

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE
For
Inter-Agency Forest Fire Coordination Group (IFFCG)



Katsho Forest Fire 2025



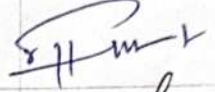
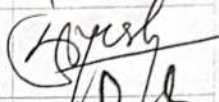


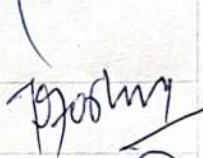

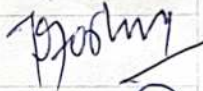

HAA DZONGKHAG

February 17, 2026



APPROVAL SHEET

IFFCG MEMBERS


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INCIDENT MANAGER


CHIEF FORESTRY OFFICER
Divisional Forest Office, Paro.


CHIEF FORESTRY OFFICER
Jigme Khesar Strict Nature Reserve (JKSNR)

INCIDENT COMMANDER


DZONGDAG
Dzongkhag Administration, Haa

17.02.2026.

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1. Background

Forests, as a vital component of ecological wealth, play a crucial role in the socio-economic development and environmental well-being of the country. Recognizing its ecological significance, forest conservation has been prioritized, and robust policy frameworks have been established to protect these natural resources. The Constitution of the Kingdom underscores this commitment by mandating that at least 60 percent of the country’s land area remain under forest cover. Thus, Article 5 of the Constitution of Bhutan states that “*Every Bhutanese is a trustee of the Kingdom's natural resources and environment and it is the fundamental duty of every citizen to contribute to the protection of the natural environment, conservation of the rich biodiversity of Bhutan*”. Currently, 69.71 percent of the nation’s geographical area is under the forest cover.

However, forests continue to face persistent threats from deforestation and degradation, driven by various factors such as forest pests and diseases, forest fires, rising demand for timber, and developmental activities. Among these, forest fires pose the most significant threat, challenging the Constitutional mandate to maintain 60 percent forest cover. The prevalence of coniferous forests, coupled with the country's steep and rugged terrain, makes effective fire suppression extremely difficult.

Haa Dzongkhag is also vulnerable to forest fire risks. According to Forest Monitoring and Information Division (FMID) 2023, 64.46% of the district’s total area is covered by forest. Of this forest cover, 31.29% consists of Fir forests, 21.09% of Cool Broadleaved forests, 14.06% of Evergreen Oak forests, 12.25% of Warm Broadleaved forests, and 4.31% of Blue pine forests (Forest Type Map of Bhutan, 2022) (Table 1).

Table 1. Forest type and cover percent

Forest type	Area (ha)	Percent
Blue Pine Forest	5409.94	4.31
Cool Broadleaved Forest	26478.81	21.09
Evergreen Oak Forest	18150.69	14.46
Fir Forest	39275.7	31.29
Hemlock Forest	10535.16	8.39
Juniper Rhododendron Scrub	5235.07	4.17
Spruce Forest	4081.76	3.25
Warm Broadleaved Forest	15380.88	12.25
Subtropical Forest	977.19	0.78
Total	125525.2	100

Due to its high coverage by conifer forests especially Fir and Blue pine forest coupled with high land surface temperature and low rainfall in the valley, risk of forest fire is imminent and difficult to control.

The trend of forest fire has been increasing as per the record from 2018 to 2025 (Figure 1). Most of the forest fires have occurred in Blue pine forests due to the high inflammability and proximity to the settlement (Figure 2).

