

RMA Wildfire Working Group Report







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Executive Summary

For the purpose of defining responsibilities in fighting wildfires, Alberta is divided into two zones – the Forest Protection Area (FPA), and non-FPA. The FPA is created through regulation under the Forest and Prairie Protection Act. Wildfires inside the FPA are the responsibility of Alberta Forestry and Parks to manage, presumably to protect Alberta’s forests as a resource for the forestry industry. Outside the FPA, rural municipalities are responsible for managing wildfires.

In 2023, RMA members endorsed resolution [7-23F: Strategy for Management of Wildland Fires Outside Forest Protection Area](#). The resolution calls for RMA to lead a working group to develop a strategy for managing wildfires outside the FPA. This report is the culmination of that work and explores the current situation, analyzes reviews and after-action reports of recent wildfires, and analyzes a survey administered to municipalities. These reviews, along with input from the Wildfire Working Group (WWG) lead to recommendations for managing wildfires outside the FPA that fall into three categories: preparedness, response, and recovery.



The recommendations are:

1. That the Government of Alberta develop a competency-based approach to firefighter training and certification based on skills, regardless of specific training standards.
2. That the Government of Alberta increase funding for the Fire Services Training Grant and other wild-fire training grants.
3. That the Government of Alberta provide funding for firefighter training for First Nations including wildland urban interface (WUI), wildland, and structural fires. This includes working with other funding agencies and the Government of Canada.
4. That Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) expands their funding eligibility to fund training for Indigenous fire departments in addition to their existing capital firefighting stream.
5. That non-FPA municipalities include a purpose statement in their Municipal Development Plan (MDP) and other planning documents regarding FireSmart, planning, and building to reduce the risks of wildfire damage.
6. That municipalities broaden mutual aid agreements to become regional resource sharing agreements that would cover sharing of equipment, infrastructure, and staff for non-frontline services required to respond to wildfires such as water treatment, communications, and others. These regional resource sharing agreements should include invitations to nearby First Nations to participate.
7. That the Government of Alberta establish a trigger point for a province-wide fire ban based on the percentage of firefighting resources committed.
8. That the Elected Officials Education Program (EOEP) develop a new course on emergency management for elected officials that addresses topics including mutual aid, cost recovery, fire bans, public communication, and evacuation/re-entry.
9. That municipalities use a data-driven, threat-based approach to determining their firefighting service level. This would include using existing information such as historic fire weather data and newly acquired information such as detailed fuel and fire risk mapping.
10. That elected officials set an expectation of municipal administration to provide adequate data and information on the impact that changes in firefighting-related budgets will have on firefighting service levels, including references to established fire service policy.
11. That the Government of Alberta and Government of Canada provide access to fuel inventory and fire behaviour data to municipalities in a manner that is practicable for their purposes. This should be supplemented with spatial data on critical infrastructure, both municipal and others such as pipelines and electricity distribution.
12. That the Government of Alberta develop and offer training to municipal staff on how to use various available fire datasets.



13. That the Government of Alberta provide grant funding to support the development of an integrated information sharing system that allows municipalities and the Government of Alberta to communicate information about fire crews prior to their arrival at a wildfire.
14. That municipalities prepare a communications plan to ensure information regarding fire conditions, risks, evacuation requirements, infrastructure or property damage, etc. reaches the largest possible proportion of local residents and other impacted parties during periods of high fire risk, during wildfire events, and post-fire. This may include steps to:
 - Partner with the GOA (all communications should be cross-posted and cohesive). This includes incorporating relevant information from the GOA into municipal communications.
 - Share information based on an assumption that many residents do not have highspeed internet.
 - Utilize the training AEMA makes available for municipal information officers.
15. That municipalities communicate to residents the cost of responding to a wildfire, who is responsible, and in what scenarios a resident may receive a bill for wildfire response.
16. That municipalities develop a policy or other guiding document that clearly defines the role of volunteers, including spontaneous volunteers, during a wildfire response, including training, command structure, and scope of work.
17. That municipalities share real-time information with other fire departments and relevant Government of Alberta departments while enroute to a wildfire event, including crew information and equipment.
18. That municipalities should conduct regional emergency exercises to fulfill their legislative emergency exercise requirements.
19. That the Government of Alberta fund the procurement of dual-band compatible radio systems that bridge the gap between the Alberta First Responders Radio Communications

- System and very high frequency (VHF) radios to loan to local firefighters when multi-jurisdictional responses are required.
20. That municipalities establish written protocols that specify if, when, and how to engage in unified command with other municipalities and First Nations, and when to respond using a less formal coordinated response. This work should be informed by data-sharing and regional service agreements.
 21. That the Government of Alberta add a clause to the Municipal Wildfire Assistance Program that specifies that Alberta Wildfire or a municipality may respond in an initial attack response to wildfires within 20 kilometres of the FPA boundary without requiring pre-approval. This should be supplemented with amendments to mutual aid agreements between non-FPA municipalities and their respective Forst Areas.
 22. That the Government of Alberta share their reclamation standards with municipalities and provide guidance and support to municipalities responsible for engaging in reclamation activities.
 23. That the Government of Alberta update their re-entry guide, including sharing guidance with municipalities to guide recovery and clean up, with a special focus on waste management.
 24. That municipalities develop and regularly review re-entry plans.
 25. That the Government of Alberta provide access to training and other support to municipalities on re-entry plans.
 26. That municipalities include in regional services agreements details related to municipal and any partnered First Nations staff and other resources that are necessary to restore critical infrastructure and services.
 27. That municipalities include the recovery phase in future tabletop exercises.
 28. That municipalities build a database of local stakeholders who can assist in supporting recovery.
 29. That the Government of Alberta provide guidance to municipalities on a threshold for situations, before they occur, in which wildfire recovery requires the formation of a local/municipal recovery task force. Smaller wildfires with short or no evacuation may not require a formal task force.
 30. That the Government of Alberta amend their threshold to provide financial support to evacuees impacted by recurring, short-term evacuations.
 31. That RMA, ABmunis, the Alberta Fire Chiefs Association, Alberta Wildfire, and Indigenous firefighting representatives work collaboratively to develop best practices and innovative approaches to attract and retain municipal and wildland firefighters.

Introduction

Wildfire events have been a routine occurrence in Alberta, disrupting communities, impacting health and safety and costing municipalities millions of dollars in wildfire management. The impacts of wildfire events are far-reaching; the risks and damage to infrastructure, human and animal safety, and public and private property have been at the forefront of wildfire events in the past. Wildfire events also have less direct yet significant implications towards municipal leadership, community

viability and many more.

In recent years, wildfires events in Alberta have become more severe: Figure 1 demonstrates how wildfire events have increased in both size and frequency, especially in the last 20 years. Wildfire trends in Alberta have evolved and often municipalities lack adequate resources and support to address them.

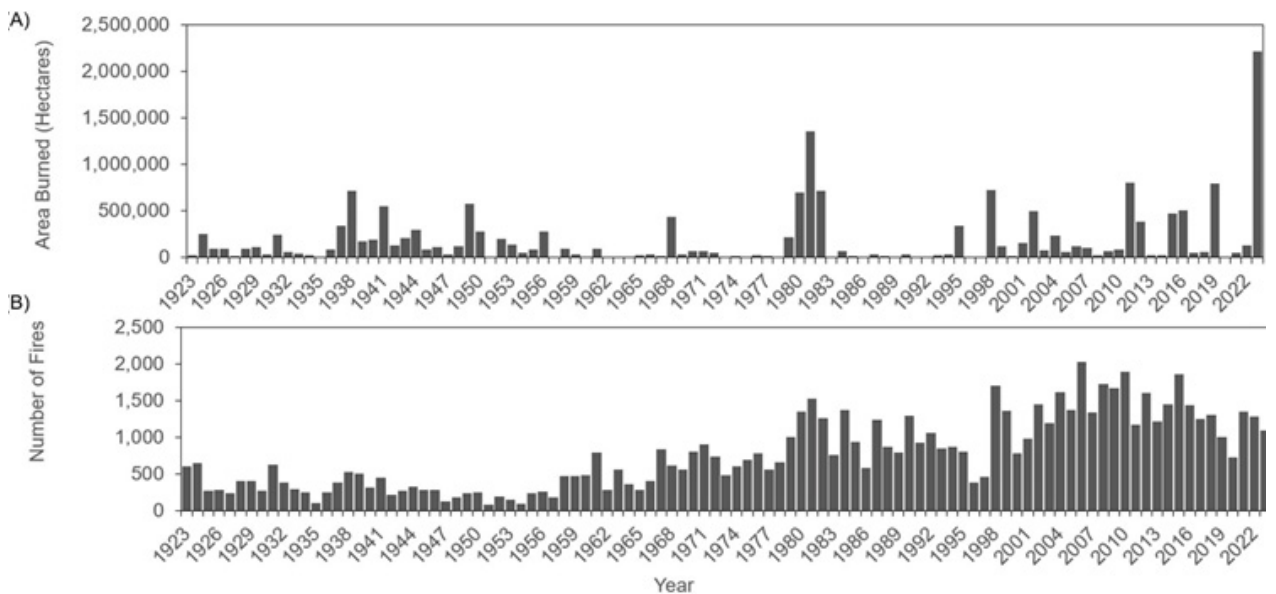


Figure created by Beverly & Schroeder (2024) using data from Alberta Forestry and Parks and P.J. Murphy (1985)

In RMA's 2023 Wildfire Survey, members reported incurring \$78.6 million in cumulative wildfire response costs. Furthermore, requests for provincial support through the Disaster Recovery Program (DRP) from survey respondents totaled over \$60 million. The 2023 wildfire season also caused approximately 38,000 residents to evacuate from over 35 communities in Alberta (Beverly & Schroeder, 2024). These costs and impacts have prompted municipalities to adjust their annual budgets and exacerbated challenges in decision-making, forcing municipalities to recover costs in alternative ways. These challenges are especially burdensome for municipalities located outside of the Forest Protection Area (FPA).



*Figure 2: Map of the Forest Protection Area (FPA) in Alberta
This map was created by the Government of Alberta (2017)*

The FPA is a geographic zone defined by Alberta Forestry and Parks through regulation primarily for the protection of Alberta's forestry resources. Today, it is also used for the management of resources during wildfire events; Section 7(1) of the Forest and Prairie Protection Act states the following:

The council of a rural municipality is responsible for fighting and controlling all fires within the boundaries of the rural municipality except that part of the rural municipality that is within a forest protection area, and the costs and expenses shall be paid by the rural municipality, subject to its right to recover them under section 9(3).

The Wildfire Working Group

The RMA Wildfire Working Group was created to help address the unique issues that municipalities outside of the FPA encounter when responding to extreme wildfire events. Prompted by resolution 7-23F, this working group was formed to allow rural municipalities and other stakeholders to collaboratively develop long-term strategies and solutions towards the management of wildfire events outside the FPA. RMA struck the wildfire working group (WWG) with representatives from:

- Parkland County
- Brazeau County
- Westlock County
- Leduc County
- Alberta Municipalities (ABmunis)
- Alberta Fire Chiefs Association
- Alberta Forest Products Association
- Alberta Emergency Management Agency

As well as advisory representative members from:

- Alberta Forestry and Parks
- Alberta Environment and Protected Areas
- Alberta Municipal Affairs

Additionally, delegate speakers were invited to share their expertise and knowledge in key areas related to the discussions of the WWG:

- Dr. Jen Beverly – Fire Behaviour Specialist and Associate Professor, Dept. of Renewable Resources, University of Alberta
- Laura Stewart – FireSmart Specialist, Alberta Forestry and Parks
- Sherry Norton – Senior Manager at MNP and Forest Resource Improvement Association of Alberta (FRIAA)
- Michael Martineau – Emergency Management Lead, Confederacy of Treaty Six First Nations
- Brad Andres – Director, Emergency Management Services, Alberta Agriculture and Irrigation

Wildfire Reviews and After-Action Reports

To establish a common understanding of and consider lessons learned from recent wildfires, the WWG coordinated an analysis of various fire reviews and after-action reports. This work was conducted in the initial stages of the WWG's process and helped guide discussions that ultimately led to the recommendations presented in this report. The reviews include wildfires both within and outside the FPA. While the WWG's mandate focused on wildfires outside the FPA, the review of major fires within the FPA is useful to inform how the Government of Alberta (GOA) responds to these incidents. Additionally, the fires reviewed that occurred primarily within the FPA included significant municipal involvement, especially as these fires threatened and damaged urban areas. This section will summarize the reviews completed by the WWG, including key takeaways. The intent is for these reviews to contextualize the recommendations made in this report.



While wildfires have always been part of the landscape, in recent years wildfires in Alberta have been increasing in intensity, frequency, and duration. Several significant fires have impacted Alberta including the following:

- 2011 Flat Top Complex fire that impacted the MD of Lesser Slave River and Town of Slave Lake, causing more than \$700 million in insurable losses
- 2016 Horse River fire that occurred in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, including Fort McMurray, and caused more than \$3.7 billion in insurable losses
- 2019 wildfires throughout Alberta that burned more than 883,000 hectares
- 2023 wildfires throughout Alberta, including many areas outside the forest protection area (FPA) such as Yellowhead County, Brazeau County, and Parkland County
- 2024 Jasper fire, from which the Town of Jasper and governments of Alberta and Canada are still in the process of recovering

Provincial Reviews

Following a major wildfire within the FPA, the Government of Alberta typically undertakes formal reviews that detail the fire response and areas for improvement in relation to responding to future wildfires.

