

### **2019 Wildfire Season Outlook**

Mr. Speaker, although last year's fire season was a significant break from years past, we know that each fire season brings its own unique challenges.

Over the winter, most of the territory experienced below average precipitation, and the few weeks of record breaking warm temperatures we saw earlier this spring caused snow to disappear weeks earlier than usual in some areas.

Although parts of the Northwest Territories received snow earlier this month, much of the NWT remains very dry—especially in the South Slave and Dehcho regions. Weather predictions for the summer indicate hotter than average temperatures and below average precipitation for all regions over the next three months.

Mr. Speaker, it could be a very active wildfire season for our firefighters.

As of this week, there have been fourteen wildfires in the Northwest Territories. Twelve of these fires are believed to be human caused. Typically we see an average of 20 human-caused fires each year, so the fact that we have already seen twelve this year is a concern. Several of these were ignited while there was still snow on the ground and all of them were preventable fires that required government resources to extinguish.

Mr. Speaker, it is critical at this early stage of the season while fuels are still dry that residents use extreme caution with campfires while out on the land. It is everyone's responsibility to ensure their fires are fully extinguished before leaving them. Residents are advised to soak the ashes, stir and soak them again.

People planning to do spring brush or grass burning are required to get burn permits from their local municipality or Indigenous government office. If burning is being done outside of municipal limits, permits must be obtained from their local ENR office.

Of course, anyone doing controlled burning should ensure they have enough water and hand tools available to put out the fire.

Mr. Speaker, fires are a vital part of our forests, but they have very real and direct impacts on people and communities. That is why we continue to work with communities on wildfire prevention and risk mitigation planning and activities.

Staff from our Forest Management Division and in the Regions continue to work with local governments to update and implement Community Wildfire Protection Plans, and to apply the principles of FireSmart to their cabins, homes and other property. Over the last few months, the Department has met with fifteen communities to discuss these important topics, and will continue to engage the rest of the territory as we move forward with protection planning.

Mr. Speaker, three NWT communities were recently awarded funding for Wildfire Community Preparedness Day to assist them with FireSmarting. Congratulations to Fort Good Hope, Whati and Wrigley on taking the initiative to prepare their communities for the risk of wildfire.

We know that managing fires is becoming more complex as a result of climate change. More than anything else, the 2014 fire season underlined the need to improve our knowledge as forest managers to keep up with the predicted trends of increasingly intense fire seasons as our climate warms.

Mr. Speaker, in the last five years our government has been working closely with research partners at various universities, federal agencies and even NASA to identify gaps in our knowledge and learn more about the changing fire environment to help us with our decision making.

This continuing collaboration between fire managers and researchers is critical in helping to ensure our fire management decisions are based on the best available information, allowing us to achieve our number one priority: keeping our residents, communities and frontline firefighters safe.

Mr. Speaker, our residents and firefighters are our most important values-at-risk. I wish everyone a safe fire season, and encourage all of our residents and communities to do their part in preventing and preparing for wildfire.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.