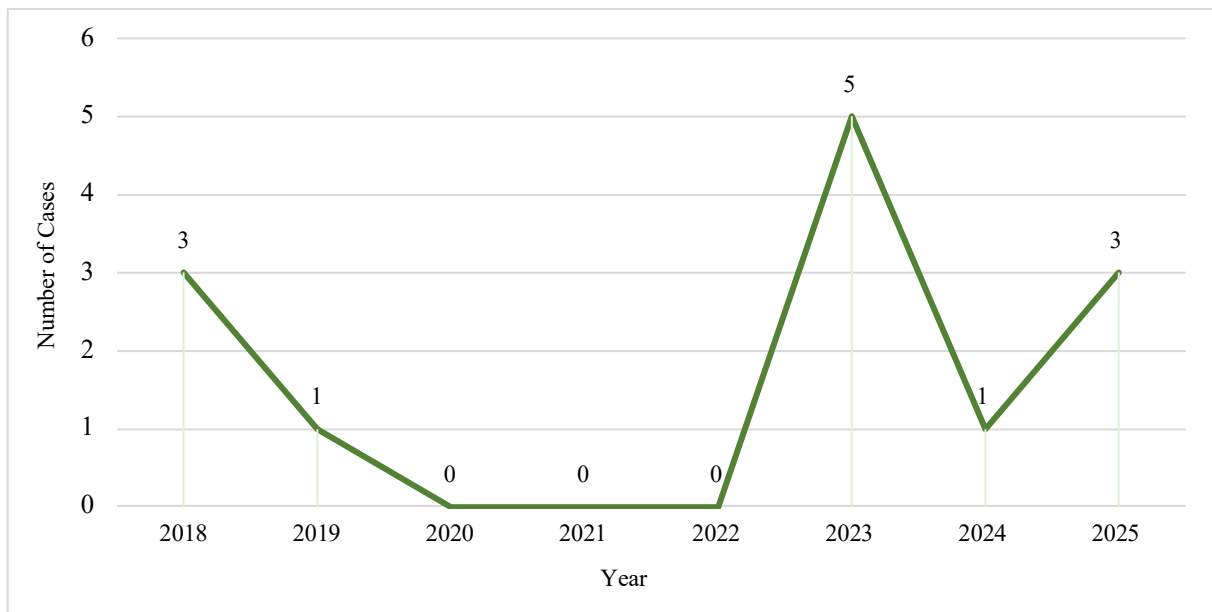


Figure 1. Trend of Forest fire from 2018 to 2025.

