



Post Wildfire 101



Rod Blake stands in his woodlot licence out of Williams Lake after the fire went through it summer 2017.

By SARA GRADY

Breaking records is celebrated at the Olympic Games, but it's dubious when talking about wildfires. And BC's forests were subject to one of the worst wildfire seasons in history, breaking records that hadn't been surpassed for decades.

Approximately 1.2 million hectares of the province's forests were reduced to blackened vertical sticks and ash from April to November of 2017, displacing wildlife, livestock and people living in the wildland urban interface areas. It subtracted forests and added increased pressure on the timber industries that define the small

communities of South and Central Interior BC.

Woodlot licensees, who have chosen to manage a small parcel of Crown land on the public's behalf, have a big task at hand. They're obligated to return a forest to "free to grow" status, meaning that the forest must be re-established with their investment and oversight. As they work to salvage any marketable timber and then reforest, they'll rely on the resources of Foresters, Agrologists, hydrologists, silviculture experts and their own depth of knowledge to fulfill that obligation.

The Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development has been nimble in its response, according to

Ian Lanki, President of the Cariboo Woodlot Association, in the heart of the wildfire zone. Salvage permits have been issued in a timely fashion and the Ministry has been receptive to feedback that would make the recovery and rebuilding more efficient. Time is of the essence, as the dead-standing trees will degrade within two to three years and be of no value whatsoever.

There are a variety of challenges facing those who manage our forests impacted by fires in BC as they work to salvage and rebuild. The first: forest fires put soil at risk.

Soil in burned out areas is stripped of the ground-layer of flora and humus that capture rainwater and allow it to percolate into the



Forest reduced to blackened vertical sticks and ash after wildfire went through.

ground. Imagine covering your raised bed with plastic wrap and then turning on a sprinkler. Not only can it be inhospitable for new seedlings, it undermines watersheds and, in extreme cases, can result in flooding downstream.

Agrologists who specialize in soil are tasked with going into the terrain and assessing hazards and identifying areas that will reap the best results for regrowth. But as one Ministry Agrologist said, “Gathering the data and then making recommendations is a combination of Science, Art and Experience. And then there’s Mother Nature.”

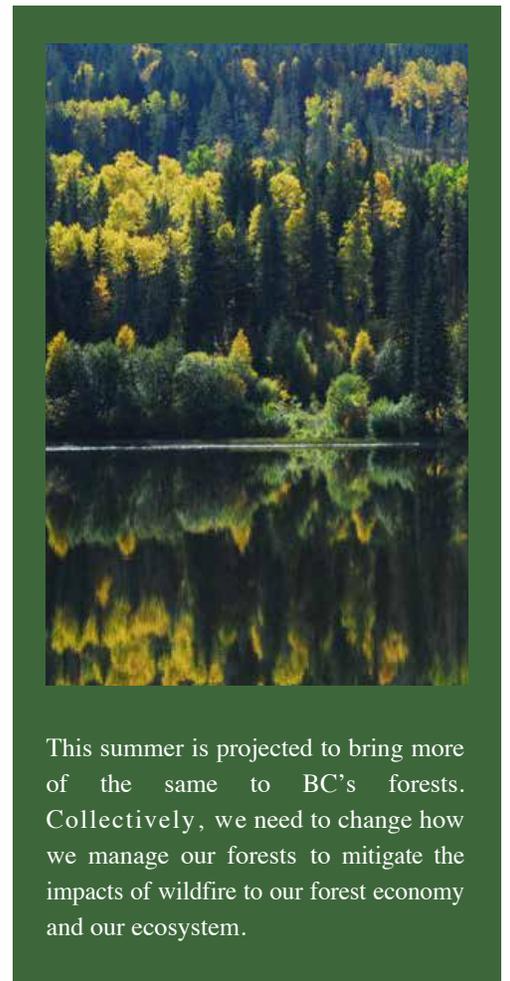
Ironically, the burned and washed out soil exposes a layer of minerals that create healthy ground for all sorts of other flora, and attract new fauna in the process. While raptors, like eagles and hawks abandon the “stick farms” because they lack the adequate cover to hunt, rodents thrive on the tender new growth that emerges. They multiply and then new predators come in search of an easy meal. With so few living trees remaining to naturally regenerate the forest, the ecosystem shifts, following Mother Nature’s lead.

While the salvaging and clean up of the 1.2

million hectares has only just begun, the next big obstacle will be where to acquire enough seedlings to plant these burned areas? But that is a question for later. BC’s Woodlot Licensees will continue to adhere to the practices that define their mandate. And despite the many challenges facing them, they will be striving to return our Crown forests to their natural beauty and health in the years to come.



Ian Lanki, President of Cariboo Woodlot Association salvaging burned timber on woodlot licence post 2017 wildfire.



This summer is projected to bring more of the same to BC’s forests. Collectively, we need to change how we manage our forests to mitigate the impacts of wildfire to our forest economy and our ecosystem.



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