

The Horse River Fire

Darby Allen

Who is this guy?



The last week in April 2016

- 4 Fires that week.
- One impacted Parsons Creek
- All extinguished
- No evacuations
- Not a particularly unusual week for the season
- Weather and conditions
 - Very hot, very low humidity, continual changing wind, driest ground conditions for 50 years
 - Crossover

Day 1 – May 1st

- Worked Sunday morning. Bernie called
- Called key people– “bit of a problem”
- Fire #92 hectares 15-20 km to the west
- Ramped up REOC
- Fire heading to town, should be south Gregoire
- SOLE Approx. 10 pm
- Gregoire, Prairie Creek and Centennial Trailer Park mandatory evacuation
- Priorities. Save life, Critical infrastructure, Property

Day 2 – May 2nd

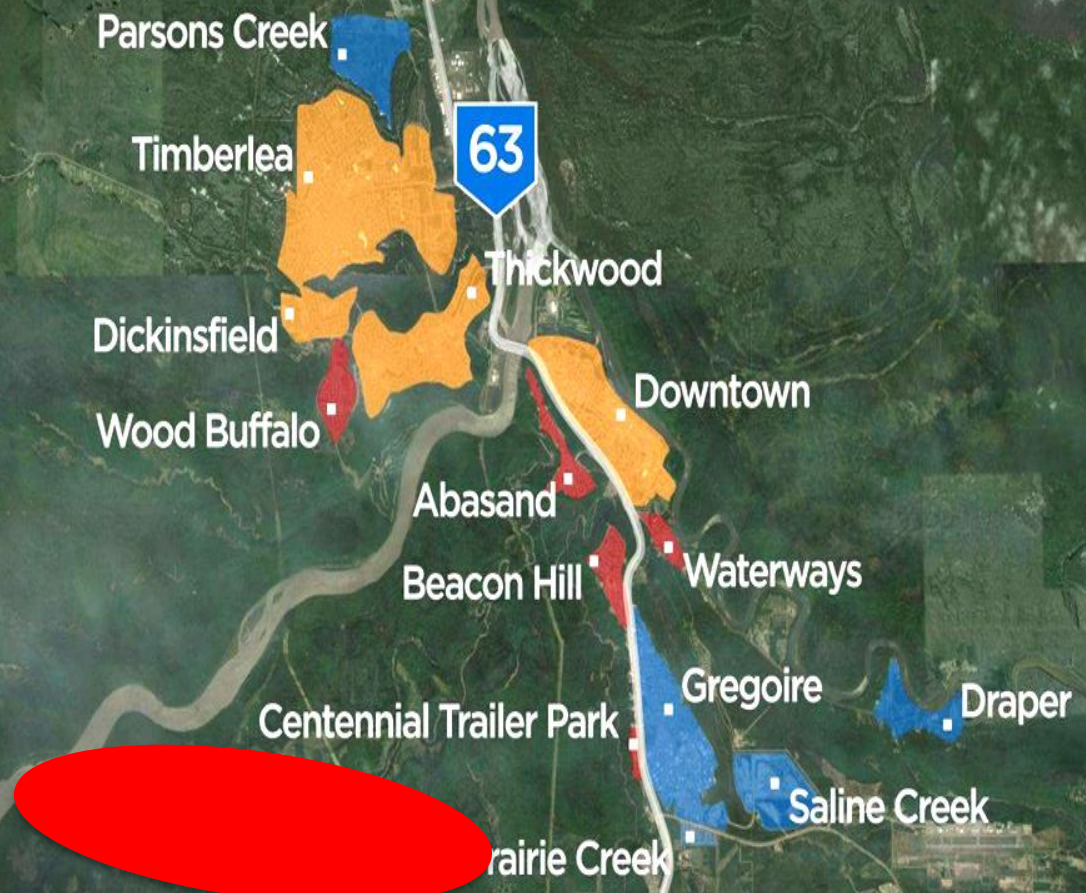
- Fire getting close
- 1,350 hectares
- Shelter in place for residential Gregoire, residents return
- Wind in SE direction, everyone feels it will pass us by.
- NTAM in place



Day 3 – May 3rd

- Driving to work, beautiful day, very little smoke
- Early discussion with Forestry- not going to be good
- Early discussion about spotting on other side of river
- Media conference
 - “ We woke up in this morning and we don’t see anything and people think its fine and its all gone away...Don’t get into a false sense of security”
- Mandatory evacuation Beacon Hill, Abasand and Grayling Terrace

Fort McMurray Neighbourhoods



Legend

- Serious Loss
- Some Loss
- TBD

As of May 4 at 12.30PM

Day 3 – May 3rd

- Imagine for a moment.....



Day 3 – May 3rd

- Areas of city on fire, Super 8 Hotel gone, Can west explosion
- 105 patients evacuated from Northern Lights hospital
- Northlands Edmonton advised to receive evacuees
- Water treatment plant, Highway 63 bridge



Day 3 – May 3rd

- 30 min notice to all residents
- Thickwood mandatory
- Total evacuation
- Bumper to bumper traffic
- Social media



Firefighting Operations

- Initially tried to set up defenses
- Overwhelmed in some areas, had to retreat
- Strategically had to change tactics
 - What could we save and where?
- Very difficult conditions, mentally and physically demanding on staff



Day 4 – May 4th

- First light worried.....
- Emily Ryan and Aaron Hodgson MVC



Day 4 – May 4th

- Provincial State of Emergency 14:15 hours
 - Provincial participation
- Highway 63/69 shut off for fire
- Sapræe Creek mandatory
- Anzac mandatory
- By the end of today, weight lifted.