Flat Top Complex Review

Overview

The Flat Top Complex wildfire occurred in May 2011 and included urban interfacing wildfires around the Town of Slave Lake and the Municipal District of Lesser Slave River. Between May 11 and May 15, fifty-two human caused wildfires began in the Lesser Slave River area. The fires destroyed close to 500 single and multi-family residences and 19 non-residential buildings. Fires burned over 79,000 hectares of forested land. Roughly 15,000 residents of the Town of Slave Lake and the Municipal District of Lesser Slave River were evacuated for approximately two weeks.

To address the wildfire, the GOA spent \$16 million on wildfire suppression. This does not include the cost of fighting structural fires, where over \$700 million in insurable losses were claimed.

Where: MD of Lesser Slave River and Town of Slave Lake
When: 2011
Area Burned: 79,000 hectares
Estimate on costs: GOA spent \$16 million

Analysis

The review makes 21 recommendations that address specific elements of the Flat Top Complex fire. As the fire occurred in the FPA, many of the recommendations are specific to actions and procedures within that context. However, several recommendations have broader applicability for non-FPA areas:

1. Establish a revised delivery model for a FireSmart program under one provincial framework, including a streamlined and enhanced funding model.
2. Advance start times for resources, including crews, equipment and aircraft contracts, to be ready for potential early fire seasons. Ensure staff vacancies are filled as soon as possible. Expand work terms to year-round for a portion of firefighting crews to support retention and provide capacity for FireSmart initiatives.
3. Ensure sufficient fire behaviour specialist capabilities at the provincial forest fire centre as part of wildfire weather forecasting, and implement wildfire occurrence predictions to support the pre-suppression preparedness system.
4. Work with other agencies (e.g. Alberta Municipal Affairs) to develop a structure protection program in which the GOA's role in structural protection is reduced. This will allow Alberta Wildfire to focus its resources and action on wildfire containment.

The intended result is an increased role for municipal fire services to provide sprinkler protection for homes. Key components will be the provision of standardized equipment and training for fire departments and focus on proactive deployment under the mutual aid network.

5. Enhance standards and training for employees involved in liaison and wildfire management information communications that support operations before, during and after a wildfire event.
6. Issue Fire Weather Advisories that include wildfire behaviour potential to ensure understanding of the wildfire danger.

Several themes emerge from the recommendations. First, prevention of wildfires and the implementation of FireSmart practices is identified as a need to reduce the intensity and frequency of future fires. While not specific to non-FPA areas, the implementation of FireSmart practices is addressed in the recommendations presented below. Second, there is a need for improved coordination between Alberta Wildfire and municipalities, including role clarity, coordinating firefighting resources, and the sharing of fire risk information from the GOA to municipalities. This includes understanding the delineation of responsibilities for responding to structural fires and communicating with the public during an evacuation. These elements, along with the need for improved data availability for municipalities emerge in other fire reviews.

Note, the Flat Top Complex fire occurred within the FPA, and therefore the recommendations that target Alberta Wildfire are specific to their role within that context. In a non-FPA area Alberta Wildfire would play a different role, but the general findings are likely applicable.

Spring 2019 Wildfire Report

Overview

The Spring 2019 Wildfire Review was completed following a busy 2019 wildfire season with extreme burning conditions and significant wildfire events. The report focused on the Chuckegg Creek wildfire (High Level), the McMillan complex (Slave Lake), and the Battle complex (Peace River).

The significant 2019 wildfire season was attributed to extreme wildfire conditions that included underlying drought in north-western Alberta, low precipitation and dry conditions across the province, warm spring temperatures, and windy conditions. Although the annual number of fires across the province was below average, the total area burned of 883,414 hectares far exceeded the nine-year seasonal average of 355,678 hectares. Addressing these fires cost the GOA a total of \$438.6 million. This number is significant as it surpasses the costs of the previous five years.

Where: High Level, Slave Lake, Peace River
When: 2019
Area Burned: 883,414 hectares
Estimate on costs: GOA spent \$438.6 million

Analysis

As the 2019 review was commissioned by the GOA and the fires took place within the FPA, the majority of the recommendations address actions that are outside of the scope of the WWG to review and consider. However, relevant recommendations include:

1. Conduct a more comprehensive review of Alberta Wildfire 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.
2. Improve quality and integration of fire weather and behaviour functions to support strategic preparedness and response.
3. Implement a common mandatory radio communication plan and system for all Alberta Wildfire personnel, municipal firefighters and first responders working on wildfire incidents.

These recommendations point to the need for improved coordination with municipalities, increased access to fire data, and a common radio system. In general, the recommendations reveal a need for improved coordination and communication between provincial firefighting assets and municipalities. These themes are consistent with those found in other reviews and are directly applicable to the mandate of the WWG. These findings are referenced in several recommendations made in following sections of this report.

2016 Horse River Fire

Overview

The Horse River Wildfire began in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo on May 1, 2016. It was

attributed to extreme wildfire conditions that included high temperatures, low humidity, sustained wind speeds, and below average precipitation, all of which led to the heightened availability of fuel.

The Horse River wildfire had burned 589,552 hectares when it was declared under control on July 4. At the peak of wildfire response resources, 2,198 wildland and municipal firefighters and support personnel, 77 helicopters, nine airtanker groups and 269 pieces of heavy equipment worked to suppress the fire. The Insurance Bureau of Canada estimated insured losses at \$3.7 billion.

Where: Regional
Municipality of Wood Buffalo
When: 2016
Area Burned: 589,552
hectares
Estimate on costs: : Not
reported, but an estimated
\$3.7 billion in insured losses

Analysis

The Horse River wildfire review makes 10 recommendations, each supported by specific actions. There are seven recommendations that inform the mandate of the WWG:

1. Alberta Wildfire needs to be prepared and ready to respond to wildfires the week after snow disappears from the ground or May 1, whichever occurs sooner.
2. Improve fire weather forecasting by extending the length of the forecast outlook period and by designing products that directly link weather forecasts with fire behaviour.
3. Equip the Planning Section of the Alberta Wildfire Coordination Centre to be operational on March 1 annually to provide fire behaviour and wildfire occurrence predictions.
4. Establish a standard operating procedure for the GOA which requires, when a wildfire escapes from initial attack and urban interface risks are present, the immediate assignment of a senior incident commander to undertake tactical planning for wildfire containment and risk mitigation.
5. Continue to develop risk management frameworks as the foundation for wildfire management policy.
6. Direct agencies and services involved in wildfire suppression in relation to the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) to establish standard operating procedures for the implementation of an Incident Command System (ICS).
7. Emphasize a long-term vision for FireSmart within the province.

These recommendations can be grouped into several themes that inform future work. First, there is a need for Alberta Wildfire to increase capacity, specifically related to readiness for early-season wildfires. This includes both response capacity and monitoring and planning. Second, there is a need for improving data availability for decision-makers. The Horse River Wildfire occurred within the FPA and as a result the recommendations are focused on provincial wildfire response, however, this finding can be generalized to include the data needs of non-FPA municipalities. Finally, there is a need for improved integration between Alberta Wildfire and municipal firefighters. This example is specific to WUI firefighters, however, the recommendations can be generalized to improve the integration between provincial and municipal firefighters that are not involved in WUI operations, including non-FPA municipalities.



Municipal After-Action Reports

While not standard for every fire, after major wildfire events some municipalities contract third parties to conduct after-action reports. After-action reports typically include recommendations for the municipality to improve preparation and response to future wildfires.

2016 RMWB

Overview

This review was prepared for the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo (RMWB) following the 2016 Horse River Wildfire. In the previous section the provincial review was analyzed which provides an overview of the GOA's response and provides recommendations from through a provincial lens. The report reviewed in this section is separate from the provincial review and focuses on the actions of RMWB. As the previous section addresses the response phase, the analysis of the RMWB report presented below is focused on the recovery phase.

Analysis

To support recovery efforts, the RMWB Council formed the Wood Buffalo Recovery Committee. The Committee was comprised of both councillors and public members, and led to the subsequent creation of a Recovery Task Force. The Recovery Task Force developed the 2016 RMWB Wildfire Recovery Plan. The Recovery Plan established five pillars and developed lessons learned in each theme:

- People - This pillar involved psycho-social recovery efforts through community rebuilding and engagement.
- Environment - The environment pillar focused on assessing and remediating environmental impacts which included environmental testing, bear smart, air monitoring coordination, and re-establishing green spaces.
- Economy - This pillar was focused on the recovery needs of small to medium businesses as opposed to long-term and larger scale economic growth (e.g. lower unemployment, oil prices, etc).
- Rebuild - The rebuild pillar was focused on the rapid reconstruction of the community to address and repair wildfire damages. It focused on making timely policy decisions that enabled reconstruction, by removing obstacles and barriers to recovery.
- Mitigate - The purpose of the mitigate pillar was to implement mitigation measures with a view to improving resiliency.

The recovery task force's work yields several lessons learned for municipalities following a wildfire that are contained in its report. The report did not include a specific budget or staff capacity required to support the task force, however, given the comprehensive role of the task force and it can be assumed that a substantial investment was made. The Horse River fire was unprecedented in its level of impact

on the community and the complexity and cost of recovery efforts. For this reason, the in-depth recovery approach taken by RMWB may not be necessary or realistic following all fires, but the general multi-pillared view of recovery identified and implemented by RMWB could act as a model for recovery considerations for future wildfires.

Brazeau County and Drayton Valley

Overview

The Town of Drayton Valley and Brazeau County commissioned an after-action report following the 2023 Buck Creek Wildfire. The Buck Creek Wildfire began on May 3, 2023, having been rekindled from a previously managed wildfire due to dry, hot, windy conditions. After reignition, the fire grew rapidly due to “unprecedented weather conditions,” leading both the county and town to declare a state of local emergency on May 4 and order an evacuation several hours later on the same day. The evacuation was issued at 11:00 pm and complicated by multiple wildfires blocking major transportation routes leaving limited evacuation corridors. More than 7,000 residents evacuated.

Where: Brazeau County and the Town of Drayton Valley
When: 2023
Area Burned: 4,998 hectares
Estimate on costs: Not reported.

Brazeau County and the Town of Drayton Valley received assistance from 35 municipal fire departments within and outside of Alberta, with Clearwater County’s WUI (Wildfire Urban Interface) trained teams, the County of Wetaskiwin and Parkland County providing an especially high level of support. The evacuation ended and residents returned on May 16-18, 2024.

Analysis

The after-action report makes several recommendations. For the purpose of the WWG, relevant recommendations include:

1. Improve the operations of the Emergency Coordination Centre (ECC) by:
 - Conducting ECC activation and standing up specific training to familiarize staff with roles and responsibilities.
 - Reviewing the ECC physical location(s) and set ups to ensure it meets all logistical needs and overall suitability for a sustained activation (e.g. ECC handbooks, vests, position-specific bins, forms, breakout rooms).
 - Hosting Incident Command System (ICS) 300 training for all eligible County and Town staff who have a primary or backup role in the ECC.
2. Ensure all staff and elected officials have the minimum legislated training requirements, and exercise accordingly to practice and retain skills, as per the Local Authority Emergency Management Regulations.



3. Design unified command into the county and town municipal emergency management plans.
4. Develop a proactive Crisis Management (Communication) Plan that will help determine processes and key messages for future events.
5. Ensure that both Brazeau County and Drayton Valley update their MEP (Municipal Emergency Plan) so that both municipalities meet or exceed the Local Authority Emergency Management Regulations.
6. Schedule regular crisis communications training to practice issuing alerts, reviewing key messages and practice social media posting.
7. Utilize the ICS structure to gain advanced situational awareness so that triggers provide as much buffer time as practicable for future planning and evacuations/re-entry.
8. Develop a robust ESS Plan as part of the MEP and embed ESS into the organization either as its own section or under the Operations Section Chief.

While the recommendations in the after-action report are specific to Brazeau County and Drayton Valley, all are applicable to municipalities more broadly and point to a need for improved support for municipalities in planning and resourcing their emergency response including emergency planning, emergency coordination centre, and training for municipal staff. These recommendations suggest that capacity building and funding for municipalities is required, items that are addressed in the recommendations of the WWG report.

Parkland County

Overview

Parkland County's Range Road 70 fire was initially ignited in November 2022, but did not pose a risk until April 29, 2023 when it rapidly spread due to the very high Fire Weather Index rating. Due to the quick spread of the fire, Parkland County activated their Incident Command Post (ICP) to expand their response capacity and declare a State of Local Emergency (SOLE) later in the day on April 29. As a result of early fire spread, 380 residents were evacuated. While the fire was considered "held" on May 3, a shift in weather index rating led to a second evacuation on May 4.

Where: Parkland County

When: 2023

Area Burned: 8,800
hectares

Estimate on costs: \$12
million for Parkland County

Analysis

The after-action report includes an assessment of the strengths and areas of improvement for Parkland County, along with lessons learned. Many of these are reflected in the WWG report's recommendations as they are applicable to many non-FPA municipalities. A summary of these items from the Parkland County after action report is presented here as context for the recommendations laid out further down in the report.

