BC Wildfire Service

Kamloops Fire Centre

CAREER CLUSTERS

Haze, blaze and workdays

Life as a FINANCE CLERK

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articles by Tereza Verenca, Kamloops Matters

Life as a FINANCE CLERK

When contractors and equipment get deployed to a fire, it's Vanessa Campagnolo's job to ensure everyone gets paid.
The 23-year-old is one of eight wildfire services clerks at the Kamloops Fire Centre who are responsible for processing invoices in an accurate and timely manner. The finance team is also tasked with HR and payroll services.

"When fire season is in full swing, it's all hands on deck," Campagnolo tells KamloopsMatters.

More than 150 invoices could hit her department's desk in one week, she says. From danger tree assessors and fallers to first-aid contractors.

"One invoice could take anywhere from 10 minutes to a whole day, depending on where the invoice comes from. If it comes from a company that has contract fire crews, and they're invoicing for two weeks' worth of work, and they had hotels that they need to be reimbursed for, meals, if they're standby … These invoices can get super complicated and sometimes they just take time. .... And that's if the invoice comes in complete," Campagnolo laughs.

There are five fire zones with the Kamloops Fire Centre: Kamloops, Lillooet, Merritt, Penticton and Vernon. Campagnolo says each zone plays a big role in keeping track of the paperwork.
It's not unusual for wildfire service clerks to be deployed to a blaze, she adds. Part of the gig can include 14-day stints in a fire camp, recording the exact time that a fire crew or a piece of equipment was on a fire. They could also be at the scene to collect documents for an injury or safety issue, or to estimate the cost of a fire.

"We're accountable to the taxpayers so we need to make sure what we're paying is no more and no less than the work that was actually done," says Campagnolo, noting she was deployed twice in 2018. "We're not just a desk job. We don't just work 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. We go on deployments and we work 12-hour days during the height of the fire season."

Campagnolo admits being on standby can be a challenge.
"We can be deployed in a moment's notice and it can be anywhere in the province," she says. "It's hard to be ready every day, to pack up and leave for 14 days. You don't know where you might go."

Despite the uncertainty of the position, Campagnolo says being at a fire is "addicting."

"It's an adrenaline rush and you're surrounded by so many people who are passionate about what they do. Even if it's just seasonal for them, or temporary, that's why they're there. It's just kind of amazing to see the passion and how that all comes together in the whole incident command system."
The Kamloops resident, who's been with BC Wildfire Service for about a year, has no plans to leave the organization.

"I just have so much pride in working for BC Wildfire," she says. "Although we're not out there on the fires all the time, I like to think that we still fight the fires in our own way."

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Life as a DISPATCHER

At just 24 years old, Madison Smith already has four fire seasons under her belt.

The Thompson Rivers University student got hired as a dispatcher for the Cariboo Fire Centre in Williams Lake, in 2016. She worked there for two summers and eventually transferred to the Kamloops Fire Centre (KFC) in 2018.

"I love the team atmosphere and how rewarding it can be," says Smith. "I love the feeling of being the crew's safety line."

This fire season, Smith worked with around 11 other KFC dispatchers (fun fact: Kamloops has the most dispatchers in all of B.C.). Inside the dispatch room, each team member can be found wearing a headset and looking at four to five computer screens.

When a new wildfire starts, it pops up on the centre's dispatch map. When that happens, Smith or one of her peers advises a wildfire officer.

"If (the fire) is in the Kamloops zone, then we call the Kamloops zone officer and then they, from there, dispatch crews, who will talk to dispatch and they maintain communication via the radio or on a phone," says Smith.

(There are five fire zones with the Kamloops Fire Centre: Kamloops, Lillooet, Merritt, Penticton and Vernon.)

"Dispatchers are the communication link between all the firefighters and other staff who are out in the field, whether they're doing project work or working on a wildfire," adds Smith.

Each crew or personnel has to check in with dispatch every two hours, to ensure everyone is safe and to maintain that contact at all times.

