



HOME AGAIN

Recovery after the
Wood Buffalo Wildfire

“It did seem to have a brain. It did seem to want to do things that we didn’t want it to do. It seemed to come up with its own plan and fight us at every level.”

~ Darby Allen, Regional Fire Chief,
Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo

MINISTER'S MESSAGE



This has been a summer many Albertans will never forget. The wildfire that devastated Wood Buffalo in the early days of May changed the lives of tens of thousands of people who had to flee their homes, most with no certainty as to when or even if they would be able to return.

In the months since the fire, I have been moved by the strength and resiliency of the many people now faced with rebuilding their homes, their businesses and their lives. I have been equally struck by the caring and generosity demonstrated by the people of our province as they rallied to help their fellow Albertans.

I have been impressed but I have not been surprised. Albertans have long been known for their strength of character and resiliency in the face of challenges. While few of us wish to be tested, when that time comes – as it did this summer for

residents of Wood Buffalo – Albertans always rise to the occasion.

It's hard to believe that the wildfire disaster occurred six months ago. In some ways, it seems much longer, while in other ways, it feels like barely any time has passed at all. One thing that is for certain: we are on our way.

It's going to be a long road, but every step we take and every decision we make that supports those affected by this disaster will bring us closer to our end goal of recovery for the people, businesses and communities of the Wood Buffalo area.

This six-month report tells the story of the wildfire and, most importantly, the many ways Albertans, our government and our partners worked together to make this region home again.

Danielle Larivee, *Minister of Municipal Affairs*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Wood Buffalo wildfire was an event that affected tens of thousands of individuals, and was one of the most significant disasters in Alberta's history. Our province – from first responders to everyday Albertans – immediately pulled together. Our collective efforts helped ensure the safe evacuation of more than 88,000 people, and ensured temporary accommodations and other necessities were available for displaced families. The wildfire response and the extraordinary efforts to address the needs of those forced from their homes demonstrated courage, strength, and the true spirit of Albertans and Canadians.

Fighting the wildfire, supporting the evacuation, and coordinating the re-entry was just the beginning. The Government of Alberta recognized that extraordinary provincial supports would be needed to help returning residents and their leadership with recovery and returning to a new normal for the region. Premier Rachel Notley created a Task Force to coordinate provincial recovery activities and to make quick decisions in support of the Wood Buffalo region's recovery.

Through the Task Force, the Government of Alberta is focusing on providing assistance to the Wood Buffalo region to support five pillars of recovery: people, economy, reconstruction, environment, and mitigation. The province is also building relationships with and acting as a connector between the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, Indigenous communities, the Canadian Red Cross, industry, and the federal government. These partners will continue to collaborate and support one another to help make the region home again.

The Government of Alberta is committed to ensuring the right resources are available to support the overall physical, mental and social well-being of Albertans. This includes mental health supports to all those affected by the wildfire.

Another integral recovery commitment is supporting businesses, many of which were already struggling prior to the wildfire. The Government of Alberta continues to work with the Canadian Red Cross to assist small businesses affected by the wildfire through grant programs to help with equipment, cleanup and property damage costs. The Government of Alberta is supporting safe and responsible rebuilding and is encouraging the involvement of local companies and workers for reconstruction in partnership with the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo. Assistance will continue to be provided to ensure residents are equipped with the information they require around rebuilding, dealing with landlord and tenant issues, fraud prevention, and utility concerns.

As recovery work proceeds, the Government of Alberta will monitor long-term environmental impacts and take action to mitigate risks, if required. There will continue to be enhanced air, soil, and water monitoring to identify and track long-term impacts of the wildfire, including communities downstream from the impacted river systems, as well as any cumulative environmental effects.

Finally, the Government of Alberta is committed to investing in disaster reduction by supporting the mitigation of wildfire and other public safety risks. Reports have been commissioned to identify lessons learned out of the response and early recovery efforts and to review the province's wildfire preparedness and response. Through this information, as well as through Alberta's FireSmart program, disaster preparedness and flood mitigation activities, the Government of Alberta will seek to further reduce the risk of disasters and emergencies in the Wood Buffalo area and all Alberta communities.



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BACKGROUND

On May 1, 2016, wildfire crews spotted a two-hectare wildfire in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, burning deep in the forest southwest of the urban service area of Fort McMurray.

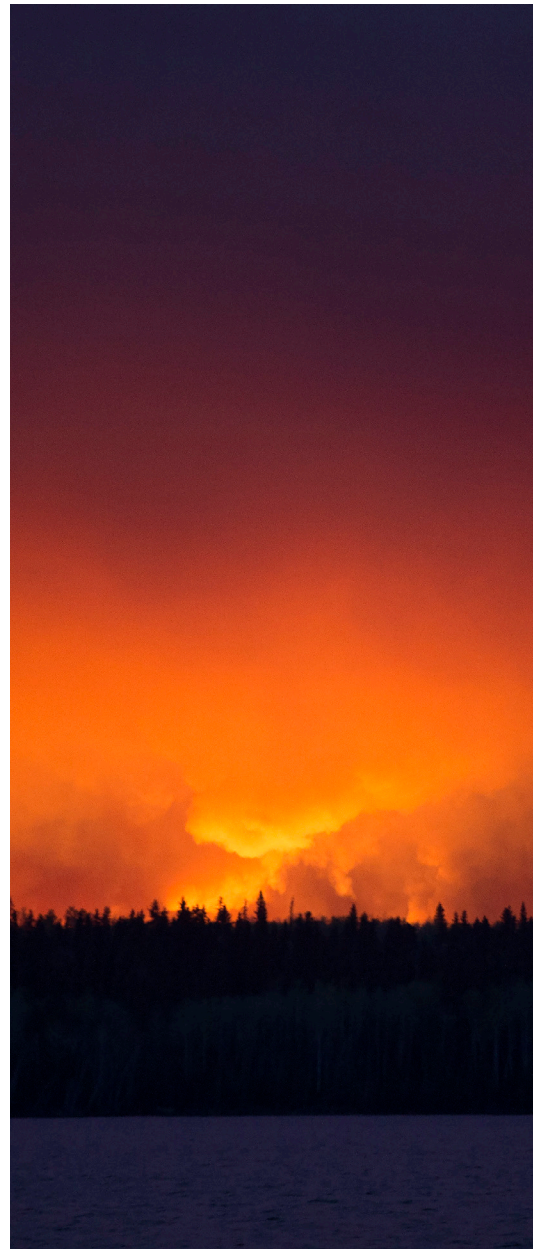
Strong winds and 30 degree temperatures helped fuel the fire. In two hours, the wildfire grew to 60 hectares. In two days, it spanned 2,600 hectares. On May 3rd it entered Fort McMurray, threatening not only the wildland but the people who lived in and around the community.

Aptly nicknamed “The Beast” by Fire Chief Darby Allen, the wildfire continued to grow as it spread across the region, forcing the evacuation of more than 88,000 people and destroying more than 2,400 homes and businesses in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo.

The wildfire would scorch more than 5,000 square kilometres in northeastern Alberta before moving into Saskatchewan. On May 31, the fire’s threat to Albertans diminished, but not before “The Beast” changed the landscape – and tens of thousands of lives – forever.

“Home Again” is about disaster, survival, recovery, the resiliency of the people who live in the region, and the support of Albertans who helped them through it.

It’s also about how the Government of Alberta is collaborating with partners to provide the support necessary to make the Wood Buffalo area home again.



BEFORE THE WILDFIRE

The Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo encompasses a unique region of northeastern Alberta. It is home to both rural and urban communities, with a population of more than 125,000 people. It's estimated that about 35 per cent of the region's population is a "shadow population" of temporary residents, many of whom come in and out of the Wood Buffalo area for employment in the region's oil sands.

With six First Nation communities and a number of Métis groups in the region, Indigenous peoples make up about 10 per cent of the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo's population. About three quarters of the Indigenous population live within Fort McMurray.