1. Education and management of fuel types and controlled burning may be helpful in minimizing wildfire risk. As the Range Road 70 wildfire was ignited deliberately to burn brush, education on fire safety and requirements may help prevent future fires.
2. Municipal councils and decision-makers and municipal fire departments should prepare for how potential road closures will be handled. This includes engaging with law enforcement and provincial highway maintenance contractors to develop a joint understanding of decision-making during road closures.
3. Data management and maintenance should include regular updates of maps and other resources prior to wildfire emergencies.
4. The county should establish a professional relationship with a crisis communications consultant who could support Parkland County's communications capacity during a wildfire.
5. Consider the inclusion of maps, diagrams and other visual aids to support evacuation messaging and alerts.
6. Utilization of FireSmart as an educational tool for landowners can help manage both risk and expectations related to wildfire events and damage recovery.

In general, the recommendations stemming from Parkland County's after-action report are consistent with findings from the other after-action reports commissioned in recent years. However, several unique recommendations are presented including sharing information with the public on the proper rules and procedures for a controlled burn, working with local law enforcement to understand how road closures will be handled, and specifically contracting a crisis communications consultant to assist with capacity during an event. As these specific items are not referenced in the other after-action reports, they demonstrate how every wildfire event is unique and provides new learnings for firefighters and municipalities.

Yellowhead County

Overview

The Yellowhead County after-action report covers three complex fires as well as several additional distinct wildfires that occurred in spring 2023. Beginning on April 29, Yellowhead County opened their Emergency Coordination Centre (ECC), followed the next day by the declaration of a State of Local Emergency (SOLE). Due to the nature of multiple complex fires, evacuation orders were repeatedly initiated and lifted at various times, until June 19 when the cause of evacuation shifted to flooding as a result of significant rain and snowfall.

Where: Yellowhead County
When: 2023
Area Burned: Not reported
Estimate on costs: \$30 million for Yellowhead County

Throughout these changing conditions, Yellowhead County was required to coordinate intra and inter jurisdictional emergency response, utilize municipal buildings and infrastructure like equipment and command centers, facilitate evacuations both into and out of the county, manage volunteers and undergo other wildfire management measures to ensure safety and minimize damage.

Analysis

The after-action report provides recommendations broken down into 11 themes. The salient lessons learned that align with the WWG recommendations include:

1. Municipalities may consider communicating the difference in jurisdiction between FPA and non-FPA areas within their municipal boundaries.
2. The Alberta First Responder Radio Communication System (AFRRCS) needs standardized naming conventions. During the Yellowhead County fires different fire departments learned they had renamed talk groups with non-standard identifiers. This led to confusion amongst the various fire departments.
3. The Government of Alberta should modernize and improve the information sharing and the mapping systems currently in use. This finding is a combination of several recommendations made in the after-action report and points to the need for a common knowledge base when making decisions on preventing and responding to wildfires.
4. Municipality-wide continuity plans following wildfire events should be given more consideration. Following an emergency event, in this case both wildfires and a flood, the impacted municipality

needs a plan to restore critical services that are needed before evacuation orders can be lifted and residents brought back home.

The recommendations coming from the Yellowhead County after-action report include several new items to this review section. First, a specific recommendation is made to inform the public of the difference in jurisdiction between the FPA and non-FPA areas of the municipality. This is particularly important when it comes to managing resident expectations, and there is likely also a GOA role to play in communicating this difference. Second, the recommendations call for continuity planning for municipal services, highlighting the need for critical infrastructure to be functioning before evacuation orders can be lifted. This idea directly informs one of the recommendations made in this report.

Trend Analysis

Each of the wildfires reviewed were unique, as were the approaches taken by impacted municipalities and the Government of Alberta. However, within these unique circumstances and lessons learned are a series of commonly occurring themes that are applicable to the WWG's work.

Communication challenges are frequently identified. This includes municipal-provincial challenges related to both technology (radios) and decision-making, communicating with the public – especially related to evacuation, and communicating with other stakeholders. While the nature of the communications challenge varies in some cases, it points to the general need for municipalities and the province to place more emphasis on planning for communications during a wildfire by all parties involved, both internally, across jurisdictions, and with the public. This WWG report makes several recommendations related to improving communications based in part on the experiences identified in the after-action reports.

A second common theme is the need for expanded FireSmart activities. Several of the after-action reports attribute success in mitigating damage to FireSmart activities. However, in most cases the after-action reports identify a recommendation for the expansion of FireSmart awareness and utilization to reduce their risk of wildfire damage. These recommendations acknowledge that implementing FireSmart practices will not eliminate the risk of a wildfire, however they can be used to mitigate the damage. This common recommendation is captured in the WWG report's recommendations, focusing on the role of the municipality in encouraging FireSmart practices.

A final common theme is the need for data-sharing related to fire risk, fuel mapping, and identifying critical infrastructure. This includes information supplied by specialists like fire behaviour experts who can assist municipalities in planning their response strategy and mapping data on fuel loads and critical municipal, provincial, and industry infrastructure. Access to experts and mapping data are of particular interest, as many municipalities will not have the capacity to complete this work internally, and may require support from other orders of government to hire consultants to gain access to this information.

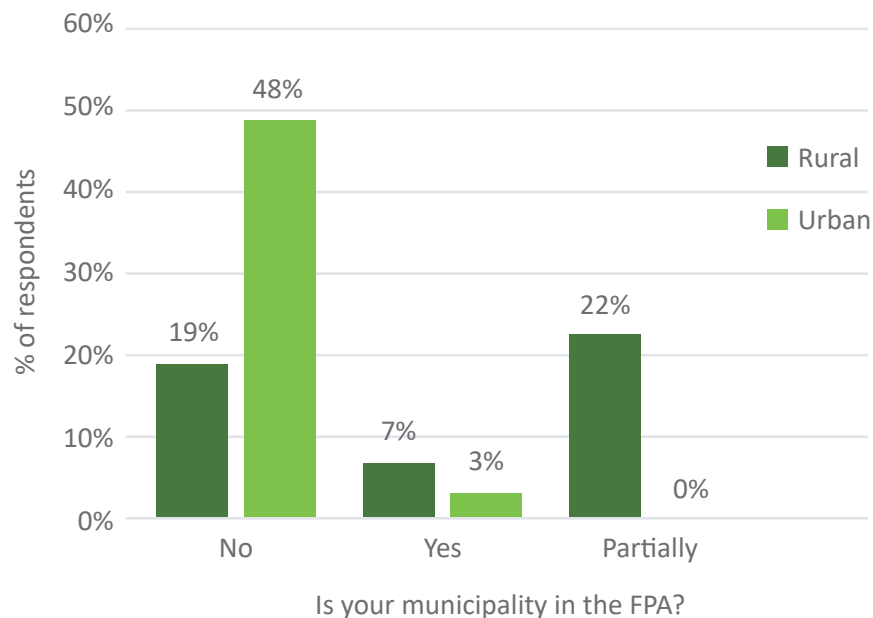
Survey Analysis

To learn more about the needs and perceptions of municipalities with regards to wildfire preparedness, response, and recovery, RMA distributed a survey to all municipalities in Alberta. This section will explore the survey methodology and present key findings.

Methodology and Rationale

The survey was developed by RMA staff and approved by the WWG. It included 35 questions related to topics such as wildfire expenditures, information access, municipal resources and capacity, and profile questions (name, title, municipality, FPA designation). The survey used various question formats such as multi-select multiple choice, single select multiple choice and short response. The survey was distributed via direct email to both rural and urban municipalities across the province on July 16, 2024 and closed on August 6, 2024.

Figure 3: distribution of respondents by municipality type and FPA designation



Analysis and Results

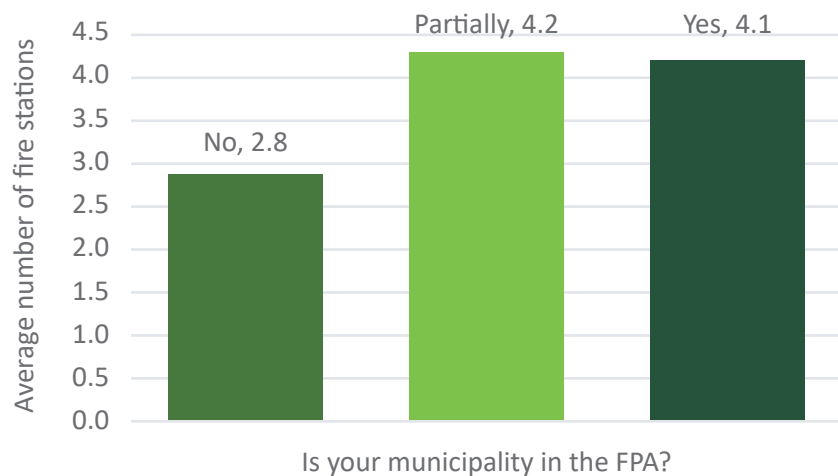
The survey was completed by 69 respondents. However, many of the following results will not total to 69 responses as outliers, non-responses and responses missing relevant data have been omitted to enable clearer analysis.

Although there were more overall responses from urban municipalities (52%) than rural municipalities (48%), 41% of all rural municipalities responded while 11% of all urban municipalities responded. This reflects the strong interest rural municipalities have in improving how wildfires are managed.

The majority of respondents were located outside of the FPA (67%) while 22% of respondents are partially within the FPA. To remain within the scope of the WWG's mandate and its outcomes, a larger focus will be placed on these respondents to ensure that the specific needs and challenges of non-FPA and partial FPA municipalities are captured in this report.

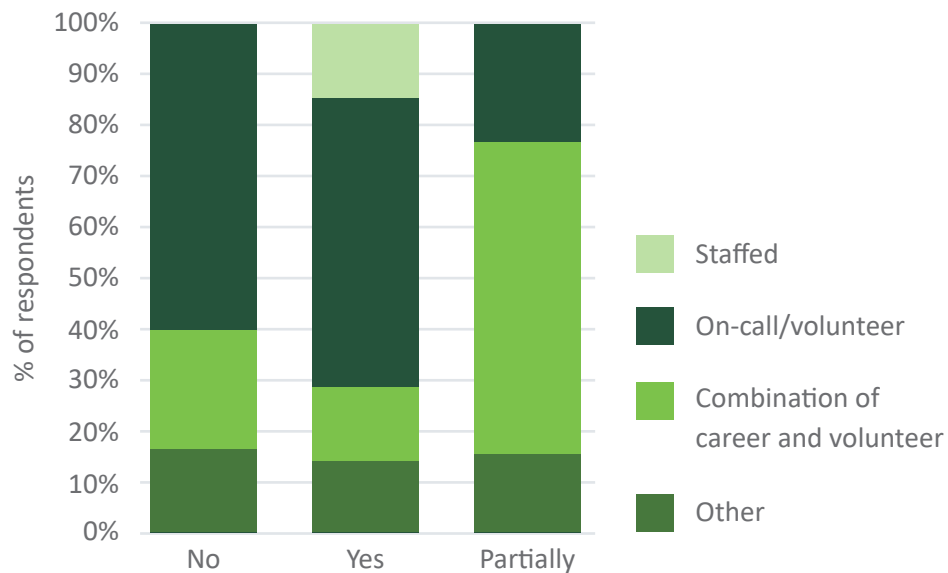
Question 5 asked respondents to indicate how many fire stations are operated by their municipalities. Figure 4 breaks down the results of this question by FPA designation and demonstrates that on average, non-FPA municipalities operate fewer fire stations than municipalities in the FPA (2.8). This result reflects the heightened challenges for municipalities outside the FPA who, under section 7.1 of the Forest and Prairie Protection Act, are required to undertake a direct role in wildfire management with limited resourc-

Figure 4: Average number of fire stations operated by municipalities by FPA designation



es (such as fire stations) required to fulfill this expectation. Although support requests to the provincial government and mutual aid agreements may be established between municipalities, non-FPA municipalities still experience resource and capacity challenges at a time when wildfire events continue to increase in frequency and severity.

Figure 5: How is your fire department resourced?
by FPA designation

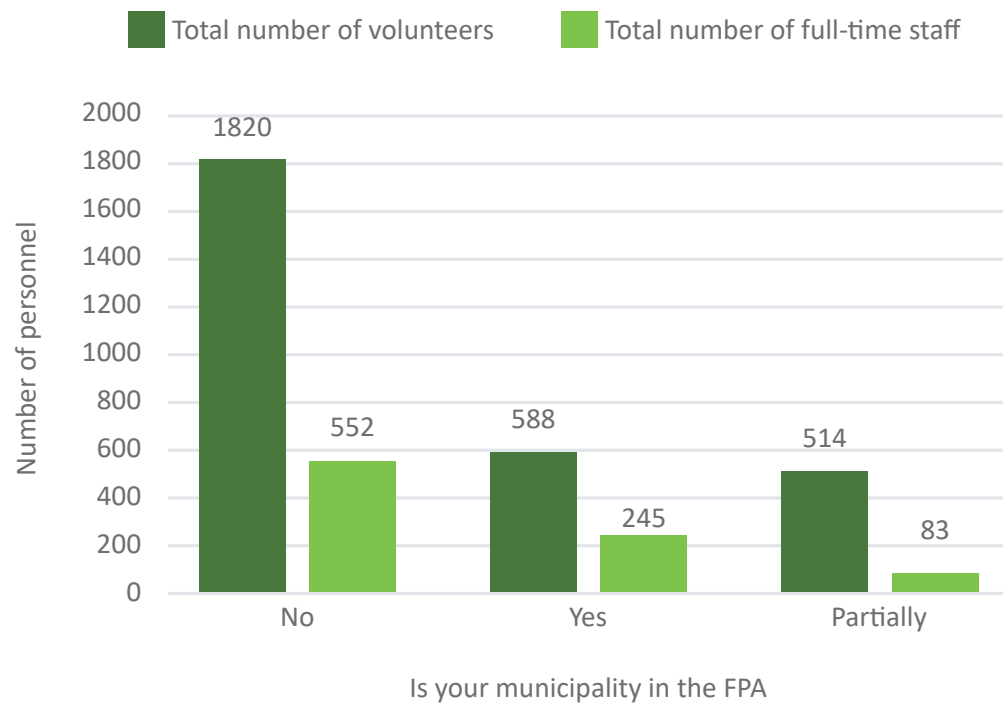


Question 6 asked respondents to describe how their fire departments are resourced. For the purposes of this question, “Staffed” means paid full time employees, “On-call/volunteer” means personnel that may be paid or unpaid but are not full-time and “Combination of career and volunteer” combines the first two categories above. Figure 5 compiles the results of this question grouped by FPA and non-FPA municipalities. Compared to other resource categories, regardless of region, on call/volunteers and combinations of career and volunteer personnel are the primary way that municipalities resource their fire departments. Among non-FPA municipalities, 60% of respondents reported resourcing their fire departments through full-time volunteers compared 23% for partial FPA municipalities and 57% of FPA municipalities. Interestingly, among partial FPA municipalities, a combination of career and volunteer personnel are primarily used to resource municipal fire departments at 62% of respondents from that category. It is also worth noting that only FPA municipalities report having full-time staffed personnel at 14% of respondents for that category. These results together suggest that volunteers are a highly relied upon firefighting personnel resource across the whole province, but especially in partial and non-FPA regions.

