

Spring 2019 Wildfire Review

Background

This review looks at spring 2019 wildfire activity and conditions; the department's preparedness and response to the Chuckegg Creek wildfire, McMillan complex and Battle complex wildfires; and the department's wildfire management program.

| Recommendation | Next steps |
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| Preventative actions to decrease wildfires | |
| <p>Immediately implement a government wide disaster resilience and prevention focused task force to enhance the adoption of FireSmart activities and principles across government, at the community level and to incorporate fire prevention in community services.</p> | <p>Government will promote the enhanced adoption of FireSmart across government and at the municipal and community level.</p> |
| <p>Immediately develop a comprehensive strategy for incendiary fire prevention to reduce the number and severity of incendiary fires.</p> | <p>An incendiary wildfire is a fire that is intentionally ignited in an area or under circumstances where and when there should not be a fire. For example: arson, mischief or playing with matches.</p> <p>In an effort to reduce the number and severity of incendiary-related wildfires, government will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Target education, communication and enforcement to address incendiary-related wildfires; • Target enforcement with partner agencies (such as the RCMP, Fish and Wildfire Officers and local Indigenous communities) in high-risk arson areas; • Complete a statistical analysis of incendiary-related wildfires to better direct resources for prevention activities; and • Offer enhanced wildfire investigation courses for government staff and partners (such as municipalities, specialized contractors, the Fire and Arson Investigation Association of Alberta and the Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre). |

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| <p>Conduct a more comprehensive review of WMB communications and stakeholder engagement strategies, systems and processes with an objective of improving the experience of community members and stakeholders who are directly or indirectly being impacted by wildfire or other natural disasters.</p> | <p>To improve external communication with community members and stakeholders, government will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct research to better understand Alberta Wildfire’s target audience and evaluate communication strategies and approaches; • Identify best method for emergency communications; • Update wildfire-focused digital information tools; and • Develop protocol that clarifies communications roles and responsibilities during an emergency event. |
| <h2 style="background-color: #f4a460; padding: 5px;">Ready to respond to wildfire</h2> | |
| <p>Develop and implement a new preparedness planning framework that balances risk, hazard, values and cost to improve overall outcomes.</p> | <p>As part of preparedness planning for a better wildfire response, government will assess current systems and available technologies and implement learnings by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhancing wildfire occurrence prediction models; and • Updating the approach to having firefighters, aircraft and equipment prepositioned in areas of high hazard to be able to respond quickly to new wildfire starts. |
| <p>Improve quality and integration of Fire Weather and Behaviour functions to support strategic preparedness and response.</p> | <p>In order to better respond to wildfires, government will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create detailed fuel mapping around communities including identifying municipal developments, critical infrastructure, utility corridors, telecommunications, and culturally important land; and • Integrate fire weather and behaviour knowledge and expertise. |
| <p>Accelerate the development and approval of the remaining Wildfire Management Plans (WMPs) to have them completed in the shortest possible timeframe.</p> | <p>Government will emphasize completing the remaining WMPs for the Grande Prairie, Peace River, High Level, Whitecourt and Slave Lake forest areas.</p> |
| <h2 style="background-color: #f4a460; padding: 5px;">Responding to wildfires</h2> | |
| <p>Establish a standard operating procedure (SOP) for situations when a wildfire escapes Initial Attack during the high risk conditions and where there are significant values at risk. The SOP would identify that an experienced Incident Commander be assigned immediately to assume command of the wildfire until the first Incident Management Team assumes control.</p> | <p>In order to improve wildfire response, government will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a SOP for situations when a wildfire escapes initial attack during high-risk conditions and where there are significant values at risk; and • Enhance training and retention of senior Incident Commanders. |

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| Revise standard tactics and strategies for sustained attack to have better, safer, and more cost-effective results. | Government will improve sustained attack methods by providing training for lower and mid-level Incident Commanders and communicating with public and stakeholders on value of indirect attack and use of hand or aerial ignition. |
| Review current policy and provide direction to wildfire management staff regarding wildfire status to clarify stages of control and the status of wildfires being monitored. | Government will use clear, consistent language to communicate the status of a wildfire and will share information about the wildfire operations techniques being used on those fires. |
| Develop and train staff, including staff from other ministries, to support Incident Management Team (IMT) deployments and Forest Areas under escalating workloads. | Government will recruit and train staff across ministries. Staff will receive mentorship and necessary certifications to be ready for deployment. |
| Implement a common mandatory radio communication plan and system for all WMB wildfire personnel, municipal firefighters and first responders working on wildfire incidents. | In order to improve communication in wildfire response, government will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review Alberta First Responders Radio Communications System for functionality and acceptance by users; • Engage Public Safety Committee ministries for support; and • Determine if single communications system is suitable on wildfire incidents. |
| Accelerate the development of a safety culture that values incident reporting, hazard assessments, workplace committees and inspections, and the engagement of front-line staff in conversations designed to protect their health and well-being. | To promote a safety culture, government will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct an annual review and update of three-year occupational health and safety (Occupational Health and Safety) plan; • Maintain Certificate of Recognition for employers who develop health and safety programs that meet established standards; and • Increase reporting of incidents, enhanced hazard assessments and incident analyses, and have more staff engaged in participation on workplace committees and inspections. |
| Information and technology systems | |
| WMB should continue with the legacy modernization program to provide functionality required by WMB to help improve the delivery of wildfire management activities and help reduce the impact of wildfires in Alberta. | Government will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a single integrated system to make enhanced decisions using better and most recent data, including record keeping of decisions; and • Use improved tools and technologies to help reduce impacts of wildfires in Alberta. |

| Cost management | |
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| Undertake a deeper cost-benefit analysis of program spending with a focus on major suppression items. | <p>In order to ensure efficient and effective spending, government will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and refine wildfire contract processes; • Review and adjust helicopter rates; • Review and adjust heavy equipment contract rates and process; and • Review and assess privatization of CL215T skimmer airtankers. |
| Risk management and strategic response | |
| Accelerate the development and organization of the Intelligence Unit in the AWCC to support strategic risk management and resource planning. | <p>Government will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide longer-term weather forecasting with the intent to forecast resource needs out 10 to 14 days for sustained action wildfires; • Integrate fire weather and behaviour knowledge and expertise; and • Align this work with a cost-benefit analysis of program spending. |