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November 09, 2023
File No.: 0530-02-01

Mayor Gord Milsom
City of West Kelowna
2760 Cameron Road,
West Kelowna, BC V1Z 2T6

Re: Request for an Independent Public Hearing Process Regarding the Grouse Complex
(McDougall Creek) Wildfire

Dear Mayor Milsom,

Thank you for your letter dated October 24, 2023, with the resolution of West Kelowna Council related to the Grouse Complex Wildfire. I share your gratitude and compassion for all who were impacted only just a few months ago, and who demonstrated strength and resilience under strenuous conditions.

I also share your concern regarding the ability of the BC Provincial Emergency Social Services (ESS) program to be effective in responding to the overwhelming scale of the Grouse Complex wildfire. The RDCO and our partners are taking steps to communicate this message from the regional political and administrative level, and to ensure the province seeks feedback from our residents, emergency personnel and others affected by this event.

We have been made aware that the Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Resiliency (EMCR), has an ESS sub-committee (ESS Team), who are tasked to find ways to address the need for more accessible support for evacuees, with specific attention to timely access to short-term financial supports and accommodation. The ESS Team is hosting a series of engagements to gather information in support of the Premiers Task Force on Emergencies.

Our regional Chief Administrative Officer's (CAO's), EOC Representatives and Fire Chiefs met with the Ministry ESS Team to share our concerns with the program and the merit in hearing from individuals in our community. The RDCO has made a formal request to EMCRC to identify an email or online platform for our communities to share their lived ESS experiences directly with the province. We are currently awaiting a response.

While the Province leads the review of the wildfire and social service responses, the RDCO continues to engage with residents most impacted by the wildfire through services offered by the Resiliency Centre, and with our regional partners in delivering services to meet their needs. The Emergency Operation Centre (EOC) is also conducting an after-action review which is a standard debrief process following an EOC activation. For the Grouse Complex Wildfire, a

third-party independent facilitator will be engaged to conduct the review, with a commitment to specifically address the unprecedented volume of evacuations. When complete, the key findings and recommendations will be made available to our regional partners and the public.

This strong relationship and communication between the RDCO and our regional partners was reflected in our unity throughout the Grouse Complex Wildfire. We also recognize and will continue to build relationships with our syilx partners to ensure their participation is embedded in the emergency operation system and processes.

As noted, the RDCO is engaging and leading constructive efforts at the community, local and provincial levels to ensure positive outcomes for our residents. We commit to communicating regularly with our partners as information comes available, whether at the Regional Board table or directly.

We recognize this fire season brought many challenges and we trust that as a community, we can still acknowledge the successes. Homes were saved and most importantly, no lives were lost, which are testaments to the coordinated efforts of our first responders and our regional partners.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Loyal Wooldridge". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Loyal Wooldridge
Chairperson