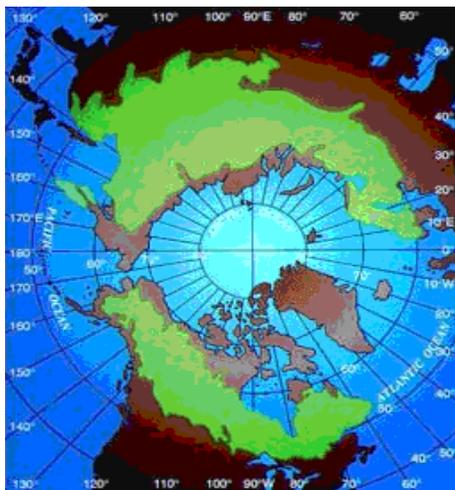


## Fire in the Boreal Forest

Canada's boreal (northern) forest is a cornerstone in the largest wild forest remaining on our planet. The deep green boreal forest sweeps across Canada from coast to coast, and is part of a band of wild forest circling the northern hemisphere: our boreal forest region is more wild and intact than almost any other forest area on the face of the Earth. Over half of Saskatchewan is boreal forest ecosystem.

The world's boreal forests have been less disturbed than other forest types because of long winters and poor soils that make it difficult to farm. Small and slow growing trees have made the boreal ecosystems unattractive to commercial loggers.

Forest fires are a natural and important function of Saskatchewan's ecosystems, whether it occurs in grasslands, parklands, or the boreal forest. Since fire is a natural disturbance, reclamation is usually not required on burned area. However, wildfire suppression efforts often cause negative disturbances to ecosystems as wildfire personnel work to extinguish fires that threaten values at risk. Creating fireguards, stream crossings, access trails, fire camps, and other activities are manmade disturbances that allow access to otherwise inaccessible areas, alter or damage fish and wildlife habitat, remove and windrow valuable topsoil, productive vegetation and forest stands.



Reclamation should be recognized as an integral part of forest fire operations and a major factor in determining suppression methods and alternative approaches to minimizing suppression disturbance.

Mark Johnston, a scientist at the Saskatchewan Research Council, said the boreal forest has evolved over thousands of years with fire as part of its ecology. He said all species of trees are capable of coping with periodic fire and regenerating quickly after a fire.

"If you look at the age-class distribution of the forest in Saskatchewan, you see that the majority of the forest is reaching a point that under the long-term average it would probably have a fire. In that sense, the forest is old. Whether it's too old or not depends upon what you're seeking in terms of the value of the forest?"