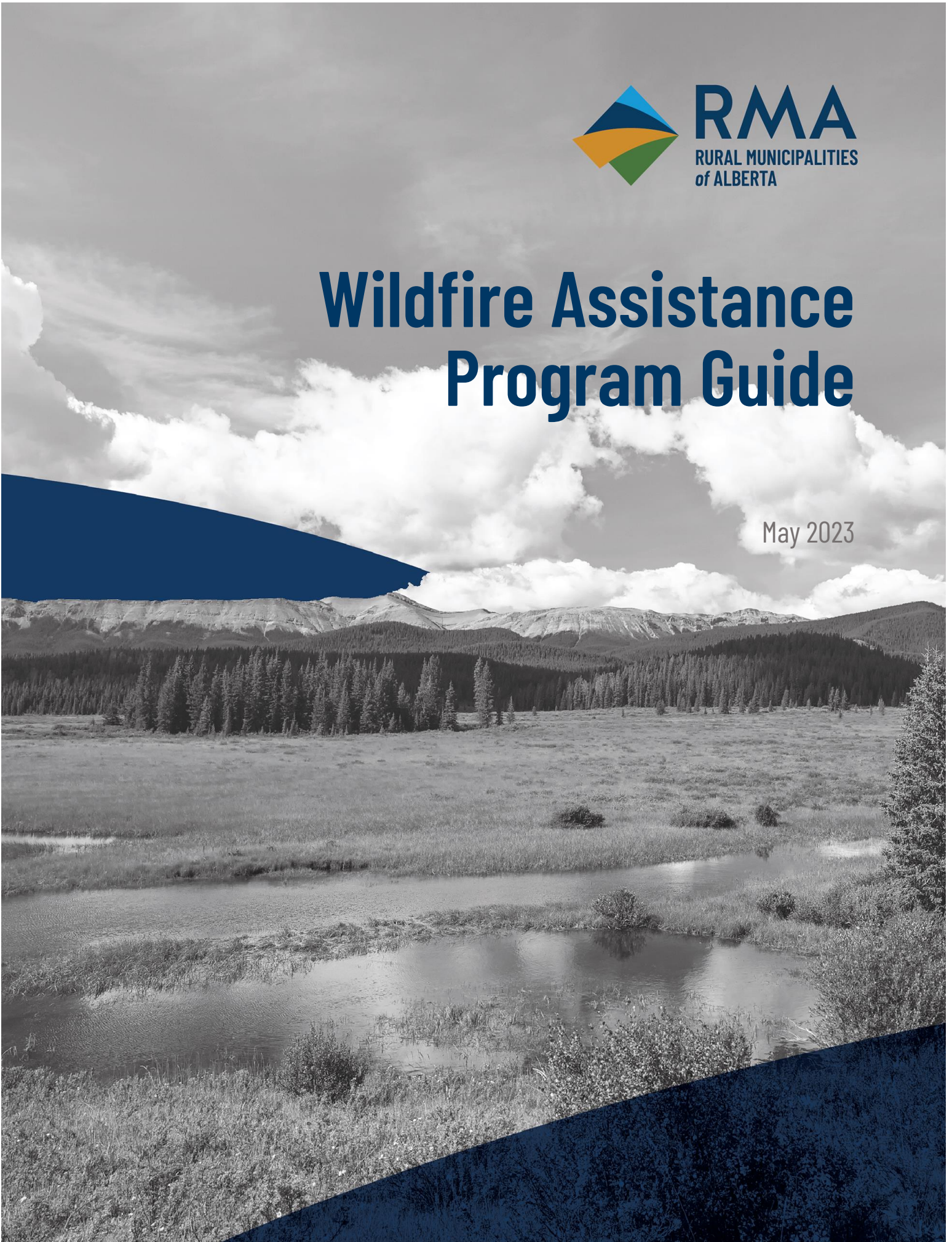




RMA
RURAL MUNICIPALITIES
of ALBERTA

Wildfire Assistance Program Guide

May 2023



Introduction

As many RMA members continue to respond to wildfires and plan for re-entry and recovery processes, RMA has received frequent member questions related to if and when the Government of Alberta plans to activate disaster support funding and how the primary disaster support funding programs are structured. RMA continues to regularly advocate to the Government of Alberta on the need for timely and sufficient provincial funding to off-set the extraordinary costs that many rural municipalities have incurred in recent weeks. RMA will provide members with information on funding availability as it is received.

This guide is intended to provide members with a short overview of the [Municipal Wildfire Assistance Program](#) and the [Disaster Recovery Program](#). The information in the guide is a summary of the more detailed information available on the GOA website. For specific questions about program eligibility, application processes, etc., members are encouraged to contact the Alberta Emergency Management Agency by phone at 1-888-671-1111 or by email at drp.info@gov.ab.ca. Members can also contact an [AEMA regional office](#) for questions about local conditions.

