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GBA UPDATE

News and Information from the Georgian Bay Association

A Tragedy That Should Have Been Avoided

By Rupert Kindersley,
Executive Director



How could this happen? How could this beautiful part of the northern Georgian Bay coast, home to many cottagers, residents, wildlife and endangered species, be destroyed by, apparently, irresponsible human action? Almost 30,000 acres gone – it will take 10-20 years for the area to recover even part of its former glory, and parts will probably never look the same, or provide the same quality of habitat. It is a tragedy that could – indeed should – have been avoided.

It is not in doubt that this fire, named Parry Sound 33, started at or near the Henvey Inlet wind farm construction site, but why did it start? The question that everyone is asking is: Why was high fire risk construction being carried out in such extreme dry conditions?

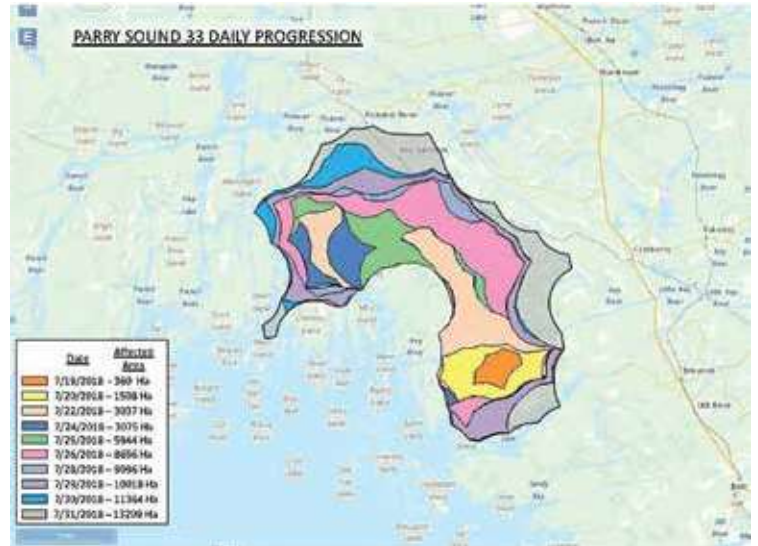
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GBA met with Pattern Development, the developer of the wind farm where the fire started, and will continue to monitor developments. We requested Pattern to ensure that their construction contractor CER and all sub-contractors maintain, for the balance of the project construction, a high level of vigilance, extra fire suppression equipment and conservative operational practices. It appears that Pattern has responded and fire safety protocols are now being followed. The large construction teams are now back working on the wind farm and the transmission line.

GBA will raise questions about the Ministry of Natural Resources & Forestry's (MNRF) oversight of this large construction project in a highly sensitive and dry area. We understand that numerous small fires occurred at this site during July. Local residents saw the smoke. This raises serious questions about whether adequate project management, monitoring and supervision by the developer, the contractor and the government were in place. Why were steps not taken to ensure that these fires stopped happening before "the one that got away"?

The MNRF's investigation into this fire will take a long time, but it is important that the full truth emerges and those



responsible are held to account. GBA is calling for an open and transparent process. We will continue to urge MNRF to make sure this happens, and we will monitor the investigation timing and process, not to mention the results.

GBA will continue to assist the Key River Area Association and the Key River community to recover from this tragedy. We will be asking government to invest resources to restore the area, pointing out the substantial loss of property and the devastation of the ecosystem in such an environmentally important area.

GBA is also concerned with MNRF's current fire rating system, as detailed below. If it is found to be deficient, GBA intends to explore the potential for coordination among MNRF, municipalities and other government agencies to ensure a consistent approach to fire ratings, making use of all available sources of information and local knowledge.

Lessons need to be learned from this fire, and quickly. GBA will continue to advocate that these lessons be reflected in land use and fire management protocols. Forest fires and their effect on the environment, people and property are a complex and increasingly challenging issue. Climate change

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Aerial shot, July 22, 2018



Sandy Bay after the fire. Photo by Jennifer Kivinen, KRAA

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 ■



Key River fire.

Concerns with MNR Fire Ratings

MNRF 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.

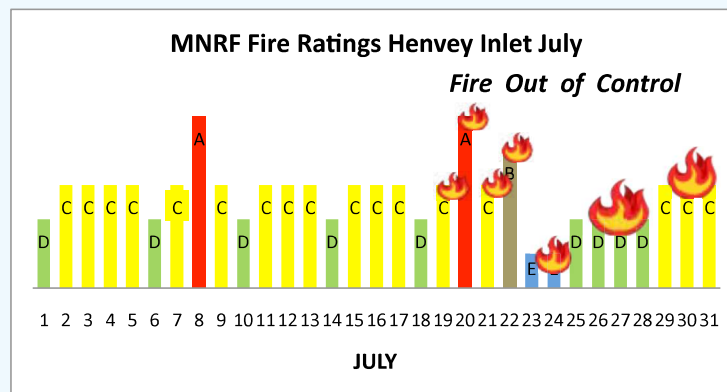
was no rain in July and it just got drier and drier. The MNRF fire ratings do not seem to relate to how dry conditions are; this has been a problem for

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. ■



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