WILDFIRE SUPPRESSION SHOULD BE A PROVINCIALY FUNDED BUDGET ITEM WHETHER IN THE [FOREST] PROTECTION AREA OR NOT

WWG Survey respondent (2024)

Figure 6: Total number of volunteer vs. staff personnel in municipal fire departments by FPA designation



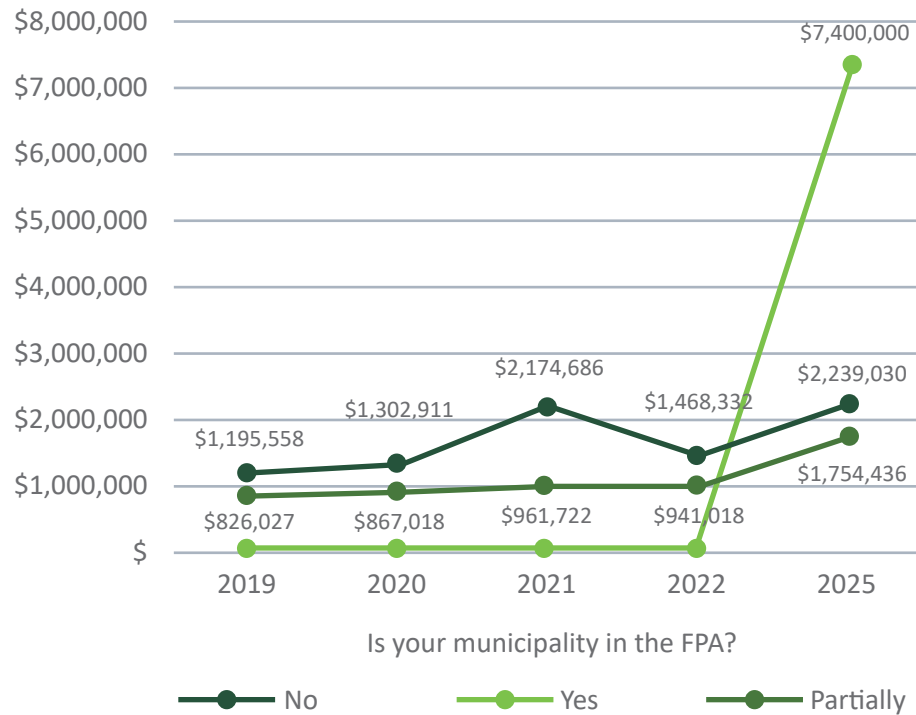
Questions 7 and 8 asked respondents to indicate how many volunteer and paid full-time staff they have available in their municipal fire departments. As shown in Figure 6, volunteers are the largest category across FPA, non-FPA and partial FPA regions. Overall, more volunteers (2922 total) than full-time staff (880 total) are servicing municipal fire departments. Non-FPA municipalities have a significantly larger volunteer presence (1820) than in partial and FPA municipalities combined (1102). The considerable difference in these findings speak to the value of volunteers as well as the reliance that municipalities, communities and orders of government place upon said volunteers to support the bulk of wildfire personnel response outside of the FPA. Volunteers are a crucial aspect of wildfire management in all municipalities, especially in regions outside of the FPA.

Question 10 was a short answer response format question, in which respondents were asked whether their municipalities charge property owners for wildfire response. Many respondents indicated that some form of direct cost for service mechanism is used to charge property owners for wildfire response. Three respondents specified that their municipalities recover costs by charging property owners, yet only in cases of negligence or fault on the property owner's part.

WE ARE A SMALL, AGRICULTURAL RURAL COMMUNITY WITH A STRICTLY VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT. TRAINING IS A LARGE EXPENSE IN WHICH WE STRUGGLE TO FIND FUNDING.

WWG Survey respondent (2024)

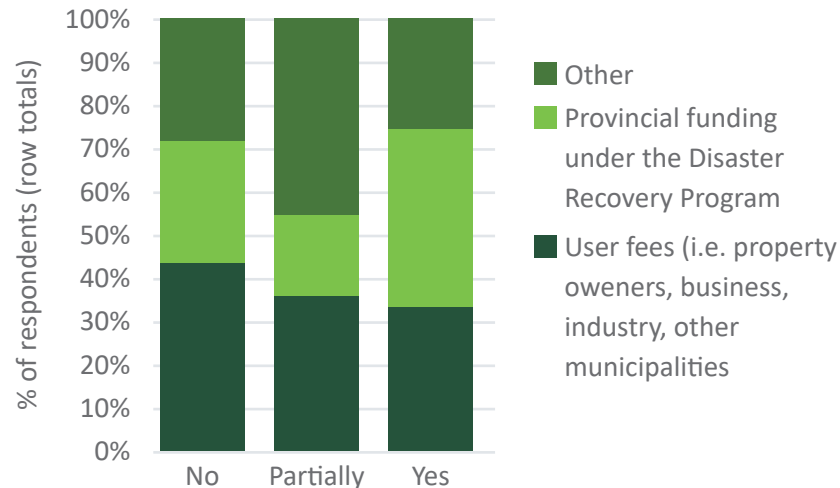
Figure 7: Municipal expenditures towards wildfire response outside the FPA (2019-2023)



In Question 12, respondents were asked about their municipality’s expenses towards wildfire response outside the FPA between 2019 and 2023. Figure 7 highlights a noticeable rise in municipal expenditures in 2023 compared to previous years across all regions, especially among FPA municipalities. Although 2023 was an exceptionally costly wildfire season in Alberta, the factors behind this result are not entirely clear.

Among non-FPA municipalities who responded, around \$2.2 million was spent towards wildfire response outside the FPA in 2023. Non-FPA municipalities also have the highest cumulative wildfire response expenditures across all years at \$8.3 million compared to \$5.4 million across all surveyed partial FPA municipalities and \$7.4 million across all surveyed FPA municipalities, reflecting the unique resource challenges and financial burdens that non-FPA municipalities have routinely faced within wildfire response.

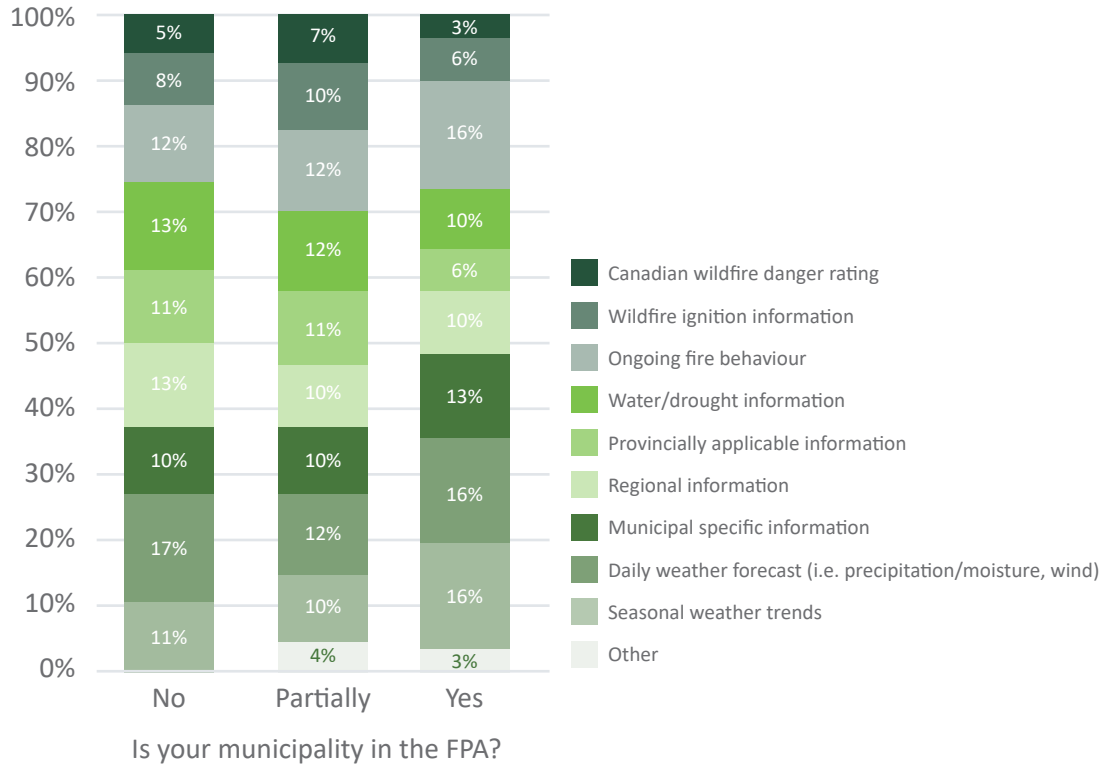
Figure 8: "What is the source of your municipality's cost recovery?"



Question 14 asks respondents to report their municipality's sources of cost recovery. Figure 8 shows that among non-FPA municipalities, user fees are the highest reported method of cost recovery at 44%. Among partial FPA municipalities, however, other methods of cost recovery are most prevalent at 45% of respondents. Four responses indicate some form of mutual agreement either with other municipalities or industry to address wildfire response cost recovery. One response lists both the Disaster Recovery Program (DRP) and the Municipal Wildfire Assistance Program (MWAP) as recovery sources for their municipality. Municipal taxes were also highlighted as a cost recovery method by one municipality while insurance was highlighted by another. Finally, one respondent indicated that their municipality simply does not recover costs from wildfire response. The broad range of these results illustrate how municipalities, especially those located partially within or outside the FPA, are challenged to recover wildfire response costs and rely on a combination of approaches with varying levels of effectiveness.

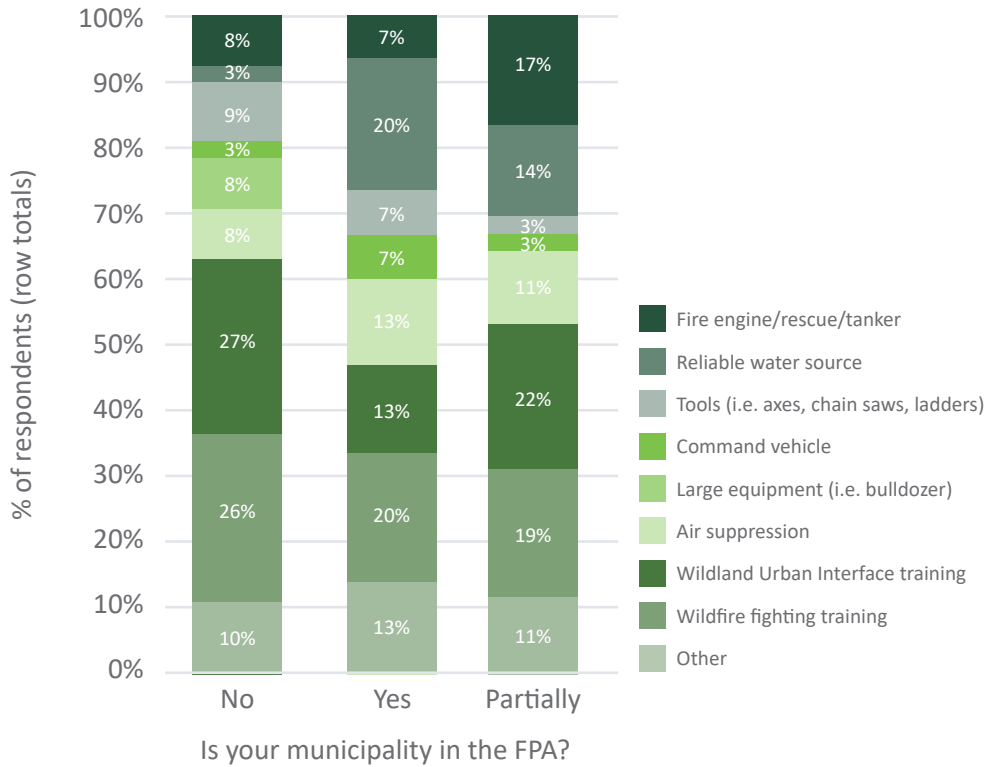
Question 17 asks respondents what wildfire-related information is most important for their municipality. As shown in Figure 9, among non-FPA municipalities, the most important information resources are daily weather forecasts (17%) followed by regional information and water/drought information (both 13%) and thirdly, ongoing fire behavior (12%). In general, these results demonstrate how a wide variety of information resources are used and valued across all regions.