Day 6 – May 6th

- Those evacuated north
- Fire heading to camps and impinging highway
- Plan A convoy
- Plan B fly them out



Information..

- 540 municipal fire/industry/ provincial firefighters
- Approximate resources engaged include 2,161 wildland firefighters/support staff, 77 helicopters (5 are classified as heavy), 18 tankers and 269 pieces of heavy equipment.
- The fire size grew to approximately 590,000 hectares (1,500,000 acres) before it was declared to be under control on July 5, 2016
- Truly incredible efforts made by all who attended
 - First responder
 - Canadian participation

What I have realized since?

- Team, Grit, Determination and Perseverance.
- If you trust in your people, and equally importantly they trust you, amazing things can happen.
- 4 major factors for success
 - Safety culture
 - Timely decisions
 - Twinning of highways
 - Actions of the people
- Totally underestimated Pets:
 - 1300 evacuated, 400 volunteers, 100 vets
 - Until June 3 fed 225 aquatic creatures could not be moved

What did I learn about myself...

I didn't realize I had the ability to lead such an incident

“ I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear”.

“ If you want the cooperation of humans around you, you must make them feel that they are important – and you do that by being genuine and humble.

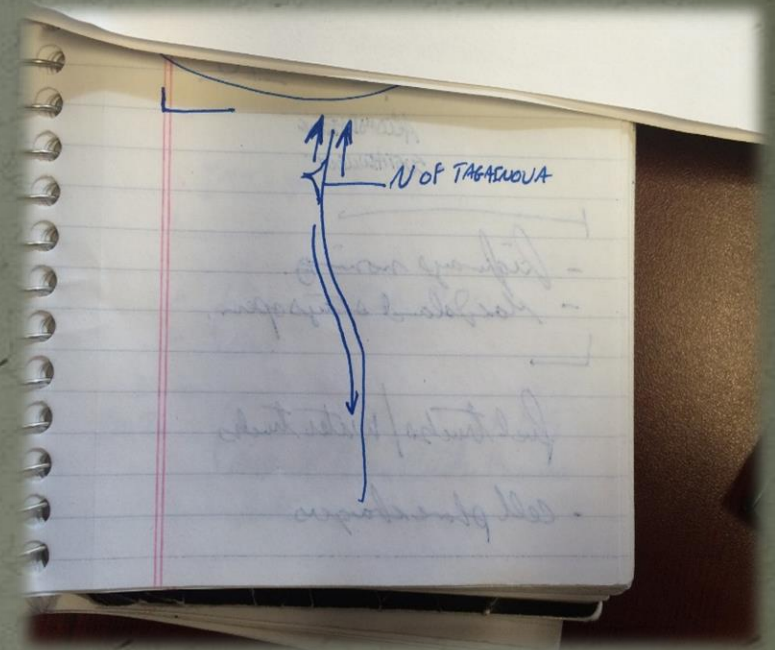
Leadership...

- The little things....
 - May 3rd 10.00 hours REOC Sitrep
 - We are in for a challenging day
 - Do your part and do it well
 - Jigsaw
 - Brenda's story
- What am I most proud of?



Leadership

- A couple of big decisions
 - Both crisis leadership decisions
 - They are different
- North- South conversation
- Highway north all lanes changed to Northbound
- Highway south all lanes changed to south bound



Leadership...

- A man called Mike.....



- Anyone can tell people good news, relaying bad news is a true test of any leader

Crisis Leadership v Leadership....

- Every day leadership v Crisis leadership
- Many of the qualities are exactly the same
- No time for much discussion, Urgency, much more stress
- Realize you wear every decision.
- Reiterate optimism verbally and body language
- Stay calm and positive



Moments in time I will never forget



FMFD



We All Come Home Safe

FMFD



We All Come Home Safe

TOOK YOUR
WASHER
FLUID
FOR FIRE
TRUCKS.
SINCERLY
FIREFIGHTERS

Crime Pr
Program
Please, n
Larger t
Station f
\$100 co

Please,
larger t

We left now but
we have a home
in Thickwood.

wanted to respect
your privacy but

wanted to thank

you from the

bottoms of our

↓ hearts. Tears and
Hugs

And Brian
Your comrades Rena

The important thing
about firefighters is
them rescue people
from fires. They put
out fires. They drive
a big truck with loud
sirens. When they
done their job they
eat doughnuts. But the
important thing about
firefighters is they
rescue people from fires.

by: Freeman

Freeman, Grade 1 student
Greely Road.

are you
are you



OUR
Tim Hortons
Hero

S/M

P/M



3

100%





“It's impossible,”
said pride

“It's risky,”
said experience

“It's pointless,”
said reason

“give it a try,”
whispered
the Heart

unknown

Thank you