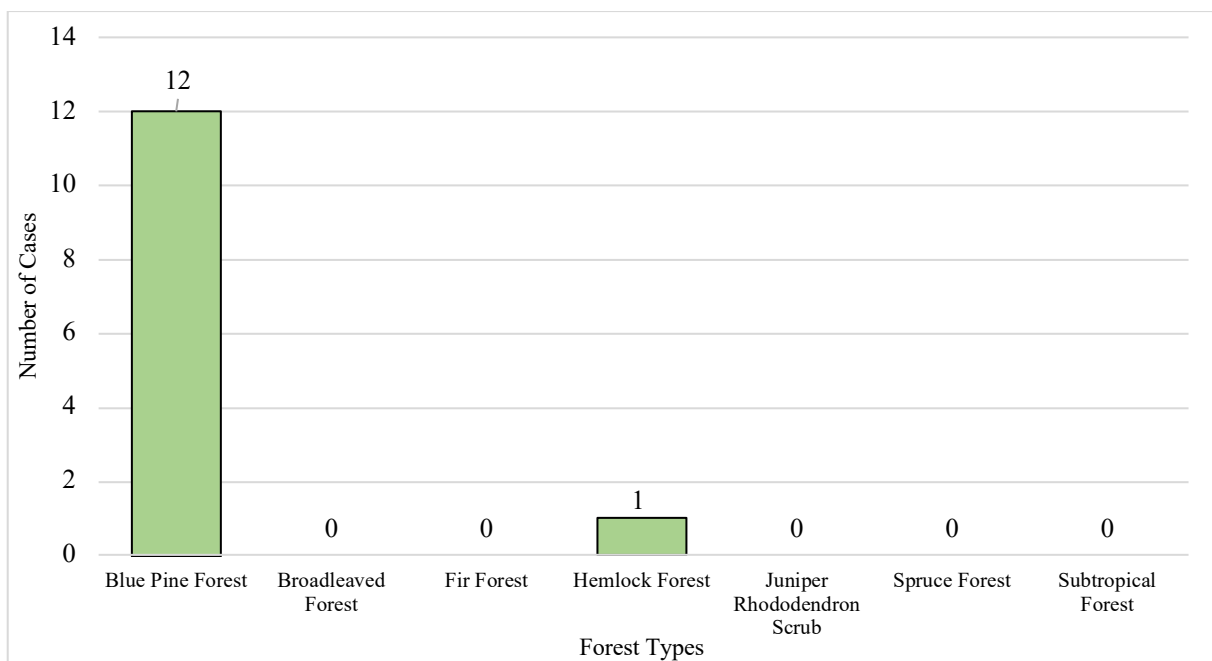


Figure 2. Forest fire frequency by forest types

1.1. Legal Provisions

The Constitution of Bhutan mandates that the Government shall ensure that a minimum of 60 percent of the country's total land area is maintained under forest cover for all time. Section 193 of the Forest and Nature Conservation Act of Bhutan (FNCA) 2023 stipulates that setting fire to State Reserved Forest Land or State Land constitutes an offence and is punishable by fines. In addition, Section 152 of the Forest and Nature Conservation Rules and Regulations of Bhutan (FNCRR) 2023 provides that the Department shall establish an Inter-Agency Forest Fire Coordination Group and Community-Based Forest Fire Management Groups.

In alignment with the Constitutional mandate that emphasizes the fundamental duty of every citizen to protect the natural environment, the Inter-Agency Forest Fire Coordination Group (IFFCG) was first established in 2017 for Thimphu Dzongkhag. Thus, Haa Dzongkhag has developed this Standard Operating Procedure to foster collaboration among various agencies including local communities in forest fire prevention and suppression efforts in the Dzongkhag.

1.2. Objectives

The objectives of the SoP are:

- 1.2.1. To facilitate efficient coordination between stakeholders before, during and after forest fire incidents and optimal allocation of resources for all forest fire suppression activities.
- 1.2.2. To enhance immediate response to forest fires and ensure the safety of firefighters.
- 1.2.3. To delineate roles and responsibilities for the IFFCG members.

1.3. Groups

The IFFCG shall have a Coordination Group and a Rapid Response Team. The Dzongdag shall be the overall Incident Commander of forest fire. In his absence, Dzongrab shall substitute as an Incident Commander.

i) Coordination Group

The Coordination Group shall discuss and plan to prevent forest fires, and also coordinate and mobilize manpower and resources at the time of forest fire depending on the severity of the incident. The regular group meeting and discussion shall be conducted at the Emergency Operation Centre (EOC). The

group shall have a communication group in WhatsApp for discussions or information sharing at all times. The IFFCG shall make a medical support team available if medical emergencies arise. The group shall conduct regular meetings to share experiences and plan way forward. The group shall comprise of the following members (Table 2).

Table 2. List of representatives for Coordination Group members

Sl. No.	Agency representatives	Responsibility	Contact Number
1	Dzongdag	Incident Commander	+975 17176888
2	Wing Commander, RBA, Damthang (Wing XI)	Member	+975 17619982
3	SI, Demo Coy.	Member	+97517694285
4	Drungpa, Sombaykha Dungkhag	Member	+975 77288490
5	OC, RBP	Member	+975 17233383
6	Chief Forestry Officer, DFO, Paro	Incident Manager	+975 17939275
7	Chief Forestry Officer, JKSNR	Incident Manager	+975 77288490
8	Thromde Ngotshab	Member	+975 77353299
9	Gup, Bji Gewog	Member	+975 17682055
10	Gup, Gakiling Gewog	Member	+975 77238333
11	Gup, Katsho Gewog	Member	+975 77660154
12	Gup, Esu Gewog	Member	+975 77212513
13	Gup, Samar Gewog	Member	+975 77304104
14	Gup, Sombaykha Gewog	Member	+975 77985518
15	De-suung coordinator	Member	+975 77288490
16	Manager, BPC	Member	+975 17116812
17	Manager, Bhutan Telecom	Member	+975 17113279
18	Manager, TashiCell InfoComm	Member	+975 77955971
19	Dzongkhag Public Health Officer (DPHO)	Member	+975 17648612
20	Bhutan Red Cross Society	Member	+975 17614186

Note: During the Interim Local Government period, the administrative officer shall assume membership responsibilities in place of the Gup.

ii) Rapid Response Team

The Rapid Response Team (RRT) is formed for immediate response to forest fire incidents. The group shall attempt for immediate suppression of forest fire and update the situation to the Coordination Group for further support. The DDMO shall report to the Incident Commander on the onset of forest fire. The group shall also conduct preliminary investigation on the cause of forest fire. The group shall comprise of officials from the following offices (Table 3). The RRT member concerned shall be responsible for immediately coordinating efforts for any fire incident in their respective jurisdiction.

