



New Zealand IMT Contingent to Canada 2015
Alberta Wildfire Management Area
High Level
Update # 2
22 July 2015

Seventeen rural fire experts from across New Zealand based in Alberta Canada helping to combat the extreme wildfire situation happening here. This update is so family members can see what's happening in the lives of those family members who are many thousands of kilometres from home.

Russell Barclay as our NRFA New Zealand Liaison Officer arrived 4 days prior to the Team landing in Edmonton so the preplanning for the team's management, tasking and transition could be made as smooth as possible for all those involved.

Greetings to you all. The team arrived safe and well at the Birch Complex and are pretty well settled into the Trailer Park as they are known.



Birch Complex Trailer Camp, with tents on the bush edge!!

It has taken some time for a few of the team to become adjusted to this type of tenting, which could be put down to the environment here in Canada, or so I've been told.

It is not the actual tenting itself that is the cause of a restless night, but the thought of receiving a visitor coming from out of the wilds in the night, who do not understand what a padlock on a tent is designed for.

At an early stage it was realised that the Logistics team would be the most important people in the camp, and they have been very busy addressing those camp issues. It has even been suggested that Logistics may be actually running the camp.



Advice is always free in this environment.
I/C's tent is inside this structure, apparently to fool the bears!



Daylight starts around 0430 and fades away around 2300.

Most of the body clocks have settled into the northern hemisphere time frame now, which took about 3 to 4 days to do so.

The daily ritual of up around 0600 breakfast and onto the briefings at 0700 is fairly normal for these camp setups.



Morning IMT Briefing sessions



Birch Complex morning briefing session.

Tasking

The Birch Complex is managing a number of large fires in the region and is split by Highway 88. The fires are on both sides of this highway with the priority being put into the 3 fires on the east side of this because of the proximity to the small community of Tall Cree. This community has already been evacuated once so there was a special need to prevent this happening again. The I/C has arranged to meet the Chief of the Community later in the week as a good-will gesture.

The three fires we are talking about here are in excess of 60,000 hectares, with the largest being in excess of 43,000 hectares on its own.

When an inspection of the fire site was undertaken it was noted that it took 45 minutes flying time in a Jet Ranger to get from one side to the other, or at least they thought they had found the fire edge.



In this forested area they have found that it is hard to distinguish where the fire is sometimes from the air, as some species like the Aspen & Black Poplar do not always burn as well as others at certain times of the year. The fire has been known to stop when it reaches such a patch, then moves along the ground cover for 100's of meters then away it goes again up into the conifers that burn very well as the pictures show. The time of day along with the time of season also has an influencing factor on this aspect also.

For the actual fire fighters in this environment road access is virtually non-existent so the only means of transport into an area can be by helicopter.

As there is often nowhere for the helicopters to land at times the fire fighters are winched/rappelled/rap attack crew, (depends where you come from) down into position through the canopy of the forest to a designated location point.





The morning briefing highlights what the weather patterns are likely to be during the day, but changes can occur that are not expected. When this happens and the tightly monitored thresholds that are set in place have been reached, be it weather related or fire related an aircraft is sent in to extract the crew because they are first priority.

There are a lot of different types of Aircraft being used in the operation, along with machinery where access is available. Landing pads for the helicopters can be constructed both by hand or machinery as the situation allows.





Fire Towers & Weather Stations



There are a few bugs about.



Bear Cub on fire watch. Photo by Kimberly Edwards

Where we're based

The team is still based on the fires at "Birch Complex".

I have included an IAP (Incident Action Plan) which the team puts together for each day of operations. This is very complex as a lot of detail goes into the makeup of each one of these. They are day and site specific in detail as you can see.

More info

If you want to know more about what's happening over in Canada, three good sites to visit online are:

- "Alberta Wildfire" - Once opened up and you click on the fire map, this goes to all the fires across Canada and you can see the details of each one by clicking on the coloured box.
- "Alberta Weather"
- "CIFFC" (Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre) website, which posts a public briefing paper each day.

If you need to contact any of the team for any reason while they're on deployment, get in touch with National Rural Fire Authority's Abi Davidson in the first instance:

- DDI: (04) 496 3688
- Mobile: (021) 985 217
- Email: abi.davidson@fire.org.nz.

Please be aware that the team are in a very remote part of Canada and contact or communication with the outside world may not be possible at times.

Plus check out our NRFA Facebook page for more news and photos along the way.

The team are all well.

I'll be in touch soon with more updates for you from Canada.

Cheers,
Russell Barclay - NZ Liaison



"Bertie Beaver"

Who's Bertie Beaver?

Walt Disney was in Alberta doing a documentary and was impressed with the place, the people, and the hospitality so much that he decided to draw an animated character based on the beaver. He is a one-off and belongs solely to Alberta. Bertie Beaver is 57 years old.