While the Wood Buffalo area is known for its abundance of energy resources – the third largest proven oil reserves in the world – it's also home to boreal forest, pristine lakes and a strong sense of community. Fort McMurray is its own modern and vibrant urban centre – and the only major centre for hundreds of kilometres.

The energy industry in the Wood Buffalo area has long been a driver of Canada's economy, and has played an influential role in the region. Energy companies directly or indirectly employ much of the population and are integral to the life of the community. For years, households have brought home higher than average incomes. And the housing market has been tight, with some of the highest prices and lowest vacancy rates in Canada. But in 2014, the price of oil plummeted and life in the Wood Buffalo area, for many, began to change.

The drop in global energy prices – and the economic downturn that followed – made a staggering impact on Alberta's economy, and this was felt acutely in the Wood Buffalo area. The region, once a magnet to workers from around the world, was now seeing people leave the area as thousands lost their jobs. Housing prices fell, vacancies rose, and once thriving businesses – restaurants, retail, and car dealerships – saw a measurable drop in customers.

When the wildfire erupted in May 2016, it would prove to be a further test of the strength and resiliency that characterizes the people of Wood Buffalo.

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LEAVING HOME – RESPONSE

“You could feel the wind blowing into the flames and the flames would come toward you, almost licking your car, on top of your car. And that’s when you feel the heat.”

~ Michael Chamberland, evacuee

Evacuation

On May 3, the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo undertook one of the largest evacuations in Canadian history. Tens of thousands fled the wildfire, many leaving with little more than the clothes on their backs.

Slow moving, bumper-to-bumper traffic traveled down Highway 63, the lone highway that led away from the flames. Some vehicles headed south, while the wildfire forced others north. And still other vehicles ended up abandoned on the side of the road after running out of fuel. With some gas stations shutdown by the wildfire, fuel was difficult to get and generous local businesses, followed by the government, set up emergency refueling stations.

Thousands of evacuees took refuge at oil sands work camps, including camps run by Shell, Syncrude, Suncor Horizon North and Canadian Natural Resources Limited (CNRL). The Indigenous community of Fort McKay First Nation and Fort McMurray First Nation also opened their arms and welcomed many people seeking safety.

The evacuation was a frightening experience, but almost everyone made it out of harm’s way. Tragically, two teenagers were killed during the evacuation when their SUV collided with a tractor trailer on Highway 881.

During that first night, all 105 patients at the Northern Lights Regional Health Centre were evacuated, including nine newborn babies in intensive care. Staff worked through the night to get everyone out safely. This involved moving patients to reception centres outside of Fort McMurray, and keeping them calm and stable until they were transported to Edmonton the next day.

“Those employees and staff also had their families to worry about. We’ve actually reserved 92 rooms locally in Edmonton to help house them and we’re working hard to connect them with their families so they know where they are.”

~ Dr. Verna Yiu, President, CEO, Alberta Health Services

PROVINCIAL EMERGENCY SOCIAL SERVICES

The Provincial Emergency Social Services (PESS) Framework enables local authorities to ask the province for support if they feel they are going to exceed their capacity to meet the essential needs of people in their community. The Framework was developed in response to a lesson learned from the Lesser Slave Lake wildfires in 2011 that government and Emergency Social Services (ESS) partners should provide a coordinated approach to ESS delivery during a disaster.

The PESS Framework and Emergency Coordination Centre (ECC) was fully enacted for the first time during the May wildfire. Among its many duties, the PESS ECC coordinated with multiple reception centres throughout the province, as well as post-secondary institutions hosting evacuees, and worked with the Department of National Defence to deliver supplies from Edmonton to CNRL, Suncor Firebag and Shell Albian Sands airstrips in the Fort McMurray area for the many first responders and firefighters working to extinguish the wildfire.

The Provincial Operations Centre (POC) was fully activated at a level 4 emergency. This is the highest level of emergency and requires representation from all Government of Alberta ministries during the response phase. On May 4, Premier Notley declared a provincial State of Emergency, with mandatory evacuation orders in place for Fort McMurray, Anzac, Gregoire Lake Estates, and the Fort McMurray First Nation. This was only the second time the province declared a State of Emergency; the first was during the southern Alberta flood in 2013.

Government began steady communications to keep Albertans informed about the situation in the Wood Buffalo region. News conferences, information bulletins, social media, websites, call centres, emails, telephone town halls, and other communications tools were used regularly to inform displaced residents of the situation back home, as well as the supports available to them. Alberta's 310-4455 call centre extended its hours to provide essential information about the wildfire and resources available to evacuees. By August 19, the call centre had received more than 78,000 calls.

FIGHTING THE FIRE

While residents fled to safety, firefighters and other first responders stayed behind, working night and day trying to tame “The Beast”.

- The number of firefighting resources peaked on June 3, 2016 with approximately 2,197 wildland firefighters, 77 helicopters and 269 pieces of heavy equipment fighting the wildfire.
- Government deployed approximately 4,700+ wildland firefighters and support staff, 80+ helicopters, and 270+ pieces of heavy equipment throughout the duration of the wildfire.
- Government received support from across Canada and from the United States, Mexico and South Africa. Approximately 1,222 additional firefighters and support staff assisted in the wildfire operations.
- The Fort McMurray First Nation used their own equipment to build a fireguard around the Gregoire Lake Reserve to save their community.



In the early stages, the wildfire moved north of Fort McMurray, threatening industrial work camps and communities, and the people who had fled to them seeking safety. The province, municipality, and Department of National Defence coordinated the evacuation of the approximately 25,000 residents who went north by marshalling convoys of vehicles through Fort McMurray to Highway 63 South. Industry companies, Air Canada and WestJet provided chartered flights for those to evacuate to Edmonton and Calgary. By May 9, all residents were evacuated.

Taking shelter

Most people who fled the region had no plans beyond getting out of danger, and finding shelter became a pressing need. Evacuees saw an outpouring of support from industry, First Nations communities, municipalities, post-secondary institutions, provincial parks, and their fellow Albertans, who offered both emergency and short-term lodging.

Reception centres were stood up across the province – consisting of post-secondary institutions, information centres, and community centres – and received tens of thousands of visits. The Northlands Expo Centre in Edmonton had capacity to provide 5,400 people with emergency lodging and cots. At its peak, an estimated 18,000 people a day were accessing its services and supports.

COMMUNITIES THAT PROVIDED FIREFIGHTING SUPPORT

Airdrie	Fort Saskatchewan	Olds	Sturgeon County
Athabasca	Grand Prairie	Olds/Mountain View County	Sundre
Athabasca County	High Prairie	Parkland County	Vegreville
Beiseker	High River	Red Deer	Vermillion
Calgary	Lac La Biche	Slave Lake	Westlock
Cold Lake	Leduc	Smoky Lake County	Westlock County
Crossfield	Leduc County	St. Albert	Yellowhead County
Didsbury	MD of Bonnyville	St. Paul	
Edmonton	MD of Willow Creek	Stony Plain	
Fort McMurray	Medicine Hat	Strathcona County	

IMPACT TO INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

During the initial evacuation, the Fort McMurray First Nation and Fort McKay First Nation welcomed their own members as well as opened up campgrounds and community complexes for the general public. However, the wildfire forced the mandatory evacuation of Fort McMurray First Nation on May 4 and the voluntary evacuation of the Fort McKay First Nation on May 6.

Fort McMurray First Nation arranged for community members – including those who ordinarily lived in Fort McMurray – to move out of reception centres and into other accommodations.

Métis Locals, such as Fort McMurray Métis Local 1935, also worked to facilitate accommodation for their members.

As smoke became more intense, the leadership from Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, Mikisew Cree First Nation and other members from Fort Chipewyan organized a fleet of boats for further evacuation of community members from Fort McKay to Fort Chipewyan. For evacuees who travelled south on Highway 881, Chipewyan Prairie First Nation provided gas and other services for evacuees.

Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, Health Canada's First Nations and Inuit Health Branch, and the Alberta Emergency Management Agency First Nations Field Operations unit worked to ensure access to culturally-appropriate health and wellness supports at reception centres, including the reception centre in Fort Chipewyan.