Figure 9: "What wildfire information is important for your municipality?"



In Question 23, respondents identified the three most required resources for wildfire fighting for their municipalities. Figure 10 highlights that Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) training (27%) and general wildfire fighting training (26%) are required most among non-FPA municipalities under the "Other" response category, many municipalities listed needs related to equipment (portable pumps and tanks, sprinkler systems and drones) and increased support for training. Many respondents indicated that funding is the

Figure 8: "What is the source of your municipality's cost recovery?"



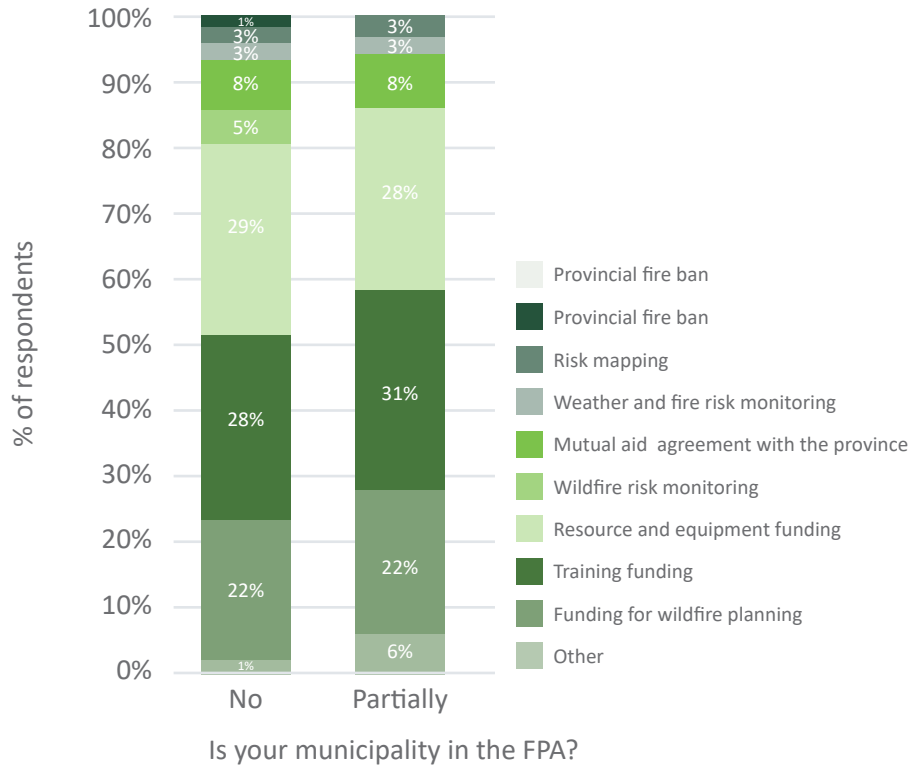
most required resource for their municipality with some specifying funding for programs like the DRP or Emergency Social Services and others calling for general provincial and federal funding. One respondent suggests removing the 90:10 cost-sharing split from the DRP to instead have the provincial government provide and secure funding and resources while another respondent suggests a more streamlined DRP process.

Finally, questions 30, 31 and 32 asked respondents to indicate what kind of support they believe the provincial government should make available to municipalities for wildfire preparedness (Question 30), response (Question 31), and recovery (Question 32). The results of these questions for partial and non-FPA municipalities are compiled in the following three figures.

OUR FIRE DEPARTMENTS ARE ADEQUATELY EQUIPPED FOR INITIAL RESPONSE, HOWEVER THE VOLUNTEER NATURE OF THE DEPARTMENTS MAKE THEM HIGHLY SUSCEPTIBLE TO THE POSSIBILITY OF LIMITED RESPONSE AND/OR BURN OUT. HEAVY RELIANCE ON MUTUAL AID AGREEMENTS AND PROVINCIAL RESOURCES WOULD BE REQUIRED FOR FRONT LINE FIREFIGHTING IN THE EVENT OF A LARGE-SCALE EMERGENCY.

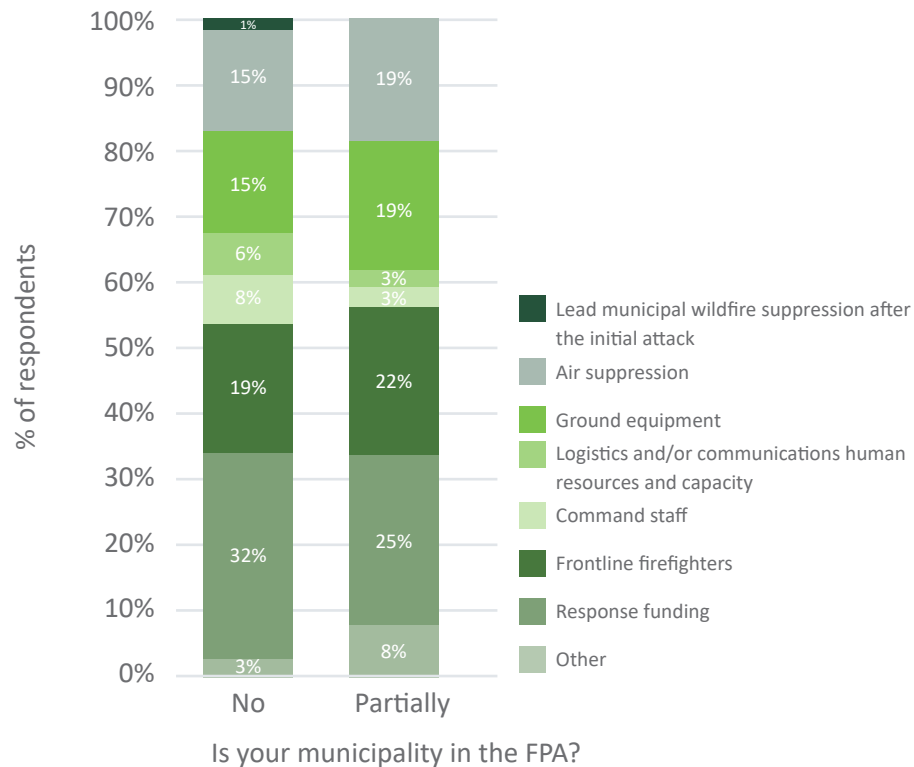
WWG Survey respondent (2024)

Figure 11: "What support should the provincial government make available to municipalities for wildfire preparedness outside of the FPA? Select your top three."



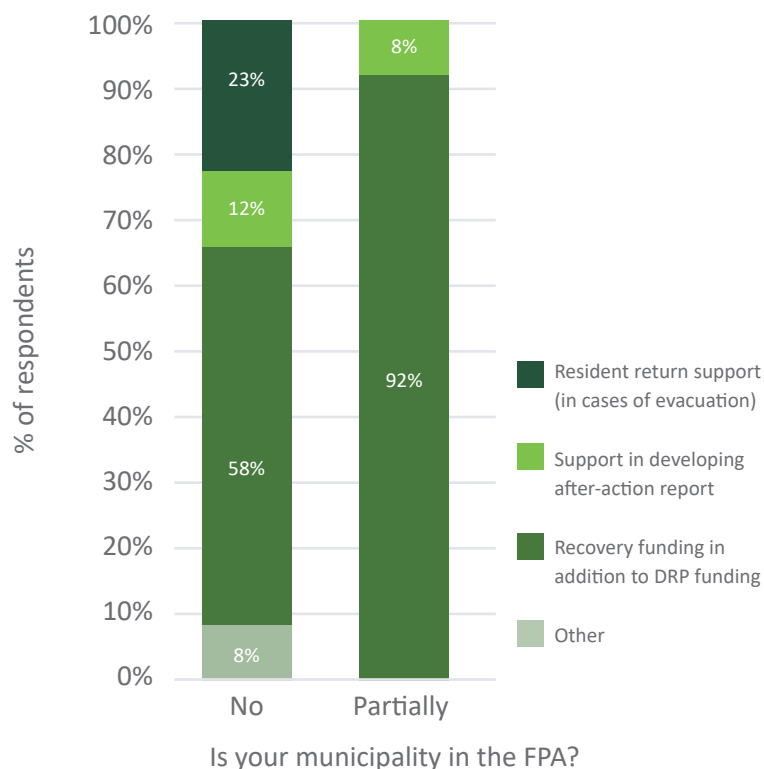
For wildfire preparedness (Figure 11), training funding and resource and equipment funding are most required among non-FPA and partial FPA respondents. This resource scarcity hinders municipalities from ensuring they are adequately prepared for wildfires, especially those located outside or partially within the FPA.

Figure 12: “What support should the provincial government make available to municipalities for wildfire response outside of the FPA? Select your top three.”



For wildfire response (Figure 12), 32% of respondents among non-FPA municipalities listed that response funding is what municipalities require from the provincial government followed by 25% of respondents for partial FPA municipalities. Frontline firefighters are also required by municipalities at 19% of respondents among non-FPA municipalities and 22% of respondents partial FPA municipalities. These results highlight that a variety of supports are required by municipalities for wildfire response in and around the FPA, all of which need to be adequately supported by the provincial government to ensure that non-FPA and partial FPA municipalities can address wildfire events as they arise.

Figure 13: “What support should the province make available to municipalities for wildfire recovery outside of the FPA? Select your top choice.”



Question 33 is a single-select multiple-choice question related to wildfire recovery. In Figure 13, the results overwhelmingly show that recovery funding is the most in demand resource by municipalities in both non-FPA and partial FPA regions. 58% of respondents among non-FPA municipalities listed recovery funding, including DRP funding, as the resource municipalities require the most. Among partial-FPA municipalities, a significant number of respondents (92%) also listed recovery funding as the most required resource for their municipality.

Short-answer responses

Many of the findings above are also supported by written responses submitted by survey respondents. These include topics related to WUI support, staff capacity, inter-governmental collaboration and overall resource funding.

Four respondents highlighted how their fire departments, which are staffed primarily by volunteers, are prone to limited response and/or burnout and that “heavy reliance on mutual aid agreements and provincial resources would be required for front line firefighting in the event of a large-scale emergency.” Over-reliance on volunteers that do not work full-time is a concern for one municipality while another municipality states that resources and staffing are required to address wildfires outside the FPA.

Two respondents noted the benefits of the WUI; one municipality noted how in-house training and the ability to rapidly deploy WUI teams have assisted with wildfire response while another municipality suggested to situate WUI teams in regions outside the FPA as “having the teams located in areas that are usually fighting forest fire diminishes that purpose”.

Two respondents have called for the equitable provision of wildfire suppression and management resources regardless of FPA designation. These respondents believe that robust wildfire management should be supported, funded and coordinated equitably across the province regardless of FPA designation

OUR MUNICIPALITY HAS A SOLID WORKING RELATIONSHIP WITH AB FORESTRY, BUT THE PROVINCE NEEDS TO RECOGNIZE THAT WILDFIRES HAPPEN IN AREAS OUTSIDE THE FPA AND THERE SHOULD BE EQUIVALENT RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO MUNICIPALITIES.

WWG Survey respondent (2024)

Links to report recommendations

The results from the WWG survey closely reflect some of the recommendations found later in this report, particularly related to wildfire preparedness. Many of the results compiled above reference personnel training as a highly valued yet underfunded resource that municipalities use towards wildfire management. Increased investment in training is also a recommendation suggested by the WWG to help support wildfire preparedness, especially for municipalities outside and partially within the FPA. Additionally, in several survey questions above, volunteer personnel were identified as a routinely relied upon resource for fighting wildfires, especially in regions outside the FPA. In the recommendations section of this report, WWG members highlighted challenges and opportunities with volunteers, suggesting for municipalities to implement a more intentional approach towards defining volunteer roles during wildfire preparedness and response. Finally increased funding was identified as a need by municipalities in the WWG survey, a requirement that was also identified in the recommendations to support wildfire preparedness.

This combined input illustrates how WWG members and municipalities at large are aligned in terms of identifying needs and challenges related to wildfire management. In general, increased funding and resource support are required to ensure that non-FPA and partial FPA municipalities are able to manage wildfires effectively.

Summary of findings

Municipalities located outside or partially within the FPA experience wildfire management challenges that are in many ways distinct from FPA regions due to complex jurisdictional expectations and resource constraints. The survey results highlight some differences in how municipalities use and access resources, information and identify needs based on their FPA designation. The findings from Question 5 highlighted how non-FPA municipalities are tasked with responding to wildfires while operating fewer fire stations on average than other regions. Results from Question 6, 7 and 8 demonstrated how volunteers are generally the most used and relied upon personnel resource for wildfire management, especially in non-FPA munic-

ipalities. Question 12 showed a 2023 spike in municipal expenditures, particularly for FPA municipalities and highlighted how non-FPA municipalities incurred the most cumulative expenses in wildfire management across all years. Question 14 highlighted the diversity of resources that municipalities have been required to use in order to recover wildfire management costs while Question 17 showed the diversity of information sources that municipalities rely upon to stay informed. Question 23 showed that WUI training and general training are the most required resource for fire departments across all municipalities. Finally, Questions 30, 31 and 32, though slightly varied in results, all highlighted that in general, funding is the form of support most required by municipalities from the provincial government.

