

The Right Honourable Mark Carney
Prime Minister of Canada
pm@pm.gc.ca

Dear Prime Minister Carney,

Re: Strengthening Canada's Wildfire Response Capacity [Revised October 23, 2025]

Economic and Climate Rationale

Canada is already paying a steep price for wildfires. Annual suppression costs now exceed **\$1 billion**,¹ and over the past five years wildfires have caused **an estimated \$30 billion**² in economic damages, including business losses, property destruction, and health system impacts. Over the past few years, wildfire smoke exposed **98% of Canadians**³ to hazardous “smoke days,” and in Ontario alone health damages surpassed **\$1 billion in a single week**⁴. Wildfire severity and frequency have **quadrupled**⁵ **since the 1970s**, and **nearly 8% of Canada's forests have burned since 2023**. Wildfire emissions now average 600 million tonnes annually⁶, much of it from soils and peat that unlock ancient carbon and accelerate climate change.

A small percentage of intense fires—about **3%**—cause **97% of the area burned**⁷ and most damages. Strategic early detection and rapid intervention could reduce losses by **30–78%**⁸, saving billions and preventing millions of tonnes of emissions. During both 2023 and 2025, Canada was at National Preparedness Level 5 (NPL5) for nearly the entire fire season⁹, with all domestic resources committed. Without new investments in capital assets, prevention, and stronger Indigenous and provincial partnerships, Canadians' health, communities, and economy will remain at severe risk.

Prevention and Forest Management

Reducing wildfire risk requires collaboration with provinces, territories, Indigenous governments, municipalities, and the forestry sector to build more resilient forests and sustain the forest

¹ <https://natural-resources.canada.ca/forest-forestry/wildland-fires/fighting-managing-wildfires-changing-climate-program>

² Based on [Évaluation économique des impacts des feux de forêt de 2023 au Québec](#) scaled to rest of Canada based in total burned area, excluding carbon costs.

³ <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41586-025-09482-1>

⁴ <https://climateinstitute.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Fact-sheet-wildfires-Canadian-Climate-Institute.pdf>

⁵ Mike Flannigan estimated in January 2025 that the area burned by wildfires has quadrupled since the 1970s. Counting the 2025 season which continues to burn, the 2021–2025 average annual area burned was 6.7m hectares compared to 1.1 million 1971–1975, or the long-term national average of 2.1 m hectares (Sources: Historical wildfire data compiled by Natural Resources Canada (NRCan) through the Canadian National Fire Database (CNFDB) and earlier national reports).

⁶ Corporate Knights Research, 2025 National Inventory Report for Canada, <https://www.nasa.gov/earth/new-nasa-study-tallies-carbon-emissions-from-massive-canadian-fires/>

⁷ Mike Flannigan [ICLR presentation](#)

⁸ Based on a quality-assured dataset of wildfire suppression outcomes (2017–2024) and Canadian modelling in Kootenay National Park showing rapid initial attack can cut burn probability by up to 78% (Parisien et al., Fire, 2019: <https://www.mdpi.com/2571-6255/2/4/60>)

⁹ <https://ciffc.net/situation/archive/>

economy. In addition to enhanced suppression capacity, we need a national wildfire prevention strategy rooted in scientific evidence and Indigenous knowledge.

Prevention – including fuel management, landscape-level planning, and community preparedness – delivers strong returns, saving multiple dollars in avoided costs for every dollar invested. Building on existing initiatives like FireSmart, a national strategy would extend prevention across the broader forest landscape and ensure sustained, coordinated investment.

Natural Resources Canada should lead a formal, evidence-based review of prevention and forest fire management practices, with a dedicated effort over the next 12 months to craft a national prevention strategy grounded in science, Indigenous partnership, and coordination with provinces territories, municipalities and their fire departments. These efforts should also work closely with the Wildfire Resilience Consortium of Canada (WRCC) to align with national research and best practices. The Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs, municipal governments, and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM), among others, should be central partners in addressing the wildland-urban interface, where risks are greatest.