In response to Albertans' generosity, donation centres opened across the province so people could drop off the immediate essentials required by evacuees, many of whom did not even have a change of clothes. To ensure families received the essentials they needed, the Government of Alberta contracted with Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) Canada to manage and distribute the massive amount of physical goods. ADRA is an internationally recognized humanitarian organization that undertakes community development initiatives, including emergency management to provide aid during disaster.

On May 6, Premier Notley announced emergency funds for evacuees were available with funding levels of \$1,250 per adult and \$500 per child. Evacuees could access funding through debit cards, cheques and Canada Post e-transfers, which provided

emergency funds to those evacuees who found shelter out of the province. More than 50,000 households received Disaster Relief Benefits, totalling just over \$99 million.

In addition to supports from government, the Canadian Red Cross also announced funding for evacuees – \$600 per adult and \$300 per child. The funding was available thanks to thousands of Albertans and Canadians who donated an unprecedented \$136 million to the Canadian Red Cross for wildfire relief. This generosity was acknowledged and matched with contributions from the Alberta and federal governments, for a total of \$319 million.

Albertans not only opened their wallets, they opened their businesses and their homes to displaced residents. Evacuees received discounts on items and free meals at many establishments, and everyday Albertans offered spare rooms and beds to those who needed accommodations.

The evacuation occurred with nearly two months left in the school year. It was evident that students would not be returning to their schools to finish the year. The Government of Alberta agreed to cover incremental costs for school authorities throughout the province that accommodated these students during May and June. In addition, grade 12 students were given the option to not write their diploma exams.

STRENGTH SOMETIMES COMES IN SMALL PACKAGES.

The harrowing experience of beloved pet gerbil Thunder the Great will be immortalized in print to help children cope with the trauma of the evacuation. A Newfoundland book publisher heard about Thunder the Great's escape from Fort McMurray and signed him to a book deal. The story revolves around 11-year-old Jackson being reunited with his pet gerbil. *Saving Thunder the Great: The True story of a Gerbil's Escape from the Fort McMurray Wildfire* was released in October 2016.

COMMUNITIES THAT HOSTED RECEPTION CENTRES

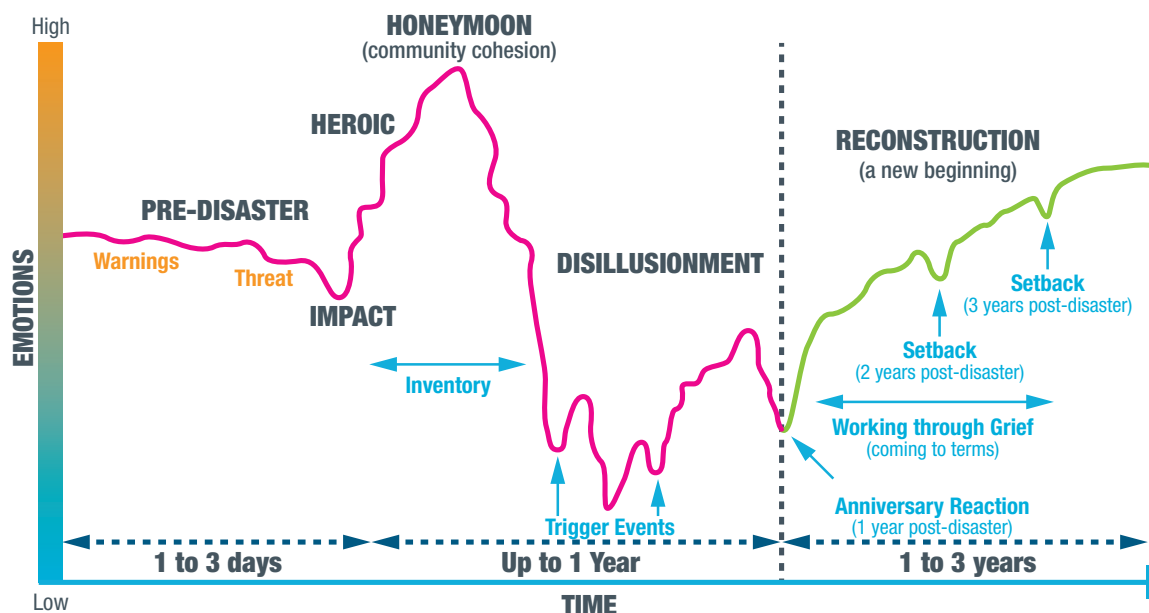
Anzac	Grassland
Athabasca	Janvier
Bonnyville	Lac La Biche
Calgary	Smoky Lake
Drayton Valley	St. Paul
Edmonton	
Fort Chipewyan	
Fort McKay	

Not everyone affected by the wildfire was of the two-legged variety. Peace officers from the Alberta Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) and the Calgary Humane Society worked tirelessly to help Wood Buffalo Animal Control Services rescue pets that could not be retrieved before their owners evacuated. By May 16, the Alberta SPCA had checked in approximately 1,200 rescued animals.

Early Emotional Support

Once people were safe and able to meet their basic needs – food, clothing and shelter – many began the process of coming to terms with the traumatic event they experienced. The graphic below illustrates the emotions many individuals and communities go through during and after a disaster.

HOW INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES ARE AFFECTED BY DISASTER



Source: Adapted from *Disaster Mental Health Services: A Primer for Practitioners*. (Myers D. & Wee, D.F., 2004)

Within a month of the evacuation, more than 8,700 people contacted Alberta Health Services (AHS) seeking mental health and wellness support – an average of about 225 per day. Between May 10 and June 30, the local addiction and mental health staff received 20,000 referrals. Pre-fire, the staff received about 1,200 referrals a year. Mental health and addiction support was provided by AHS and other teams deployed to Fort McMurray and to reception centers throughout the province. Disaster mental health teams from British Columbia – including Caber, a Delta Police Victim Services trauma dog – were deployed to offer support.

Evacuees were not the only ones exposed to a traumatic event. Firefighters, first responders, and staff from the municipality who stayed behind to run emergency operations, often exhausted from the firefight and working around the clock for days, also required immediate wellness support. Some had also lost their own homes in the disaster. While many homes were saved, many on the front line wished they could have saved even more homes than they did.

With the regular hospital closed, AHS established a temporary hospital to offer emergency care and respond to immediate health concerns. Supports were set up for firefighters and first responders; mental health teams were available and were also part of roving teams identifiable by their pink lanyards that said “Emotional Well-being”. The teams were present in Fort McMurray from the start and also at welcome centres during re-entry.

“Sometimes we think of loss as just maybe our home in particular, that’s the most obvious, but there are so many other things. For example, I could lose my relationship with my neighbour who is no longer there, some of my personal mementos, my sense of safety and security in the community.”

~ Michael Donaldson, supervisor of counselling services with the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo

STRUCTURES DESTROYED IN THE RMWB

Area within the RMWB	# of Residential Units Destroyed
Abasand	1168
Anzac	12
Beacon Hill	476
Draper	13
Gregoire	4
Lower Townsite	1
Parsons Creek	10
Prairie Creek Industrial	1
Saprae Creek Estates	86
Thickwood	187
Timberlea	379
Waterways	238
YMM Airport	4

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GETTING PEOPLE HOME

“We think we’ve got this thing beat.”

~ Darby Allen, Regional Fire Chief, Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo

After reaching nearly 230,000 hectares, growth of the wildfire finally began to slow. Unfortunately, the fight wouldn’t end soon enough. For the thousands of people whose homes were destroyed or damaged, the loss was enormous.

With the wildfire posing a reduced threat to the urban service area, the initial emergency phase began to wind down, and the focus turned to re-entry, rebuilding, and the long journey of recovery.

IMPACT ON ALBERTA PUBLIC SERVICE

While most of the province’s buildings and other infrastructure weren’t affected by the wildfire, the disaster had a major impact on its human resources, the Alberta public service. Many of the approximately 300 public servants who lived and worked in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo endeavored to continue the day-to-day operations and provide the government services the people in the region required, both during the event and immediately upon re-entry.