THE SINGLE FUNDAMENTAL CHALLENGE FOR MOST MUNICIPALITIES IN NON-FPA AREAS IS THE LACK OF STAFFING DURING PEAK BURNING PERIODS. RELIANCE ON PAID-ON-CALL OR VOLUNTEER STAFF IS OF PARAMOUNT CONCERN. EMPHASIS ON EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT COMMISERATE WITH SEASON MOWING PROGRAMS AS AN EXAMPLE WOULD GREATLY ENHANCE CAPACITY.

WWG Survey respondent (2024)

Together, these results all demonstrate that non-FPA municipalities are tasked with doing more despite having less; the lack of adequate resources, support and funding make it difficult for these municipalities to adhere to section 7.1 of the Forest and Prairie Protection Act while ensuring the safety and well-being of their communities. This mandated obligation for non-FPA municipalities results in increased wildfire management costs, exacerbated by resource and funding scarcity. Through the survey results and the WWG, municipalities advocate for further support from orders of government and improved coordination between stakeholders to ensure more efficient wildfire management, especially for non-FPA and partial FPA municipalities.

Recommendations

The WWG recommendations are divided into three themes: preparedness, response, and recovery. The WWG took this approach as discussions led to emerging recommendations that addressed the different phases of emergency management from planning to action to moving forward in the aftermath. In addition to these core recommendations, the WWG developed other recommendations that do not specifically address the working group's FPA-specific mandate, but rather apply to wildfire management or emergency response more generally. These recommendations are included in this report at the end of this section.

In each sub-section, a description of that phase of emergency management is presented. These sub-sections are further broken down into themes, with specific recommendations presented within these themes. This taxonomy is presented in the figure below. Note that the numbers assigned to each recommendation are for reference purposes only, and do not indicate any prioritization.

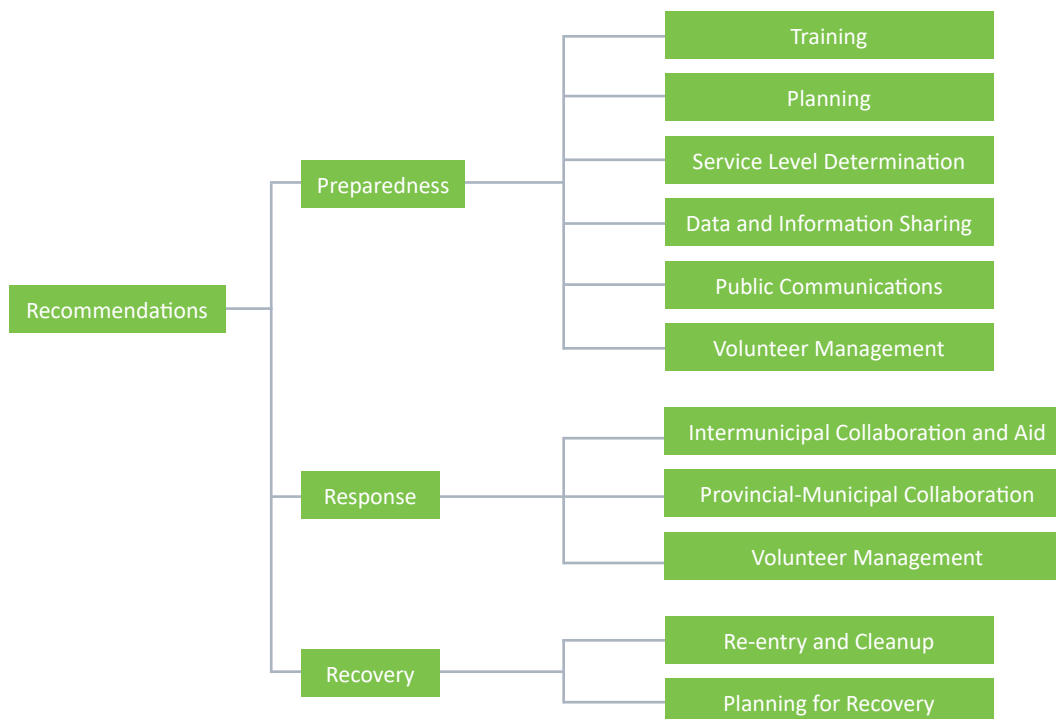


Figure 14: Taxonomy of WWG Report Recommendations

Each recommendation includes an explanation of why the WWG views it as significant and how it will enhance wildfire preparation, response or recovery. The recommendations are intended for a variety of audiences, including several GOA ministries and agencies, municipalities, and other stakeholders. Therefore, each recommendation is presented with a target audience to guide readers in using this report and RMA in advocating for recommendations to be implemented.

Preparedness

Much of the ability to respond to a wildfire is based upon the planning and resource availability that comes before the wildfire begins. The recommendations presented in this section are intended to improve the readiness of municipalities, the GOA, and other agencies to respond to wildfires outside of the FPA effectively, and they form the foundation of improvements to the system.

Training

Municipal firefighter training typically focuses on structural firefighting. The rationale appears to be that all municipalities are responsible for structural fires, especially urban fire departments. Furthermore, structural fires are more prevalent than wildfires and will therefore account for more of the calls that municipal firefighters respond to. As a result, the training model does not account for the fact that in many regions of the province municipal firefighters are increasingly being called upon to respond to wildfires. Therefore, while these recommendations are not exclusive to municipalities outside the FPA, they are critical to forming the foundation of wildfire preparedness for non-FPA municipalities.

Recommendation 1

That the Government of Alberta develop a competency-based approach to firefighter training and certification based on skills, regardless of specific training standards.

Context and Rationale –While multiple wildland firefighting standards are used for training in Alberta, many municipalities face barriers in accessing the training, travel and time commitments due to the centralized training offerings associated with most standards. The recommendation calls on the GOA to work with stakeholders to develop a provincially recognized competency-based approach to training wildfire fighters. The goal would be the development of a common curriculum consisting of multiple competencies that are covered in part by other existing standards.

Further, the GOA should follow the model used for structural firefighting programs in rural areas and provide resources that equip local firefighter trainers to teach and evaluate this new competency-based standard. Achieving these outcomes will involve the GOA reviewing the current standards, determining equivalencies across the various training programs, and ensuring the availability of trainers to serve rural communities. The training would not be delivered by GOA staff, but rather by municipalities or other firefighting training organizations.

Target – Government of Alberta - Municipal Affairs

Recommendation 2

That the Government of Alberta increase funding for the Fire Services Training Grant and other wildfire training grants.

Context and Rationale – the Fire Services Training Grant (FSTG) is available to municipalities, First Nations, and Metis Settlements to cover costs of training firefighters. This grant is critical for municipalities to ensure their fire departments are properly trained. In 2025, \$500,000 is available through the FSTG, although each application is capped at \$10,000. Estimates are that 15% to 20% of requests to the FSTG are for wildland firefighter training. While training for wildland firefighter training represents a small portion of overall requests, this is likely at least partially due to the \$10,000 cap, which is insufficient to properly support non-FPA fire departments seeking to train their firefighters to respond to wildfires in addition to their training requirements for structural firefighting. Therefore, increasing the overall funding for the FSTG is necessary to increase the per application cap.

The FSTG is only eligible to train municipal firefighters to NFPA 1140 Wildland Firefighter standards, which is not deemed sufficient by AEMA or Alberta Wildfire for their firefighters. To address this, the competency-based approach to training in recommendation 1 could be funded through the FSTG and direct municipalities to local trainers. This would require the GOA to increase funding to the FSTG and expand the list of programs it is eligible to fund.

Target – Government of Alberta - Municipal Affairs

Recommendation 3

That the Government of Alberta provide funding for firefighter training for First Nations including wildland urban interface (WUI), wildland, and structural fires. This includes working with other funding agencies and the Government of Canada.

Context and rationale – Indigenous fire departments face barriers in accessing grants for firefighting training. As the wildfire working group understands, Indigenous Services Canada requires Indigenous fire departments to meet certain training requirements to be eligible for capital funding grants. Therefore, supporting training for Indigenous fire departments will increase their capacity to respond based on both an increase in technical skills and expanded access to grants to support modern firefighting equipment. Indigenous fire departments are valued partners in responding to wildfires, and supporting their efforts to gain access to training and capital grants improves the overall capacity to respond to wildfires.

Target – Government of Alberta

Recommendation 4

That Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) expands their funding eligibility to fund training for Indigenous fire departments in addition to their existing capital firefighting stream.

Context and Rationale - the wildfire working group understands that Indigenous fire departments face barriers in accessing grants for both training programs and capital expenses. To address these issues, It

is recommended that Indigenous Services Canada amend their funding program to bring wildland-urban interface fire fighting and wildland fire fighting in alignment with structural and community fire fighting to ensure Indigenous Fire Departments are eligible for training streams and future capital grants.

Target – Indigenous Services Canada



Planning

The recommendations in this section relate to steps municipalities can take to plan for wildfire emergencies to either reduce the severity of impact or better prepare them to respond.

Recommendation 5

That non-FPA municipalities include a purpose statement in their Municipal Development Plan (MDP) and other planning documents regarding FireSmart, planning, and building to reduce the risks of wildfire damage.

Context and Rationale – FireSmart Alberta provides recommendations and tools for municipalities and landowners to reduce the risk of wildfires damaging infrastructure. Many municipalities, especially in areas that are heavily forested, are already working to implement FireSmart principles in their planning and operations. Additionally, many municipalities are also implementing other FireSmart principles related to education for residents on steps they can take to reduce wildfire risks. This recommendation speaks to the specific role of municipalities as the planning authority.

Despite serving as local planning authority, municipalities are limited in what they can require in terms of FireSmart practices. The Alberta Safety Codes Act provides the legislative structure for the design, manufacture, construction, installation, use, operation, occupancy and maintenance of buildings and the electrical and plumbing systems they use. To avoid the creation of a dual set of standards, Section 66(1) of the Alberta Safety Codes Act states that a municipal bylaw that attempts to regulate a matter already governed by this act is inoperative. This same section blocks municipalities from requiring FireSmart building materials into their bylaws. However, municipalities can include a purpose statement in their bylaws that guides builders and developers in understanding the bylaw's intent – in this case encouraging FireSmart activities.

Target – non-FPA municipalities, FireSmart, RMA and ABmunis

Recommendation 6

That municipalities broaden mutual aid agreements to become regional resource sharing agreements that would cover sharing of equipment, infrastructure, and staff for non-frontline services required to respond to wildfires such as water treatment, communications, and others. These regional resource sharing agreements should include invitations to nearby First Nations to participate.

Context and Rationale – Many municipalities have mutual aid agreements related to emergency response. Typically these agreements cover the practice of sending firefighters from one municipality to another in response to a call for aid. However, wildfire response and recovery requires a broad range of resources and expertise. Regional resource sharing agreements would continue to pre-determine when and how municipalities share firefighting staff and equipment. The regional agreements would also cover if and how municipalities can share operations staff and equipment to assist with road closures in the event of an evacuation, communications staff to assist with managing various communications channels, as well as staff and equipment to assist with recovery such as water and wastewater technicians to ensure those systems are properly functioning.

This recommendation may apply to both FPA and non-FPA municipalities, as FPA municipalities may be in a position to offer assistance to their non-FPA neighbours.

Target – Municipalities

Recommendation 7

That the Government of Alberta establish a trigger point for a province-wide fire ban based on the percentage of firefighting resources committed.

Context and Rationale – As firefighting resources are deployed, the overall ability for Alberta Wildfire and municipalities to respond to new wildfires decreases. Therefore, steps that can reduce the occurrence of new wildfires should be taken to limit the number of overall fires in the province. One tool that exists is a province-wide fire ban, which would restrict burning in all areas. The GOA should seek to implement a province-wide fire ban in scenarios where there is a risk that Alberta Wildfire and municipal fire departments will not be able to effectively respond to current and any emerging wildfires.

When developing the trigger point, the GOA should consider current and forecasted fire weather, the availability of equipment and firefighting aircraft, and the overall staffing level committed to existing fires. To satisfy this information requirement, the GOA may need to undertake additional information collection and sharing requirements.

Target – Government of Alberta

Service Level Determination

Municipalities provide services to a level that is locally determined based on available budget and priorities. This process involves the exchange of information, data and expectations between a municipality's administrative staff and council. Ultimately the level of service provided on any particular service, including

firefighting. is determined by the local council.

Recommendation 8

That the Elected Officials Education Program (EOEP) develop a new course on emergency management for elected officials that addresses topics including mutual aid, cost recovery, fire bans, public communication, and evacuation/re-entry.

Context and Rationale – The EOEP is an Alberta based non-profit that is wholly owned by RMA and Alberta Municipalities with the goal of providing relevant education to Alberta’s municipal elected officials. A standalone course on the role of elected officials in emergency management is necessitated by the breadth and depth of information required to be shared.

Target – The EOEP

Recommendation 9

That municipalities use a data-driven, threat-based approach to determining their firefighting service level. This would include using existing information such as historic fire weather data and newly acquired information such as detailed fuel and fire risk mapping.

Context and Rationale – As discussed in the preamble to this sub-section, municipal council’s must decide what level of firefighting service makes sense in their local context. Some municipalities likely require a significant level of preparedness to respond to wildfires including training and specialized equipment. In other municipalities, a lower level of service is more appropriate. This decision is ultimately up to the local council, however, they should consider what makes sense based on their local threats and other budgetary constraints. Municipalities should not rely solely on keeping funding consistent with previous budgets as their metric for determining the level of risk and corresponding budget they plan for.

