

Ministry of Natural
Resources and Forestry

Office of the Minister

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354-2024-360

May 17, 2024

Rhonda Smith
Municipal Clerk
Municipality of Temagami
clerk@temagami.ca

Dear Rhonda Smith:

Thank you for your letter detailing your municipality's support of the Council Resolution from the Municipality of Calvin regarding the National Fire Fighting Strategy.

As the natural hazard landscape continues to change, factors such as the changing climate and societal drivers are resulting in increased demands to protect the public, communities, property, critical infrastructure, and businesses in Ontario. My ministry has initiated a review to understand how best to modernize our wildland fire and other natural hazard programs that will result in improved outcomes to meet these heightened and changing demands.

Early work has been focused on understanding environmental changes and studying how other jurisdictions are adapting. To address current challenges, my ministry has made several immediate changes including:

- Investing over \$5 million to provide up to \$5000 retention bonuses to attract and retain employees in front-line fire, aviation, and critical support positions to enhance capacity for the 2024 fire season.
- Enhancing marketing strategies and platforms to recruit FireRanger and fire management program specialist positions.
- Reimbursing training costs to help remove potential cost barriers for eligible FireRanger recruits.
- Investing in Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS) technology and equipment to address current needs and challenges and exploring partnership opportunities to further invest in aerial fire suppression and research.
- Increasing our dedicated prevention and mitigation staff, expanding our FireSmart programs and continuing to evaluate and explore the expansion and modernization of both programs.

Our Aviation, Forest Fire and Emergency Services staff and partners are actively monitoring the current and forecasted weather to help predict wildland fire conditions. They also completed maintenance activities for all ministry owned aircrafts, reviewed equipment levels and ensured fire suppression equipment is serviceable. As this year's fire season unfolds, we will continue to dedicate necessary resources to ensure the safety and protection of our communities.

Recently, the Honourable David Piccini, Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development, announced proposed legislative and regulatory amendments to support wildland firefighters and wildland fire investigators in receiving the same presumptive WSIB coverages as municipal firefighters. This would include presumptive coverage for prescribed occupational cancers, heart injuries and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Shifting to our mitigation and prevention activities, FireSmart is a national program administered by the Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre (CIFFC) that helps Canadians understand their wildland fire risk and decrease the likelihood of the associated negative impacts. Research indicates that the risk to communities can be substantially mitigated by conducting thorough wildland fire risk assessments and implementing FireSmart principles. These principles encompass various strategies such as public education, vegetation management, legislation, planning development considerations and emergency preparedness.

My ministry's wildland fire prevention and mitigation programs include working with communities and local partners to promote interest in and adoption of the FireSmart principles, by:

- Supporting municipalities and the public in wildland fire prevention and mitigation through community wildland fire protection planning as part of the FireSmart Program
- Focusing on reducing the threat of wildland fire through the application of several mitigation principles (e.g., vegetation management, development considerations, public education, training, emergency and wildland fire protection planning).
- Assessing, working with partners, approving and/or supporting prescribed burning initiatives to reduce hazardous wildland fire conditions as part of the prevention and mitigation programs.
- Direct engagement and active communication with industry, communities, residents, businesses and our partners about the ways they can support activities – especially during periods of high or extreme hazard – to reduce the likelihood and impact of wildland fires.

Municipal Forest Fire Management agreements provide to residents the most appropriate response to wildland fires within their community and support the important partnerships that we have across the province to support response to wildland fires.

Another helpful resource is the CIFFC [Strategic Plan](#). CIFFC is a not-for-profit corporation owned and operated by the federal, provincial and territorial wildland fire management agencies. They operate seven days a week during fire season to coordinate resource sharing among member agencies and international partners. By prioritizing response coordination, resource sharing, information dissemination and international partnerships, CIFFC ensures a high level of preparedness to effectively manage wildland fires, both domestically and internationally. CIFFC is also the administrator of the national FireSmart program.

By fostering strong partnerships and leveraging available resources, we can enhance the safety and resilience of communities in the face of this natural hazard. Our mitigation team and FireSmart leads would be happy to meet with you to discuss opportunities for FireSmart training and education, as well as the Ontario FireSmart

Communities Transfer Payment Program, and other opportunities related to Community Wildland Fire Protection Plans. To set up a meeting, please contact Sarah Allen, Provincial Coordinator, Communications and Mitigation Unit, at 705-945-5875 or sarah.allen@ontario.ca.

Thank you again for writing.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Graydon Smith', written in a cursive style.

The Honourable Graydon Smith
Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry

- c. The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada
The Honourable Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario
The Honourable Bill Blair, Minister of Defence Canada
Vic Fedeli, MPP, Nipissing
Sarah Allen, Provincial Coordinator, Communications and Mitigation Unit, MNRF
Teresa Scroope, Deputy Clerk Records Management Coordinator, Municipality of Calvin