Municipal Wildfire Assistance Program

The [Municipal Wildfire Assistance Program](#) (MWAP) is a provincewide program designed to provide financial assistance to municipalities that incur extraordinary incremental costs in the suppression of wildfires outside of Alberta's [Forest Protection Area](#). For the purposes of a MWAP, a wildfire is defined as an unwanted or unplanned natural or human-caused wildfire that burns in forested, grassland, or other vegetative areas outside the FPA.

The MWAP is intended to assist in:

- Helping reduce both the risk and losses associated with wildfires outside the FPA.
- Supporting local emergency preparedness for emergencies and disasters.
- Motivating municipalities to implement wildfire prevention initiatives.

The following situations are not eligible for assistance:

- Insurance for the damage, loss or costs was reasonably and readily available before the disaster or emergency occurred.
- There is a substantial likelihood that the damage, loss, or costs could be recovered through legal action.
- Funding of the full amount of the damage, loss or costs is available under other Government of Alberta programs.

Declaration Process

Information relating to the severity of the event will be reviewed by the Disaster Recovery Committee (administered by the AEMA) to determine if the criteria for approval of an application and subsequent program have been met. The Disaster Recovery Committee will provide a recommendation to the Minister of Municipal Affairs concerning approval of a MWAP.

Under the [Disaster Recovery Regulation](#), the Minister of Municipal Affairs may issue a ministerial order declaring an MWAP for a specific municipality or region in response to a wildfire. Financial assistance will become available to impacted municipalities upon the signing of the ministerial order.

Once an MWAP application is approved, the AEMA will notify applicants in writing with a description of the program, the precise geographic area it covers and, if appropriate, instructions regarding the submission process. Notification of the program closure for applicants will occur two years from the date of the approval of the Ministerial Order.

Eligibility and Application Process

When an MWAP is declared, the [Alberta Emergency Management Agency](#) (AEMA) will provide affected municipalities with application forms to facilitate the submission of timely and accurate information with respect to damages in their respective areas (see s. 2.1.3 of MWAP Guidelines).

Municipalities located within an MWAP area must meet several criteria to be eligible for funding, including:

- Have advised the AEMA of the fire and potential MWAP application as soon as is reasonably possible.
- Are unable to recover all of the costs through another government program or legal action.

- Have requested assistance from the local Forest Area Manager (if appropriate) at the earliest practicable time.
- The costs associated with the municipality's wildfire response must exceed \$25 per capita.

A full list of eligibility considerations can be found in s. 3.1 of the MWAP Guidelines.

For an [application](#) to be considered for approval, the municipality must submit its application to the AEMA within 90 days of the beginning of the event. Municipalities are required to provide monetary damage amounts and damage descriptions in three categories:

- Emergency operations.
- Infrastructure damage.
- Fire fighter costs.

Specific eligible costs are included in the MWAP Guidelines (Part 4).

Evaluation and Approval Process

Each application is reviewed prior to being presented to the Disaster Recovery Committee to ensure the information presented is valid and complete. If there are any errors or issues within the application, it can be amended before the final approval process.

Financial assistance will only be available pending the review of all documentation. A municipality may request, in writing, an advance payment to address early funding required.

There is a two-year limit established for completion of repairs and the submission of documentation to support an application for assistance. A municipality may request an extension from the Managing Director of the AEMA in extenuating circumstances.

Once a MWAP application has closed, no additional requests for assistance will be considered for that application. The final payments will be made based on receipt and review of all documents submitted by the applicant prior to program closure.

Disaster Recovery Program

The AEMA has developed the [Alberta Public Sector Disaster Assistance Guidelines](#) for the administration of disaster financial assistance through Alberta's [Disaster Recovery Program](#) (DRP). The DRP is intended to provide support to both property owners and public sector entities for uninsurable loss and damage due to disasters.

The purpose of the DRP is to:

- Contribute to a ready and resilient Alberta.
- Restore public property to its pre-disaster functional condition, but not be a full cost property replacement program, like some forms of insurance.
- Be a program of last resort.

Municipal DRP assistance may only be provided for fires when the fire poses a threat to urban and commercial developments, and actions taken in response to the fire are primarily for preemptive actions, including evacuation, and damaged infrastructure restoration.

Declaration Process

Pursuant to the [Disaster Recovery Regulation](#), the Minister may approve a DRP in a geographic area if the Minister is satisfied that the disaster caused widespread damage to property, and the cause of the disaster was extraordinary. Sections 1.4 and 1.5 of the guidelines provide more details as to the criteria for approving a DRP, including criteria to determine whether a disaster has impacted a municipality's economic viability.