The data municipalities use to determine their service level will be varied based on the local context. However, the Alberta Fire Chiefs Association has a data committee whose work may be of use to municipalities seeking to action this recommendation.

Target – Non-FPA municipalities

Recommendation 10

That elected officials set an expectation of municipal administration to provide adequate data and information on the impact that changes in firefighting-related budgets will have on firefighting service levels, including references to established fire service policy.

Context and Rationale – The WWG learned that in many cases, municipal councils set firefighting budgets based on assumptions or historical funding levels. This approach often overlooks fire risk data (as recommended above), the increasing likelihood of a wildfire, or increased training, equipment, and staff costs. When a municipal council is presented with information to inform their decision-making on the training, recruitment, and capital budget they choose to make available to their fire department, they should also

expect to be made aware of what level of service their fire department will be able to provide given the budget, and what level of service is required based on projected fire risk for the coming year. This recommendation is not intended to steer municipalities towards increasing their budgets (unless the data indicates it is necessary); rather it is intended to ensure municipal elected officials have adequate information to make decisions on level of service. The level of service to be provided should be established in policy, which will drive budget discussions. A review of level of service policies should be included in orientation for new councils.

Target – Non-FPA Municipalities



Data and Information Sharing

Non-FPA municipalities require access to accurate and current data to assess fire risks and plan for response. Currently, different municipalities use different combinations of data and have different levels of sophistication in terms of how they monitor wildfire risk and plan for wildfire response. Few municipalities independently gather wildfire data, with most depending on provincial or federal sources.

Recommendation 11

That the Government of Alberta and Government of Canada provide access to fuel inventory and fire behaviour data to municipalities in a manner that is practicable for their purposes. This should be supplemented with spatial data on critical infrastructure, both municipal and others such as pipelines and electricity distribution.

Context and Rationale – Municipalities need access to fuel inventory and fire behaviour data to understand high-risk areas, plan for evacuation, apply for grants, and respond effectively to wildfires. While several sources of data already exist such as the GOA's fire danger website, fire bans, and the Canadian Forest Fire Weather Index, information on fuel inventory is less accessible. A single source of information that includes fuel inventory, current fire behaviours, and critical infrastructure is required for non-FPA municipalities to plan for and respond to wildfires. RMA could play a role in shaping this tool to ensure it is applicable to non-FPA municipalities.

Target – Government of Alberta, Government of Canada

Recommendation 12

That the Government of Alberta develop and offer training to municipal staff on how to use various available fire datasets.

Context and Rationale – Many sources of information exist that municipalities could use to better understand fire risk and response, and ultimately improve decision-making. However, interpreting this data requires expertise not available in every municipality. Therefore, training for municipal staff is required to ensure an equitable level of knowledge. The GOA should consult other experts in this field, including the National Research Council to facilitate the development of this training.

Target – Government of Alberta

Recommendation 13

That the Government of Alberta provide grant funding to support the development of an integrated information sharing system that allows municipalities and the Government of Alberta to communicate information about fire crews prior to their arrival at a wildfire.

Context and Rationale – The WWG learned that some municipalities faced logistical challenges in incorporating firefighters and equipment from other municipalities into a coordinated response. Delays would be reduced and coordination enhanced if municipal decision-makers had prior knowledge of what specific equipment an arriving fire department is bringing with them. To help relieve a bottleneck in information gathering and decision-making, it is important for municipalities with mutual aid agreements to have a detailed inventory of the equipment their neighbouring fire departments have access to. The GOA has an opt-in database for WUI response. While this database on its own is not comprehensive enough to address this recommendation, it may serve as a useful guide in developing the information sharing tool. To support this initiative, funding is required from the GOA.

Target – Government of Alberta

Public Communications

During any emergency event, communicating clearly, consistently, and effectively with the public is necessary to ensure safety and build trust. During a significant wildfire, the municipality is likely not the only source of information, and therefore it is critical that municipalities communicate consistently with other organizations involved in the response and that they are seen as a credible source of information by the public.

Recommendation 14

That municipalities prepare a communications plan to ensure information regarding fire conditions, risks, evacuation requirements, infrastructure or property damage, etc. reaches the largest possible proportion of local residents and other impacted parties during periods of high fire risk, during wildfire events, and post-fire. This may include steps to:

- Partner with the GOA (all communications should be cross-posted and cohesive). This includes incorporating relevant information from the GOA into municipal communications.
- Share information based on an assumption that many residents do not have highspeed internet.
- Utilize the training AEMA makes available for municipal information officers.

Context and Rationale – In a wildfire emergency, municipalities will quickly become tasked with many different operational roles. This will require an “all-hands-on-deck” approach that will necessitate the use of prepared plans to reduce decision-making bottlenecks. It is imperative that communications plans ensure public safety and build trust. In several of the wildfire reviews analyzed in the previous section, communicating with the public at various stages of the fire was identified as a challenge. Communicating the decision to issue an evacuation order was a particularly challenging item. In the absence of a plan, there is a risk that multiple municipal departments share conflicting information that leads to confusion, or that the communication of crucial information is delayed or does not reach those that most require it. Therefore, it is critical that a municipality have a communications plan that identifies decision makers and spokespersons and reaches residents in an efficient manner during an emergency event.

Target – Non-FPA municipalities, Government of Alberta

Recommendation 15

That municipalities proactively make information available to residents related to the cost of responding to a wildfire, who is responsible, and in what scenarios a resident may receive a bill for wildfire response.

Context and Rationale – Some municipalities fund their fire response by charging a fee for service to the resident(s) who they provide firefighting services to. While this practice is not new, many rural residents are unaware that they may be billed for fire response. While some insurance companies offer coverage for this, not every policy offers coverage and the value of any existing coverage will be limited. Therefore, it is important for residents to understand what their insurance will provide in the event they receive a bill as a result of fire response from the municipality.

Target - Municipalities

Volunteer Management

Rural Albertans have a long history of stepping up to help their communities. This volunteer spirit is evident in many cases where rural residents have supported wildfire response, both formally and spontaneously. Volunteerism can be extremely beneficial to the overall response effort. However, spontaneous volunteers acting outside of a command structure can put themselves and others at risk.

Recommendation 16

That municipalities develop a policy or other guiding document that clearly defines the role of volunteers, including spontaneous volunteers, during a wildfire response, including training, command structure, and scope of work.

This should include communicating an understanding of the significant risks involved to spontaneous volunteers. Additionally, the municipality should conduct a risk assessment that includes understanding the potential risk posed by volunteers to other first responders, and the public along with the potential liability of allowing volunteers to do certain tasks.

Context and Rationale – In some situations, volunteers may form an important part of community response to a wildfire - many non-FPA municipalities are largely served by either volunteer or paid on-call firefighters. However, coordination of resources is critical to both the effectiveness of response and the safety of firefighters and other first responders. Municipalities should recognize that residents may seek a frontline role during a wildfire and prepare potential volunteers to understand the risks, provide proper training, and include them within the formal response structure. To achieve this, non-FPA municipalities should create a volunteer plan that specifies the risks, types of work that can be carried out by volunteers, and volunteer reporting/communication structures. This should focus on preparing volunteers in advance of a wildfire and limit the role of untrained spontaneous volunteers. The role volunteers play must be aligned with their training and preparedness. While Alberta Wildfire offers a 1.5 day training course for residents wishing to assist in a wildfire event, it must be noted that these volunteers will not be involved in frontline firefighting. Respectively, municipalities should not allow volunteers to take an active role in firefighting unless they are part of a volunteer fire department.

Target – Non-FPA municipalities

Response

The response phase of wildfire management covers what is typically thought of as the “action” portion of the event. This includes active firefighting, potentially managing evacuations, and coordinating resources with other municipalities and the GOA. In many cases the recommendations in this section are reliant upon actions taken during the preparedness phase discussed above, however, they are not necessarily tied to those recommendations.

Inter-municipal Collaboration and Mutual Aid

Municipalities in Alberta have a history of providing one another aid in times of emergency. In many cases this aid is guided by mutual aid agreements, which municipalities negotiate to both offer their services to other municipalities and to ensure they can rely upon aid when requested. These agreements are typically limited in scope to only cover emergency resources and personnel such as firefighters. Municipalities should endeavour to include all rights holders in their collaborative work, including finding ways to invite nearby First Nations.

Recommendation 17

That municipalities share real-time information with other fire departments and relevant Government of Alberta departments while enroute to a wildfire event, including crew information and equipment.

Context and Rationale – Currently, firefighters manually check in with commanders when they arrive at

a wildfire, which creates delays in deploying firefighters to fight the fire. Such delays can be mitigated by pursuing a system, similar to that used in the energy industry and by AEMA for fires within the FPA, to support automated information sharing between fire departments about the firefighters arriving at the wildfire from other jurisdictions. This information should include the level of training of each firefighter (including any specialized training that may be relevant), their equipment, and other logistical items such as dietary restrictions. This type of check-in system already exists within the oil and gas industry, and could potentially be implemented for fire departments.

Target – Municipalities, Government of Alberta

Recommendation 18

That municipalities should conduct regional emergency exercises to fulfill their legislative emergency exercise requirements.

Context and Rationale – As discussed earlier, non-FPA municipalities are increasingly responsible for responding to large scale, sustained, wildfires. Large-scale wildfires commonly cross municipal boundaries and require a multi-jurisdictional response, or are so large and intense that non-impacted municipalities send personnel and resources to support their neighbours.

To effectively prepare for the multi-jurisdictional nature of wildfire response, municipalities should begin joint training and conduct emergency exercises, including seeking to partner with First Nations, private industry, and utilities. These exercises could serve to fulfill their emergency exercise requirements, with the added benefit of sharing the cost of this work with other participating municipalities. Joint training and emergency exercises will improve familiarity among municipal fire departments and create the working relationships required for an effective and efficient response to wildfires.

These joint training exercises can benefit from incorporating examples from real wildfire events that occurred in Alberta. To support this work, AEMA has grant funding available through the Emergency Management Preparedness Program (EMPP).

Target – Non-FPA municipalities, AEMA

Provincial – Municipal Collaboration

Wildfires do not follow jurisdictional boundaries. They are likely to impact multiple municipalities and may cover both FPA and non-FPA area. With this in mind, communications and collaboration between municipalities and between municipalities and the GOA are critical to an effective response.

Recommendation 19

That the Government of Alberta fund the procurement of dual-band compatible radio systems that bridge the gap between the Alberta First Responders Radio Communications System and very high frequency (VHF) radios to loan to local firefighters when multi-jurisdictional responses are required.

Context and Rationale – In a wildfire response that involves municipalities, Alberta Wildfire, and the Alber-

ta Emergency Management Agency (AEMA), each organization may use a different radio system. In 2016 the GOA created the Alberta First Responders Radio Communications System (AFRRCS), which is a two-way radio network used by many, but not all, municipal, provincial, and First Nations first responders. In some cases, municipalities have not adopted AFRRCS due to the implementation cost, which limits their ability to communicate with firefighters from jurisdictions that use AFRRCS when responding to a wildfire. Additionally, Alberta Wildfire maintains a very high frequency (VHF) radio system for use in remote areas with poor line of sight.

Due to the cost of universally implementing AFRRCS, and the operational advantages of VHF in some scenarios, the WWG is not recommending a single radio technology solution. However, it is imperative that firefighters can communicate with one another during a joint response. AEMA has 400 radios available, which may be suitable for dual-band use if they are programmed beforehand, however, if additional dual-band radios are required a specific budget is required for these radios along with distribution plans for deploying them in wildfire areas.

Target – Government of Alberta

Recommendation 20

That municipalities establish written protocols that specify if, when, and how to engage in unified command with other municipalities and First Nations, and when to respond using a less formal coordinated response. This work should be informed by data-sharing and regional service agreements.

Context and Rationale – Unified command is an incident command system used when no single agency has primary authority to respond to the wildfire or when the wildfire crosses political jurisdictions such as municipal boundaries or the FPA boundary. In a unified command scenario, there is no single commander. Instead, jointly approved objectives are established and actioned without a need to discuss jurisdictional boundaries. AEMA includes unified command as an incident command option within their doctrine, and it was recently used successfully in the 2024 Jasper wildfire.

However, unified command can be onerous to implement, especially in scenarios where several municipalities are jointly responding to a wildfire outside the FPA. In these scenarios, municipalities may instead enter a joint response outside of a unified command structure. For example, municipal fire departments could geographically divide areas of responsibility and follow their own existing incident command structures. This option still requires significant inter-municipal collaboration and communication, but it may be more efficient in non-FPA fires that do not pose a threat to an urban area, in which case a unified command option may be beneficial to coordinate resources.

Target – Non-FPA municipalities

Recommendation 21

That the Government of Alberta add a clause to the Municipal Wildfire Assistance Program that specifies that Alberta Wildfire or a municipality may respond in an initial attack response to wildfires within 20 kilometres of the FPA boundary without requiring pre-approval. This should be supplemented with amend-

ments to mutual aid agreements between non-FPA municipalities and their respective Forst Areas.

Context and Rationale – Wildfires can move quickly from one side of the FPA boundary to the other. To prepare for the possibility of a cross-jurisdictional fire, the responsible parties on both sides of the FPA boundary should begin communicating before the fire crosses the border. The intent of this recommendation is to specify that non-FPA municipalities and Alberta Wildfire may respond in an initial attack capacity to a wildfire on the “other side” of their FPA boundary without passing those costs on to municipalities.

