport reaches high. New fire warning signs will be

- installed at all picnic shelters at this time as well. If the hazard reaches extreme all stakeholders and major special events will be notified, a smoking ban will be implemented. Forestry staff and Park Rangers will increase the frequency of fire watch trail patrols.
- e) If deemed necessary, during extreme conditions evening security will be initiated using Ranger patrols.
 - f) During the winter of 2004 – 2005 Stanley Park water main replacement will continue. A new Standby Fire Pressure Regulating Valve will be installed where the Park and City water services meet along Beach Avenue. This valve will provide additional fire flow capacity to the Park water system by allowing water to be forced to flow “backward” from the City to the Park. This water main upgrade from the old 200mm pipes to the new 300mm pipes will increase the available water pressure to 8000 litres/minute. At the same time additional hydrants will be installed along Park Drive at each trail head.
 - g) The Park Board supported the VFRS initiative to purchase 8 hand held thermal imaging cameras. Having a tool such as this camera available will help the Fire Department in locating reported fires in Stanley Park that are not always easily found.
 - h) a GPS co-ordinate map of Stanley Park has been developed and is being shared among police, fire and the airlines to enhance communication when a site is to be located and described. Similar work on Everett Crowley Park will follow.
 - i) An inter-agency fact sheet that includes relevant information about the parks identified for fire risk management, fire protocols and contacts for distribution to the media, stakeholders and staff is attached as Appendix 2.
 - j) If and when the risk of fire hazards in the parks escalates, a public information handout will be prepared and made available to the public at all public outlets in Stanley Park and at Champlain Heights and West Point Grey Community Centres.

CONCLUSION

Based on the above plans, practice and public awareness efforts, it is felt that the risks of a major wildfire outbreak can be managed without extensive damage.

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