



COLUMBIA SHUSWAP REGIONAL DISTRICT

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February 20, 2025

Sent by email: FOR.Minister@gov.bc.ca

Honourable Ravi Parmar
Minister of Forests
PO Box 9049 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria, BC V8W 9E2

Dear Minister:

Re: Cooperative Community Wildfire Response Program

On behalf of the Columbia Shuswap Regional District (CSRD) Board of Directors, this letter is to inform you we respectfully decline participation in the Cooperative Community Wildfire Response (CCWR) program. After careful consideration, we have determined that the program does not align with our Regional District's responsibilities, operational capacity or the needs of the community members.

The CSRD has concerns regarding the downloading of wildfire response responsibilities, costs, and services from the provincial government to regional districts, creating an untenable burden on local taxpayers and emergency management resources. Our decision to opt out is based on the following key concerns:

Misalignment with regional district responsibilities and capacity

The CCWR is a service creation that does not fit within a regional district model. The CSRD also has contractors managing the emergency programs in Revelstoke (Revelstoke and Area Emergency Program) and Golden (Golden and Area Emergency Program). This program does not fit within the guidelines of those contracts.

Program scope extending beyond identified regional district fire protection zones

It appears the CCWR program model is a mechanism to replace provincial wildfire response efforts, placing the scope of emergency management resources, funding, and staffing onto the Regional District, with the expectation the service area goes beyond established Regional District fire protection zones, which fall under Provincial jurisdiction, not within the Regional District's area of responsibility and jurisdiction.

Undue burden on local taxpayers and emergency management resources

Administering the CCWR would require considerable staff time, of which the CSRD's Shuswap Emergency Program does not have the capacity to fulfill. The workload, such as maintaining volunteer lists, training, and engagement, without guaranteed work for program members, is incredibly onerous on financial and personnel time resources.

The effects of climate change are increasing disaster intensity, duration, frequency, and scale of

ELECTORAL AREAS

A GOLDEN-COLUMBIA
B REVELSTOKE-COLUMBIA

C EAGLE BAY-WHITE LAKE-TAPPEN
D FALKLAND-SALMON VALLEY

E SICAMOUS-MALAKWA
F NORTH SHUSWAP-SEYMOUR ARM
G BLIND BAY-SORRENTO-NOTCH HILL

MUNICIPALITIES

GOLDEN
REVELSTOKE

SALMON ARM
SICAMOUS

emergencies yet the CSRD is still running at the same capacity in its emergency management program as ten years ago. The growing demand for increased staffing to manage the increasing number of local emergencies needs to be addressed, without the additional CCWR program the Province is encouraging us to acquire.

Lack of consultation with emergency management staff

CSRD is concerned there was no consultation with its emergency management staff, this misstep is a departure from what has been done historically. It should be noted this is the second attempt at introducing the program. Originally the program was presented as a collaboration with local fire departments funded by BCWS. Now the program is being offered to unprotected areas only, there is no reasonable service to attach CSRD support.

Potential for conflict with residents and reputational damage

While the program is technically optional, it sets the CSRD and emergency response teams up for conflict with residents of the area, potentially setting us up for failure and causing reputation damage. The burden of opting out for the reasons outlined in this letter falls on the CSRD, which could cause irreparable damage to public perception of the CSRD and provincial firefighting response efforts.

The CSRD emphasizes that the program does not meet the needs of the community members and will not accomplish what they have expressed they want and need.

Concerns about future changes to program scope and guidelines

There is concern the Province can change the program scope, process, and guidelines at any time. The CSRD is apprehensive that any changes, without having direct or indirect involvement in any decisions, would result in the impact being fully felt by the CSRD.

In summary we believe the CCWR program model shifts wildfire response responsibilities from the Provincial onto regional districts, creating an unsustainable strain on our resources. Our emergency management program is already operating at capacity, managing an increasing number of local emergencies due to climate change impacts. Adding the CCWR program would further stretch staff capacity and resources.

Additionally, the program's focus on areas beyond our established fire protection zones, jurisdiction, and area of responsibility. We are also concerned about the lack of consultation with our emergency management staff and the potential for program changes without our involvement in future decision-making processes.

In light of the above concerns, we strongly recommend that BC Wildfire Service (BCWS) serve as the prime contractor for the CCWR program participants. This approach would ensure that wildfire response efforts are led by the provincial agency with the expertise and resources, avoiding undue strain on regional districts and their emergency management programs.

We appreciate your understanding and consideration and thank you for your forthcoming response.

Yours truly,

COLUMBIA SHUSWAP REGIONAL DISTRICT

Per:

A black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of the Board Chair.

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Board Chair

cc: Honourable Brittney Anderson, Minister of State for Local Governments and Rural Communities
Honourable 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 Trish Mandewo, UBCM
City of Salmon Arm
District of Sicamous
City of Revelstoke
Town of Golden
Regional Districts