

Fighting Forest Fires and Restoring the Environment

Forest fires are a fact of life in Saskatchewan. Some of the fires, such as those in the observation/modified zones, are left to carry out the natural process of helping to renew the forest. Saskatchewan Wildfire Management fire-fighting crews put out others, especially those that threaten lives, communities or valuable resources.

Fighting forest fires and other wildfires often means getting staff and equipment into an area and, once they are in place, clearing a spot for a camp and a spot for helicopters carrying supplies and fuel to land. The landing zones are also often used as staging areas for helicopters that directly attack a fire. Fighting a fire can also mean cutting kilometres of fire control lines through the forest. Fire control lines are areas where vegetation has been cleared to create a break in the path of an advancing fire.

"A properly built fire control line will help stop a wildfire from spreading so it is a valuable tool for fighting forest fires. The campsites and landing zones are also crucial to fighting fires," says Paul Maczek, Sask. Wildfire Management Fire Science Specialist. "However, sometimes building them can open up otherwise inaccessible areas, change or damage fish and wildlife habitat and remove valuable topsoil, vegetation and forest stands. While it is important to fight fires it is equally important to do as little environmental damage as possible."

In some cases it is critical to deal with wildfire promptly so equipment operators and other fire-fighting personnel do whatever needs to be done to get the situation under control. However, there is often time to make a detailed plan of how to attack a fire, avoid doing additional environmental damage and reclaim areas that do get disturbed or damaged during fire fighting.

"We will look at an area and decide on the most effective way to deal with the fire with the least amount of environmental damage," says Environment's Maczek. "We will use the natural terrain as best we can for building fire control lines. We will decide if we need to use heavy equipment in an area or if we can accomplish our goals with firefighters who are using lighter equipment such as pumps or perhaps with aircraft. We also consider every waterbody to be fish-bearing so we try to avoid damage to it and its banks. We also try to avoid crossing them. If we have to we may install a temporary culvert or build a temporary bridge of logs and brush."

Once the fire is out, the disturbed areas such as fire lines, landing pads and campsites will be reclaimed. This is done by several methods: replacing soil, re-establishing the slopes on hills and stream banks and preventing erosion by re-planting vegetation.

Wildfire Management utilizes a centralized decision making philosophy for wildfire operations. Wildfire Management is the final authority on provincial priorities, resource allocation, and operational policy and procedure.

Wildland fires are attacked as quickly as possible with dedicated initial attack crews (Type 1 crews) operating in each of the 14 Forest Protection Areas (FPA's). If fires escape initial attack, areas activate sustained action crews. These crews consist of emergency firefighters (Type 3), or contracted First Nations crews (Type 2), and are normally hired from the communities and reserves within the local Forest Protection Areas. At times, Type 2 and Type 3 crews are also brought in from less active areas of the province. When provincial manpower pools are depleted, Saskatchewan may access additional trained wildland fire suppression personnel from other provinces and from the United States through

the Mutual Aid Resource Sharing (MARS) agreement and the CAN/US agreement (this process is handled by the Provincial Duty Officer).

If wildland fires become too large or exceed the resources available within the local Forest Protection Area (e.g. too many fires occurring at one time), an Incident Management Team (Type 1 or Type 2) will be assigned to a particular fire or to a fire complex. The Incident Management Team will report directly to the Senior Fire Manager or a designate responsible for the fire area in which the fire/fires are burning

FITNESS TESTING REQUIREMENTS FOR WILDLAND FIREFIGHTERS BY CREW TYPE	
Type 1 – Initial Attack Fire Fighter (Agency)	Arduous Pack Test/ Upright Row Test/ Pump & Hose Test
Type 2 – Sustained Action Fire Fighter (Contract)	Moderate Pack Test – 3.2 km hike with 25 lb pack in 30 minutes
Type 3 - Sustained Action Fire Fighter (Emergency Hire)	Light Test – 1.6 km hike with no pack in 16 minutes

Crew Types

Initial Attack Crew- Type 1

Type 1 Crews are made up of Ministry of Environment unionized staff. Type 1 crews are located in each Forest Protection Area and consist of highly trained and experienced seasonal staff. These individuals have a combination of training and experience that meets or exceeds the interagency exchanged standards for wildland fire fighters established by the Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre (CIFFC). The primary purpose of Type 1 crews is to perform initial attack activities on wildland fires. Type 1 Crew Leaders and Crew Members are also utilized to fill fireline supervisory roles, supervising Type 2 and Type 3 crews on sustained action fires. They are also eligible for export under the Mutual Aid Resource Sharing Agreement (MARS) established among the various fire agencies in Canada. Type 1 crews may also be exported to the United States under the auspices of the CAN/US agreement.

Sustained Action Crew- Type 2

Type 2 crews are contracted through formal agreements with First Nations organizations and Northern Communities (Northern Forest Protection Worker Training Program). These crews are located in various communities and reserves near or within the commercial forest. Crew size consists of five fire fighters including the Crew Leader. Type 2 crews are expected to provide firefighting services as needed and work on projects within their home communities or reserves in times of low fire danger. Type 2 crews are made up of qualified/certified individuals and are primarily utilized to control and contain hot fireline on sustained action fires. Type 2 crews may also be used to assist Type 1 crews on initial attack where required. Many individuals on Type 2 crews return each fire season and have a great deal of fireline experience and formalized training.

Emergency Fire Personnel (EFP) Crew- Type 3

Type 3 crews are made up of qualified/certified fire fighters hired on emergency basis. Type 3 crews are used to support Type 1 and Type 2 crews working on sustained action fire operations. Type 3 crews are normally used on fireline that is under control or in the mop up stage. Each crew should include five fireline personnel including a qualified/certified Crew Leader. In addition to wildland fire suppression the Crew Leader is responsible for supervision and safety of Crew Members, timekeeping, and equipment inventory. Type 3 crews are not normally considered for export to other provinces or agencies for wildland fire fighting.

Forest Protection Offices

All offices have a 306 area code:

Big River Fire Base - 469-2500

Buffalo Narrows Fire Base - 235-1800

Cypress Hills Fire Base - 662-5498

Dorintosh Fire Base - 236-7696

Fishing Lakes Fire Base - 426-2600

Hudson Bay Fire Base - 865-4500

Ile a La Crosse Fire Base - 833-3230

La Loche Fire Base - 822-1703

La Ronge Fire Base - 425-4447

Pelican Narrows Fire Base - 632-5500

Prince Albert Fire Base - 953-3422

Southend Fire Base - 758-6255

Stony Rapids Fire Base - 439-2062

Weyakwin Fire Base - 663-5620