



Fire & Vegetation Management Newsletter

BANFF, KOOTENAY AND YOHO NATIONAL PARKS

Summer/Fall 2011

Basic Wildland Fire training in Kootenay National Park - July 2011



**A wet season so far,
but there is a lot going on and we're
thinking ahead**

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Information:

Fire Communications Officer:
403-522-1256, julia.millen@pc.gc.ca

Here are the burning questions...

- What prescribed burns are proposed for the fall of 2011? These fires provide great opportunities to stop, watch and learn about this amazing natural process.
- What does *Export Duty* mean for Parks Canada fire crews? (hint: it's not a government tax!)
- There are green invaders in our mountain national parks. What is Parks Canada doing, and how can you help?



Fire duty? In this wet weather?

A Wet Spring

At the height of summer, we were still waiting for more than one or two days of summer weather! The late spring and heavy snowpack meant that scheduled prescribed burns could not go ahead. The fire danger was low and there had been no wildfires in our area. Apart from thinning trees in the fire guards for the Ottertail prescribed fire area of Yoho National Park, what *were* our fire crews doing? What they do best - dealing with fires, of course!



Wood Buffalo National Park

Lending a Hand

The fire season was in full swing in other parts of Canada. Our crews helped with the northern Alberta fire that spread into Wood Buffalo National Park, and the Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre called upon our crews to help with fires in northern Ontario.

The wildfire in northern Alberta was one of the largest in Alberta's history, covering approximately 600,000 hectares – 45,000 hectares of which were within Wood Buffalo National Park.

Each of Parks Canada Agency's Incident Management Teams rotated through Wood Buffalo National Park, and several of Parks Canada's Initial Attack crews supported the Wood Buffalo fire operations.

Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre

Parks Canada belongs to CIFFC, a non-profit organization that coordinates information, services and resource sharing (equipment, personnel, aircraft, for example) across provinces, territories and federal fire management agencies. On-call teams are "exported" to locations that need help.

Participation in CIFFC is like fire insurance. Parks Canada fire crews help out when they can, and in turn, help is available to us, should the need arise.

A Northern Experience

On Call

Darren Quinn, the Fire Technician for LLYK, spent some time in Wood Buffalo National Park as Planning Section Chief on the Incident Management team, responsible for communicating information to staff involved with the fire (including maps, action plans, fire status updates, weather analysis and fire behaviour predictions).



The fire was about 20 kilometres from the closest incident command post in Fort Chipewyan. Quinn had the opportunity to see the region from a unique perspective, flying over several areas of the vast Peace-Athabasca Delta, as well as travelling on the interconnected waterways of the delta. "In an effort to reduce costs, boating to various parts of the fire was an enjoyable alternative to using helicopters."

Quinn found the fire quite different from those in our mountain parks. "It takes a day or two to acquire a new sense of scale. Large fire is common up there for good reason. The landscape is huge and generally flat in comparison to mountain topography."



Burn pattern after the Wood Buffalo fire

During one windy day in the peak burn period, the fire took a spectacular 20+ km long run through continuous boreal jackpine forest. "Unfortunately," remarks Quinn, "that happened before my shift, but the burn pattern we observed after the fact was impressive in itself."

Quinn says the variety of vegetation and fuel types made fire behaviour predictions difficult, and long-term drought meant that what looked like water on the map would often be completely dry upon observation. That's different from our wet summer!

Upcoming Prescribed Fires - Late Summer/Early Fall 2011

Prescribed Fire in the Parks

This year's late spring, late snow melt, rapid green-up and wet conditions meant the window of opportunity for prescribed fires did not occur. Fire managers still hope to complete some of the prescribed fire projects listed below this fall.

