

CANADIAN WILDLAND FIRE STRATEGY DECLARATION



OUR GOALS

The following goals, representing social, ecological, and economic perspectives, are an important part of this vision:

Resilient communities and an empowered public

Responsibility for the development of resilient communities and for empowerment of the public is shared among individuals, communities, industries, and governments through a comprehensive set of actions in accordance with a risk management framework.

Healthy and productive forest ecosystems

Integrated forest and land management policies and practices that consider the biological, ecological, and physical characteristics of wildland fire, such as increased use of natural and prescribed fire and other treatments, will maintain or enhance the biodiversity, ecological integrity, and productivity of forest ecosystems.

Modern business practices

All stakeholders will share expertise and resources in a culture of continuous improvement founded on the principles of risk analysis, risk management, and science and technology. Such sharing will be facilitated through effective partnerships and innovative institutional arrangements and will lead to an economically efficient process for continuous improvement, development of innovative policies, and maintenance of Canada's state-of-the-art wildland fire preparedness and response capability (in terms of both people and equipment).

OUR PRINCIPLES

We agree on the following principles:

- Public safety — including the safety of firefighters — is paramount.
- Fire is an essential ecological process that contributes to the productivity, health, and biodiversity of the forests.
- Unwanted wildland fires can have a negative impact on public safety (including threats to security, health, and life), property, resources (including timber), services (including recreation and tourism), and non-market values. The responsibility for reducing risk from wildland fire is shared among individuals, communities, the private sector, and governments, according to jurisdiction and mandate.
- Wildland fire management, including the use of fire as a land management tool, is an integral component of land and resource management.
- Comprehensive risk management approaches, including an appropriate mix of mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery, are required to manage wildland fire.
- Interagency and intergovernmental co-operation and common technical standards, shared across Canada, improve the efficiency and effectiveness of wildland fire management.
- Innovation and evaluation are essential to ensuring the continuous improvement of wildland fire management policies and practices across Canada.
- Governments and the private sector have responsibility for forest fire management on their respective lands, which the Canadian Wildland Fire Strategy will respect. The Strategy will also respect, through collective and/or bilateral agreements, governments' jurisdictions and their own policies, laws, regulations, and implementation needs.

PUBLIC SAFETY AND RESOURCE PROTECTION IN OUR WILDLANDS

Canadian wildlands encompass 402 million hectares of forest, as well as many hectares of grasslands, tundra, alpine meadows, and brushlands. These wildlands are integral to our environment, economy, traditions, and history, and they are critical to our ability to realize our aspirations as a society. When fires strike, however, the same wildlands that provide jobs, recreation, and opportunities for a natural living environment threaten Canadians and their investments. Wildland fires are the most frequent and the most expensive natural emergency in Canada, costing as much as \$1 billion per year, a cost paid mainly by provincial and territorial governments. The costs and impacts of such fires will continue to increase during the worst fire seasons as a result of increased use of and pressures on wildlands, as well as changes in climate and weather. The urgency of meeting the challenge is heightened when homes, investments, and economies are affected by large fire events. A new approach is needed to address an increasing concern for Canadians — the need to deal with the root causes as well as the symptoms of wildland fire threat.

In September 2004, the Canadian Council of Forest Ministers agreed on an action plan for renewing wildland fire management and protection for the people and resources of Canada. Building on that agreement, this declaration expresses the commitment of the Ministers to improving the safety of Canadians and their investments and protecting wildland resources from fire.

Canada's strength and success in dealing with wildland fires to date has resulted from a high level of co-operation among governments in terms of research, development, expertise, and resources whenever the need arises. This declaration builds on that important Canadian value and strengthens it in the face of increasing challenges and demands. Governments have made significant investments in wildland fire management over many decades. The Ministers agree that even more investment will be needed, but they also know that money alone will not suffice.

OUR VISION

Innovating strategically to protect Canadians, their communities, their resources, and the environment

Our vision strives to bring governments together to address emerging strategic wildland fire issues by the most effective and efficient means for each jurisdiction.

OUR COMMITMENT TO ACTION

We commit ourselves to apply our knowledge and expertise to fulfill our vision in the following important areas:

Canadian FireSmart Initiative

FireSmart products and activities must be developed and implemented to enhance mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery within Canadian communities and among residents in the wildland–urban interface. These products and activities will contribute to Canadians' understanding of risks, to appropriate mitigation, to the development of training and capacity to respond, to the use of modern techniques and equipment, and to the dissemination of information as needed during wildland fire incidents.

Wildland fire preparedness and response capability

The federal, provincial, and territorial agencies involved in dealing with fires must adapt to increasing challenges, particularly in the wildland–urban interface, by sharing knowledge, standards, training, and resources, as well as by improving capacity and infrastructure in areas such as equipment, aviation, and technology.

Public education and policy

Fire is an important natural element of the Canadian wildlands. There is a significant need to increase the information available to citizens about the role of fire and the risks that it poses to them and their property. Policies need to be developed that consider and manage those risks to the extent possible. Those policies must also be adaptable to our evolving understanding of the risks of fire and the potential for risks to increase under conditions of climate change.

Innovation

Canada is recognized for its innovative solutions to difficult problems, such as strategic and operational wildfire decision support systems. The complex dimensions of the challenges posed by wildland fire, including sociological, economic, and biophysical aspects, present significant opportunities for innovation, including refinement of these existing systems.

We, the Canadian Ministers responsible, endorse this Declaration and undertake, on behalf of all Canadians, to support its spirit and intent.

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Minister of Natural Resources
Ontario

M. Pierre Corbeil
Ministre des Ressources naturelles et de la Faune
Québec

M. Benoît Pelletier
Ministre responsable des Affaires intergouvernementales
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