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Are we ready for the 2018 wildfire season?

Fire season in British Columbia officially starts on April 1

"It's a topic that far too few of us take seriously, but each year, it seems, our fire seasons here in B.C. are more dramatic and more destructive," says Steve Lackey of the Campbell River Forestry Task Force.

Journalist Ed Struzik, author of *Firestorm: How Wildfires Shape our Future*, in Campbell River later this month, revisiting scorched earth across the continent and introducing scientists, firefighters and resource managers who make the case for a radically different approach to managing wildfires.

"Ed has been watching climate trends in the world's headlines, and what he sees has him very concerned about how our lives will be affected by wildfires," Lackey adds. *"Warmer temperatures, increased winds and decreased rainfalls in spring and summer are all risk factors for the kinds of wildfires like we saw in 2017 in BC's Interior and these conditions are becoming more and more common."*

Catch the presentation March 25 at 1 p.m. at the museum. Find more information at www.crmuseum.ca.

"Wildfires help maintain healthy ecosystems in the forests of the northern United States and Canada, but for more than a hundred years we have practiced fire suppression to prevent the destruction of forest resources on which forest industries depend," says the Forestry Task Force's Jason Hutchinson.

By the 1960s, forest managers started to understand that fire played an important ecological role, and in some cases they began allowing for fires to burn – usually in a controlled setting.

"As human populations have grown, and insect infestations and diseases destabilized forest ecosystems and created more fuel, we are seeing more large uncontrollable burns that are threatening people's homes and livelihoods," says Struzik. *"Despite our improved understanding of fires, we are finding ourselves unable to adequately manage wildfire risks."*

He explains, *"if the past tells us anything about the future, some place on Vancouver Island will burn big as it did in 1938, when the Bloedel Fire shrouded two-thirds of the island in thick smoke. The difference between the past and the future, however, points to something more dramatic happening."*

With hotter, drier weather over the last decade, more lightning, more diseased trees and dry forest fuel and more people living, working and using the forest for recreation – and people causing more wildland fires than lightning strikes do – Struzik continues, *"it all adds up to fires burning bigger, faster and more often, even on the soggy west coast."*

Hutchinson, who is a registered professional forester, recommends people take steps to reduce the threat and be prepared in the event of a wildfire. Families can take proactive measures with a disaster response kit ready and a family emergency plan in place

"Have a family meeting to discuss the fire protection and prevention around your home, family cabin or your time in the forest this season," Hutchinson suggests. *"Ensure that you are prepared and knowledgeable about how to both prevent forest fires, and how to be prepared to react should you be confronted with such a disaster."*

Homeowners can take steps to reduce fire risk with fireproof roof material, removing flammable shrubs and firewood piles immediately adjacent to the home, reducing the amount of fuel on the forest floor in urban-interface forests, and removing dead trees around urban areas.

"But when these large fires hit, even the most diligent homeowner won't be able to avoid their destructive force," Hutchinson adds. *"Neighbourhoods and cities need to take steps to reduce their risks, and these kinds of initiatives take time, money and expertise."*

Government of Canada information on wildfire emergency preparedness is available at <https://www.getprepared.gc.ca/cnt/hzd/wldfrs-en.aspx>



BE PREPARED....HELP PREVENT FOREST FIRES!

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