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Patrick Wruck
Commission Secretary and Manager
Regulatory Support
British Columbia Utilities Commission
Suite 410, 900 Howe Street
Vancouver, BC V6Z 2N3

Dear Patrick Wruck:

**RE: British Columbia Utilities Commission (BCUC or Commission)
British Columbia Hydro and Power Authority (BC Hydro)
Emergency Response and Wildfires Mitigation Plans**

BC Hydro writes in response to the BCUC's March 25, 2022 letter requesting a summary of any significant updates or changes to our Emergency Response and Wildfire Mitigation Plans, as well as a high-level debrief of our 2021 wildfire season. BC Hydro has identified and made a number of changes to our Emergency Response and Wildfire Mitigation Plans, as outlined below. While the Plans have not been substantially revised, these improvements have been reflected in our existing documentation.

2021 Wildfire Season

2021 was a severe and damaging wildfire season in British Columbia. In mid-June 2021, an unprecedented heat wave across large parts of the province caused large areas in the Interior to experience high to extreme wildfire risk, and, on June 30, 2021, a wildfire destroyed the town of Lytton, B.C. In response to this and several other large wildfires that broke out across the province, BC Hydro's Interior Regional Emergency Operations Centre was activated on July 2, 2021.

The wildfire season continued to escalate, and, on August 9, 2021, BC Hydro's Emergency Coordination Centre was activated to support evacuation planning. The Provincial Government declared a province-wide state of emergency that was in effect from July 20 to September 14, 2021.

The 2021 wildfire season had significant impacts on BC Hydro's system and customers. There were over 21,000 customer outages and, following the fires, BC Hydro crews replaced over 700 damaged poles, 58 of which were transmission structures. It is

estimated that total costs to BC Hydro for the 2021 wildfire season, including labour, materials and services, is in excess of \$12 million.

The effort to mitigate and manage the resulting impacts of the 2021 wildfire season was also significant. More BC Hydro teams than ever before were involved in the prevention, mitigation, response and recovery efforts. Key activities included monitoring, planning, information sharing and liaising, field response, communications, development of evacuation planning, and overall support to BC Wildfire Services and restoration by crews in the field.

Lessons Learned

Following the 2021 wildfire season, we identified areas that worked well and areas for improvement, which are being actioned in advance of this year's wildfire season.

The areas that worked well were:

- Approved Safety Management Plans were established outlining equipment and procedures for crews to work safely in areas impacted by wildfires;
- The emergency management structure provided good coordination internally and externally including liaising with agencies such as BC Wildfire Services, critical infrastructure owners and operators, Indigenous Nations, and communities; and
- Existing tools and processes for situational awareness such as the Emergency Operations Dashboard provided valuable, real time information.

The following areas were identified as opportunities for improvement:

- Improve safety planning and responsibilities to be clearer and facilitate better reporting in areas where BC Wildfire is the Prime Contractor;
- Improve evacuation planning and tracking for employees and facilities in impacted areas; and
- Improve reporting of damage and risk assessment to be easier to use and interpret.

Changes to our Emergency Response and Wildfire Mitigation Plans

As a result of the 2021 wildfire season and the subsequent debrief that identified areas for improvement, BC Hydro has undertaken a number of changes to improve our Emergency Response and Wildfire Mitigation Plans. Additionally, we have plans for further changes over the coming fiscal year to continue strengthening our wildfire response program.

To improve safety planning and responsibilities, BC Hydro has updated our Safety Management Plans. Updates include standardizing equipment and procedures for crews

working in impacted areas, including the use of respirators. This will allow BC Hydro to respond quicker to wildfires as crews are familiar with safety procedures and have the appropriate equipment ahead of time.

To improve evacuation planning and response, BC Hydro has developed new guidelines for people leaders and workers to follow should an Evacuation or Order be issued for their community or reporting work location. These new guidelines will allow BC Hydro to ensure staff safety and clarify expectations for workers who reside in an impacted area.

To improve damage and risk assessment and reporting, BC Hydro has enhanced its Wildfire Danger Rating Mobile App to include a workflow that allows for the electronic documentation of job site wildfire risk assessments. Additionally, we improved our methods to assess and report infrastructure damages by implementing Graphic Information System tools that can extract reported damages and send them to BC Hydro's web-based mapping application. As a result, data can then be sorted by time, asset type and location. Additional work is underway to further integrate damage assessment reporting into mapping.

Additionally, as part of assuring our Emergency Management Program, we have completed the annual review and update of our wildfire protocols that provide communications and reporting instructions between BC Hydro and the BC Wildfire Service. We also updated protocols for safe working practices by Front Line Workers in areas under Evacuation Alert or Order.

Fiscal 2023 Plans for Improvement

The severity and extent of damage from the 2021 wildfire season identified more extensive and long-term changes that BC Hydro needs to make to its Emergency Response and Wildfire Mitigation Plans.

BC Hydro is continuing to refine and mature its wildfire preparedness through updates to the Wildfire Management Program. The Program defines governance of wildfire prevention and response across BC Hydro and confirms roles and responsibilities to achieve greater collaboration and efficiency to mitigate and respond to wildfires.

For further information, please contact Alicia Henderson at 604-623-4381 or by email at bchydroregulatorygroup@bchydro.com.

Yours sincerely,



Chris Sandve
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