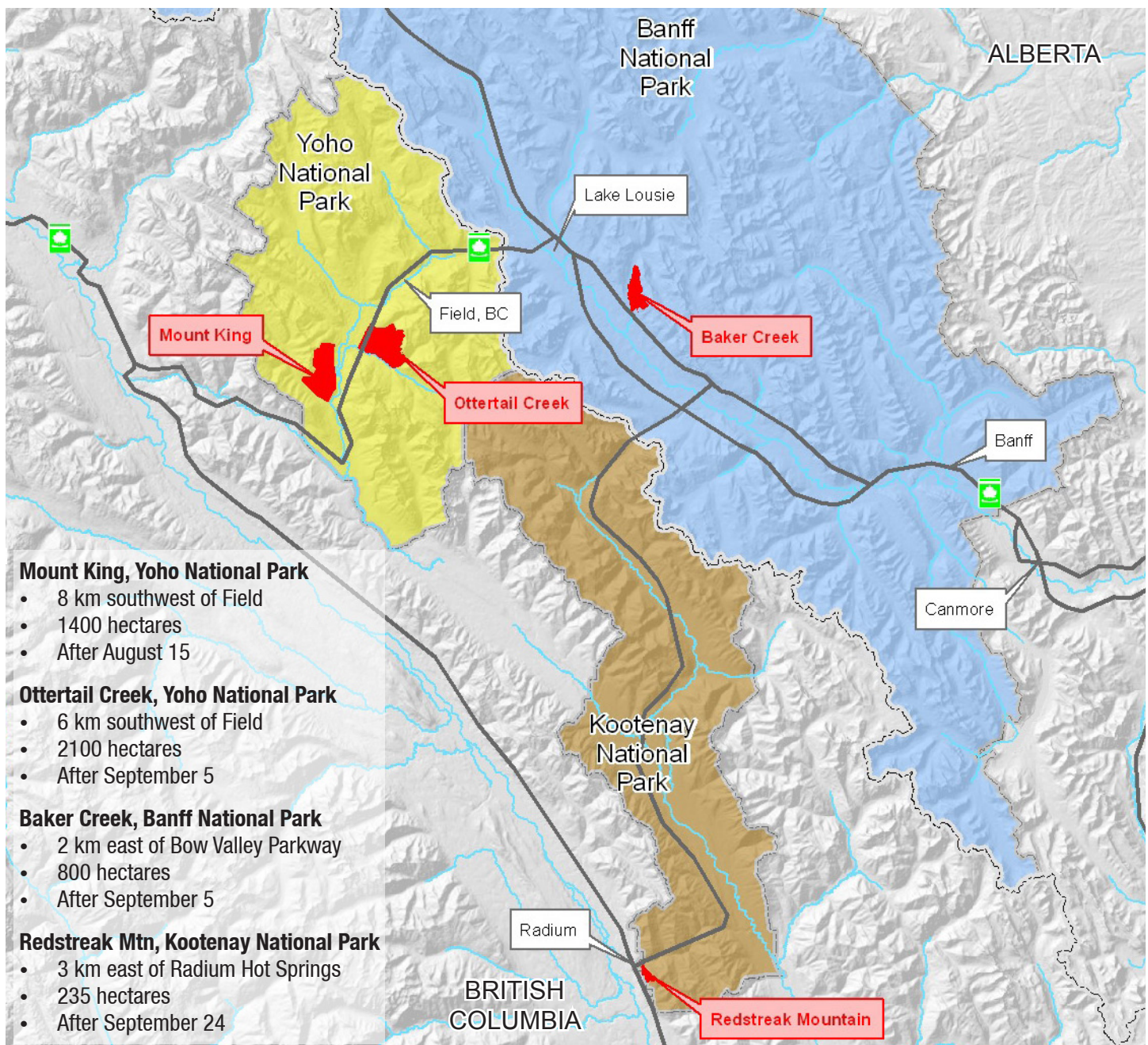
The decision to move forward with a prescribed burn depends on many factors, including weather, forest dryness, and the regional fire situation. Projects are rescheduled from season to season and year to year until exactly the right "prescription" conditions occur.

Prescribed fires help maintain forest health, restore the historic fire cycle, build fuel breaks to protect facilities and people, restore ecosystems, and improve habitat for animals such as grizzly bears.

Smoke Advisory Information

If you or a family member has a smoke sensitivity and would like to receive advance notice of burning days, please contact Julia Millen, Fire Communications Officer, to be put on Parks Canada's Smoke Notification List (julia.millen@pc.gc.ca or 403-522-1256).

For smoke forecasts in BC and Alberta: www.bcairquality.com/bluesky/



Alien Invaders: Be On The Lookout!



Orange Hawkweed likely arrived in North America as an ornamental plant. It has taken advantage of the open habitats created by the wildfires of 2003 along Highway 93 in Kootenay National Park.

This fall, Orange Hawkweed will be treated along the roadsides at the north end of Kootenay National Park, and in Yoho National Park. Mowing and pulling only increase its growth, so spot-spraying with a herbicide will occur.

Through **integrated pest management**, Parks Canada aims to maintain native plant and animal diversity by preventing introduction of non-native plants and eliminating or controlling them where practical. All decisions are guided by ecological knowledge and principles.

They're Here

Aliens are invading our national parks... not invaders from space, but plants! The invaders have been introduced as a direct result of human activity over the past few decades, many arriving as accidental hitch-hikers. They may look harmless, but they disrupt natural ecosystem processes and threaten biodiversity. Of the 119 invasive species found in the Lake Louise, Yoho and Kootenay field unit, about a dozen are of significant concern, particularly if they occur in special protection areas or in the backcountry.

Super Competitors

Invasive plants have enhanced abilities to survive, thrive and reproduce, and without their natural predators or disease, in some cases can out-compete or eliminate native plants.

Chemical Warfare: Leafy Spurge and Spotted Knapweed give off chemicals to make soil unsuitable for native plant germination or growth (allelopathy). Tall Buttercup contains a bitter juice that is unpalatable to animals, and causes skin blisters.

Tricky Travellers: Leafy spurge seed capsules explode, ejecting seed up to 4.5 metres away. Houndstongue seeds are prickly and hitchhike long distances on animals and humans.

Impressive Growth: Orange Hawkweed's above-ground runners form a dense mat which impedes native plant growth. Leafy Spurge and St. John's Wort can both re-sprout from root fragments.

Well-armed but misnamed: Canada Thistle is protected by prickly spine-tipped leaves. Despite its name, it's not Canadian, but originated in Eurasia.

Seed Factories: Common Mullein produces over 200,000 seeds/plant. These can germinate after being in the soil for over 100 years. Tall Buttercup seeds can last up to 15 years.



Leafy Spurge



Spotted Knapweed



Tall Buttercup



Houndstongue



St. John's Wort



Canada Thistle



Common Mullein

What Parks Canada is Doing

- Monitoring invasive vegetation
- Removing weeds by hand
- Mowing
- Spraying herbicides
- Re-seeding with native species

What You Can Do To Help Fight Invasive Weeds

- Learn to identify invasive plants
- Report Sightings (especially along hiking trails and in backcountry locations) to 250-347-6174 or Karen.Lassen@pc.gc.ca
- If possible, include date, location (GPS if known), number of stems (or estimate), area covered (or estimate), and photo (optional)
- Learn more:
<http://www.pc.gc.ca/eng/pn-np/bc/yoho/natcul/natcul21.aspx>