



POLICY

23.03 Forest Fire Management

1. Statement of Policy

The Government of the Northwest Territories will provide forest fire management services on forested areas.

2. Principles

The Government of the Northwest Territories will adhere to the following principles when implementing this Policy:

- (1) Fire should be recognized as a significant and natural phenomenon in the forests of the Northwest Territories.
- (2) Fire management should strive to attain forest management and other land use objectives in a manner that considers environmental, social and economic criteria.
- (3) The first consideration in the allocation of fire management resources shall be the protection of human life. All other considerations shall take into account the relative value of a specific or collective set of natural resources and improvements/developments that may be destroyed or otherwise altered by forest fires in any given forest area relative to the cost of continuing a sustained attack on fire occurrences.
- (4) Effective fire management should include community consultation and be responsive to the needs of Northwest Territories residents.
- (5) Fire management should draw upon local knowledge.
- (6) Fire management policy shall be consistent with other government policies with respect to providing opportunities for participation by Northwest Territories residents, groups or organizations.
- (7) Nothing in this Policy shall prejudice any present or future treaty or land claim based rights.



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3. Scope

This Policy applies to all forest areas under the jurisdiction of the Government of the Northwest Territories.

4. Definitions

The following terms apply to this Policy:

Fire Behaviour - the manner in which fuel ignites, flame develops and fire spreads and exhibits other related phenomena as determined by the interaction of fuels, weather and topography.

Fire Detection - activities designed to detect forest fires as early as possible after ignition. Fire detection activities occur at the public and departmental level, and include: fixed and airborne detection; remote sensing; and communications.

Fire Environment - the surrounding conditions, influences, and modifying forces of topography, fuel, and fire weather that determine fire behaviour.

Fire Hazard - a general term to describe the potential fire behaviour, without regard to the state of weather-influenced fuel moisture content, and/or resistance to fireguard construction, for a given fuel type. Such an assessment is based on physical fuel characteristics.

Fire Line

- (a) that portion of the fire upon which resources are deployed and are actively engaged in suppression action. In a general sense the working area around a fire;
- (b) any cleared strip used to control a fire.

Fire Line Organization - the organization of resources that are deployed and are actively engaged in suppression action.



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Fire Management - the activities concerned with the protection of people, property and forest areas from wildfire and the use of prescribed burning for the attainment of forest management and other land use objectives, all conducted in a manner that considers environmental, social and economic criteria.

Fire Presuppression - activities designed to ensure an organized, equipped fire control force is in place to take effective fire suppression action. Fire presuppression activities include: specialized training; preparation of a fire line organization plan; fire weather forecasting; equipment and supplies are dedicated; radio communications; and, utilization of remote sensing for monitoring.

Fire Prevention - activities designed to prevent the occurrence of fires caused by people. Fire prevention activities include: public and school education; media campaigns; preparation of community forest fire management and protection plans; and, the reduction of fire hazards and risks.

Fire Risk - the probability or chance of fire starting determined by the presence and activities of causative agents (i.e., potential number of ignition agents).

Fire Suppression - all activities concerned with controlling and extinguishing a fire following its detection. A response to any fire may include initial attack, sustained attack, limited action, delayed action, or observation and monitoring.

First Attack Period - the first 24 hour period following detection of a forest fire.

Forest Area - any uncultivated land that, by reason of the existence of trees, grass or other vegetation thereon, possesses timber, forage, recreational, wildlife or other value.

Forest Fire - any wildfire or prescribed fire that is burning in forested areas, grass or alpine/tundra vegetation.

Initial Attack - the action taken to halt the spread or potential spread of a fire by the first fire-fighting force to arrive at the fire. An Initial Attack Crew is a crew specially hired, trained, equipped and deployed to conduct initial attack on wildfires.



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Prescribed Burning - controlled application of fire to a specific land area to accomplish predetermined forest management or other land use objectives.

Prescribed Fire - any fire deliberately utilized for prescribed burning; usually set by qualified fire management personnel according to a predetermined burning prescription. Note, in some cases a wild fire that may produce beneficial results in terms of the attainment of forest management and other land use objectives may be allowed to burn under certain burning conditions according to a defined burning prescription, with limited or no suppression action, and as such, may be considered a form of prescribed fire.

