



July 8, 2026, Issue Brief

As summer conditions continue to evolve across the Kootenay Rockies, wildfire smoke is affecting air quality in parts of the province while drought conditions continue to intensify across several regional watersheds. Although there are currently no active wildfires within the Southeast Fire Centre, new fire restrictions will take effect on July 10 to help reduce the risk of human-caused wildfires.

This issue brief provides an update on current air quality conditions, upcoming fire restrictions, regional drought conditions, and resources that tourism businesses can use to encourage safe and responsible recreation.

Air Quality

While there are currently no active wildfires within the Southeast Fire Centre, smoke from wildfires burning elsewhere in BC and neighbouring jurisdictions may still affect air quality across the Kootenay Rockies. Smoke can travel hundreds of kilometers, meaning local air quality may deteriorate even when there are no nearby fires. As of July 8, the [BC Wildfire Dashboard](#) shows no active wildfires within the Southeast Fire Centre.

The Province has issued an [Air Quality Warning](#) for several regions of BC as wildfire smoke is expected to affect air quality over the next 24-48 hours. Smoke conditions can change quickly, with impacts varying significantly between communities and throughout the day depending on weather patterns and fire activity.

Although not all areas of the Kootenay Rockies are currently experiencing poor air quality, smoke may affect visibility, outdoor recreation, and visitor comfort as conditions evolve. Tourism businesses and destination partners are encouraged to monitor local conditions regularly and be prepared to answer visitor questions as smoke conditions change.

Tourism Implications

Visitors often rely on local tourism businesses and visitor centres for guidance when smoke conditions change. Even when air quality remains acceptably locally, media coverage of wildfires elsewhere can influence travel decisions and create uncertainty.

Consider:

- Monitoring local air quality throughout the day
- Sharing current conditions through your website or social media when appropriate
- Encouraging visitors to adjust to outdoor activities if smoke becomes more noticeable
- Directing visitors to official sources for the latest information

Key Messages to Share with Visitors

- Check the Air Quality Health Index before heading outdoors.
- Reduce or postpone strenuous outdoor activities if smoke levels increase.
- Spend time indoors in a cleaner-air space when conditions are poor.
- Keep vehicle windows closed and set ventilation to recirculate when driving through smoky areas.
- Individuals with asthma, heart or lung conditions, older adults, young children, and pregnant people should take extra precautions.

Learn More

Helpful resources include:

- [Provincial Air Quality Warnings](#)
- [Air Quality Health Index \(AQHI\)](#)
- [Interior Health's](#) guidance on protecting yourself from wildfire smoke
- [Environment and Climate Change Canada's FireWork](#) smoke forecast, which provides a visual forecast of predicted smoke movement over the coming 48 hours

Open Fire Prohibitions

Effective 12:00 pm on Friday, July 10, the BC Wildfire Service will implement a Category 2 Open Fire Prohibition across the Southeast Fire Centre to help reduce the risk of human-caused wildfires during continuing hot and dry conditions.

The prohibition applies to Category 2 open fires – including debris piles, burn barrels and burn cages, air curtain burners, carbonizers, fireworks, and binary exploding targets – and will remain in effect until October 31, 2026, unless rescinded earlier.

Category 1 campfires are not included in this prohibition and continue to be permitted at this time, where local regulations allow. Existing Category 3 Open Fire Prohibitions remain in place.

Tourism Implications

Although Category 1 campfires remain permitted at this time, increasingly dry conditions mean safe campfire practices are more important than ever. Tourism businesses and visitor-facing organizations can play an important role by encouraging visitors to:

- Check for local campfire restrictions before lighting a fire, as temporary bans may be implemented and local regulations can differ.
- Use designate fire pits where provided and follow all posted regulations.
- Never leave a campfire unattended, and ensure it is completely extinguished before leaving. Fires should be cool to the touch before being abandoned.
- Use locally sourced firewood to help prevent the spread of invasive species and avoid collecting wood or damaging vegetation within parks and recreation areas.

Small reminders from trusted local sources can help reduce the risk of human-caused wildfires as conditions continue to dry throughout the region.

Drought Conditions

The introduction of additional fire restrictions reflects the same seasonal trend shown in the province's drought monitoring: landscapes across parts of the region continue to dry as summer progresses. The Province updates drought levels weekly to reflect local water availability and potential impacts on communities and ecosystems.

Current drought levels within the region include:

Watershed	Current Drought Level
Creston	Level 1
Kootenay Lake – West Arm	Level 2
Slocan – Lower Columbia	Level 3

A Level 3 drought indicates that adverse impacts to communities, businesses, agriculture, or ecosystems are possible, while Levels 1 and 2 reflect early stages of increasing water scarcity. Drought levels are expected to continue evolving throughout the summer as weather conditions change.

Tourism Implications

Although drought conditions may not create immediate impacts for most visitors, they are an important indicator of the region’s overall wildfire risk and water availability. As conditions continue to dry, tourism businesses can help promote responsible recreation by encouraging visitors to:

- Follow all wildfire restrictions and practice safe campfire use.
- Conserve water where requested by local communities or accommodations.
- Stay informed about current wildfire conditions and local advisories.
- Respect any temporary closures or restrictions implemented to protect natural areas.

Monitoring drought conditions alongside wildfire activity helps provide a broader understanding how seasonal risks are evolving across the Kootenay Rockies and where wildfire risk may continue to increase.

Learn More:

- [BC Drought Portal](#)
- [BC Wildfire Service](#)

Resource Spotlight

Camper's Code – Practice Fire Safety

As summer recreation continues and wildfire risk increases, the [Camper's Code – Practice Fire Safety](#) resource offers practical guidance that tourism businesses can share with visitors. The resource reinforces key fire safety practices, including checking local fire restrictions, using designated fire pits, keeping campfires small, and never leaving a fire unattended, ensuring fires are completely extinguished, and using locally sourced firewood to help prevent the spread of invasive species.

This resource may be useful for sharing through websites, social media, campground communications, or visitor information channels.

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