Table 3. List of Rapid Response Team members

Sl. No.	Agency representatives	Contact Number
1	Range Officer, Haa Forest Range Office (Team Leader)	+975 17611310
	Range Officer, Bji Forest Range, JKSNR (Team leader)	+975 17542375
2	Dzongkhag Disaster Management Officer (DDMO)	+975 17917320
3	Officer Commanding, RBP	+975 17233383
4	Adjutant, RBA Damthang	+975 17619982
5	De-suung Gojey	+975 17121584
6	Range Officer, Sombaykha	+975 17805598
7	Range Officer, Gakiling	+975 17734800
8	Unit In-Charge, Haa-East FMU	+975 17686612
9	Unit In-Charge, Lonchu FMU	+975 17484195
10	Unit Incharge, Selela FMU	+975 17429523
11	Production Incharge, Haa-East FMU, NRDCL	+975 17172933
12	Production Incharge, Lonchu FMU, NRDCL	+975 17696426
13	Production Incharge, Selela FMU, NRDCL	+975 17681168
14	Chiwog Tshogpas (Annexure III)	
15	BPC officials (Site In-charges)	

Three stages shall be followed to address the forest fire. They are forest fire prevention, forest fire suppression and post fire management.

2. Forest fire prevention

2.1. Awareness programs

The Divisional and Park Offices along with Dzongkhag Administration shall create awareness on forest fire prevention through various media such as BBSC, local TV channels and social media regularly before the onset of the dry season. Targeted awareness including clear reporting of the incident shall be carried out in local communities. The Gewog Administration shall create awareness to local communities to refrain from debris burning, campfire and *sang* offerings in their respective Gewogs before the onset of dry season.

The forest office concerned shall create awareness on forest fire prevention during meetings organized at the Gewogs and Dzongkhag in collaboration with Gups, DDMO and BPC.

Furthermore, the forest office concerned in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, shall create awareness on forest fire based on the existing FNCA and FNCRR to the local communities.

2.2. Agricultural debris burning

The Gewog/Thromde Administration shall issue permits for burning of agriculture and other debris wherever necessary and intimate to the Divisional or Park office as per Section 10 of FNCRR (Amendment) 2025.

2.3. Clearing of Power infrastructures (Transmission lines and transformers)

The BPC shall clear vegetation around the power infrastructures (transformers and along the transmission lines) before the onset of dry season as per the Section 11 of FNCRR (Amendment) 2025. The Division/Park Office shall facilitate the removal of forest produce along the transmission lines that pose a risk of forest fire ignition.

2.4.Capacity building

Considering safety concerns and requirement of effective command system, the Dzongkhag Administration, Divisional and Park Offices shall plan and organize training on firefighting techniques, use of equipment handling and communication protocol for the Rapid Response Team (RRT). The Divisional and Park office along with Dzongkhag Administration will source funds for the training in collaboration with the DoFPS and Department of Local Governance and Disaster Management (DLGDM). In addition, the Divisional and Park Offices shall impart training to relevant stakeholders from member agencies and local communities on safety measures, prescribed burning techniques and fire-line creation once before the onset of dry season.

2.5.Infrastructures

The Dzongkhag and Gewog Administration shall plan and construct water reservoirs around lhakhangs, national monuments and cluster settlements, and mapped for use during fire emergencies. These water reservoirs shall support firefighting efforts through the deployment of fire engines, water pumps, fire hydrants and water bags in the event of a fire. Community and private lhakhangs shall construct water reservoirs or ponds near their lhakhangs and the Division/Park and Gewog Administration shall monitor and report to the Dzongkhag Administration. The BPC shall construct adequate fire breaks around transformers and other installations. The BPC shall monitor and clear right of way along the transmission lines by December.

