

**2017 Wildland Fire Season**

Mr. Speaker, 2017 was an above-average fire season. This year, 249 wildland fires were reported, affecting over one million hectares. That makes this the seventh worst year for area burned by forest fires since Environment and Natural Resources began keeping records in 1975. As a comparison, in 2016 there were 188 fires that burned 229 thousand hectares, a below-average year. In 2014, 385 fires and 3.4 million hectares burned. In a regular year, the Northwest Territories experiences about 213 fires affecting just over 500 thousand hectares of land.

This year, in addition to the 136 fire fighters who made up 34 four-person crews, ENR hired 378 Extra Fire Fighters across the NWT for training or in support of wildland fire operations. These crews were critical in managing the 2017 wildland fire situation.

ENR fire crews continue to provide a professional level of service to the residents of the NWT. This was especially demonstrated this summer by the great work crews did to protect communities when fires encroached on Fort Good Hope, Nahanni Butte, Fort McPherson and Tsiigehtchic.

In addition to actioning fires and protecting values-at-risk, fires crews in all regions assisted communities with thinning and pruning projects to increase community protection.

As a government, it is important for us that we are able to provide assistance to other Canadian jurisdictions, as many of them helped us in our time of need during previous wildland fire seasons.

This season, with the extreme burning conditions in western provinces, we assisted British Columbia by providing 80 crew members, 24 overhead personnel, and equipment. In

addition, the GNWT assisted Alberta and Parks Canada, specifically Wood Buffalo National Park, with a total of 14 air tanker missions for fires in their areas.

Mr. Speaker, every resident has a responsibility to help prevent fires in the NWT. Despite ongoing public awareness campaigns on fire safety, of the 249 fires this year, 17 fires are suspected to be person-caused.

I cannot stress enough the value and importance of our FireSmart Program. It is everyone's responsibility to FireSmart their home and cabin, and promote the FireSmart Program in their community. Property owners and communities should be using FireSmart tools to reduce their risk of loss from wildland fire.

In cooperation with the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources continues to lead an initiative to review, update and integrate community wildland fire protection plans into existing GNWT emergency management processes. This will ensure communities have a more complete understanding of their role in FireSmart and what is required to mitigate community risks of a wildland fire. Information about the FireSmart program and community protection plans is available on the ENR website and at local ENR offices.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources remains committed to working with NWT residents and communities to finalize community wildland fire protection plans and develop and propose amendments to modernize forest protection legislation. Over the next year, we will remain vigilant in working with property owners across the North and all NWT residents to reduce the risk of wildland fires, and to prepare for a potentially extreme fire response in 2018.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to note that the GNWT employed the new group of 802 Fire Boss Aircrafts on fires in all regions this summer. These aircrafts proved highly successful in initial and sustained attack. The 802 air tanker group was also exported to Ontario to help with fires, and also actioned several fires for our friends in Alberta and Wood Buffalo National Park. Feedback from fire crews and the air attack officers this summer indicated

they are both impressed and pleased with the group's performance. Turbine aircrafts with the ability to use both foam and retardant, and have access to more water sources are proving to be a sound investment for the people of the NWT.

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

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.