Dispatch is also responsible for doing what's known as a "flight follow" on BC Wildfire Service aircraft. That requires checking in every 30 minutes.
"They kind of give us a position check as well as opps (operations), (to let us know) everything is good out there."

Amid the organized chaos, Smith is also monitoring all radio transmissions and phone calls in her assigned fire zone.

"You're sitting in front of a desk and talking a lot during the day," she says with a laugh, noting, "The public is how we find out about wildfires. And early detection is a great thing."

Smith was inspired to apply to BC Wildfire Service by her family. Her grandfather worked with the service, in many different positions, for a number of years leading up to his retirement. Her sister, meanwhile, got hired shortly after she was out of high school.

"That really got me interested in just seeing the role she was doing," says Smith. "So then I applied. Due to the high activity and the fast-paced environment, I thought that was something that suited me well."
The family ties go even further. Smith's mom Tracy is a dispatch supervisor at the Cariboo Fire Centre (Smith's hometown is Williams Lake).

If anyone is thinking about applying, Smith encourages it.

"We're really approachable as a whole in BC Wildfire Service. Come down and talk to us, and see the people of BCWS and see what there is to offer for opportunities out there. It's a big family here. It's a very rewarding and fun job. I've thoroughly enjoyed my four years here."

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Life as an AIR ATTACK OFFICER

During wildfire season, it's not unusual for Michael Benson to start his morning in Kamloops, head to Fort Nelson for the afternoon, and wrap up the day in Smithers.

As a provincial air attack officer and as the superintendent of airtanker operation, that would be classified as a normal day. "We're very nomadic," Benson says with a laugh.

There are 17 air attack officers in all of B.C.; they're the ones who are flying the bird dogs overhead, or as Benson calls it, the "small sports car of an airplane." Kamloops is home to the province's airtanker fleet; there are 24 airplanes in total: eight bird dogs and 16 airtankers.

"It's really understanding the risks," says Benson. "So we listen to the weather every morning and that just helps us understand what to expect throughout the day, in terms of what fire behaviour we're going to see."

All the officers meet on a call at the start of each day; they review photos of the fires, go over what happened the previous day and discuss the successes and the challenges of the last 24 hours.

When they get into their aircraft and head out to a fire, they have a number of responsibilities. "The role of the team onboard the airplane is making sure the operations are done very safely," says Benson.

That includes managing the airspace around a fire, acting as mobile air traffic control.

"You create order of what is a whole lot of aircraft that could be arriving at a fire."

He notes the airspace is very three-dimensional, in that each airplane has its place.

"We stack our airtankers at 500-foot intervals above us, so that they're able to be separated from each other, for safety reasons."

Bird dogs are also tasked with flying all the routes much heavier aircraft (like airtankers carrying 30,000 pounds of retardant) will fly. That's to ensure each run is clear.

"We go down low... that is 100 to 150 feet above terrain. That's kind of the wheelhouse where the airplanes are flying around when they're dropping," says Benson, adding helicopters and water skimming aircraft also fly at the same level of bird dogs.

At the same time, his team is gathering intelligence and passing it on, so fire centres are aware of what the fire looks like.

A single mission can last anywhere between 3.5 to four hours, depending on how complex the blaze is. "You'll take off from one airport, no guarantees where you'll land. Busy days, we might fly 10 hours...

Once we've completed responding to the fire, we provide a final update and then you don't know what's going to happen; you go to another fire, or you go and land at an airtanker base and prepare for the next one."

Benson has been with BC Wildfire Service for 24 years. The Salmon Arm native started with the organization right out of high school. He got a job on a crew with the Rapattack program.

It was meant to just be a summer job, while Benson was attending post-secondary.

"It was fun. It was really awesome camaraderie, really good for learning life and professional skills," he says.

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One summer grew into two, which grew into 12 years (Benson went on to get his anthropology degree and a business degree, too).

"Then I started transitioning into managing helicopters on large fires, and that was a good transition for me, in terms of learning the language of aviation, managing multiple aviation resources, and then I was doing that for a few years while starting my training with the airtanker program, as an air attack officer."

It took Benson about one and a half years to complete his air attack officer certification (there are three levels, and they're not easy).