2.6.Creation and maintenance of fireline

Settlements and monuments located near forested areas are particularly vulnerable to the threat of forest fires, making the creation of fire lines a critical preventive measure. The Dzongkhag Administration shall identify potential risk areas around national monuments and settlements and map with help from the Department of Local Government and Disaster Management. The Gewog Administration in collaboration with the Dzongkhag Administration shall plan and mobilize resources and manpower, whereas, the Division/Park shall provide technical support. Gewog Administration shall coordinate annual maintenance of firelines around the settlements and community lhakhangs.

2.7. Tools and Equipment

The Dzongkhag Administration, Division/Park shall prioritize the supply of Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs) and tools for the RRT members. In addition, the member agencies shall be responsible for purchasing equipment if there is fund provision or shall propose a budget. The Dzongkhag Administration, Division/Park shall also facilitate the supply of equipment depending on the availability of funds. Following are the lists of basic tools for RRT (Annexure I). The leader of the response team for respective offices shall maintain the stock register and record of issue and ensure they are returned after the forest fire. The IFFCG members shall explore funding, procure firefighting tools and equipment for use by the fire fighters (Annexure I).

2.8. Monitoring

The DDMO, Division/Park and Gewog Administration shall regularly monitor any incidence of forest fire during the dry season especially around the settlements, power infrastructures and lhakhangs and report to the IFFCG in case of any forest fire incident. The BPC shall monitor along the transmission lines regularly especially during dry seasons.

2.9. Coordination meeting

The IFFCG coordination meeting shall be organized by the Division/Park and DDMO twice in a year to address issues and plan a way forward to strengthen the IFFCG.

3. Forest Fire Suppression

3.1. Operational procedure for the forest fire incident management

On the first day of the incidence

1. Any member of the two groups getting the first-hand information shall immediately inform both the IFFCG and the RRT through phone call or WhatsApp on the occurrence of a forest fire.
2. The RRT led by a representative from the Division/Park shall visit the forest fire site immediately for situation assessment and suppression by involving local people of the area without having to wait for the instruction from the IFFCG. The response team shall form a team to collect evidence on the occurrence of forest fire through a preliminary investigation. The

- RRT led by Division/Park shall report to the Coordination Group on the status of the fire and update on the requirement of resource support.
3. If the fire is beyond control of the RRT, the RRT shall report to the Coordination Group. The Coordination group shall accordingly mobilize additional resources (tankers, fire engine, etc.) wherever accessible.
 4. An Agency deploying manpower for firefighting must send their people with necessary equipment in teams with a team leader. Each team from an agency must report to the Incident Commander or authorized representative at the indicated vantage point.
 5. The Division/Park will lead the investigation supported by the RBP on the cause of forest fire from the first day of forest fire incident for necessary action.

On the subsequent days

6. If the firefighting operation extends over more days, the Division/Park representative shall give the *Situational Report* to the Incident Commander in the Coordination Group.
7. The Incident Commander, representatives from RBA, RBP and Division/Park shall meet at the EOC for debriefing and plan for deployment modality.
8. The Coordination Group members shall accordingly mobilize the resources for the following days as per the recommendation.
9. The DDMO shall facilitate the arrangement of logistics for the firefighters. In the absence of the DDMO, the respective Gewog Administrative Officer shall coordinate these arrangements in consultation with the DDMO.
10. The firefighters must report at the indicated vantage point for briefing for the day on mentioned time.
11. The Incident Commander/authorized representative shall brief the firefighters on direction of firefighting, personal safety, team work, equipment handling, place and time of reporting back in the evening.
12. In case of deployment of manpower for night duty, the Gewog Administration shall nominate local communities in collaboration with RBP.

