

[Insert Date]

Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM)
525 Government Street
Victoria, BC V8V 0A8

Subject: Concerns and Recommendations Regarding the Cooperative Community Wildfire Response Program

Dear UBCM Representatives,

The Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen (RDOS) wishes to express serious concerns regarding recent changes to the Cooperative Community Wildfire Response (CCWR) Program under the Community Resiliency Investment Program. While we recognize and appreciate efforts to enhance community wildfire response capabilities, the revised CCWR framework significantly deviates from its original intent and places undue responsibilities on local governments.

Key Concerns:

1. **Increased Oversight Responsibilities:** Local governments are expected to provide oversight of CCWR qualified Societies, ensuring compliance with program standards, which creates an administrative burden beyond our current capacity.
2. **Activation and Liability Issues:** Local government emergency management staff would be required to activate CCWR qualified Societies to support BC Wildfire Service (BCWS), diverting resources away from critical Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) functions during wildfire events.
3. **Community Expectations vs. Program Scope:** The CCWR Program outlined activities, including resource deployment, mop-up, and patrols, do not align with some Societies expectations of engaging in direct fire attack, leading to potential challenges.

Recommendations: To address these concerns, the RDOS Board recommends the following adjustments to the CCWR program:

1. Re-evaluation of Program Design:

- Ensure the CCWR Program aligns with the roles and capacities of local governments during wildfires.
- Strengthen engagement with regional districts during program development and implementation.

2. Clarification of Roles and Responsibilities:

- Local government are in support of providing funding for Societies to get qualified as a CCWR Society but do not have the capacity or resources to be responsible for their oversight before, during or after activation.
- Define that regional districts do not have the capacity to ensure compliance with provincial funding requirements for these groups.

3. Funding for PPE & Training:

- Ensure CCWR funding for PPE and training remains a financial transaction only, with no obligation for local governments to manage equipment inventory.
- Require that societies receiving funding are solely responsible for training and equipment management.
- Exclude local governments from any liability associated with CCWR training, equipment, or deployments.

4. Tasking CCWR Qualified Societies:

- Assign BCWS or the Office of the Fire Commissioner (OFC) as the responsible agencies for deploying and managing CCWR qualified Societies.
- Recognize that OFC and BCWS already coordinate with municipal and regional fire departments, making them the appropriate entities for overseeing these initiatives.

The RDOS remains committed to wildfire mitigation and community resilience. However, we urge the Provincial Government to collaborate with local governments to refine the CCWR program in a manner that accurately reflects the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders.

We appreciate your attention to these concerns and look forward to working together towards a more effective and sustainable wildfire response framework.

Sincerely,

[Name]

[Title]

Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen