

is causing hotter, drier weather globally that has led to massive forest fire emergencies in recent years in multiple areas around the world. Humans are increasingly causing fires, often in locations where nature would not have caused them. In Ontario about one-third of fires are human caused; in BC and California, which have suffered badly both this year and in recent years, the percentage of human-caused fires is much higher. Our suppression of natural forest fires has also resulted in more “fuel” – denser undergrowth - to be available in most areas, allowing fires that are out of control to burn quicker, hotter and, possibly, larger. We all need to be better prepared for what will come in future.

For more detailed information on the fire and its aftermath please go to: [georgianbay.ca/news/update-on-henvey-inlet-fire](http://georgianbay.ca/news/update-on-henvey-inlet-fire) ■



Key River fire.

## Concerns with MNR Fire Ratings

**M**NRF fire ratings dictate the protocols under which construction and other commercial and industrial activity

must operate in any area subject to a fire restriction.

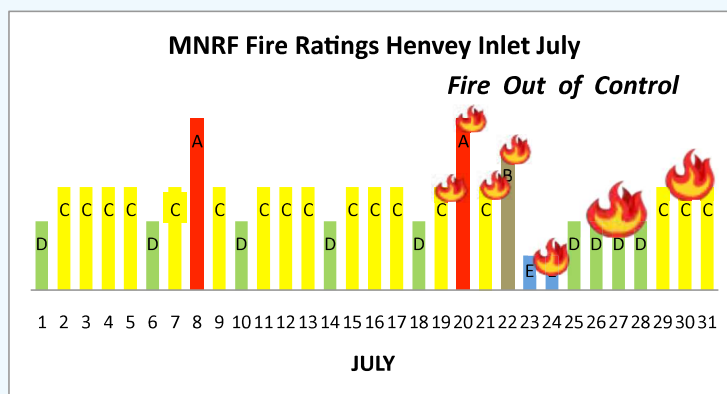
MNRF fire ratings are part of a North American network that includes all of Canada and most of the US, and utilizes a common methodology to calculate fire ratings using data from weather stations (there are about 150 weather stations in northern Ontario).

The variables employed, besides moisture levels measured on April 1st and subsequent precipitation, are temperature, wind speed and direction, humidity and the nature of the forest undergrowth and trees (fuel type).

MNRF has five ratings – Extreme (A-Red); Very High (B-Brown); High (C-Yellow); Moderate (D-Green); and Low (E-Blue).

At the time the fires started on July 19th, the MNRF rating was C, while the neighbouring municipalities of the Township of the Archipelago and Killarney had their highest (Extreme-Red) rating in place throughout July.

Before and after the fire started, MNRF ratings varied primarily between C and D – see graph below.



It is astonishing that MNRF's lowest rating was in place for two consecutive days shortly after the fire started, followed by four days at a D rating at a time when the fire was expanding rapidly and there had been no rain at all!

### Why the difference in fire ratings?

The municipalities simply look at how dry it is, and maintain the extreme, total fire ban level when it is very dry until there is sufficient rain to cautiously bring the rating down. There

was no rain in July and it just got drier and drier. The MNRF fire ratings do not seem to relate to how dry conditions are; this has been a problem for many years. So something appears to be wrong with their system.

This is a public safety issue. The MNRF ratings must be set higher in extremely dry weather, and the strange fluctuations that appear to be unrelated to fire danger should be eliminated. One thought is that their system predated recent climate change impacts that are causing

increasingly dry conditions every summer, and the parameters need to be updated accordingly.

GBA is exploring with MNRF what improvements can be made to improve public safety, and will ask the Ministry to set the ratings higher and err on the side of caution, rather than institute ratings that are too low and too late. It is important to ensure that future construction and other high fire risk commercial activity is strictly curtailed when extremely dry conditions prevail to prevent any more fires of this nature in future years. ■