TAKING STOCK OF THE DEVASTATION

Leaders travelled to the region to see for themselves the aftermath of the wildfire. On May 9, Premier Rachel Notley toured Fort McMurray to survey the damage and meet with the first responders who had been fighting the wildfire for days.

On May 13, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau visited Fort McMurray, where he met with Fire Chief Darby Allen, Premier Notley and emergency workers.

And on June 24, Sophie, the Countess of Wessex and Canada’s Governor General David Johnson visited the area and toured the neighbourhood of Beacon Hill with the Fire Chief and Mayor Melissa Blake. The Governor General also visited Fort McKay First Nation, where he delivered commendations for both Fort McKay First Nation and Fort McMurray First Nation for their leadership during the emergency.

On May 11, Government of Alberta staff flew into Fort McMurray to meet with local officials and review the status and capability of critical infrastructure. Specifically, special team leads visited the drinking-water and wastewater treatment plants as well as lift stations, the landfill, and the regional emergency operations centre.

During this time, the Government of Alberta, along with the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo and the Wood Buffalo Environmental Association, began working to implement monitoring programs to assess air and water quality. The goal was to understand the impact the fire would have on human health, the environment, and the critical infrastructure that would be needed to support eventual re-entry and clean-up, including:

- Ash sampling to assess potential contaminants in ash and soil to determine if it was suitable to go into the landfill. The program also assessed health risk to residents and workers upon re-entry.
- Drinking-water sampling from the water treatment plant and water distribution system to understand the work needed and to monitor progress in getting critical infrastructure up and running. The drinking-water distribution system was critical in supporting local fire fighters within the urban environment (e.g. structural fires). Moreover, assuring the return of the drinking-water distribution to normal function was imperative for protecting public health and facilitating the phased re-entry of residents throughout the region.
- Enhanced surface water monitoring to evaluate the short- and long-term impacts of the fire on the aquatic environment in the Athabasca River.
- Enhanced monitoring of air quality to assess the health risk to first responders and others who remained behind to deal with the immediate impacts of the fire.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

- In total, 83 First Nation members from Mikisew Cree First Nation, Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation and the Fort McMurray First Nation lost their homes in the urban area of Fort McMurray.
- A welcome centre was established in Nistawoyou Friendship Centre to assist and support Indigenous community members as they returned home
- In mid-June, insurance companies collectively hired SPECS, a post-loss company, to organize and oversee the bidding process for demolition contractors. SPECS selected Christina River Construction Ltd – a business enterprise of Fort McMurray First Nation – as the primary contractor for demolition and cleanup, which began mid-July.

Re-entry

The POC worked with the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo to develop a phased, voluntary re-entry plan for residents to return to neighbourhoods that were safe and houses that were habitable between June 1 and 4. The Canadian Red Cross provided transportation for returning residents who needed it, including flights. Young children, the elderly, and people in need of medical care were advised not to return until the medical services were back up and running and the air quality index had stabilized.

Three neighbourhoods were not able to be re-entered, as there were health concerns related to the concentration and volume of toxins left behind and the amount of ash that needed to be removed prior to re-entry of these areas. Abasand, Beacon Hill, and Waterways neighbourhoods were fenced off and tackifier, a composite material that is sprayed and hardens into a protective shell, was applied to help manage the ash. Residents were given controlled access to the neighbourhoods during the day, and were allowed to book supervised appointments to sift through the remains of their homes. On August 31, residents of 439 homes within Abasand and Beacon Hill were able to move home. A further 31 homes in Waterways were able to be re-occupied on October 24.

“Today is not the end of the story. It is not a return to normal life and it’s not yet a celebration. There’s still a lot of work to recover and rebuild Wood Buffalo. This will be the work of years, not weeks.”

~ Premier Rachel Notley, speaking to reporters on June 1, the first day of the phased re-entry.



To prepare for the phased re-entry, the province, municipality, and private sector partners worked together to ensure essential services were available.

- The wildfire interrupted electricity in some areas in Fort McMurray. ATCO crews worked with the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo's Regional Emergency Operations Centre to restore power to critical infrastructure.
- ATCO coordinated the restoration of utilities before and after re-entry, and by 9 p.m. on June 1, ATCO had performed 7,880 re-lights, representing nearly 40 per cent of all structures. By June 17, this number grew to 86 per cent and by June 30, more than 90 per cent of re-lights had occurred.

Alberta Environment and Parks, in coordination with Alberta Health, AHS, the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health, and Health Canada (First Nations and Inuit Health Branch) formed a Drinking Water Quality Task Team, responsible for establishing the required conditions for restoring potable water back to the Fort McMurray area and to outlying communities that relied on the urban infrastructure. This included reviewing distribution flushing plans, assessing progress towards lifting the boil water advisories, and helping to inform and update the public.

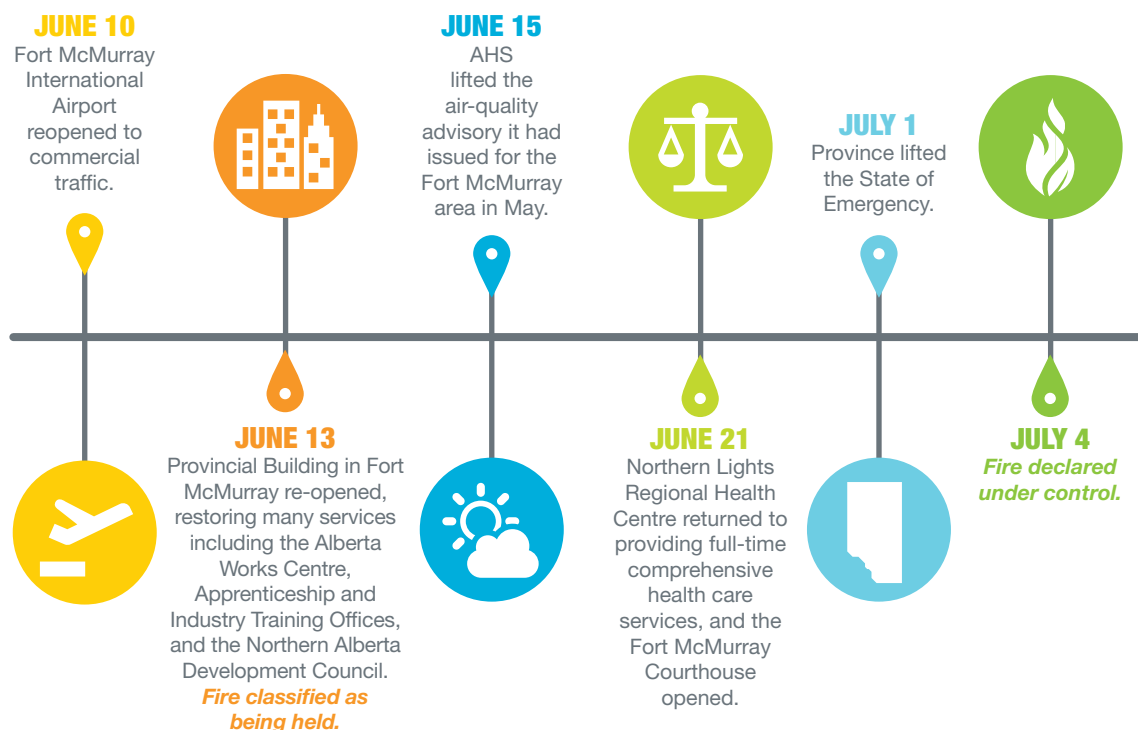
On the wastewater side, technical experts from the Government of Alberta worked with the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo and their consultants to ensure the wastewater collection system and wastewater treatment plant were operational prior to the phased re-entry.



Environmental monitoring experts from the Government of Alberta and the Wood Buffalo Environmental Association continued to monitor air and water quality in Fort McMurray and surrounding communities, to assess risks and inform re-entry plans and support re-establishment of municipal drinking water supplies.

The Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo established welcome centres to greet residents and serve as a central source of information and services. Help came in many forms. Representatives from the Insurance Bureau of Canada outlined next steps for residents on insurance claims; the Red Cross provided cleanup kits that included safety masks; and referrals were made to the Government of Alberta for emergency financial benefits. Representatives were also on hand from municipal departments, utility corporations, and non-profit groups.

Each day, re-entry was assessed to identify and mitigate any potential issues that could pose a risk to the health, safety and well-being of residents. The re-entry went as planned, and by June 15, more than 56,000 people visited information centres in the region.



Cleaning up

Once back in their communities, residents were eager to begin cleaning up their homes and properties. This included removing more than 10,000 refrigerators and freezers that could potentially pose a health risk.

Cleanup also meant re-establishing critical infrastructure, including safe clean drinking water and the wastewater collection system. While boil water advisories were in effect as residents returned, through a phased approach, most boil water advisories were lifted by July 15. Drinking-water distribution system and reservoir cleaning and flushing, as well as water quality testing occurred through late May, June, and July.

Like in the response phase, public safety was a priority as people returned to the community. But along with safety and well-being, there was also a broader effort towards stabilizing municipal government and services, the local economy, and community supports.

That meant re-establishing social services and health services, re-opening day cares, and kicking off summer programs, such as those held by the YMCA. It also meant ensuring returning residents had access to the supports they would need as the excitement of returning home transformed into shock and grief at the enormity of their situation. Programs included grassroots therapy groups and the region's Wildfire Grief and Loss Support Group.



RECOVERY AND THE WORK AHEAD

With the wildfire diminished, and with many people returning to their homes, the response phase of the disaster wound down and transitioned into one of recovery. Recovery differs from the more urgent response phase; it is a multi-year process, and progress is not linear. It requires investment, not just the financial investment necessary for rebuilding, but also an investment in the time and effort needed to engage multiple stakeholders to understand needs and develop priorities and a common vision. Recovery involves working with many partners, with sometimes competing priorities, to drive the recovery process forward.

While the province was the lead in response, it is important that recovery and rebuilding is led by local leadership, as they are best positioned to make decisions related to the future of their community. For the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, that leadership is the Wood Buffalo Recovery Committee, made up of three municipal councillors and six members of the public, and the municipally-staffed Recovery Task Force. Both were put in place by the municipality to develop and coordinate recovery activities at the local level.

Although the recovery is locally-led, the Government of Alberta has a role to play in supporting local leadership, ensuring coordination of provincial recovery efforts, and making decisions to help stabilize the community and allow recovery to progress. To that end, Premier Notley established the Wood Buffalo Ministerial Recovery Task Force, supported by the Wildfire Recovery Task Force, to coordinate its provincial recovery activities and support local efforts in early May.

WOOD BUFFALO MINISTERIAL RECOVERY TASK FORCE (WBMRTF)

Chaired by Premier Rachel Notley and vice-chaired by Danielle Larivee, Minister of Municipal Affairs, the WBMRTF makes decisions on the support the Government of Alberta is providing to the residents and communities of the Wood Buffalo region as they recover from the wildfire.

Other ministers on the WBMRTF include: Sarah Hoffman (Health), Brian Mason (Infrastructure and Transportation), Joe Ceci (Treasury Board and Finance), Shannon Phillips (Environment and Parks), Oneil Carlier (Agriculture and Forestry), Irfan Sabir (Human Services), Lori Sigurdson (Seniors and Housing) and Richard Feehan (Indigenous Relations).

GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA'S ROLE

- Provide coordination and oversight to the province's recovery activities.
- Make decisions related to policy and funding priorities for recovery initiatives within the provincial interest or areas of responsibility.
- Communicate provincial programs and policy to the region.
- Support local authorities, as appropriate, in its communications with residents.
- Provide expertise and advice, as requested, if available.

MUNICIPALITY'S ROLE

- Lead recovery and rebuilding for the region.
- Set recovery priorities and objectives.
- Develop a recovery plan and implementation plans to operationalize it.
- Engage with residents and communicate recovery information to them.
- Build on and leverage relationships, such as with the Canadian Red Cross, industry, First Nations, and local organizations.

The circumstances of this disaster meant the Government of Alberta's role in the recovery effort would be different from the 2011 Slave Lake wildfire and the 2013 Southern Alberta flood. The type of supports the province provides in a disaster depends on the specific circumstances of the event and the local capacity to address it, as well as the supports available from private insurers and non-government organizations, such as the Canadian Red Cross.



Much of the damage in this wildfire was to private homes and businesses, which are generally covered by insurance. Damage to provincial infrastructure was minimal, so government's direct role in rebuilding is limited. In addition, there is strong local capacity and resources, both within the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo and in the dynamic private sector that has built the region.

The Government of Alberta is doing its part to provide funding to support recovery from the wildfire. The Government of Alberta estimates its response and recovery costs for the wildfire at \$647 million. This includes \$30 million in matching donations to the Canadian Red Cross, and approximately \$225 million to the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo for its disaster event costs.

Government of Alberta as “connector”

The foundation of government's work is its strong relationship with partners. The Government of Alberta's role as “connector” is to leverage its many relationships and link partners to other partners so as the region recovers, it will benefit from the support and expertise of everyone.

To inform its work, the province collaborated with many partners in the recovery to identify needs and issues and find the best way government can help. These partners included the:

- Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo
- Canadian Red Cross
- Federal Committee on Northern Alberta Wildfires
- Indigenous communities
- Western Economic Development Canada
- Insurance Bureau of Canada
- Industry Recovery Working Group

While the Government of Alberta has worked with many of these partners in the past, this disaster has strengthened many of these relationships, which will benefit how partners work together in future events. One relationship that deepened significantly was with the Canadian Red Cross.

“Our country truly pulled together to help Alberta in its time of need and our government will continue to work closely with the Canadian Red Cross to ensure the donations of Albertans are used to make a real difference in the lives of the people of Wood Buffalo as they recover from this devastating wildfire.”

~ Danielle Larivee, Vice-Chair of Alberta’s Wood Buffalo Ministerial Recovery Task Force and Minister of Municipal Affairs



The Canadian Red Cross collected approximately \$319 million for wildfire relief from generous Albertans and Canadians, as well as matching funds from the Alberta and federal government. The development of a grant agreement for the Government of Alberta’s \$30.3 million in matching funds led to an unprecedented partnership between the province and the Canadian Red Cross, which has increased both capacity and opportunities to provide recovery support. This partnership has:

- Leveraged the Canadian Red Cross’ expertise in providing support to vulnerable people, including the uninsured and underinsured, using a case management approach to ensure holistic needs are addressed;
- Identified areas where gaps in support existed, and worked together to develop programs and services that could address the needs of people and businesses affected by the wildfire; and
- Partnered on messaging and communicating services and benefits.

The Government of Alberta brought together a multi-party working group that consisted of the Government of Alberta, Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, Canadian Red Cross, Indigenous communities, and the Government of Canada to share information and identify opportunities to support the people and businesses affected by the fire.

GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA'S \$30.3 MILLION MATCHING CONTRIBUTION WILL BE DIRECTED TO THREE AREAS:

- The Community Organizations Partnership Program to provide grants to local charitable, non-governmental and Indigenous organizations to support the recovery of residents and the community (\$14.3M).
 - The program will also address longer-term recovery needs of various people, such as the elderly, children and youth, homeless people, First Nation members on and off-reserve, and Métis community members in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo.
- Relief for small business owners who need assistance (\$15M).
 - This funding is to help small business owners deal with uninsured losses and expenses created by the wildfire.
- Funding for specific health initiatives and research activities to promote the long-term emotional and social well-being of residents affected by the wildfire (\$1M).
 - This safety and well-being initiative will support and fund emerging health research activities related to the mental health impacts of the wildfire in the Wood Buffalo area.

THE CANADIAN RED CROSS HAS BUILT A SIGNIFICANT RELATIONSHIP WITH FIRST NATIONS AND MÉTIS COMMUNITIES.