Property - land or real estate. Includes both private and public land or real property.

Relative Value - the estimated economic value of a specific or collective set of natural resources and improvements/developments that may be destroyed or otherwise altered by forest fire in any given forest area relative to the cumulative cost of continuing fire suppression efforts after the first attack period. The relative value in immediately adjacent threatened areas may also be considered in forest fire response decision making.

Sustained Attack - all the action taken to halt the spread or potential spread of a fire following initial attack.

Values-at-risk - human life and the specific or collective set of natural or cultural resources and improvements/developments that have measurable or intrinsic worth and that could or may be destroyed or otherwise altered by fire in any given area.

Environment

Means the components of the Earth, including:

- (a) Air, land, and water;
- (b) All layers and constituents of the atmosphere;
- (c) All organic matter and living organisms; and
- (d) Rocks, sediments, and other inorganic matter;
- (e) The interacting natural systems that include components in items a to d; and
- (f) The movement and forms of energy within these systems.



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Indigenous Knowledge

Knowledge and values which have been acquired through experience and observation from the land or from spiritual teachings and handed down from one generation to another.

Natural Resources

Natural components of the environment that can be used for human and ecological purposes, consisting of flora and fauna and their habitat, including the air, land, water as well as wildlife, forest and agricultural products. It also includes resources that cannot be replaced or renewed following extraction, including all minerals, aggregates and petroleum resources.

Public Land

Any land in the Northwest Territories over which the Government of the Northwest Territories holds the administration and control.

Sustainability

Meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

5. Authority and Accountability

(1) General

This Policy is issued under the authority of the Executive Council. The authority to make exceptions and approve revisions to this Policy rests with the Executive Council. Authority and accountability is further defined as follows:

(a) Minister

The Minister of Environment and Climate Change (the Minister) is accountable to the Executive Council for the implementation of this Policy.

(b) Deputy Minister



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The Deputy Minister of Environment and Climate Change (the Deputy Minister) is accountable to the Minister and responsible to the Minister for the administration of this Policy.

(2) Specific

(a) Minister

During a fire occurrence, should the Minister deem that a request for an exemption to this policy is warranted and a quorum of the Executive Council is not available on a sufficiently timely basis, then the Minister may approve an exemption on behalf of the Executive Council. The Minister shall advise the Executive Council as soon as possible of the basis for granting the exemption.

(b) Ministers

The Ministers of Municipal and Community Affairs, Public Works and Services, Transportation, Health and Social Services and Education, Culture and Employment shall consult with the Department of Environment and Climate Change on programming, design and construction of infrastructure or facilities in forest areas, and the maximization of benefits from fire management.

(c) Deputy Minister

The Deputy Minister (or designate):

- (i) is responsible for the administration and provision of forest fire management programs and services;
- (ii) sets priorities and makes decisions regarding fire management activities;
- (iii) sets priorities and makes decisions regarding forest fire responses;
- (iv) maintains an up-to-date database of values-at-risk; and
- (v) represents the Department of Environment and Climate Change in national forest fire undertakings.

6. Provisions

(1) Forest Fire Management



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Forest fire management consists of the activities concerned with the protection of human life, property and forest areas from wildfire. Forest fire management is also concerned with the use of fire as a tool to achieve forest management objectives. These objectives may consist of habitat maintenance and enhancement, silviculture or the reduction of forest fuel accumulations.

Forest fire management includes fire prevention, fire detection, fire presuppression, fire suppression and prescribed burning.

(2) Forest Fire Response

All forest fires shall receive a response based on consideration of the following criteria:

- (a) values-at-risk;
- (b) land and resource management objectives;
- (c) availability of personnel and equipment;
- (d) fire weather;
- (e) fire risk in higher-valued areas; and
- (f) where property or resources are threatened, the relative value of that being threatened.

Recognizing that fire is a significant and natural phenomenon in the forest areas of the Northwest Territories, the Department of Environment and Climate Change may not extinguish every fire occurrence but will follow the principles and guidelines in this Policy.

