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# WorkBC

## Employment Services Centre

# Horton Ventures Inc.

## Employer Survey Follow-up

### October 2017

Canada 



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## Purpose and Intent

The Horton Venture Inc. (HVI) Employer Survey, located on the [WorkBC HVI website](#), provides a snapshot of the labour market representing small business trends in the communities served by the WorkBC Employment Service Centres in Ashcroft, One Hundred Mile House, and Williams Lake. The survey was conducted during the month of March 2017 and the report was released in May 2017.

As part of the long term planning, HVI intended to follow-up with the Employers who had projected labour force increases and decreases to measure actuals and to offer additional services. This follow-up was scheduled to take place during the month of October 2017.

In consideration of the extreme wildfire events this past summer, HVI made the decision to forego a formal follow-up survey and instead research the current issues affecting the Local Labour Markets. The findings will be used as a starting for point for approaches and strategies to respond to longer term wildfire impacts.

## Wildfires 2017 Timelines

July 6 <sup>th</sup>	<p>The Gustafson wildfire was discovered in the 100 Mile House area with the first Evacuation Order<sup>1</sup> issued 6:05 pm that same day.</p> <p>The Elephant Hill wildfire was discovered in the Ashcroft/Cache Creek area.</p>
July 7	<p>An Evacuation Order<sup>2</sup> was issued on July 7<sup>th</sup> at 4:15 pm for Cache Creek and Ashcroft communities.</p> <p>Numerous wildfires started in the Williams Lake and Cariboo Chilcotin areas mainly from dry lightning strikes and the first Evacuation Order<sup>3</sup> issued 8:00 pm that evening.</p> <p>There were 56 new wildfire starts in BC on July 7, 2017 and a Provincial State of Emergency was declared.</p>
July - September	<p>A hot and dry summer ensued with BC's worst fire season in history that saw 272 fires in the Cariboo. There were numerous community evacuations orders and alerts issued throughout the Thompson Nicola and the Cariboo Regional Districts along with the major centres of Cache Creek, 100 Mile House and Williams Lake.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ 60 homes and 167 structures were lost in the CRD.<sup>4</sup> The hardest hit was 105 Mile, Spokin Lake Road and Miocene, Soda Creek Road, the Plateau Fire area, and the Hanceville area.</li><li>▪ The Elephant Hill wildfire destroyed 130 homes, 76 structures, and 4 Institutional buildings including a Volunteer Fire Hall in the TNRD.<sup>5</sup> This fire traveled over 100 km north and was responsible for 1 loss in the CRD. The hardest hit areas include Boston Flats, Loon Lake, and Pressy Lake.</li></ul>
September 15 <sup>th</sup>	<p>The Provincial State of Emergency was lifted after 10 weeks.</p>
September 20 <sup>th</sup>	<p>The last Evacuation Alert was rescinded for the Highway 24 corridor.</p>

## Survey Method

During the month of October 2017 the HVI Employer Services Team informally interviewed Employers in their local communities to determine changes to staffing levels and skills needs going forward as an impact of fires.

The CCATEC Job Fair in Williams Lake was held on October 4 -5, 2017. The HVI Job Developers from Ashcroft, One Hundred Mile and Williams Lake attended to interact with the 40 employers participating in the event and representing a range of industries and occupations.

Employers were asked open and closed questions such as:

*Were you impacted by the wildfires?*

*How were you impacted by the wildfires?*

*How are you managing with the impacts?*

*What percentage of business revenues was lost?*

*Did all of your employees return following the rescinding of orders and alerts?*

*How many employees did not return following the wildfires?*

*Are you currently looking for employees?*

*What types of positions are you looking to fill?*

*Are there mandatory employment qualifications?*

## Interview Results – Wildfire Impacts

### General

- All businesses interviewed were impacted negatively by the wildfires
- Revenues were lost due to evacuation orders and alerts as well as highway closures and detours
- Operations were scaled back and/or shut down for a period of time forcing lay-offs and production loss
- Businesses that depend on the revenues generated through the summer peak periods were hit hard
- Most businesses had employee loss; evacuees found work elsewhere and did not return to their employers following the rescinding of evacuation orders and alerts
- Lower skilled, low-paying type work saw the greatest numbers of employees not returning to their place of employment following the rescinding of evacuation orders and alerts.
- The majority of employees in higher paying skilled jobs in the Forestry, Mining, and Heavy Construction Industries returned to work following the wildfires, although a few did not
- Clean drivers abstracts, Industry qualifications, and previous experience were noted as typical prerequisites to work in the higher paying skilled job opportunities