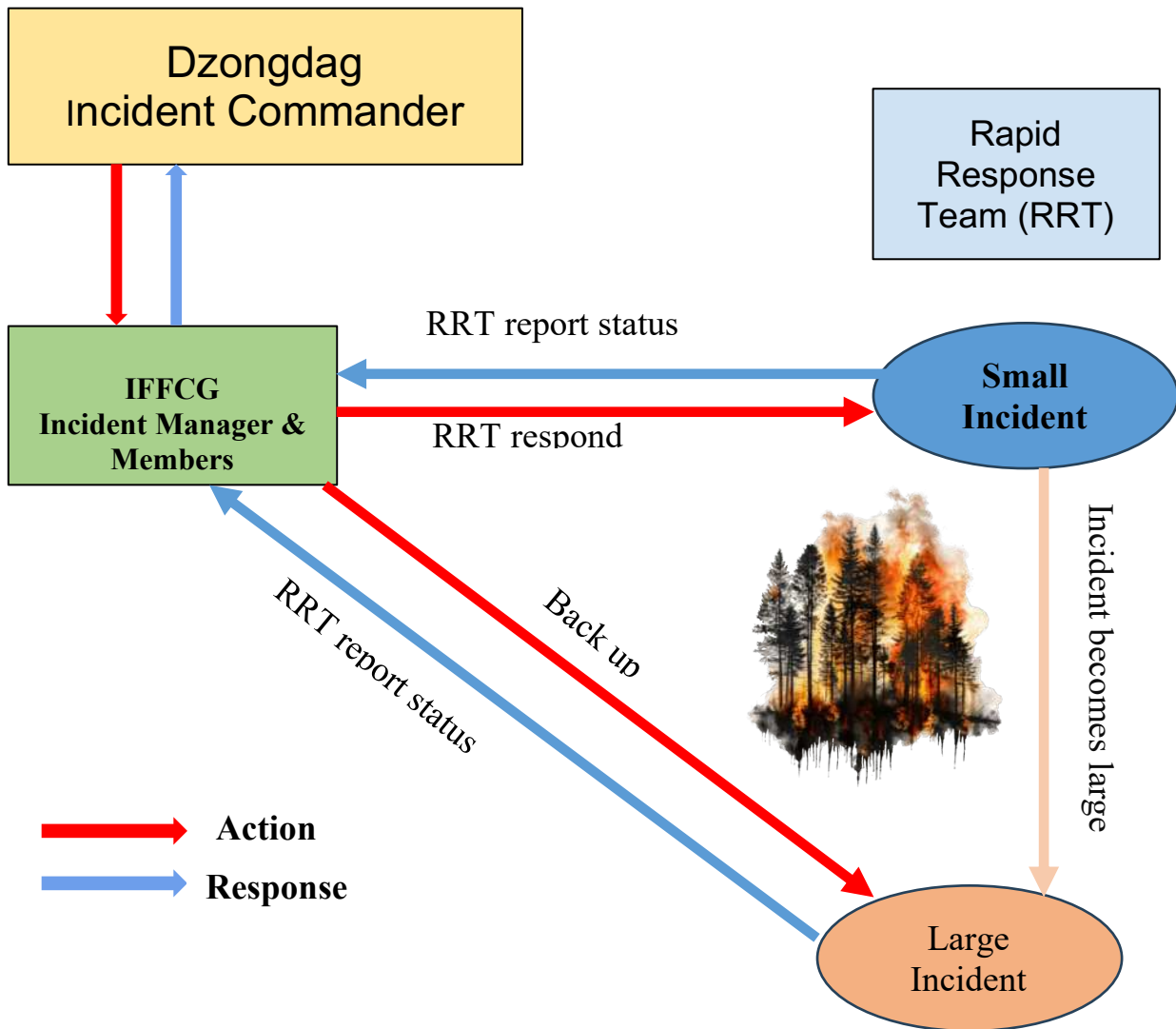