Some of the things he loves about his job is being high in the sky.

"Rarely do people get to fly in that sort of environment, 100 to 150 feet above terrain, in smoke, and in the amazing terrain of British Columbia," he says.

However, it can be hard some days. Benson has a small family at home and there are many times he has to be on the road (or in the air).

Furthermore, the position has high stress and high demands.

"There are a lot of responsibilities," he says. "You're ultimately responsible for the safety of all those aerial resources responding to a fire."

You also have to be on top of your game in the bird dog, he says. Air attack officers have to monitor radios and satellite phones, and have to constantly be communicating with everyone within the system. "It can be quite fatiguing. There's very little downtime mentally (when you're in the airplane)."

But it's all worth it, says Benson.

"Being part of the airtanker program, you can effect change in such a short period of time just because of the speed and the power of the airtanker fleet. I think for anyone in any job, if you can see the results of your job, that’s a reinforcer within itself."

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Life as a PREVENTION SPECIALIST

Nicole Bonnett wears many hats at the Kamloops Fire Centre.

She's one of two prevention specialists, who help coordinate prescribed burns and educate the public about the province's FireSmart program. The latter is ensuring members of the community are aware of what steps to take to protect themselves (and property) from wildfire.
"FireSmart is something that can be done year-round.

Prescribed burning is something we do in what we call the shoulder season, in the spring and fall," Bonnett tells KamloopsMatters.

Prescribed burns (fires purposely set) can be arranged for a variety of reasons.

That can include habitat improvement, community protection (burning combustible materials that have built up on the forest floor), and ecosystem restoration. And it's not just the BC Wildfire Service initiating the burns. It's not unusual for the organization to be approached by biologists, a municipality or a First Nations group looking to burn.

"When somebody identifies a project area, sometimes they want our guidance," says Bonnett.
"Sometimes they want us to help throughout the whole project, but we may not be involved in all the steps."

Bonnett, who started with the BC Wildfire Service in 2017 as a dispatcher, points to a prescribed burn carried out in the Keremeos area earlier this spring. The burn was done in partnership with the Lower Similkameen Indian Band and the Okanagan Nation Alliance.

"They wanted to burn for community protection, but as well for big horned sheep habitat," she says.
A prescribed burn can take months to plan.

"You need to get the ball rolling the previous fall because you'll have to come up with a prescription for the land, and that might include prescribed fire and the treatment for the land, and sometimes there's prework to be done," she says.

Bonnett's job is to make sure all the moving parts align. From liaising with all the parties involved to doing site visits, if required.

"It’s not just something that we are like, 'It would be a good idea tomorrow to go burn a couple of hectares.'"
"There’s a lot that goes into it from the fire behaviour side. You have to look at what the weather typically or historically does in that area for the time period you’re hoping to do the burn. You have to decide what kind of intensity you want the fire to burn at. Do you want a low-intensity burn? Are you just looking to remove the ground fuels, or do you want to do a stand-replacing burn?"

There's also determining what kind of ignition will be required: hand or aerial.
"We have people who are well-trained, very experienced in that," says Bonnett. "(My job) is coordinating those pieces to make sure they're done in a timely manner, and that everyone needed to be kept in the loop is kept in the loop."

The FireSmart aspect of Bonnett's job is all about teaching the public and local governments about the program and how it works. Last year, the province rolled out the Community Resiliency Investment Program. The program aims to reduce wildfire risks by providing funding and FireSmart initiatives to B.C.'s communities.

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"It's a lot of engagement and education," Bonnett says of that aspect of her role.

When fire season hits, being a prevention specialist could also mean filling in as a fire information officer or helping the fire origin and cause crews.

At the end of the day, the thing Bonnett loves about her job is being able to create all those relationships. Both inside the office and outside.

"I grew up in our fire centre, so it’s kind of nice to be able to support the areas that I called home for the majority of my life."

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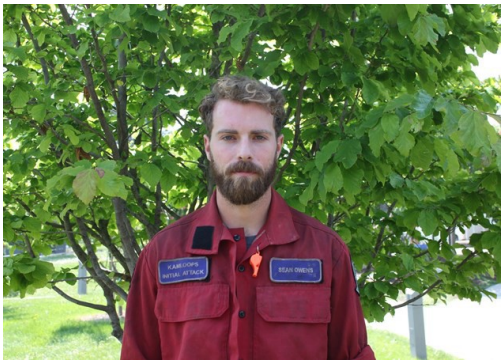
Life as a INITIAL ATTACK CREW LEADER



Sean Owens vividly remembers his first day on the job as an initial attack crew leader.

In 2017, a car had hit a powerline in Cherry Creek, causing the pole to fall. The crash ignited a grassfire adjacent to a house, and the garage ended up catching fire.

"Highway 1 was shut down. There was police doing road control. There were airtankers and skimmers and helicopters working to help control it," recalls Owens. "It was a bit of an intense situation to jump into. Fortunately, there was another initial attack crew there."

Initial attack (IA) crews are made up of three firefighters, including the crew leader. They're the first ones to respond to a wildfire after the call comes through dispatch.

These rapid-response crews are responsible for containing fires at the smallest possible size. IA can remain on a blaze for up to 24 hours without being resupplied. Often, IA teams travel by truck, or in some cases, by helicopter, if the area is remote.

(If there's nowhere for the helicopter to land, a rapattack crew is dispatched; the helicopter takes them to the fire, they rappel down and the helicopter lowers the equipment. To be part of the team, you can't weigh more than 175 pounds.)

Typically, a fire usually has one IA crew and is supported by a contract crew. A single IA crew is able to aggressively attack and contain a surface fire up to four hectares on its own.

The first thing Owens does when he arrives at the scene is he provides an initial report to dispatch. "(I tell them) what I'm seeing on the ground, and request any additional resources, like crews or aircraft or any other gear we might need. Then we really start the work after that."

One of the main objectives for IA is to stop the spread of the fire. That can be done through a number of ways: using water pumps (to do this, crews need to find a nearby water source, like a lake or a river), clearing forest fuels from the fire's path, felling trees and building fireguards. Fireguards require crews to dig a trench — anywhere from one inch to three feet deep — around the blaze.

Unit crews are dispatched to larger fires. Made up of 20 people, these teams can be self-sufficient for up to 72 hours.

Once the flames have died down and the fire is near the end of its life, IA moves into the mop-up stage. This involves a process called "cold-trailing."

"(We're) using our hands to feel for any remaining heat on the ground. It's fairly obvious where there's any heat," he says. "There's tricks of the trade to see where hot spots are."

Owens, who's been with BC Wildfire Service for five fire seasons, got involved with the organization after a firefighting friend explained how exciting the work was.

"That's what made me want to apply," he says, adding he graduated with a forest resources technology diploma a couple of years ago.

When asked about challenges that come with the job, Owens pointed to a public misconception. "I think there’s a big expectation that IA will be able to contain any and all unwanted fires. But there’s only so much that firefighters and aircraft can do when the fire is wind-driven and racing upslope," he tells KamloopsMatters. "It's managing that expectation. Sometimes it’s not as easy to control (the fire) as the public seems to think."

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The busy wildfire summers of 2017 and 2018 were "exhausting, aggressive, challenging," says Owens. Long hours, scorching conditions and being away from family and friends all made it tough. However, it was very rewarding.

"It's definitely a tradeoff. You miss out on a few things at home but you get this great experience with your crew throughout the whole summer," he says.

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Life as an AIR OPERATIONS BRANCH DIRECTOR

Bryce Moreira joined BC Wildfire Service 11 years ago as part of a high school program that earned him credits.

He started in Nelson as an initial attack crew member (those are the firefighters who are first to respond to a wildfire).

Moreira stuck with BC Wildfire Service and ended up working over the summers, while he was back home from the University of Guelph (he eventually graduated with a physics degree).

Today, he's the air operations branch director at the Kamloops Fire Centre.

In a nutshell, he coordinates a team of "hel-cos" or helicopter coordinators and oversees the chopper operations at the base.