## Services, Tourism and Hospitality

- Wildfire affected business along the major corridors of the Fraser Valley and the Cariboo Chilcotin Plateaus tremendously, leaving many without employment, staff, or revenues
- One fast food restaurant in Williams Lake indicated 60% of their staff did not return after the evacuation orders and alerts were rescinded in the area
- Highways closures and detours limited transportation, reducing business operations and impacting tourism and the return of seasonal residents
- Many businesses generate the majority of their revenue in the summer months through tourism
- Some wilderness resorts suffered partial or complete fire loss; for resorts able to save their main structures, the wilderness environment has been devastated
- The negative effect on local businesses resulted in the closure of the Ashcroft - Cache Creek Regional Golf & Country Club
- Back country closures and restrictions placed additional limitations on tourism throughout the regions
- The Tourism, Hospitality, and Services Industries are still facing staffing shortages and are actively recruiting for positions such as Cooks, Dishwasher, Servers, Cashiers, Sales Associates, and Cleaners

## Forestry and Lumber Manufacturing

- Lumber Mills in 100 Mile House, Williams Lake and Chasm, as well as smaller mill operations, were shut down as a result of direct threat from fire
- Over 1.2 million hectares of forest was scorched in BC with an estimated 53 million cubic metres of wood impacted<sup>6</sup>
- Back country closures further restricted forestry and logging operations
- It is not known how timber loss will impact the future of logging and wood product manufacturing
- In the short term forestry may benefit, with operations claiming burnt timber and repurposing them, but as the fires claimed a great amount of merchantable timber there may be a significant log shortage for local sawmills in the long term
- Employment opportunities include Labourers, Saw Operator and various Heavy Equipment Operator positions

## Mining, Heavy Construction and related Support Services

- Mine production near Williams Lake was suspended due to road closures and evacuations of employees living in adjacent areas where wildfires were threatening their homes
- A mine services company based out of Ashcroft is still trying to recoup employees and get operations back up to full capacity production

- Employment opportunities include various Heavy Equipment Operators, Labourers, Heavy Duty Equipment Technician, Welder, Parts person, Clerks, Traffic Control, and IT positions

### Agriculture

- Businesses depending on revenues generated through the summer peak periods were hit hard
- Local produce farms depending on roadside market sales were greatly impacted by highway closures. One family-run orchard indicated a 70% loss in revenue and did not hire seasonal employees as usual
- The BC Cattlemen's Association estimates 30,000 cattle were affected by evacuation orders and fires with devastation to crown range land resulting in loss of grasslands and range fencing
- Some ranches lost structures, pastures, hay crops and hay bales; the extent of cattle loss is still being calculated
- A multi-million dollar dairy farm operation in Cache Creek-Ashcroft lost their main cattle barn

### Transportation

- Various highways closures and detours limited transportation restricting business operations
- A trucking business based out of Cache Creek indicated possibility of reducing business because of employee loss – cannot find qualified Drivers for Super B contracts

### Health Services

- Some smaller, community-based organizations also lost employees
- Both public and private employers have openings such as Receptionist, Cook and Janitor

### Other

- Residential/Commercial Construction was delayed because of the Wildfires, but the Industry is currently very active with recent job postings for experienced tradespersons
- The wildfires caused employment expansion for Wildfire Technicians, Security Guards, and Clean-up/Restoration positions
- Other employment opportunities include Telecommunications Technician, Sales Representative, Camp Cooks, Life Guards, and RCMP

## Conclusion

There has been an initial negative impact to the local labour market, the damage has not been fully assessed, and the disaster recovery process has only just begun. The impact from the wildfires will be complex and will affect industries and occupations in various ways. Post fire restoration activities may contribute to increased labour market activities in the near future but the long term challenges facing the Forestry and Tourism Industries are yet to be determined.

The majority of local employment opportunities are related to Food Services, Accommodations and Retail Sales occupations which typically pay low wages. Employers are having difficulties filling positions.

There are also openings in higher paying skilled jobs but some employers are having a hard time finding qualified applicants.

The HVI Employer Service Team is working with Employers to fill open positions. Horton Ventures Inc. will continue to monitor the job market and communicate all appropriate resources and supports available to employers and job seekers that fit with labour market needs in and around the region.

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## End Notes

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<sup>1</sup> [CRD Orders & Alerts 2017](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Elephant Hill Fire Orders & Alerts](#)

<sup>3</sup> [CRD Orders & Alerts 2017](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Update to structure fire losses in CRD](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Wildfire Damage in the TNRD](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Business Vancouver news](#)