

WHAT WE'VE HEARD SO FAR:
Wildfire Act policy development engagement

Wildfire prevention and the role of local government bylaws

May 2026

BRITISH COLUMBIA | BC Wildfire Service



Responsibility for regulating activities that cause wildfires

The Wildfire Act sets out the legal framework for wildfire management in British Columbia. Section 4 of the act establishes provincial and local government roles in regulating activities that pose wildfire risk, such as open burning and industrial operations. These rules have been largely unchanged for more than 20 years. The BC Wildfire Service is now reviewing whether this approach is working well or needs to be updated.

CURRENT STATE OVERVIEW

Wildfire Act

Addresses use of open fire, industrial machinery, hazard abatement, railway, utilities and other activities.

Generally applies throughout B.C. with some exceptions.

Municipalities*

Bylaws, rather than the *Wildfire Act,* regulate open fire and other activities that may start wildfires.

*except eight prescribed municipalities listed in section 2.1 of the Wildfire Regulation.

Regional Districts & Improvement Districts

Wildfire Act regulates activities that cause wildfires, unless there is a fire department and bylaw that meets specific criteria.



What is the problem?

As population growth and development extend into forested landscapes, wildfire risk is rising at the interface between communities and wildlands. Different jurisdictions face unique risks around activities that can cause wildfires – from tourism to industrial activities – but it's crucial that they are coordinated across boundaries on the map.

Approximately 75% of wildfires within fire department response areas are human caused.* This pattern is different from the broader landscape where approximately 40% of fires are caused by humans. This highlights the heightened importance of effective regulations aimed at preventing human ignitions within local government boundaries.

BC Wildfire Service has heard from staff and local governments that unclear roles – along with challenges related to authority, capacity and communication – are limiting the effective regulation of activities that lead to wildfires.

All these reasons demonstrate why it's more important than ever that jurisdictions work together to ensure that preventing ignitions is seamless across jurisdictional boundaries.

* According to BC Wildfire Service data.





Engagement so far

Prior to launching formal engagement in 2026, informal conversations with local governments and BC Wildfire Service staff helped to identify the need for review of the current legislative framework.

So far in 2026, engagement with local governments has included:

Feb 11	Virtual webinar for regional and improvement districts attended by 73 participants
March 4	Virtual webinar for municipalities attended by 89 participants
April 8	Break-out session held at the Wildfire Resiliency and Training Summit
Ongoing	Provision of one-to-one meetings as requested

Importantly, we have sought feedback and input on these topics from First Nations through alternate channels, including written letters, a webinar series and opportunities for focused meetings where requested.

Note on scope: This policy engagement is focused on laws that prevent people from starting fires. Wildfire suppression and fuel mitigation fall outside the scope of this work, but remain closely connected, as preventing human-caused wildfires directly eases demands on wildfire response and emergency management capacity.

Throughout this report, we will share quotes from local government staff and officials. These quotes were received through the engagement conducted in winter/spring 2026.



Summary of top themes

These are the top themes identified by local government representatives during recent engagement:

- Capacity and enforcement are key constraints for implementing wildfire prevention bylaws
- Division of responsibility and authority for regulating activities that cause wildfires is often unclear
- Participants expressed strong interest in more education, guidance and coordination
- Local governments have unique governance and regulatory considerations
- Future approaches should be flexible enough that they respond to the varied needs of different local governments
- Appreciation for open-ended engagement approach with longer timelines



Capacity and enforcement are key constraints

One of the strongest themes we heard repeatedly in our conversations was challenges with capacity and enforcement.

Local governments – particularly rural jurisdictions – shared that they lack the staffing, funding and authority to enforce bylaws.

We heard that a balanced mix of incentives and penalties – and ensuring that bylaws and Provincial regulations are enforceable – could improve compliance and reduce enforcement burdens.





Division of responsibility and authority is often unclear

We heard that the current regulatory landscape is hard to navigate. Wildfire prevention rules are spread across multiple jurisdictions, making them difficult for professionals and the public to understand and apply.

There is confusion about how provincial legislation applies within local government boundaries and how responsibilities and authorities are split between different jurisdictions.

"Does the Wildfire Act apply to Crown land within a municipal boundary?"

"It can be difficult even for fire professionals to navigate the patchwork of regulations and jurisdictions. There is no map or central resource. It may not be reasonable to expect the public to understand regulations."

"As a citizen and resident, I don't know what the bylaws are or what bylaws apply."

Better regulation facilitated by more education and increased coordination



Local governments expressed the value and necessity of provincial wildfire expertise in assessing wildfire risk, leading enforcement and providing consistent direction.

While many local governments want to continue to manage their own risks, stronger coordination between different levels of government could support and strengthen their work.