"I usually start early in the morning and I brief all the pilots," he tells KamloopsMatters. "The number of pilots can range from one to 10 to 15, sometimes 30 helicopters."

During the morning meeting, Moreira and his team discuss what the day will look like. "Everything from where some of the helicopters will be tackling missions to where helicopters will be transporting people around a fire."

"It's constantly changing," he says of the operations plan. "To make sure that all the aircraft can support the ground operations on the fire."
Hel-cos (there could be one to three hel-cos on a blaze) are the ones deciding where a helicopter can bucket.

"My job is to coordinate the hel-cos to make sure they have all the correct number of helicopters they need to suppress a fire," explains Moreira, noting he's in constant communication with all the crews (ground and air), to make sure everyone is working safely and effectively.

"Also, I have to ensure that the ground crews and the helicopters aren't working too closely."
BC Wildfire Service had eight helicopters on contract this summer. If additional resources are needed, more can be hired.

One of the misconceptions about air support is that it's the best way to put out a fire, according to Moreira. That's not the case.

"They are a very useful resource and there's a reason we use them all the time; however, it's always the ground crews that really make sure that the fire is out and stays out once we leave the site ..... When you don't see aircraft flying it's probably because there are 10 or 20 times more ground crews making sure that that fire is out."

While things can get a bit hectic at times, Moreira loves the fast-paced environment when there are a lot of operational tasks at hand.

"Just being in a state where you have to operate at a high level all the time and then realizing the decisions you're making and everything you're instructing other people to do is being effective to support the larger plan," he says. "Our larger plan is to always suppress the fire but there are so many smaller tasks that need to happen before that goal is accomplished."

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Life as an INITIAL ATTACK FIREFIGHTER

Heather Murray has worked with BC Wildfire Service for the last three seasons. (via BC Wildfire Service)

For the last three years, Heather Murray's summers haven't been spent lounging by the lake for days on end. She's been in the bush, as part of an initial attack crew, fighting wildfires.

Initial attack (IA) crews are made up of three firefighters, including the crew leader. They're the first ones to respond to a wildfire after the call comes through dispatch.

"I was inspired to join the wildfire service because I did my degree at UBC in natural resource conservation and so, we studied a lot of climate change and climate change-related issues, wildfire being one of them," Murray tells KamloopsMatters. "I was also on a varsity sports team, in rowing. BC Wildfire Service seemed like a good job that combined both my interests in climate change as well as physical activity."

As Murray puts it, no day on IA is the same.

"We never know where we'll be in five minutes or five days or five weeks," she says with a laugh. Each IA member is scheduled to work during the hottest part of the day; in other words, when a wildfire is most likely to ignite.

If it's a busy fire season, she and her team will be on "red alert."

"Red alert is basically the fastest way to get firefighters out the door. What that means is you're ready at all times... so you're wearing your uniform, your boots... and everything is ready to load into the helicopter. We're in the air within five minutes of being dispatched."

Murray anticipates she was deployed on red alert 15 times during the 2018 wildfire season.

If they're travelling by helicopter (instead of by truck), Murray says one of the first things IA does is look for a water source near the fire, while they're still in the air.

"We land the helicopter either by a nearby road or if there's a suitable helipad area. And then we'll unload our gear. We'll then hike that gear as close as possible to the fire," explains Murray. "And then we'll look for a water source (for our hoses), that hopefully was already spotted while in the air. But if not, we'll have to look with a GPS."

The water source has to be at least two feet deep, and there needs to be enough of it to sustain the length of time necessary to put out the fire. If there's no nearby lake or river, that's when air support is called in, says Murray.

Once crews locate a water source, they hike a jerry can and a 45-pound, gas-powered pump to the site. IA then has the task of cutting a trail to and around the fire, which requires chainsawing whatever obstacles (like logs) might be in the way.

Once the trail has been cleared, firefighters lay down the main hose and build a guard around the fire. Crews need to dig a guard (by hand) in order to prevent a fire from spreading.