- Performing outreach casework in Janvier, Anzac, Fort McKay and Fort Chipewyan
- Working with Métis leadership and community members to meet the needs of urban Métis community members
- Providing community funding for local events:
 - Elders feasts
 - National Aboriginal Day events
 - Graduation ceremonies
 - Métis Fest

Insurance Bureau of Canada (IBC) and Insurance Providers

Unlike the 2013 Southern Alberta flood, the wildfire disaster is, for the most part, an insurable event. The Government of Alberta is working with the IBC and insurance companies to help people recover from the damage and losses they sustained in the fire.

- The IBC spearheaded services, paid for by insurers, to collectively remove and properly dispose of white goods (fridges, freezers, etc.), and organized a collective demolition approach to efficiently prepare lots for rebuilding.
- Claims adjusters from other provinces and countries arrived quickly to supplement local resources. Many insurance providers and the IBC mobilized to the Wood Buffalo area before residents returned, and set up field offices and staffed welcome centers to provide support and answer questions.
- To support the municipality's recovery efforts, the IBC moved a senior team to the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo's Regional Emergency Operations Centre to help coordinate industry response and to liaise with the municipality.
- Insurance companies anticipate spending \$3.6 billion to help people and businesses return to normal. In the three months following the fire, insurance companies paid \$600 million to policyholders to help them with expenses, income loss, repairs, and clean up.

Indigenous Relations

The Government of Alberta has made it a priority to build upon its relationship with Alberta's Indigenous peoples. While this disaster has created new challenges for Indigenous peoples who were affected by the fire, the Government of Alberta is committed to continuing to strengthen our partnership, throughout recovery and beyond.

The Government of Alberta will continue to work with affected Indigenous communities and organizations to better understand the impacts of disasters on Indigenous peoples, and on traditional land and uses. This includes developing a framework for working together to improve supports in place for future disasters.

TRAPLINES

Due to the unprecedented footprint of the wildfire, approximately 40 Registered Fur Management Area traplines were damaged or destroyed. The Government of Alberta and the Canadian Red Cross are working together to develop options to assist trappers, including First Nations trappers who hunt as a Treaty right on First Nations reserve lands, to replace their cabins, lost cabin contents, trapline hardware and ceremonial items.



HELPING PEOPLE RE-ESTABLISH HOME

...In Resilient, Sustainable, Inclusive Communities

Our recovery work draws on lessons learned in past disasters, while also addressing the unique circumstances and issues surrounding the Wood Buffalo wildfire. We have organized our efforts to support recovery under five pillars: people, economy, reconstruction, environment, and mitigation. Within each pillar, the government's efforts are focused around key areas of provincial responsibility, as well as priority recovery issues that have emerged through discussions with partners and impacted communities, groups, and individuals. These are the areas where the province has directed its efforts to date and identified a role in supporting local recovery efforts in the months and years to come as it helps the Wood Buffalo area become home again.

Pillar	Themes and Issues
People	<p><i>Ensure the right resources are available to support the overall physical, mental and social well-being of Albertans.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental health supports • Temporary housing • Support to local authorities
Economy	<p><i>Encourage job creation and economic diversification while building stronger relationships with industry and small businesses.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small business support • Hire and buy local
Reconstruction	<p><i>Encourage innovative solutions and responsible development and involve local companies and workers wherever possible.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rebuilding • Consumer protection and public safety standards
Environment	<p><i>Monitor long-term environmental impacts and mitigate risks, if required.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental testing and monitoring
Mitigation	<p><i>Invest in disaster reduction by supporting mitigation of wildfire and other public safety risks.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disaster preparedness • FireSmart • Flood mitigation

PEOPLE

Mental health supports

People who have lived through a disaster often experience symptoms of stress, depression, and anxiety. Many require initial support; some will require assistance in the months to come with ongoing stress and other difficulties; and a few will need longer-term mental health treatment.

- On May 11, the Alberta Health Addiction and Mental Health Emergency Coordination Centre was activated to streamline and coordinate mental health supports from the health sector.
- Alberta Health, in conjunction with multiple stakeholders including the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, developed a coordinated cross-ministry and cross-sector approach to provide immediate and long-term mental health supports for those affected by the wildfire. The immediate intent was to:
 - Address the mental health needs of all community members, including those requiring specialized, targeted services.
 - Engage in prevention activities that promote mental health and well-being.
 - Provide opportunities for communities to reconnect.
 - Plan for supports to reduce the likelihood of more serious and long-term addiction and mental health issues.
 - Provide information on trauma, health, and access to services.
 - Adapt services to meet the needs of those they serve.
- \$18.65 million dollars has been approved to implement a Psychosocial Recovery Framework for the first year to promote the mental health, well-being and resilience for all residents and to alleviate the strain on front-line providers now and into the future.
- The Government of Alberta will provide support for mental health services for schools and students, from kindergarten to grade 12, affected by the wildfire. This includes:

- providing professional development for educators to support trauma-informed practice;
- providing enhancements to the Wood Buffalo Regional Collaborative Service Delivery Framework for more school-based supports, including:
 - mental health coordinators,
 - family school liaison workers,
 - school counsellors, and
 - First Nation, Métis and Inuit mobile outreach success coaches; and
- developing a response and recovery toolkit to support schools in future disasters.
- The Government of Alberta is participating on several committees that will address the mental health impacts of the wildfire, including but not limited to:
 - the Social Recovery Task Force, formerly known as the Recovery Interagency Committee;
 - the Community Partnerships Advisory Committee; and
 - the Community Well-being and Resiliency Group.
- The Government of Alberta will continue to collaborate with the above groups using the Psychosocial Recovery Framework to support the long-term psychological wellbeing of people affected by the wildfire. As the recovery evolves, efforts will shift to meet the dynamic needs of the community. The Framework specifically considers the need for specialized supports for populations including children, seniors, and Indigenous peoples. With this in mind, the services provided will aim to be age and culturally appropriate.
- AHS established an Indigenous Traveling Team to provide mental health support to Fort McMurray and area Indigenous communities.

Temporary Housing

Residents who lost their homes to the wildfire or who were unable to return to standing homes in restricted areas needed to find temporary housing. Some displaced people found themselves unable to cover the costs of temporary accommodations, in addition to other expenses such as paying a mortgage, or pulling together enough money to cover a damage deposit and first month's rent. To support people in these circumstances, the Government of Alberta:

- Established the Wildfire Evacuee Transitional Accommodation (WETA) benefit so households that did not have insurance or sufficient insurance to pay for temporary accommodations costs could access financial support until August 2.
 - WETA Assistance: \$4.8 million for 4,875 households
- Provided \$1.7 million for Income Support Emergency Benefits to 2,163 households through the Income Support Program (cumulative total as of August 11).

The Government of Alberta, the Canadian Red Cross and Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo created a working group to better understand the longer-term housing needs of returning residents. The group assessed supply and demand, discussed issues and developed options. The group included representatives from Government of Alberta ministries, the Canadian Red Cross, the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, Métis Local 1935, Waypoints, Wood Buffalo Housing Development Corporation, Fort McMurray Real Estate Board, and industry.

The Canadian Red Cross also conducted a housing survey on behalf of the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo and the Government of Alberta between July 26 and August 11 to determine whether displaced residents had secured temporary housing that met their specific needs.

- More than 20 per cent of the 1,167 residents displaced from destroyed or damaged homes responded to the survey and said they had not secured housing for the duration of their repair or rebuild, with the majority noting a need for two to three bedroom units.

The municipality developed a temporary RV park, Abraham's Landing, which was in operation until October 31, 2016. The municipality also relaxed its bylaws to allow people to park RVs on their lots.

- While the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo's rental market has many one and two bedroom accommodations available, the survey responses highlighted the need for three or more bedroom units.
- The Government of Alberta proposed to send up to 65 mobile home units to Fort McMurray from Slave Lake, but found that, despite the survey results, there was a lack of demand for the units. The units will not be transported at this time, but the interim housing program remains open to assist families in finding local interim housing solutions. If the need exists in the future, government will revisit the option to bring in the interim housing units.
- The Government of Alberta will continue to support the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo to work with local property managers and landlords to meet the needs of those seeking one and two bedroom units.
- The Canadian Red Cross will provide financial assistance for rent on a case-by-case basis.

