

# The Times They Are A-Changin'

Smoke. I can never remember so much of it hanging in the air for so long. The curtain hid nearby landmarks; you tasted it during every waking moment; air quality alerts, alerts we normally seldom – if ever – received, became fixtures of daily life.

No, these aren't reflections about the Horse Lake/Fort McMurray wildfire. Thankfully I've been far away from that tragedy. My memories are of last summer in southeastern B.C. Last year was the worst fire season in Washington State history; the previous worst season had been 2014. The Okanogan Complex and Stickpin fires were primarily responsible for those circumstances.

So too was the Rock Creek wildfire that erupted along the banks of the Kettle River, normally a 90-minute drive from Kelowna. That fire engulfed dozens of homes and closed Highway 3, the only southern route to the coast.

This issue's features are a product of what last summer underlined emphatically for me. Wildfire is elbowing its way to a prominence on the landscape we haven't seen for generations. My money says it's going to be the most immediate and pressing example of the adaptive challenges climate change presents to Alberta.

My article offers you some details about wildfire's presence on the landscape, explanations for that pattern, government's response, and some of the hard choices we need to debate.

Todd Kristensen and Ashley Reid take an important look into one aspect of the history of fire in Alberta – its use by First Nations. The peoples of the plains and the boreal made fire an important tool in their efforts to secure good livelihoods and Todd and Ashley will help to familiarize many of us with that aspect of our history.

FireSmart represents one response of non-profits and governments to wildfire's emergence as an issue they should take seriously and address. Joanna Skrajny offers you the first of two critical, constructive appraisals of what FireSmart has delivered. Joanna doesn't dispute the value of efforts to make communities located in the midst of our forests more resilient and resistant to wildfire. She suggests though that commercial forestry interests have coopted FireSmart as part of their efforts to improve their bottom lines. Clearcuts and FireSmart don't go together in her assessment.

Jane Drummond focuses your attention on what she believes FireSmart has delivered to the community of Nordegg. Again, there's no dispute with what FireSmart

should do – strengthen the protection of communities from wildfire. Again though, there's considerable room to improve the on-the-ground implementation of the FireSmart program. It's a very valuable reminder of the need to better ensure that public lands designations and policies are coherent and that they respect the ambitions of residents.

Our penultimate fire feature comes courtesy of Andrea Johancsik. Our national parks are protected areas where a history of fire suppression has changed profoundly the ecological constitution of those lands. Andrea's article examines the need for and the challenges accompanying efforts to use fire in national parks as a tool to restore the natural processes we've suppressed for more than a century.

Our last fire article is by Esther Bogorov. Esther advocates the embrace of a wider, more ecologically-sensitive understanding of wildfire damage.

Finally, on behalf of the Board and staff of AWA, I'd like to extend AWA's heartfelt support to our fellow citizens from Fort McMurray. No one should have to experience what they have endured. May the future treat them well.

*-Ian Urquhart, Editor*