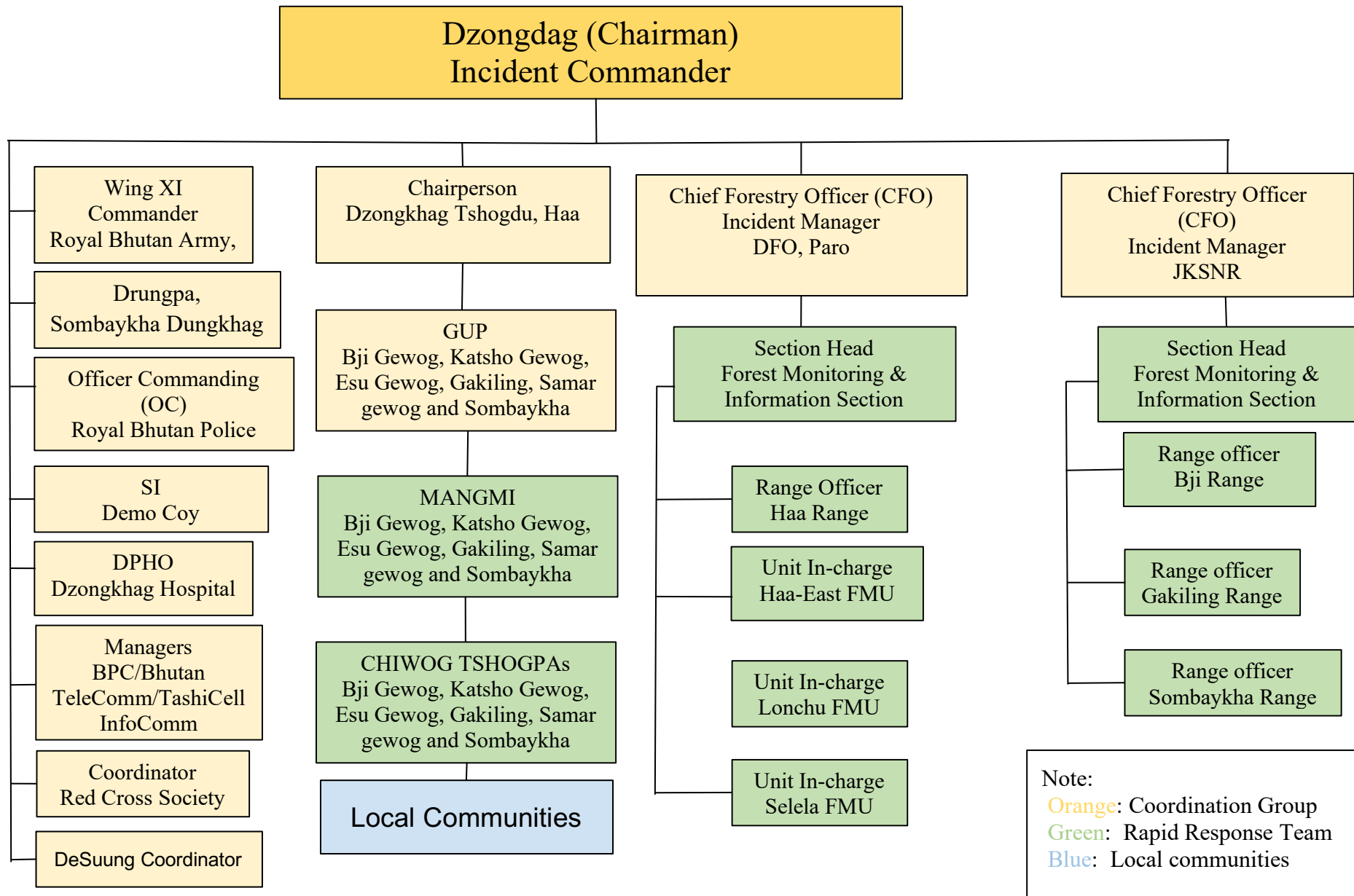