Eligibility and Application Process

A wide range of municipal costs are eligible for reimbursement under the DRP in categories such as personnel costs, intergovernmental costs, equipment costs, response costs, recovery costs, and others.

Notable recovery costs eligible for assistance include:

- The cost of remediation of an applicant's property.
- For property that consists of infrastructure and related equipment owned by the Crown in Right of Alberta or a local authority, the cost of returning the property to its pre-disaster functional condition.
- The cost of restoration, replacement, or repairs to infrastructure directly related to the provision, distribution and treatment of potable water and sanitary sewage disposal.
- The cost of appraising and estimating damage, if the cost is in addition to the work carried out by the applicant's employees and occurs within six months of the disaster event start date.
- The cost of hiring contractors for damage assessment and recovery cost appraisals, including related professional service costs.
- The cost of making safe any public infrastructure and public facilities, including, but not limited to, beaches, zoos, and parks, which constitute a threat to public safety, including removal of trees and tree limbs.

To the extent that the cost was necessary for the applicant's disaster response activities, the following costs are eligible for assistance:

- Obtaining means of transportation
- Providing materials and supplies

- Acquiring equipment, including rentals
- Leasing temporary spaces
- Paying expenses and stipends for volunteer responders during the disaster event response and immediately thereafter

Costs associated with disaster response activities listed below are not eligible for assistance unless otherwise determined by the AEMA to be the applicant's incrementally increased costs due to the disaster event:

- Budgeted operating expenses, including maintenance.
- Emergency services related to routine incident management.
- Medical services delivered through regular health infrastructure and resources (including hospitals, public clinics, and ambulances).
- Health protection and treatment exceeding six months.
- Services that exceed basic essential needs, as determined by the AEMA's Provincial Operations Centre as not necessary for the response.

A full list of eligible expenses is available in parts 4 to 7 of the guidelines.

Based on changes made to the DRP in 2021, all eligible costs are subject to a 90%/10% cost-share ratio between the Government of Alberta and the eligible municipality.

Evaluation and Approval Process

The AEMA is responsible for determining financial eligibility for assistance, including decisions of what costs for recovery of damage or losses may be compensated, limits on assistance, or the determination that an applicant is not eligible for any assistance. To be eligible for assistance where a DRP is established, applicants must be within the affected geographical area or where the AEMA determines that damages and losses were not due to the disaster event described. The Minister responsible for the AEMA may approve a DRP if they are satisfied that the disaster caused widespread damage to the property and the cause of the disaster was extraordinary.

An applicant may be paid assistance, only if:

- The applicant incurs and provides an invoice and proof of payment for a cost that is eligible for assistance within the guidelines.
- The applicant meets all of the eligibility criteria contained in these guidelines.
- No provisions in the guidelines make the applicant ineligible for assistance.

The program will be complete three years after the disaster event program approval date. Extensions of approval may be requested in extenuating circumstances. A request for extension must be submitted to the Managing Director no later than two years of the program approval date.

Alberta Private Sector Disaster Assistance Guidelines

While the DRP also provides private financial assistance to help individual property owners restore uninsurable property that is lost or damaged by a disaster to its basic, pre-disaster condition, wildfire damages are not eligible for DRP assistance for private property owners.

Other Information

Support for Impacted Agricultural Operations

The [Agricultural Financial Services Association](#) (AFSC) provides Alberta farmers with crop insurance, livestock price insurance, farm loans, commercial loans and farm income disaster assistance. The AFSC is supporting the response to the wildfires in Alberta by working with affected producers to meet their specific needs during this challenging time.

The following items are important to note for assistance:

- Perennial Insurance: for clients who have acres insured under the Moisture Deficiency Insurance (MDI) product, a Pasture Spot Loss Fire Benefit is included.
- Annual Insurance: The Hail Endorsement covers insured acres for losses caused by hail, accidental fire, or fire by lightning.
- AgriStability considers losses caused by accidental fire, or fire by lightning when calculating the participant's program year margins.
- Lending.

Clients are encouraged to contact their local [AFSC branch office](#) for any further information.

Insurance Bureau of Canada

The [Insurance Bureau of Canada](#) (IBC) is the national association representing Canada's private home, auto and business insurers. Essentially every home and tenant insurance policy covers damage caused by fire. Fire damage to vehicles is covered if optional comprehensive or all-perils coverage was purchased. Homeowners or tenants who are evacuated or are unable to return home as a result of wildfire damage are entitled to [additional living expenses](#) (ALE).

IBC has also developed an Insurance [Wildfire Q & A](#) document, based on questions from the ongoing Alberta government telephone town halls. The telephone town halls take place every evening between 7:30pm-8:30 pm until Sunday, May 21. To listen in, you may hone 1-833-380-0691 or [listen in live](#).