Every forest fire that is detected and reported requires a decision on the magnitude and type of response. The primary objective is to suppress the fire before it becomes large and requires significant suppression effort.

Fires that are actioned may receive initial attack, sustained attack, limited action or delayed action depending on an evaluation by fire managers. This guideline recognizes the policy principle that fire is a significant and natural phenomenon in the forests of the Northwest Territories and that under adverse fire weather conditions suppression efforts may be ineffective.



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(3) Values-at-Risk

The Department of Environment and Climate Change, through broad based consultation, shall determine the values-at-risk based on the following hierarchy:

- (a) Human Life;
- (b) Property (communities and other infrastructure);
- (c) Natural Resource values (e.g., primary wildlife harvesting areas, commercial timber areas, endangered species areas); and
- (d) Cultural Resource values (e.g., historic/archaeological sites, culturally significant areas).

The decision making process begins prior to any forest fire season. Information on values-at-risk is gathered by the Department from many sources, including: communities; hunters' and trappers' associations; planning commissions; renewable resources management boards; and timber and wildlife land managers. The Department shall make the final determination as to values-at-risk and advise those concerned accordingly.

Since it is not operationally feasible to consult with different groups when a fire is reported, it is critical that the different groups identify and articulate values-at-risk well in advance of fire occurrences.

(4) Response Guidelines for Values-at-Risk

- (a) Human Life

In forest areas where wildfire has the potential to threaten human life, a high degree of fire preparedness as determined by the fire environment and risk of fire occurrence is maintained. The Department of Environment and Climate Change maintains fire fighting resources that are not committed to other fire events in readiness of such fire occurrences.



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Aggressive initial attack is taken on all occurrences and action is continued until human life is no longer threatened. Unquestioned priority over all other fires is automatically given to forest fires threatening human life.

Where wildfire has the potential to affect lower valued areas, the Department evaluates occurrences to determine what level of fire suppression action may be undertaken. Fire suppression action may be taken when higher values are not at risk and fire fighting resources may be committed without risking a lower state of fire preparedness in high valued forest areas.

(b) Property

In forest areas where wildfire has the potential to destroy property, a high degree of fire preparedness as determined by the fire environment and risk of occurrence is maintained.

Action is taken to secure property values and to minimize damage to property throughout the forest area. The Department maintains fire fighting resources that are not committed to other fire events in readiness of such fire occurrences. Priority to protect property is secondary to occurrences threatening human life. However, property remains a higher priority over other values. The Department carries out fire suppression efforts until the fire is declared out or until the fire no longer threatens the property, or until cumulative expenditures after the first attack period equal the relative value of the property, or until fire fighting resources must be withdrawn to protect higher values.

(c) Natural Resources

Where wildfire has the potential to affect natural resource land areas, including those things which require wildfire protection but do not involve the protection of human life or property, the Department may carry out fire suppression efforts until the fire is declared out or until the fire no longer threatens the resource, or until cumulative expenditures after the first attack period equal the relative value of the resource, or until fire fighting resources must be withdrawn to protect higher values.

(d) Cultural Resources

Where wildfire has the potential to affect historic/ archaeological sites or culturally significant areas, including those things which require wildfire protection but do not involve the protection of



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human life, property or natural resources, the Department may carry out fire suppression efforts until the fire is declared out or until the fire no longer threatens the resource, or until cumulative expenditures after the first attack period equal the relative value of the resource, or until fire fighting resources must be withdrawn to protect higher values.

(5) Inter-jurisdictional Cooperation

Suppression action in areas bordering other jurisdictions shall be governed by co-operative fire control agreements. The Northwest Territories is a partner in the Mutual Aid Resources Sharing Agreement administered through the Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre.

7. Prerogative of the Executive Council

Nothing in this Policy shall in any way be construed to limit the prerogative of the Executive Council to make decisions or take action respecting the Department of Environment and Climate Change outside the provisions of this Policy.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Caroline Cochrane".

Premier and Chair of the
Executive Council