



People and Communities are the Answer to BC's Future Wildfire Threats

By Kelly McCloskey, Tree Frog News Editor



The summer of 2017 brought the worst wildfire season in BC history with 1.2 million hectares burned. Is this the new normal? How do we reduce the associated risks to our forests and our communities? Cue Deputy Minister Tim Sheldon to introduce Dr. Scott Stephens, Professor, Wildland Resource Science, University of California, Berkeley. With five of its 20 most destructive wildland-urban interface fires occurring last year, it was a similar story in California.

With unbridled passion and considerable knowledge of the Mexican and Australian experience, Professor

Stephens spoke of the new normal in California – climate change and larger and more frequent fires. Notable comments include:

- Frequent fire forests have changed dramatically in the last 100 years and a critical factor in their resilience is their structural diversity
- The more heterogeneity of forest structure pre-fire, the greater the recovery post-fire, even after years of drought.
- Green forests need to be modified to reduce vulnerability rather than just chasing the dead trees
- The wildland urban interface is the world's biggest fire management issue as people continue to build in areas where fire risk is high and suppression is difficult

As for solutions, Dr. Stephens prefers to the Australian model of “prepare, stay, defend or leave early” rather than the USA’s “ready, set, go”, with full knowledge that it comes with risk. The people and communities most at risk need to be engaged and ready to act—rather than just waiting for an evacuation notice. Further, forest resilience needs to be a forest management objective and planning and community development need to be improved so as not to replicate the vulnerability across the landscape.