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Because there are only three of them, IA firefighters will action the fire in sections; IA will be supported by contract firefighters if needed.

They'll attach smaller hoses to the main hose in order to conserve water and to cover more ground.
"Most of the time, we have a very limited water supply. We never want to have water spraying on a fire that's not efficient or used in a meaningful way," says Murray.

Unsurprisingly, IA work can be physically challenging on the body.

"If you've been on a fire for many days and the food is being flown to you, that's canned food. You're eating cold (food)," she says. "It's trying to maintain a high level of physical output while sustaining yourself with canned food in a compromised environment."

And that's if the helicopter can land; smoky skies may hamper that.

It's also not easy to make plans in the summer.

"It's a challenge," says Murray. "We can't always explain the fact that we don't have a set work schedule.

... We don't know when to say, 'Oh, I'll see you this time,' because you might be flying out the door. You might not have the time to text them or call them."

Though it may be hard sometimes, working as an initial attack crew member is rewarding, she adds.
"I love the excitement of it. I love working hard."

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Life as an INFORMATION OFFICER

Hannah Swift has been involved with the BC Wildfire Service for the last three fire seasons. (via BC Wildfire Service)

If you follow BC Wildfire Service on Twitter or Facebook, you know the organization updates readers frequently when wildfire season is in full swing.

One of the faces behind those posts is Hannah Swift, a fire information officer at the Kamloops Fire Centre.

She and her colleagues are responsible for disseminating information to the public. The group handles the BC Wildfire Service's social media accounts, creates news bulletins and takes calls from the public. They're also spokespeople for the organization and are often quoted in articles about wildfires and the service.

Swift says when there's a big blaze, like 2018's Okanagan complex, there can be anywhere from four to five information officers assigned to the incident.

"For the most part, we're based out of the office in the fire centre, but when there's a larger incident, and say an incident management team is set up there, that's usually when we go out to the field, or if there's a lot of media showing up wanting interviews at the site," explains Swift.

Fire information officers have similar schedules like fire crews, and are scheduled to start at 8 a.m. If it's a busy fire season, they can work up to 14 consecutive days.

"Those days would be anywhere from eight hours to 14 hours, depending on how busy you are," says Swift, who graduated with a bachelor of commerce degree from the University of Victoria. "We do go on standby, and that's based on fire danger. When it's really busy, we might be on call until late into the evening. Otherwise, maybe only until 10 p.m."

Fire information officers work closely with regional wildfire coordination officers (RWCO). RWCOs turn the operational jargon provided by ground and aircrews into something you or I can understand. Swift then takes that information, after it's been approved by the RCWO, and shares it with the public.

"As things evolve, maybe every two hours, you go in and get another update; how many crews are going out that day? What kind of resources are on the fire?"

This year marked Swift's third season with BC Wildfire Service. Her first two were spent in Penticton on an initial attack crew.

"Going into fire information wasn't an end goal, but after those two seasons, especially working in the Okanagan, it was so busy in 2018...just seeing all the media and the need for better communication with the public, that kind of interested me."

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One of the challenges of the job is the public's expectation around getting the most up-to-date information, she says.

A fire's growth can change very quickly; if you throw five or six more fires into the mix, things can get hectic, says Swift.

"It can be disheartening when people are frustrated by the work we're trying to produce or put out there. We are operationally focused, so we can only get so much information. We do try to turn it around for the public."

What she loves most about her time with the wildfire service are her coworkers.

"First responders are a really great group of people. Everyone has the same goal in mind: we're out here doing the best that we can. It's the people I work with that keep me going on those long days," says Swift.

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Life as an ASSETS MANAGEMENT ASSISTANT

If something breaks in the Kamloops Fire Centre, it's up to Lauren Gothe to troubleshoot the problem and fix it.

Gothe is an assistant on the asset management team; the group is responsible for facilitating contracts related to construction, maintenance (for example, leaky sinks) and anything asset-related in the five fire zones (Kamloops, Lillooet, Merritt, Penticton and Vernon) and at three air tanker bases (Kamloops, Penticton and Blue River).