Target – Non-FPA municipalities, Alberta Wildfire

Recovery

After the response phase of a wildfire, other agencies and neighbouring fire departments return to their home communities, and the municipality directly impacted by the wildfire is left with the sometimes years-long task of recovering from the wildfire. This phase is critical to supporting residents and businesses as they seek to return to their regular lives following the wildfire.

Re-entry and Clean Up

The complexity of recovery after a wildfire is significantly influenced by factors such as whether infrastructure was damaged or destroyed and if an evacuation was necessary. Some of the recommendations below are specific to scenarios that required evacuation and/or during which infrastructure damaged or destroyed. However, planning for these events is critical to the success of a municipality to recover from a significant wildfire.

Recommendation 22

That the Government of Alberta share their reclamation standards with municipalities and provide guidance and support to municipalities responsible for engaging in reclamation activities.

Context and Rationale – Following fires outside the FPA, municipalities are responsible for land reclamation similar to how Alberta Forestry and Parks is responsible for reclamation within the FPA. This responsibility is typically outside the expertise and capacity of municipalities, and will likely require the use of contractors. To ensure that municipalities are meeting all regulatory requirements, the GOA should provide guidance to municipalities in this scenario to ensure that the reclamation is completed correctly and in a cost-effective manner.

Target – Government of Alberta

Recommendation 23

That the Government of Alberta update their re-entry guide, including sharing guidance with municipalities to guide recovery and clean up, with a special focus on waste management.

Context and Rationale – Alberta Environment and Protected Areas (EPA) participated in the WWG. During

discussions about dealing with waste management, recovery, and hazardous waste, EPA indicated they had resources that could be shared with municipalities to inform their recovery work. These activities are outside the scope of day-to-day operations for municipalities, as their role in waste management is typically limited to residential waste. This guidance will be enhanced by input from Alberta Health on any potential health considerations related to moving and handling waste. Having GOA support on best practices will reduce the amount of research a municipality needs to address the management of construction and demolition waste during recovery, which likely require specialized equipment and training to handle compared to household waste. Additionally, municipalities who have undergone a waste management program following a wildfire should be encouraged to share their plans and lessons learned with other municipalities.

Target – Government of Alberta – Environment and Protected Areas, Health. Municipalities.

Planning for Recovery

A coordinated recovery is based on sufficient planning and training exercises. In many ways, a successful recovery can be tied to activities that occur before the wildfire. While many of the recommendations below are intended to spur action in the same phase as the earlier preparedness section, they are focused on proactively clarifying roles and processes related to recovery.

Recommendation 24

That municipalities develop and regularly review re-entry plans.

Context and Rationale – Municipalities provide services essential to everyday life for their residents. During an emergency situation, such as a wildfire, these services may be disrupted or halted depending on the severity of the event. To prioritize restoring municipal services, it is recommended that municipalities develop and regularly review a re-entry plan that guides the municipality in providing services to residents during and following a wildfire. The specific services to be included as requirements in a re-entry plan will be specific to local needs, but may include water/wastewater service, access to healthcare, groceries, schools, and fuel.

Target – Municipalities

Recommendation 25

That the Government of Alberta provide access to training and other support to municipalities on re-entry plans.

Context and Rationale – Planning for re-entry following a wildfire may require a municipality to engage in planning outside of their area of expertise. The development of these plans may require expert advice from communications professionals, technical operators, emergency managers, and other professionals. To support the creation of well-designed plans, the GOA (through AEMA) should provide training to municipalities.

Target – Government of Alberta – AEMA

Recommendation 26

That municipalities include in regional services agreements details related to municipal and any partnered First Nations staff and other resources that are necessary to restore critical infrastructure and services.

Context and Rationale – As discussed in recommendation 6, regional service agreements should specify available aid from neighbouring municipalities and interested First Nations to support elements of wildfire response and recovery not directly related to actual firefighting services. Doing so allows for a more effective resource sharing network to support a municipality impacted by a wildfire.

Following a wildfire, staff in the affected municipality will likely be operating at maximum capacity to prepare the community for re-occupation. Therefore, to support recovery efforts it is recommended that municipalities include in their regional service agreements what services and staff they can provide to assist their neighbours in restoring critical infrastructure, such as water and wastewater treatment, roads, etc. quickly.

Target – Non-FPA municipalities

Recommendation 27

That municipalities include the recovery phase in future tabletop exercises.

Context and Rationale – Municipalities regularly conduct tabletop exercises to prepare for how they will manage emergency scenarios, including wildfires. These exercises play a critical role in providing experience working through the steps of responding to a wildfire. However, in many cases they skip over the steps required to bring residents back following an evacuation and other recovery actions required with or without an evacuation. This gap was identified by WWG members and is an opportunity for municipalities to begin to develop their skillset in facilitating recovery following a wildfire. The specific elements to be included in this phase of the exercise should be left to the municipality, but they may include items such as restoring critical services like water and wastewater, checking that transportation infrastructure is safe, highlighting supports for residents, and developing a communication strategy for updating the community following the wildfire.

Target – Municipalities

Recommendation 28

That municipalities build a database of local stakeholders who can assist in supporting recovery.

Context and Rationale – Following a wildfire, residents will likely require support on a wide range of concerns that are often outside of the expertise of a municipality to provide. This may include counselling, veterinary services, employment support, and others. While most municipalities have strong relationships with those providing such services in their communities, it will be helpful for municipalities to have a current database of local stakeholders who can support residents following a wildfire. In the event a municipality requires a service but is unable to find a local provider, the Provincial Emergency Coordination Centre (PECC) may be able to provide links to these services. Municipalities should collaborate with these

stakeholders to understand what services they are able to offer and ensure they understand what the purpose of the database is. These relationships will relieve pressure on both residents and the municipality.

Target – Non-FPA municipalities

Recommendation 29

That the Government of Alberta provide guidance to municipalities on a threshold for situations, before they occur, in which wildfire recovery requires the formation of a local/municipal recovery task force. Smaller wildfires with short or no evacuation may not require a formal task force.

Context and Rationale – Following a wildfire, some municipalities have created recovery task forces that oversee the recovery phase and provide recommendations to the municipality. These task forces provide structure to the recovery process and can generate meaningful recommendations to better prepare the municipality for future wildfires. However, a formal task force is likely not required following every fire. This recommendation asks the Government of Alberta to provide guidance to municipalities on a threshold or set of factors that indicate a task force should be created. This may include criteria such as if an evacuation was required and for how long, if private buildings were damaged or destroyed, if municipal infrastructure was impacted, etc. It may also depend on the size and capacity of the municipality.

Target – Government of Alberta

Other Recommendations



The WWG identified several gaps in wildfire policy that are not specific to non-FPA communities. However, these ideas represent significant areas for improvement in how wildfires and evacuations are managed, and are therefore presented here for consideration.

Evacuation support

Recommendation 30

That the Government of Alberta amend their threshold to provide financial support to evacuees impacted by recurring, short-term evacuations.

Context and Rationale – The current evacuee support payments require evacuees to be evacuated for a period of seven or more days continuously. This leaves individuals in communities that are subject to multiple evacuations in a fire season ineligible if none of those evacuations exceed seven days. Being evacuated multiple times during a wildfire season will impact evacuees financially. Evacuees who are away from their homes for more than seven days total in a 120-day period should be eligible for provincial support.

Target – Government of Alberta

Firefighter Recruitment and Retention

Recommendation 31

That RMA, ABmunis, the Alberta Fire Chiefs Association, Alberta Wildfire, and Indigenous firefighting representatives work collaboratively to develop best practices and innovative approaches to attract and retain municipal and wildland firefighters.

Context and Rationale – The Government of Alberta and municipalities across Alberta are facing challenges in attracting and retaining firefighters. A collaborative, multi-sector approach can explore comprehensive recommendations to attract and retain firefighters to all regions of Alberta, both related to structural fire and wildfire fighting.

Target – RMA, ABmunis

Conclusion

The work of the WWG represents a new approach to an issue that has previously been studied following recent major wildfires in Alberta. The recommendations presented here reflect the analysis of previous wildfire reports, a survey of municipalities, and the informed discussions of WWG members supported by presentations by experts. These recommendations are a starting point for how non-FPA municipalities, the Government of Alberta, and other agencies can work together to improve wildfire management outside of the forest protection area. Moving forward, RMA intends to advocate for the adoption of these recommendations by the various targeted stakeholders and to continue to identify solutions for non-FPA municipalities.

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Glossary and list of Acronyms

FireSmart - A framework designed to mitigate the risk of and educate residents and stakeholders regarding the potential for large uncontrollable wildfires near communities and critical infrastructure.

Mutual Aid Agreements - Agreements between organisations that permit authorities to maintain an acceptable level of general firefighting expertise for their jurisdiction, specialize in a particular area of firefighting in terms of training and resources, and through cooperation provide Albertans with a complete firefighting capability.

National Research Council - Under the National Research Council Act, the NRC is the primary federal agency that supports science, innovation, research and development in Canada.

Operations Section Chief - Within the Incident Command System (ICS) command structure, the Operations (Section) Chief spearheads project planning and resource allocation, ensuring effective implementation of daily operations. They monitor progress, identify areas for improvement, and optimize resource utilization to enable informed decision-making and continuous quality improvement in incident response

Unified Command - Unified command is an incident command system with no single commander. Instead, jointly approved objectives are established and actioned without a need to discuss jurisdictional boundaries.

Wildland - Primarily the portion of Alberta defined as Forest Protection Area (FPA)

AEMA - Alberta Emergency Management Agency

The agency within Alberta Municipal Affairs responsible for providing strategic policy direction and leadership to the Government of Alberta and its Emergency Management partners

AFRRCS - Alberta First Responder Radio Communication System

A two-way radio network for first responders in municipal, provincial and First Nations agencies across the province.

DRP – Disaster Recovery Program

A funding program administered by the Government of Alberta through AEMA that enables residents, businesses and municipalities to apply for financial assistance to cover uninsurable damage due to extraordinary disasters. The cost split between the Government of Alberta and DRP recipients is typically 90:10.

EMPP – Emergency Management Preparedness Program

The Emergency Management Preparedness Program is a Government of Alberta program that supports expanding and enhancing emergency management preparedness. Through capacity building and resource

support, the objective is to assist entities with emergency management results in an increased number of trained emergency management practitioners and local capabilities.

ESS – Emergency Social Services

The provincial-level support to local communities (e.g., municipalities, districts, Metis settlement, special areas, etc.) in dealing with the human impact of emergency and disasters. PESS assist local ESS staff/volunteers and leadership coordinate the delivery of ESS services and supports in all the phases of emergency management.

EOEP – Elected Officials Education Program

The Elected Officials Education Program (EOEP) is jointly owned and operated by the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) and the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA). The EOEP was formed in 2007 to provide Alberta's municipal elected officials with professional development opportunities and ensure that they are well-positioned to serve their communities effectively.

FRIAA – Forest Resource Improvement Association of Alberta

A non-profit organization with authority and responsibilities related to the enhancement of forest resources delegated under the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act. FRIAA offers funding through a variety of programs related to forest protection and management in Alberta.

FSTG – Fire Services Training Grant

The Fire Services Training Program (FSTP) Grant provides funding to assist communities in ensuring their local fire services are adequately trained to respond safely and effectively to identified community risks.

ICP – Incident Command Post

The primary location for on-scene incident command and management following the Incident Command System (ICS).

ICS – Incident Command System

The standardized communication and coordination system by which emergency response is conducted. An ICS helps to clarify roles, chain of command and efficient inter-agency collaboration

MDP – Municipal Development Plan

A municipal development plan (MDP) is a key policy plan that communicates the long-term desired land use for a community. It is a high-level blueprint that shows how a community is expected to change over time and the shape it will take in the future.

MEP – Municipal Emergency Plan

The formal emergency response plan required by legislation of all local governments that includes activation, notification, roles and the responsibilities in the event of a major emergency or disaster; and typically

requires the declaration of a State of Local Emergency (SOLE) and/or a coordinated response by a number of emergency management agencies.

MWAP – Municipal Wildfire Assistance Program

Is a provincial program administered by the Government of Alberta designed to assist municipalities in both reducing the risk of loss associated with wildfires and addressing the extraordinary costs of extinguishing wildfires when they occur

NFPA – National Fire Protection Association

Based in the USA, the NFPA is a global non-profit organization that develops and publishes codes and standards related to fire safety and is the leading authority on fire, electrical, and building safety.

PECC – Provincial Emergency Coordination Centre

Alberta's communication and response coordination centre. It is staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and serves as a central point for the collection, evaluation and dissemination of information concerning single or multiple incidents across the province. It is responsible for coordinating the initial response and maintaining the Government of Alberta's response support for natural or human-induced disasters.

SOLE – State of Local Emergency

Section 21(1) of the Emergency Management Act empowers municipalities to declare a state of local emergency (SOLE). Declaring a SOLE provides municipalities with a wide range of powers within their municipal boundaries that are normally unavailable or limited under the Municipal Government Act. To declare a SOLE, a municipality "must be satisfied that an emergency exists or may exist in its municipality."

VHF – Very High Frequency (radio system).

VHF radios offer service in areas with poor line of sight between radio users.

WUI – Wildland Urban Interface

The region where human development (either industrial, agricultural or residential) overlaps with wildland areas. In Alberta, wildland areas are also known as the Forest Protection Area