



United States IMT Quick Guide for Border Fires with British Columbia

Introduction

Your team has just accepted an assignment near the international border with Canada and there are a few things you'll need to consider. First of all, this Quick Guide refers to fires near the British Columbia border and references documents and agreements the US and British Columbia have developed on how to operate. Your host agency should be able to help steer you with potential issues and concerns, who to contact from the British Columbia Wildfire Service as well as both country's Border Agencies. However....recognize that border fires do not happen all that frequently and your host agency may not have dealt with a border fire for several years. The local players involved on both sides of the border may have limited experience dealing with a border fire and all will need to work together to plan out the appropriate response and understand how to deal with border issues.

The British Columbia and NW United States Wildfire Response Border Arrangement

Fortunately there is an arrangement established for wildfires across the British Columbia border with the US. It's referred to as the British Columbia & NW United States Wildfire Response Border Arrangement and there is an annual Border Arrangement Operating Guideline. You should have a copy of this and it can be obtained on the GACC website. This document will help your IMT navigate border issues. This is a starting point to familiarize your IMT with basic protocols and who to contact from the British Columbia Wildfire Service and Border Agencies. It is NOT a detailed document but sets up the framework of how the Arrangement works and what you may need to consider for planning purposes and may lead you to consider what questions you may want to be asking and who you may need to coordinate with. It is jointly developed by the British Columbia Wildfire Service, BLM, USFS, USFWS, NPS, Washington DNR, Idaho Department of Lands, Canada Border Services Agency, and the US Customs and Border Protection.

The British Columbia Wildfire Service

The British Columbia Forest Service (BCWS) is the agency in British Columbia for wildfire protection on all lands outside of incorporated cities and National Parks. This is the wildland fire protection agency you will be dealing with from British Columbia.

The Province is divided into 6 Regional Wildfire Coordination Centres. There are three Centre's along the southern BC border (from west to east: Coastal Fire Centre, Kamloops Fire Centre, and Southeast Fire Centre). Each Centre has a Centre Manager and Deputy, with Senior Protection Officer's for Operations, Aviation, and Prevention. Within each Regional Centre there are several Zone offices with a Forest Protection Officer who would be similar to an FMO. You should be prepared to have contact with the Regional Wildfire Coordination Centre as well the Zone offices.

The Threat Zone

The Threat Zone is defined as the "area in which a wildfire poses a threat to the International Border or adjacent values." It is not defined by a hard line (i.e. 5 miles from the border) but needs to be situationally defined. Fires 7 miles from the border have made runs and threatened the border while fires ½ mile from the border may pose little risk to the border pending current and anticipated fire activity. The closer you are to the border there is an increased need for coordination and the more



severe the fire season or fire potential will drive the need for more coordination by your IMT. This is especially important for all aircraft utilization.

If Your IMT is near the Border You Should:

- Work with your host agency or agencies to be briefed on local border protocols.
- Obtain the local contacts from the US and Canada border agencies.
- Obtain the local contacts from the British Columbia Wildfire Service’s Regional Coordination Centre and Zone Office.
- Make sure your Command and General Staff have reviewed the Border Arrangement Operating Guideline.
- Make contact with the BCWS, US Customs and Border Protection, and Canada Border Services Agency and provide situational awareness and share products with them.
- Extend an invitation to the BCWS and border agencies to be part of your planning process.

Things to Consider by Functional Area (Not a complete list....just some things to consider)

IC’s	Be aware of the Operating Guideline document. Make contact with the BCWS and establish a relationship.
Info	Recognize the possibility of info needs on the other side of the border. You may or may not be able to cross the border. Work with the BCWS to help identify potential needs.
Liason	Recognize the need to work with the BCWS and any local entities on the BC side of the Border.
Operations /Aviation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with the BCWS fire personnel to keep them informed of fire status, fire growth potential, and any needs. • Be aware of the protocols for border crossings if needed. • Have an understanding of what US aircraft can and can not do if they cross the border (i.e. dipping/skimming from Canada, landing in Canada for an emergency, landing to drop off firefighters or for re-supply) • Know when to contact the Air Marine Operations Center (AMOC) in San Diego for aircraft flying near the border. • Be aware that the BCWS may be able to offer aircraft to drop water or retardant in the US without landing in the US. • Know the standard Air to Air (126.7) freq and the initial ground comms freq using BC Silver (163.890) for US/BC communication on the border. • Work with the US Customs and Border Protection as well as Canada Border Services Agency to understand needs or issues with crossing the border at a Port vs a remote crossing.
Plans/Ops	Recognize that not all US personnel may be admitted to Canada. If you have IA responsibilities near the border make sure you identify resources who are likely to be admitted to Canada and be aware that approval by the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) can only occur at the time of the emergency and there may be a short time lag prior to approval is given. Resources without a passport may be admitted upon approval via a remote crossing. Understand what this process entails.
Plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain a contact list from the BCWS, US Customs and Border Protection, and Canada Border Services Agency. • Be prepared to have coordination meetings with the BCWS and/or Border agencies. They will want to be part of the planning process and would like your products shared with them • Work with the BCWS to obtain map layers on the Canada side of the border if needed.
Safety/Ops /Plans	Do you need to consider evacuation planning for the BC side of the border? Or for a Port office? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate with the BCWS for potential evacuation planning needs.
Logistics	You may need to have additional Canadian radio frequencies programmed and will need to share your frequencies with the BCWS and border agencies.