

2018 WILDLAND FIRE SEASON

Mr. Speaker, 2018's fire season was well below-average for the Northwest Territories. A total of 56 fires were reported, affecting 13,222 hectares. In comparison, there were 249 fires and just over 860 thousand hectares burned in 2017. The 25-year average is 231 fires and about 686 thousand hectares burned each fire season.

As a government, it is important for us to be able to provide assistance to other Canadian jurisdictions, as many of them have helped us during previous wildland fire seasons. The relatively inactive fire season allowed Northwest Territories personnel and resources to be exported to assist with wildland fire response in other jurisdictions facing extensive wildland fires.

A total of 76 Type-1 firefighters, 19 overhead staff and three air tanker groups were sent to British Columbia, Ontario, Alberta, Yukon, Saskatchewan and various national parks throughout the fire season.

Crews that remained in the territory this summer carried out important wildland fire management, maintenance and FireSmart activities. They cleared brush, cleaned up fire breaks, managed overgrown vegetation and constructed helipads to ensure future protection of our communities and infrastructure.

Within the South Slave region the communities of Fort Smith, Hay River and Fort Providence benefited from clearing and brushing activities concentrated in both the communities and along highways and around fire towers.

In and around the community of Fort Simpson fire crews continued FireSmart work around the Wild Rose subdivision, clearing and removing trees. They also did brushing and tree removal in the Fort Simpson Campground and widened the community wood lot access road so that residents can have better access to fire wood.

Within the Sahtu communities of Délı̄nə, Tulita and Fort Good Hope work primarily concentrated on improving existing community fuel breaks by making them wider and clearing brush.

In Fort McPherson the crew completed five helipads near water sources along the fuel breaks near the community. In Tsiigehtchic and Inuvik fire crews concentrated on improving the areas around weather stations, radio towers and various patrol and fire bases.

In the North Slave region in addition to completing a number of FireSmart activities the Department held a FireSmart workshop at Pontoon Lake that was well attended and received by the public.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud of the integrity and hard work shown by our wildland fire personnel this fire season, both at home and while assisting other jurisdictions. Environment and Natural Resources fire crews continue to provide professional service to our residents and as representatives of our government while serving elsewhere.

The Government of Northwest Territories continues to work with communities on risk assessment and hazard mitigation to identify priority areas for protection planning in the face of possible wildland fire. Earlier this year we saw the Hamlet of Enterprise become the first certified FireSmart community in the Northwest Territories. We hope the example they have set as leaders in community protection will be a model for forested communities across the territory.

Taking FireSmart actions continues to be the most important and effective way residents can protect their values at risk from wildland fire. It is everyone's responsibility to FireSmart their home and cabin, and to promote the FireSmart program in their community.

This winter, we are asking those heading out to their cabins to take time to FireSmart their property. Clearing vegetation around the cabin by cutting firewood close to home and keeping the area around the cabin free of combustible materials can go a long way in protecting from wildland fire.

Mr. Speaker, this season, only three fires are suspected to have been person-caused. I would like to thank the majority of our residents for remembering to choose secure locations to make fires for cooking and keeping warm, and for making sure those fires were out before leaving. I would also like to recognize the work of our staff in getting vital messaging around fire prevention out to our communities.

As is our usual practice, Fire Operations has debriefed with headquarters and the regions on how the season went during our annual fall fire managers meeting in Fort Smith last month. The meeting is an important opportunity to share lessons learned, report on the season and develop winter work plans. In the spring, we will hold our annual pre-season meeting to ensure we are properly prepared for the upcoming fire season.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to once again thank all our fire personnel. From the fire crews out on the fire line, to our radio operators, and air attack officers, to those doing logistics and planning, and everyone who worked hard this summer to protect both our residents and our neighbours to the South. Your commitment and efforts are appreciated.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.