



RMA
RURAL MUNICIPALITIES
of ALBERTA

Summary Wildfire Working Group Report

February 2025



Introduction

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 Forest Protection Area (FPA). The working group was formed and met throughout 2024, and their work is captured in a report featuring 31 recommendations to government, municipalities, and other stakeholders. This report was developed by RMA's wildfire working group, which included representatives from RMA member municipalities, ABmunis, the Alberta Fire Chiefs Association, the Alberta Forest Products Association, and various ministerial administrative staff in an advisory capacity.

Goal of the working group

For the purpose of defining responsibility for responding to wildfires, Alberta is divided into two zones – the 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. As wildfires increase in frequency, duration, and intensity municipalities outside the FPA require additional support to respond to large scale wildfires that were not likely contemplated when the FPA was created.

Summary of the report

The report is divided into three main sections. First, a detailed review of existing provincial and municipal after-action reports is provided. The reports reviewed include the Flat Top Complex, Spring 2019, 2016 Horse River, 2016 Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, Brazeau County and Drayton Valley, Parkland County, and Yellowhead County. This analysis reveals common themes that were used to inform the discussion of the working group and ultimately the recommendations. The second section shares the results of the survey that RMA conducted in 2024 regarding the needs of municipalities to respond to wildfires. The final section presents the report's 31 recommendations, which are categorized into three categories: preparedness, response, and recovery. The preparedness section addresses training, planning, service level determination, data and information sharing, public communications, and volunteer management. The response section addresses intermunicipal collaboration and aid, provincial – municipal collaboration, and volunteer management. The recovery section addresses re-entry and cleanup and planning for recovery.

The recommendations are as follows:

Preparedness

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 wildfire 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.

Response

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.

Recovery

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.

Other recommendations

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.