"It really changes," Gothe says of her day-to-day. "You can't walk in with expectations of what you're doing that day."

One of the things the asset team looks after is ordering retardant.
"If we're busy, we'll be placing an order (of retardant) every day," says Gothe. "We have about 80,000 to 90,000 litres available to fill."

Unexpected things can sometimes pop up, like the water supply being cut off; something that actually happened in July.

"We weren't getting any water supply for our toilets, our sinks or our air tanker base. That put us at a scare. Like what if a fire came up and we couldn't supply retardant?"

(In case you're wondering, the ratio of water to retardant is 5:1.)

"I'm constantly challenged," says Gothe. "(These problems) really make you think."

Asset management assistants (there are two at the Kamloops Fire Centre) are also the ones who order gear and equipment for crew members, as needed.

"For deployment gear, people have to tell us what they want. Or if someone’s phone breaks, they’ll put in a request for new equipment... When it comes to specific gear orders, we do have a set contract in place with different companies. When it comes to, say, ordering something for the base itself, like a sink or a water heater, that's where we'll shop around."

Though the job is seasonal, Gothe is hoping to continue on with the BC Wildfire Service in the fall and winter. She's been with the organization for the last 1.5 years, first in finance and then in prevention.
"Anyone you talk to in wildfire loves it. It’d be hard to find someone who doesn’t love and enjoy what they’re doing. It’s hard work and long hours, but it’s so rewarding," says Gothe.

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Life as an REGIONAL WILDFIRE COORDINATION OFFICER

Dale Bojahra likens his job to playing chess, but from 1,000 feet in the air.

As a regional wildfire coordination officer (RWCO), he oversees a lot of moving parts.

During wildfire season, what's known as a "regional wildfire coordination centre" is set up. Within that system, there are different sections: logistics, operations, finance, for example.

"My role is...to ensure that, first of all, we have all the resources alerted and we're prepared for our anticipated new fire load, and also that we're supporting the region in our various zones (Kamloops, Lillooet, Merritt, Penticton and Vernon), making sure they're well supported and responding to the current incidents that they have," explains Bojahra.

Part of being an RWCO includes preparedness meetings on Monday and Thursday mornings. "Twice weekly we look at the current and anticipated fire situation and we review the resources that we have on, to ensure that we can respond to fires. That's a big part of the business: watching all the weather and looking out three, four days in advance."

Bojahra, who's based in Penticton, notes each fire zone has its own wildfire coordination officer; all of them report to him.

Besides weather data, RWCOs look at years of historical data for the region, when determining what a fire might do.

Each RWCO is also equipped with a "preparedness plan."

"Essentially, it's a template that is flexible. (It) gives you an outline that, under a given set of conditions, this is generally the type of resources you're going to want to have on.....I look at it in that holistic, global view to make sure that, can we cover off from one area to another area? Do we have enough (resources)? If one (zone) is short, are they aware we're short in other areas?"

If you think being an RWCO sounds like organized chaos, it is, Bojahra says with a laugh. "I never really know when I come into work, what the day's going to bring me. Even if it's a slow day, where we're not expecting a fire, there's a number of things that can happen out there that still require attention and some action," he tells KamloopsMatters.

"The last two (wildfire) seasons are prime examples of that, where we were heavily involved with local flood work in the local communities," he adds.

2019 marks Bojahra's 25th year with BC Wildfire Service. He joined the organization when he was 18. "I grew up near the rappel base in Salmon Arm. I actually cross-country skied competitively and a number of the coaches there were members of the rappel crew and I'd hear about what they did and I used to always go out for the Father's Day rappel demonstration every year at the Salmon Arm Airport, and it seemed like the neatest job in the world," says Bojahra.

He laughs that he was a "little too big" for the rappel team at the time. He ended up getting hired as an initial attack firefighter.

"I've always loved the dynamic situation of this role," Bojahra says of being an RWCO. "It can be very difficult when you don't win; those are tough days. But it's very satisfying to coordinate this large group of dedicated people who are so passionate about what they do."

articles by Tereza Verenca, Kamloops Matters