Prevention must prioritize natural infrastructure such as wetlands and peatlands, alongside forest management, fuel reduction, prescribed burns, and FireSmart practices. Together, these measures can reduce fuels, disrupt fire spread, and deliver co-benefits for flood and drought protection, lower greenhouse gas emissions, and strengthen biodiversity resilience. Effective fire management must also address risks from infrastructure, such as rail systems, and extend beyond forests to other fire-prone ecosystems.

National Fire Administration (NFA)

To enable better coordination, Canada should establish a National Fire Administration. The NFA would integrate fire and life safety considerations into federal policy, strengthen prevention, and improve federal emergency response while respecting provincial jurisdiction. It would complement — not replace — the Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre (CIFFC), ensuring federal leadership on prevention, coordination, and policy integration, while provinces and territories maintain operational control for firefighting in the forests.

Scale of Investment Required

Recent federal initiatives — such as WildFireSat, new training and equipment programs, the Wildfire Resilient Futures Initiative, and FireSmart funding — represent progress but remain modest, totaling **only hundreds of millions over several years**. By contrast, wildfire risk has grown fourfold since the 1970s, with NPL5 conditions dominating the 2023 and 2025 fire seasons. Meeting this challenge requires **multi-billion-dollar, capital-intensive commitments in surveillance, suppression, and training — not incremental dollars**. These recommendations build on, rather than duplicate, existing federal and provincial programs. Without this scale of investment, suppression capacity will continue to be outstripped by climate-driven fires.

This builds on federal commitments in the platform and mandate letters — including strengthening Parks Canada’s wildfire response capabilities — and complements recent investments such as

\$45.7M for wildfire research (Aug 2025) and \$11.7M for the Wildfire Resilience Consortium of Canada (July 2025).

Recommendations

National Fire Administration: Establish a national fire administration to ensure federal policy decisions related to fire, emergency, and life safety in communities are optimally conceptualized and calibrated.

Training and Equipment Fund: Invest \$1.2 billion over five years to scale up training and equipment programs, enabling provinces, territories, municipalities, and Indigenous governments to access specialized wildland, wildland-urban interface, and general fire department equipment, along with training and surge capacity to respond to climate-driven fire behaviour.

Surveillance and Monitoring Infrastructure: Invest \$400 million over five years to enhance real-time monitoring capacity. While WildFireSat (2029) is an important milestone, its twice-per-day snapshot is insufficient for operational needs. Canada requires a complementary, continuous surveillance layer — including wildfire detection drones, high-frequency satellite feeds, and support for Indigenous fire guardians— to deliver actionable intelligence and enable rapid intervention.

Shared Suppression Capacity: Invest \$2.5 billion over five years in capital support for provinces, territories, municipalities, and Indigenous governments to expand and modernize aerial and ground fleets. Federal investment should focus on procurement, financing, and interoperability, while day-to-day operations remain with local authorities. This respects regional differences (e.g., airtankers in the West, waterbombers in the East) while ensuring national-scale assets are available.

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These requests focus on capital equipment and systems with long procurement timelines. By investing now, Canada will ensure readiness for future fire seasons while supporting provinces and territories that retain jurisdiction over fire management.

Funding Request

- Total five-year funding: \$4.1 billion CAD (70% capital investment)
- FY 2026 request: \$820 million CAD

These investments would save lives, protect the economy, reduce emissions, and strengthen community resilience.

Conclusion

We respectfully call on the Government of Canada to use Budget 2026 to launch a national resilience package that includes a national fire administration alongside CIFFC and that strengthens wildfire prevention, equips provinces, territories, municipalities and their fire departments with critical assets, supports Indigenous partnerships, and ensures Canada's forests and communities are better protected for generations to come.

Signed,

Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs

Council for Clean Capitalism

Nature Canada

Ducks Unlimited Canada

Mining Association of Canada

Protect Our Winters Canada

World Wildlife Fund Canada