SOCIAL HOUSING SUPPORTS

Many people who lived in government-owned and supported social and affordable housing in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo were displaced by the wildfire. This included clients of the Wood Buffalo Housing and Development Corporation (WBHDC) which operates more than 1,300 units. There were 16 government-owned social housing units lost, and another 16 units damaged by the fire as well as 12 WBHDC owned affordable housing units lost during the event.

Several housing organizations from across the province provided housing assistance to those displaced, including the seniors from the Rotary House lodge. Financial assistance was provided by the Government of Alberta to offset any costs incurred from providing this support.

Supports to Local Authorities

The people and communities directly affected by this disaster are in the best position to lead their recovery efforts, but they need support to do so, not just financial but in the form of expertise and advice. The Government of Alberta provided support in a number of ways, including:

- Continuing to work closely with the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo through the WRTF to provide recovery support, advice, and expertise to their Wood Buffalo Recovery Committee and their Recovery Task Force.
- Placing recovery coordinators in the communities, as well as on many working groups that include residents of the Wood Buffalo area who have been directly impacted by the fire. Coordinators provide an essential liaison between the community and provincial knowledge, relationships, and recovery activities.
- Ministries working tirelessly with partners to ensure the people affected by the wildfire continue to receive the public services they need. Most Government of Alberta programs and services in the Wood Buffalo area are back in full operation.
- Advancing \$87.5 million in Disaster Recovery Program funding to help the municipality pay for costs related to responding to the wildfire.
- Deferring the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo's payment of the education property tax requisition until they were in a position to pay as normal operations resumed.
- Confirmed stabilization funding for school authorities in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo to help maintain their day-to-day operations of school jurisdictions if faced with a decline in enrolment. This funding will help protect the jobs of teachers, support staff and others working for the affected school jurisdictions and maintain program and service levels for students despite any short-term changes in environment.

In the long term, the Government of Alberta will work with the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo and other regional partners to ensure the community has the capacity to return to a pre-disaster level and sustain itself with regular levels of provincial support.

ECONOMY

Small Business Support

As many as 4,000 small businesses have been affected by the wildfire. Many businesses in the Wood Buffalo area are struggling with challenges, including damage to their buildings and goods, lost revenue in the weeks after the evacuation, and staff shortages due to employees who have not returned (or may not ever return). Small businesses are a key element in any community's economic recovery from a large-scale disaster. Small businesses provide critical employment for returning citizens, as well as a wide range of goods and services that contribute to a robust and thriving community. They also provide industry diversity that supports economic stability and sustainability.

- On June 10, the Canadian Red Cross announced a small business grant of \$1,000 to eligible small businesses. It was the first of more supports to come to support the recovery of fire-affected small businesses in the Wood Buffalo area.
- Small businesses recovering from the Wood Buffalo wildfire will have access to two complementary recovery programs as they resume operations and support their employees.
 - The first program – funded by the Government of Alberta, Government of Canada, and the Canadian Red Cross, and administered by the Canadian Red Cross – will provide up to \$20,000 to cover costs, including new equipment, property damage and cleanup.

IMPACT OF THE WILDFIRE ON THE ENERGY INDUSTRY

In May, the wildfire shut down several major oil sands operations. In total, 17 facilities were affected by the fires, and all but one¹, are back online. All facilities brought online have returned to pre-fire production, equalling roughly 1.5 million barrels per day.

The Alberta Energy Regulator oversaw the restart of operations, and followed a detailed plan that focused on the safety of workers and the environment.

In total, Alberta oil sands production dropped by about one million barrels a day in May and by about 700,000 barrels in June. Production returned to pre-fire levels in July.

¹ This facility remains offline due to the company's decision, not because of fire damage.

- The Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo has also allocated funding to support a second program to provide small businesses with wages and labour assistance.
- Through the Community and Regional Economic Support program, the Government of Alberta is providing the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo with \$750,000 to support the Back to Business Resource Centre, a one-stop shop for businesses to access government, business planning and office resources to assist with their return to operation, and business recovery expos in Fort McMurray.
- The Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo established an Economic Recovery Advisory Committee to ensure 2016 wildfire economic recovery efforts are coordinated and local businesses are supported over the coming months and years.
- The Government of Alberta is participating in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo's Business and Economic Recovery Plan, in place to accelerate business and economic recovery in the Wood Buffalo area, enable small and medium enterprises to remain in the region, assist in overall business continuity, and continue the diversification of the economy.

Hire and Buy Local

The Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo has been vocal in encouraging as much recovery work as possible go to local contractors and local workers, and is looking at promoting “buy local” or “open for business” campaigns.

SUPPORTING FOREIGN WORKERS

- Providing Temporary Foreign Worker information sessions in partnership with Service Canada and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada in major centres to more than 275 evacuees.
- Connecting with immigrant-serving agencies throughout Alberta to provide updates and appropriate contact information for affected permanent and temporary residents seeking assistance from the agencies.
- Alberta Immigrant Nominee Program developed special measures for affected applicants by providing one year within which affected applicants can maintain their eligibility and seek alternative employment if necessary.

- The Government of Alberta is developing partnership options to deliver a new, temporary plumber training program associated with Keyano College and local area high schools. This will support a skilled labour force in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo during the rebuild.
- The Government of Alberta is also working on measures to support apprentices not currently working in their trade to continue to progress in their technical training. This will improve completion rates across the province and will support continued development of a skilled labour force in Fort McMurray and across Alberta.

ENVIRONMENT

Environmental Testing and Monitoring

Environmental testing and monitoring is a routine practice in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo. Since 2012, the Canada-Alberta Joint Oil Sands Monitoring Program has been assessing the cumulative effects of oil sands development in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo. The program was interrupted by the fire due to the inability to access monitoring sites, but has since returned to normal monitoring schedules. However, during the fire emergency, monitoring efforts were shifted to focus on air and water quality in and around the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, to identify effects and risks associated with the fire.

- The Government of Alberta supported adding additional mobile air and water quality monitoring stations in and around Fort McMurray and surrounding communities.
 - These additional stations provide real-time information about risks posed to first responders and drinking water treatment plants in Fort McMurray and downstream, and identify short-term changes in water chemistry caused by the fire in streams and rivers, and their impacts.
- Prior to re-entry, soil quality monitoring was conducted to guide clean-up and remediation activities.

- After clean-up is complete, a further phase of soil testing will be undertaken within neighbourhoods of Fort McMurray.
 - This phase will be to screen public spaces for potential contamination and evaluate risks associated with exposure.
- Long-term impacts of contaminants from the fire on local traditional foods will be evaluated. This work will be important for communities within the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo.

In the long term, there will continue to be enhanced air, soil and water monitoring to support recovery in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo. Regional environmental monitoring will be modified to identify and track the long-term environmental impacts of the wildfire, including communities downstream of the impacted river systems, as well as the cumulative environmental effects of regional development activities. The Government of Alberta continues to be committed to understanding the potential human health impacts from the fire and providing advice as needed to ensure the region remains safe for human health and habitation.

Caribou are an endangered species that were greatly impacted by the fire, due to both the fire itself and firefighting activities.

- About 150 kilometres of fireguard, helipads, and stream crossings were created to fight the fire, and fell within the woodland caribou range. This has disturbed scarce caribou habitat in their range at a time when herds are imperiled and the Government of Alberta is starting to develop range plans to meet federal recovery obligations.
- Work on restoring the natural habitat is projected to be completed by February 15, 2017. This is being done to protect Alberta's wildlife, prevent and reduce soil erosion potential, ensure soil stabilization to support vegetative recovery, and further reduce subsequent wildfire hazard. However, full reclamation of the habitat will take about 50 years.

RECONSTRUCTION

Rebuilding

Reconstruction is a long and often complex journey. The Government of Alberta will continue to provide supports and protections as people in the region rebuild homes and businesses.