Figure 3. Flow Chart on Operational Procedures during Forest Fire

4. Post fire action

The Division/Park shall assess the impact of forest fire and submit a Forest Fire Report in a prescribed format to the DoFPS with a copy to the IFFCG. The Division/Park along with RBP shall prepare a detailed investigation report including challenges faced, lessons learnt and a set of actionable recommendations shall be submitted to the IFFCG. The Division/Park shall appraise the Department for post fire management activities such as extraction of fire burnt trees and plantation.



ANNEXURE I: TOOLS AND EQUIPMENTS

Table 4. Personal protective equipment

Sl. No.	Name of equipment	Haa Range	JKSNR	Requirement (nos.)
1	Mask (N95)	0	0	25
2	Gloves	0	0	50
3	Safety goggles	0	0	25
4	Helmet	5	27	25
5	Searchlight Torch	0	0	50
6	Water bottle	0	0	0
7	Safety rope (4 meters)	0	0	0
8	Machete (<i>Patang</i>)	0	20	15

Table 5. Firefighting tools and equipment

Sl. No.	Name of tools	Haa Range	JKSNR	Requirement (nos.)
1	Water bag	11	12	30
2	Rake	20	0	25
3	Shovel	0	0	0
4	Flappers	35	24	0
5	Collapsible water tank	0	0	2
6	Chainsaw of different size	0	0	2
7	Drone for fire monitoring and water transportation	0	0	1
8	Communication handsets	6	0	10
9	Water tanker (in areas accessible by road)	0	0	1
10	Portable water pump	0	0	1
11	Fire engine	0	0	1
12	Blowers	0	0	2
13	Spades	0	6	10
14	Drip torch	0	0	2
15	Flexible pipe	0	0	2

ANNEXURE II: SITUATIONAL REPORT FORM

1. Location:

2. Time and Date of Incidence:

3. Area Burnt (ha/ac):

4. Cause(s) of Fire:

Natural Human-induced Unknown

If known, specify: _____

5. Offender Detected:

Yes No

If yes, details: _____

6. Accessibility of Site:

Easy Moderate Difficult

Remarks: _____

7. Manpower Deployed:

8. Resources Mobilized:

(e.g. flappers, water tankers, chainsaws, vehicles, PPE)

9. Human Casualty:

Nil Injured Fatal

Details: _____

10. Property Damaged:

Nil Yes

Details: _____

11. Status of the Forest Fire:

Active Under Control Extinguished

Remarks: _____

12. Potential Risk:

(e.g. nearby settlements, monuments)

13. Resources Required:

14. Manpower Required:

15. Place and Time of Reporting:

16. Remarks:

**Report Submitted By
Name & Designation:**

Office/Unit:

Phone Number:

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

ANNEXURE III: CONTACT DETAILS OF CHIWOG TSHOGPAS

	Bji Gewog	Phone Number	Remarks
1	Chempa-Gaychukha Tshogpa	+975 77810275	
2	Chumpa-Jamdoe Tshogpa	+975 17684556	
3	Gyensa-Tokay Tshogpa	+975 77899849	
4	Yangthang-Yangoen Tshogpa	+975 17674912	
5	Talung-Tsenka Tshogpa	+975 77698284	

	Esu Gewog	Phone Number	Remarks
1	Kana-Geyruna Tshogpa	+975 17399613	
2	Pajekha-Sangkiri Tshogpa	+975 17570956	
3	Tshaphel-Tsiloongkha Tshogpa	+975 17731381	
4	Domchhog-Beytsho Tshogpa	+975 17907196	
5	Kipri-Takchu-Bangayna Tshogpa	+975 17415179	

	Gakiling Gewog	Phone Number	Remarks
1	Dorithasa-Kaukha-Yangtse Tshogpa	+975 17346334	
2	Sertena-Fenteyna Tshogpa	+975 77277343	
3	Thangdokha-Saidzong Tshogpa	+975 17904951	
4	Ngatse-Putsena Tshogpa	+975 77447720	
5	Rangtse-Youkha-Tanga Tshogpa	+975 77265957	

	Katsho Gewog	Phone Number	Remarks
1	Wangtsa-Churigang Tshogpa	+975 17610677	
2	Bali-Mombaytshokha Tshogpa	+975 77217089	
3	Kargoen-Yatam Tshogpa	+975 17957971	
4	Ingo-Pharikha Tshogpa	+975 77461148	
5	Drading-Kajena Tshogpa	+975 17610449	

	Samar Gewog	Phone Number	Remarks
1	Shari Tshogpa	+975 77317945	
2	Puduna-Jyankana Tshogpa	+975 17740790	
3	Dorikha-Lombjigang Tshogpa	+975 17869958	
4	Langpa-Nubgang Tshogpa	+975 17747600	
5	Balamna Tshogpa	+975 77366627	

	Sombaykha Gewog	Phone Number	Remarks
1	Sambay-Ama Tshogpa	+975 77298042	
2	Nakha-Tashigang Tshogpa	+975 17663224	
3	Bebji-Mochhu Tshogpa	+975 77306808	
4	Yaba-Shayma Tshogpa	+975 17640570	
5	Shaba-Shebje Tshogpa	+975 77285492	