Participants frequently commented that more education and communication about jurisdiction is needed, including education on the Wildfire Act and Regulation and how the Act applies to local governments.

"Enhanced comms and media from BCWS has made a difference."

"Messaging to the public does not clearly identify that municipalities are responsible for prevention bylaws."

"Authority staying within a municipality works for our community but standard bylaw examples would be great."

Local governments have unique considerations when regulating activities that can cause wildfires



"[The Wildfire Act is] too broad – [it] does not consider local conditions."

We heard that for local governments wildfire prevention is part of broader governance issues. They must consider factors such as smoke sensitivity, tourism, development, ownership, homelessness and public education.

For local governments, success in wildfire prevention is often considered in the context of built/maintained land, FireSmart, building codes and development permit areas.

Some participants indicated that regulating hazard abatement may be a gap.

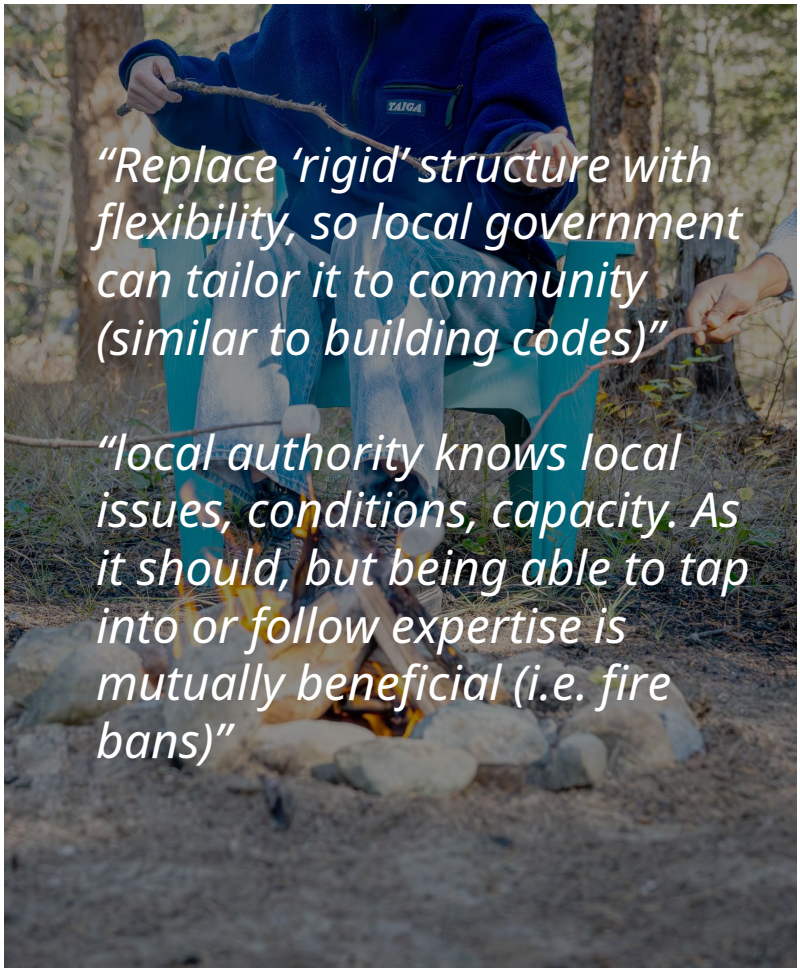


Need for flexibility

With 161 municipalities, 27 regional districts, and more than 200 improvement districts in B.C., local governments are diverse, each carrying unique capacities and risks.

When we asked about what activities cause wildfire ignitions, we heard a wide range of responses – from beach fires to logging operations, hunting, farming and encampments.

As a result, we heard the desire for leadership and baseline direction from the Province, which can be modified locally as needed.



"Replace 'rigid' structure with flexibility, so local government can tailor it to community (similar to building codes)"

"local authority knows local issues, conditions, capacity. As it should, but being able to tap into or follow expertise is mutually beneficial (i.e. fire bans)"



Open-ended engagement on these topics without a pre-determined solution is preferable

Although local governments felt that the framework could be improved, we did *not* hear calls for large scale or rapid change.

We heard repeatedly that curiosity-driven engagement and open questions lead to better relationships and information exchange.

We are grateful to every local government representative who has participated in this engagement process so far and look forward to staying connected as we continue to advance this work.

“please do stay in the curiosity phase for a while.”

“[We are] really appreciating open looped feedback.”





What's Next?

As we enter the core wildfire response season, engagement work will slow down.

However, we are still open to having one-on-one meetings with any interested local government representatives.

Please reach out to schedule a meeting, or to correct, add or expand on anything in this document.

We plan to resume this work in the fall, where we will close off the question-asking and issue-scoping phase and begin to bring forward our findings.

Email us:

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