The Government of Alberta supported reconstruction through:

- Participating in the YMM Home Show on August 20, 2016 to assist homeowners throughout the rebuilding process including contractor selection, potential pitfalls, and landlord and tenant concerns.
- Facilitating the installation of eight modular units to ensure students had classrooms in September after four schools were unable to be re-occupied in the most affected neighbourhoods.
- Working collaboratively with the Fort McMurray Métis Local 1935, the tenants of a lost provincially-owned building, to support their future needs.
- Creating tip sheets focused on the safe removal of ash and debris and the safe cleanup of structurally compromised structures, as well as tip sheets with information on Occupational Health and Safety.
- Supporting the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo in developing the decisions and processes required to allow residents in Abasand, Beacon Hill and Waterways to be ready for the 2017 construction season.

- As of October 27 the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo has approved 1,770 demolition permits, And 1,298 demolitions have been certified as complete.
- The first rebuilding permit was issued on August 11 for a home in the Wood Buffalo neighbourhood and the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo has issued 240 reconstruction permits as of October 27, 2016.

As a result of the collaborative efforts of the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo community, school jurisdictions, AHS, and the Government of Alberta, all 27 schools were extensively cleaned and restored, and plans were in place to support more than 12,000 students and staff displaced by the wildfire to be able return in September for the start of a new school year.

Consumer protection and public safety standards

- The Government of Alberta has implemented new builder information disclosure requirements under the New Home Buyer Protection (Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo) Regulation. The builder information requirements will help residents make more informed decisions when selecting a builder to reconstruct their home.
 - As of October 20, 2016, 155 builder declarations have been submitted with 139 declarations published to the website, while 313 new homes have been registered with the New Home Buyer Registry.
 - As rebuild activity increases in 2017, program staff will work proactively with individuals who are rebuilding to support them as they navigate the reconstruction process.
- In response to current and anticipated concerns, full-time Consumer Protection Investigators were placed in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo on a rotating basis to:
 - Investigate and educate ongoing landlord and tenant issues under the *Residential Tenancies Act* (e.g. deposits, price hikes, illegal evictions), and potential violations relating to consumer protection (under the *Fair Trading Act*).

The wildfire forced the closure of the Gregoire Lake Provincial Park, and damaged infrastructure. The Government of Alberta will:

- Relocate and rebuild staff residences from the Anzac staff compound at Gregoire Lake Provincial Park, as well as rebuild the day use area and boat launch, and other structures that were lost.
- Remove dead standing trees in the facility area to create a safe environment for visitors.
- Replant the forest around the campground, boat launch and day use area.

MITIGATION

Disaster preparedness

The Government of Alberta is committed to mitigating the impacts of another wildfire event that may threaten communities in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo. Even as the communities were starting the clean-up and recovery, work was already underway to reduce and mitigate the risk of future wildfires and other disasters.

- As it did after the 2011 wildfire in the Lesser Slave Lake region and the 2013 Southern Alberta flood, the Government of Alberta is hiring an external contractor to identify the lessons learned out of the response and early recovery efforts. Areas the contractor will look into include the evacuation, emergency social services, crisis communications, engagement and collaboration during the emergency, and preparedness and readiness for the 2016 disaster season.
- Also, as is standard practice after significant wildfires, the Government of Alberta is undertaking a review of wildfire preparedness and response. An external contractor is reviewing Government of Alberta's preparation for the 2016 wildfire season – including analyzing the conditions leading up to, and during the first month of the wildfire, as well as the overall firefighting response to the wildfire.

These reports and initiatives will help government enhance wildfire management and inform changes and improvements to how the province and Alberta's emergency management system operate in future disasters.



FireSmart

Alberta's FireSmart program engages and supports municipalities and Indigenous communities in public education, legislation, interagency cooperation, cross-training, emergency planning, and vegetation management to reduce wildfire hazard and risk through a proactive balance of wildfire prevention, mitigation, and preparedness activities.

FireSmart improves a community's ability to better withstand a wildfire event. It improves the safety of firefighters and the public, as well as the ability of firefighters to suppress the fire, and minimizes potential wildfire damage and loss. The widespread adoption of FireSmart risk-reduction practices by homeowners can reduce the losses to residential property.

- The Government of Alberta is supporting a collaborative approach to help reduce the damage and impact of the Wood Buffalo wildfire by:
 - implementing FireSmart activities; and
 - increasing the level of community awareness and understanding of Alberta's FireSmart program through education and outreach.

SEVEN DISCIPLINES OF FIRESMART

Education- People living in forested areas need to be aware of the wildfire threat and ways they can take action to make their home and community become "FireSmart."

Fuel management- The removal of excess vegetation and creation of fuel breaks, a gap in vegetation, minimizes fuel for wildfires.

Legislation and planning- Land use planning helps foresee problems to lessen the risk of wildfire.

Development considerations- The use of FireSmart development standards helps manage the wildfire reality by reducing the flammability of structures.

Interagency cooperation- Working towards a FireSmart community relies on strong partnerships.

Emergency planning- Being prepared for an emergency is important for everyone—from community members to fire agencies.

Training- Getting the right training is important for firefighter safety and for effectiveness in suppressing wildfire.

- The Government of Alberta is working closely with the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo and First Nations groups to identify FireSmart priorities and operational requirements, achieve community and municipal endorsement, and develop a strategy and work plan.
- The Government of Alberta will participate on a FireSmart Regional Activity Team to develop and implement a wildfire mitigation strategy positioned around the seven FireSmart disciplines.

Flood mitigation

The Government of Alberta has been working with the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo to determine how to approach the rebuild in the Waterways neighborhood in a manner that appropriately addresses future flood risk. The wildfire destroyed a significant number of properties in Waterways, which is susceptible to backwater flooding due to ice jams on the Athabasca River and from high flows on the Clearwater River and Hangingstone River.

The Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo is engaging with residents to understand their wishes and concerns for rebuilding in this neighborhood and exploring the possibility of a demountable flood wall as an appropriate community flood mitigation system.

To support these discussions, the Government of Alberta has clarified that there is no current legislation preventing rebuilding in Waterways and that a demountable flood wall is potentially a viable mitigation option and will continue to support them in exploring its engineering viability. If a flood occurs before community mitigation is built, the municipality and affected residents remain potentially eligible for funding under for the Disaster Recovery Program (DRP).



CONCLUSION

The experience of recent major disasters in Alberta has taught us that Albertans are incredibly generous and resilient, and that in crisis we have relationships and resources we can leverage to get the job done.

When a major disaster occurs in a region, the long-term impacts on its people, economy, and environment are not immediately known. But what is known is that recovery will take years. As this report shows, the Government of Alberta believes in working closely with its partners to assess and identify needs to build a multi-stakeholder understanding of the impact, and to determine the appropriate actions. The Government of Alberta remains committed to supporting the region's recovery and our efforts going forward will build on the work already undertaken and the provincial investments identified as needed for this disaster.

What we also know is that increased focus on mitigation and preparedness before disasters will make recovery easier. Climate change means that major disasters are likely to become more frequent within our province and the Government of Alberta has learned much from the experience of recovering from three major disasters in five years.

In addition to supporting the affected communities from this disaster, the Government of Alberta will be doing the following to be better prepared for future ones:

- Continue to engage the federal government in discussions about changes to the Disaster Financial Assistance Arrangements and increased mitigation funding.
- Explore opportunities to build on the partnership established with the Canadian Red Cross for a closer and more integrated working relationship in future recoveries.
- Review the Government of Alberta's recovery policies and programming to adapt them to the increasing requirements posed by climate change and the lessons learned from three major disasters in five years.

There is no comfort in saying that Alberta has become familiar with disasters. However, the experiences we have gained, the lessons we have learned and the partnerships we have developed have strengthened our resiliency and resolve, and fortified our ability to move forward the next time disaster strikes.

Thanks to the collaborative efforts of many, and a shared vision by all, we will ensure that communities in the Wood Buffalo area will be home again.

Alberta

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